

Evaluation of the WHO Neglected Tropical Diseases Programme

Evaluation brief - 2019

Objectives and scope of the evaluation

The overall purpose of the evaluation was to assess the accomplishments of the WHO Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD) Programme as well as the lessons learned through implementation at the three levels of the Organization, and specifically to: document successes, challenges and gaps of the NTD Programme during the biennia 2014-2015 and 2016-2017 with a focus on the WHO Roadmap for Implementation (Roadmap); and provide lessons learned and strategic recommendations for the design and operationalization of the next steps addressing the remaining toll of NTDs in the context of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019-2023.

Key findings and conclusions

Relevance: In general, the NTD Programme is aligned to the needs of Member States, as identified in the Roadmap, World Health Assembly resolutions, Sustainable Development Goals, and their own country strategies. The London Declaration on NTDs and the Roadmap were instrumental in increasing the profile of NTDs globally, regionally and nationally. The NTD Programme closely mirrors the strategies in the Roadmap and the WHO core functions are also relevant, particularly the provision of technical advice and guidance. WHO works in partnership with other stakeholders to address all needs across its core functions. Some of the disease subprogrammes within the NTD Programme are doing this more successfully than others, for example, lymphatic filariasis. Several countries have made progress on NTDs with WHO support, while others are just starting their work on NTDs, resulting in different needs worldwide across the diseases. As countries move towards elimination of NTDs, there is increasing demand for guidance on post-elimination surveillance, activities after validation and verification, new diagnostics, and supporting research.

Effectiveness: The past seven years have been successful in terms of reach and increased profile of NTDs thanks to the collective efforts of Member States, the NTD Programme and partnerships/collaboration with nongovernmental organizations, donors, and pharmaceutical companies. The NTD medicine donation programme was very successful, delivering 1.762 billion treatments to 1 billion people in 2017 for

five preventive chemotherapy NTDs (lymphatic filariasis, onchocerciasis, soil-transmitted helminthiasis, schistosomiasis, and trachoma). Effectiveness is varied across diseases, strategies and countries. In many cases, WHO guidelines are in place to support diseases, however, there were more activities in relation to some diseases than others (e.g. lymphatic filariasis versus taeniasis), resulting in some diseases remaining “neglected of the neglected”.

Efficiency: Attempts have been made to ensure cost efficiencies in the NTD Programme (e.g. integration of mass drug administration, delivery across diseases), but fundamental challenges remain. Given existing limited resources, some NTDs remain “neglected of the neglected” and the addition of new NTDs without a corresponding increase in resources will only exacerbate this problem. Areas for improvement include: integration across diseases; intersectoral coordination across WHO (e.g. with water, sanitation and hygiene and the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases); and continued improvements to the medicine supply chain.

Sustainability: The focus of the WHO NTD Programme over the past few years has been on mass drug administration for preventive chemotherapy, and other strategies for control and prevention of NTDs have not progressed to the same extent, challenging long-term results. With the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, universal health coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals, WHO has an opportunity to refocus NTD efforts to include key areas of zoonotic diseases, integrated disease management, water, sanitation and hygiene, and vector control, as well as the health systems strengthening behind this (e.g. laboratory diagnostics, capacity building, and surveillance systems, including post-elimination). Funding relationships are extremely important given the competitive environment for funding to meet the Sustainable Development Goals. On the other hand, the NTD programme is reliant on donor funding for 85% of its budget, which can challenge the programme’s autonomy.

Equity: The consensus is that NTDs are diseases of the poor, and hence the work being undertaken is addressing the needs of vulnerable populations. Improved monitoring would help to reach all

vulnerable populations, including rural and remote areas, conflict zones and internally displaced people.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: An updated Roadmap, as well as the London Declaration-type document, is needed to help to keep momentum for NTDs.

- (i) The focus of the Roadmap and NTD Programme should broaden beyond a focus on mass drug administration for preventive chemotherapy diseases, to include further articulation and implementation of the other four strategies of the NTD Programme (integrated disease management/case management, water, sanitation and hygiene, vector control, and zoonosis) with clear, achievable community mobilization and strategies for all NTDs. Sustainability targets need to be built into the strategy.
- (ii) The importance of integration across the 20 NTDs should be a focus of the new Roadmap, linking the NTD work to the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, universal health coverage, health systems strengthening and the Sustainable Development Goals.
- (iii) The list of included NTDs for the Roadmap and the NTD Programme needs to be safeguarded. The WHO Secretariat and its partners need to ensure adequate resources and support for the NTDs that are included on the list.

Recommendation 2: The WHO NTD Programme should consider further integration across NTDs.

- (i) To facilitate integration across NTDs, including within the NTD Programme: providing integrated guidelines (e.g. across strategies) and supporting their implementation, planning across diseases in an integrated manner, and ensuring that staffing aligns with integrated strategies across diseases.
- (ii) From a partnership perspective, WHO should encourage donors to adopt an integrated approach to NTDs and ensure intersectoral collaboration within WHO and externally to support work on NTDs.

Recommendation 3: A stronger overall integrated programme management function at NTD headquarters level to ensure efficiencies, moving from coordination to collaboration and integration of NTDs, and ensure sustainability.

- (i) Consider a formal mechanism to coordinate internally at WHO headquarters to ensure intersectoral collaboration and integration that

will further address NTDs (e.g. with programmes on water, sanitation and hygiene, surgery, mental health, universal health coverage), as well as research needs (e.g. by formulating a well-articulated research partnership with the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases).

- (ii) The NTD Programme should conduct a clear stakeholder analysis with articulated strategies about external engagement to ensure that diseases/sub-groups collaboratively engage stakeholders in a more harmonized, consistent and integrated way.
- (iii) The NTD Programme should have a well-articulated programme logic model and a specific, detailed performance measurement framework to ensure management has performance data for decision-making.
- (iv) The NTD Programme should assess the logistical support role it provides, (i.e. whether it fits within WHO's core functions, and if it is adequately resourced at all levels of WHO).
- (v) As country-level NTD surveillance data is critical, surveillance systems will become more important as the NTD Programme moves towards elimination and eradication. WHO should work with partners and countries to strengthen NTD surveillance systems at country levels.
- (vi) The NTD Programme needs to set the conditions for sustainability, which are defined clearly (e.g. domestic institutionalization, drug procurement) and integrated into the NTD Programme.

Contacts

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The evaluation report is available here: https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/documents/evaluation/evaluation-ntd-report.pdf?sfvrsn=351a363f_2