Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are a diverse set of 20 diseases and disease groups with a singular commonality: their devastating and disproportionate impact on impoverished communities. Understanding NTDs can lead to stigma and life-altering disabilities that prevent those affected from working, attending school, and gaining socioeconomic mobility to name a few. For over a decade, disease- endemic countries and the global community have worked together toward eliminating and controlling NTDs. With donor support, concerted partnerships, and local, national, and global coordination, national NTD Programs (NTDPs) have improved their efficiency, effectiveness, and impact. While such support has enabled countries to make steady progress, it has not reinforced national leadership to plan, implement, and fund NTD interventions fully and independently.

Sustainable NTD Program Management

With government-led NTDPs at the helm, NTD sustainability processes can focus on obtaining the technical and financial resources needed for increased ownership and accountability and for the mainstreaming of NTDs into national policy, financing plans, and delivery structures. Sustaining NTD goals will require a shift in countries’ relationships with donors, from an approach based on short-term humanitarian assistance and vertical disease-specific programs to one that has NTD control efforts overseen and managed by national and local governments in order to reduce reliance on donors over time and promote locally-led development.

Accelerating NTD 2030 Targets Achievement Through Paradigm Shifts in Country Ownership

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable NTD Program Management

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USAID and its implementing partners developed the above framework to support prioritization of activities in four functional areas that will contribute to achieving NTDs’ elimination and control targets. Financing is one of the crucial pillars, with a particular focus on mobilizing sufficient domestic resources for robust NTD support.

Phase 1: Engaging a Broader Pool of National Stakeholders

The first phase of the USAID-supported NTD sustainability approach is to raise awareness of NTDs to a broader and more diverse pool of government, national, and local stakeholders and to engage them in sustainable, country-led NTD interventions. Throughout Phase 1, NTDPs in West Africa worked with the Act to End NTDs | West consortium to identify, encourage, and meet with traditional and non-traditional stakeholders within the MOM and across sectors. Together, they were able to provide stakeholders with an analysis of NTDs and their socio-economic burden as well as opportunities for mainstreaming NTD intervention planning and delivery into national systems to maintain sustainable services and public health gains. Nine NTDPs across Côte d’Ivoire, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Benin engaged with key sectors, resulting in the development of a national ownership action plan; revising or establishing multi-stakeholder stakeholder partnerships; identifying priorities such as integrating NTD data into health management information systems; increasing the role of community leaders in raising awareness of NTD prevention and treatment; and establishing health focal points across various MoHs using key stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education. The political will and the high-level engagement of national stakeholders in Phase 1 helped establish the direction for Phase 2 and the long-term future vision of sustainable, country-led NTD interventions and national investment.

Phase 2: Conducting a Self-Assessment of NTD Sustainability

Phase 2 focuses on conducting comprehensive analyses of the NTDPs’ capacities and the country’s efforts and investment in NTD interventions and services. This phase includes several types of partner-led analyses that culminate in a self-assessment driven by NTDPs using the USAID Sustainability Maturity Model. This tool guides NTDPs in scoring themselves along a continuum for each of the USAID Sustainability Framework’s six outcomes to determine the current state of their strengths and weaknesses and the milestones required to achieve their target goals in each functional area.

With a structured format for defining and prioritizing milestones in their respective contexts, this activity strengthened NTDPs’ understanding of NTD sustainability, translated into increased political will and improved alignment with national and regional policies to enhance the long-term future vision of sustainable, country-led NTD interventions and national investment.

Phase 3: Developing and Validating a National NTD Sustainability Plan

Phase 3 activities focus on the development of a national NTD sustainability plan. This includes comprehensive, robust analyses of the NTDPs’ capacities, the country’s and the sector’s efforts and investment in NTD interventions and services. This phase involves developing and carrying out a participatory process that leads to the creation of the NTD Sustainability Plan. This process outlines actions, owners, timelines, and accountability measures needed to achieve sustainability targets and milestones. These plans serve as guides to achieving control and elimination goals and cement the need for country ownership, collaboration, and coordination.

Phase 4: Development and Validation of Country Sustainability Plan

National NTD Sustainability Plans will provide a roadmap for future NTD interventions and services. This phase involves the development and validation of the Sustainability Plan. The plan will be anchored to the political and national ownership, domestic resource mobilization, and other mainstreaming efforts.

Phase 5: Progress Evaluation

This phase involves evaluating the progress made in Phase 4 and assessing the sustainability and impact of the National NTD Sustainability Plans.

CONCLUSION

Throughout Act to End NTDs | West’s experiences, these comprehensive, coordination-intensive activities take at least one year to complete. For this reason, it is important to maintain the momentum spent to follow through on commitments outlined in the Sustainability Plan. Phases 4 and 5 of the process involve implementing these country NTD Sustainability Plans and monitoring their progress.

Looking ahead, successful implementation of these plans will rely on:

- Continued engagement with multi-sector stakeholders and well-coordinated support of country priorities and ownership by stakeholders and donors.
- A strong level of internal accountability established and led by the NTDP and other government stakeholders, using internal government mechanisms and multi-sector platforms to track country implementation of sustainable NTD interventions and follow-through on commitments.
- Co-designed technical assistance by country leadership, partnerships with donors, and strong engagement of actors to bolster country ownership, national health workforce, regional coordination, and other mainstreaming efforts.

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