Neglected Tropical Diseases

The U.S. Role

USAID has coordinated with global partners in targeted mass administration of preventive medication for seven neglected tropical diseases: lymphatic filariasis (elephantiasis), schistosomiasis (bilharzia), onchocerciasis (river blindness), blinding trachoma, and three parasitic worms. USAID funding supplements partner-government budgets in safe and effective delivery of medicine and in efforts to scale up treatment to national coverage for the control and eventual elimination of these disabling, disfiguring diseases.

Achievements

» Fifty-two million people are no longer at risk for elephantiasis, and 35 million people are no longer at risk of acquiring blinding trachoma, thanks to the interruption of local transmission of these diseases by USAID-supported campaigns that administer preventive medications to entire communities.²

» U.S. government investments have leveraged over $6.7 billion in donated medications from the pharmaceutical industry for mass preventive medicine administration.³ (continued on back)

As part of an effective public-private partnership, the U.S. government has supported the delivery of 825 million treatments for neglected tropical diseases in six years, reaching millions of vulnerable people in 23 countries.¹
Why it Matters

More than one billion people around the world are affected by neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) – infections and conditions such as river blindness, snail fever, and hookworm. The world’s poorest populations are disproportionately afflicted, and the effects of these diseases – sickness and disability, compromised mental and physical development, blindness, and disfigurement – effectively “anchor large populations in poverty.”

“NTDs are devastating. More often than not, nobody dies, but they are disfigured, stigmatized, and stunted in their physical growth and cognitive development. The result – according to an increasing body of evidence – is that the poorest of the poor remain trapped in poverty because the NTDs keep them from achieving their full cognitive and physical capacity.”

– Dr. Peter Hotez, Dean, National School of Tropical Medicine, Baylor College of Medicine, and President, Sabin Vaccine Institute

Achievements (continued)

» Thanks to a regional mass treatment program, no new cases of river blindness have been reported since 2007 in the six Latin American countries where river blindness is endemic, and the elimination of river blindness in Colombia was officially declared in August 2013.

Success Story:
Drug-Shoe Combination Aims to Stomp Out Haiti’s Neglected Diseases

Since 2008, community volunteers have visited schools across Haiti on an annual basis to distribute medicine and shoes as part of the country’s efforts to stomp out two endemic diseases: the mosquito-borne lymphatic filariasis and soil-transmitted helminthes – commonly referred to as intestinal worms – acquired from walking barefoot on contaminated dirt.

The shoes, which were added to the drug program’s distribution channels in 2011, are the result of a partnership between USAID, IMA World Health, and TOMS, a U.S.-based company that provides new shoes to a child in need with every pair purchased.

USAID has helped the Haiti NTD Control Program train 19,000 community volunteers to help implement the program. With assistance from USAID and other partners, consistent mass drug administration (MDA) will eventually eliminate diseases like lymphatic filariasis (LF) from Haiti.

Water, Sanitation Work Also Vital in NTD Fight

USAID’s extensive work on clean water and sanitation has also helped combat NTDs by interrupting transmission due to uncontained human waste and poor hygiene practices.

Endnotes
4 The World Health Organization includes 17 diseases in this category: dengue, rabies, trachoma, Buruli ulcer (Mycobacterium ulcerans infection), endemic treponematoses, leprosy (Hansen disease), Chagas disease (American trypanosomiasis), human African trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness), leishmaniasis, cysticercosis, dracunculiasis (guinea worm disease), echinococcosis, foodborne trematode infections, lymphatic filariasis, onchocerciasis (river blindness), schistosomiasis (snail fever), and soil-transmitted helminthes (intestinal worms).
6 Personal correspondence from Michelle Brooks, Sabin Vaccine Institute to Ken Forsberg, InterAction, December 2013.