

Facilitating Multisectoral Coordination and Engagement for Neglected Tropical Disease (NTD) Sustainability

ACT TO END NTDs | WEST
TECHNICAL BRIEF No. 3

Countries have made significant progress in their efforts to control and eliminate NTDs through coordinated efforts among relevant key global health stakeholders. At the forefront of these efforts are national **NTD Programs (NTDPs)**, led by physicians, epidemiologists, and experts in public health, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and finance. Additional stakeholders include community leaders and community drug distributors, who have played a pivotal role in NTDP elimination and control efforts. NTDPs conduct disease mapping, mass drug administration (MDA), treatment, surveys, and other activities to control and eliminate NTDs.

The planning of NTD services and the provision of NTD services are often siloed and, when not mainstreamed into national systems policies, strategies, and service delivery structures, the sustainability of NTD control, elimination, and public health gains are threatened. Continuing to address the challenges NTDs pose on society and achieving elimination and control targets require a robust, integrated, coordinated, and country-led approach from national policy to community-based services levels. Therefore, coordination within the health sector and with non-health sector stakeholders must be prioritized to sustain and expand existing NTD services and service delivery platforms.

As part of a series of accompanying briefs on [country ownership](#) and the need for [dynamic shifts in technical assistance](#), this brief discusses how NTDPs, supported by USAID's Act to End NTDs | West program, have advanced **multisectoral coordination** by engaging key stakeholders across sectors around the benefits of NTD control and elimination and identifying opportunities for their engagement in NTD programming. By coordinating and engaging with stakeholders across sectors with shared target populations, NTDPs can integrate NTD services into existing delivery platforms, supply chains, and workforce infrastructure to sustain NTD control and elimination services more efficiently and effectively. These channels may be related to other health programs such as maternal and child health, nutrition, and malaria, as well as non-health sectors including water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), education, finance, planning, and environmental protection. Strong multisectoral coordination is a central driver and indicator of progress towards sustainability and aligns with the **World Health Organization's (WHO) Neglected Tropical Diseases Roadmap 2021-2030** pillar to ensure "holistic, cross-cutting approaches including integration across NTDs, mainstreaming in national health systems, coordinating with adjacent sectors and strengthening country capacity and global support."¹

¹ *Ending the neglect to attain the Sustainable Development Goals: a road map for neglected tropical diseases 2021-2030*, World Health Organization (2020), 9.





Figure 1 Sustainability approach supported by USAID in West Africa

Figure 1 illustrates the multi-phased approach, supported by Act to End NTDs | West, that promotes multisectoral coordination to advance NTD sustainability milestones. The process is adapted to each country’s specific needs and objectives and identifies context-specific priorities and timelines. In **Phase 1**, the NTDPs engage intra- and inter-sectoral stakeholders through sensitization meetings and illustrate the range of benefits gained from the elimination and control of NTDs to garner buy-in and support in the fight against NTDs. **Phase 2** involves select assessments that identify key cross-sector stakeholders, barriers, and opportunities for strengthened coordination with potential and existing NTDP stakeholders. **Phase 3** actively prioritizes sustainability services by developing a formal Sustainability Plan while simultaneously formalizing and launching multisectoral coordination mechanisms and their action plans. **Phase 4** is the implementation of the Sustainability Plan, which is evaluated and reiterated throughout **Phase 5** and relies on the active participation of health and non-health sector stakeholders. Drawing from practical experiences and insights drawn throughout these phases, the following sections will highlight how NTDPs mobilize and engage key stakeholders across sectors to coordinate and integrate NTD services within the broader health system, resulting in public health and socioeconomic gains.

STIMULATING CROSS-SECTOR ENGAGEMENT

The NTDP-led efforts reinforce that mobilizing stakeholders with shared priorities early in the sustainability process is crucial to achieving sustainable NTD services. Understanding and determining what stimulates engagement across sectors has been critical in building strong partnerships and enhancing coordination as NTDPs move towards sustainability goals.

To gain other sectors’ and health programs’ support of sustainable NTD services, NTDPs conducted **sustainability sensitization meetings during Phase 1** in Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo (see text box example on next page). These meetings convened high-level representatives from ministries of health, WASH, education, environmental health, and finance, UN agencies, civil society organizations (CSOs), private sector representatives, and other relevant stakeholders to create awareness of NTD services and discuss the shared benefit of NTD control and elimination. These meetings also provided stakeholders the opportunity to discuss sustainable NTD services, using the framework outlined in **Figure 2**.

Through an iterative and participatory approach, stakeholders identified priorities for cross-sectoral coordination, assigned stakeholder roles, and developed long-term visions for cross-sectoral support for sustainable NTD control and elimination efforts. In **Senegal**, for example, the sensitization meeting posed questions on what NTDP sustainability priorities should be and how current stakeholders could create and support opportunities to act on them. These discussions took place among stakeholders from various health programs, technical and financial partners (e.g., UNICEF, WHO, the World Bank, Cooperation Française), and ministries of education, scientific research, agriculture,

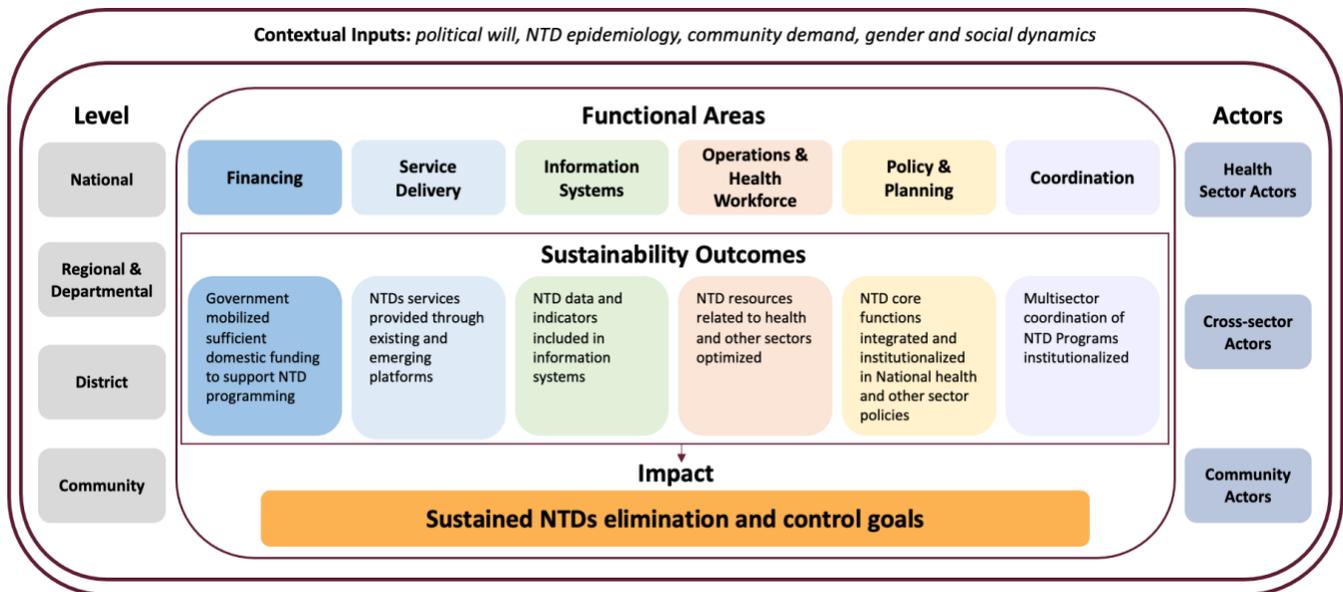


Figure 2 NTD Sustainability Framework

infrastructure, finance, and community development. In **Ghana**, national stakeholders discussed how sustainability efforts align with the country’s existing “Ghana Beyond Aid” initiative, which outlines specific steps Ghana health and development programs must take to reduce donor dependence. Convening with stakeholders early in the process catalyzed engagement and dialogue around NTD control and initiated the development of a roadmap for setting NTD sustainability priorities, as discussed in **Phase 3**, below. These sensitization meetings have been the initial step for building productive working relationships among cross-sector stakeholders and the NTDPs.

IDENTIFYING RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS AND OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH STAKEHOLDER LANDSCAPE AND BARRIER ANALYSES (PHASE 2)

Along with convening stakeholders across sectors in sensitization meetings in Phase 1, Act to End NTDs | West supports NTDPs in conducting select assessments to pinpoint where multisectoral collaboration is needed. Throughout **Phase 2**, Act to End NTDs | West works closely with NTDPs to evaluate a country’s current state of NTD services and efforts toward achieving sustainability. This includes mapping NTD stakeholders, examining the factors that motivate or hinder multisectoral coordination for NTD programming, and identifying opportunities to address them. During this phase, NTDPs leverage in-depth stakeholder landscape and cross-sector barrier analyses to identify opportunities for program integration, expansion and sustainability.

The purpose of the **Stakeholder Landscape Analysis** is to map stakeholders across sectors and to present a country’s current NTD Program sustainability capacities and its collaboration across the functional areas of financing, services, information systems, operational capacity, policy, and coordination, which feed into the development of the Sustainability Plan in **Phase 3**. Such analysis has, for example, allowed **Ghana’s** NTDP to identify that applying an existing compensation model to community drug distributors could galvanize participation and increase the number of persons reached in MDAs.

Stakeholder Groups Represented at FY20 Sensitization Meeting in Sierra Leone

- **Health Programs:** Health & Sanitation, Policy, Planning & Information, Social Mobilization, Adolescent & School Health, Water Resources, Health Securities & Emergencies, Environmental Health, Food & Nutrition, District Health Management Teams
- **Ministries:** Environmental Protection Agency, Agriculture & Forestry, Water Resources, Scaling Up Nutrition Secretariat
- **UN:** WHO, UNICEF, World Food Programme, Food & Agriculture Organization
- **Development Partners:** GIZ, Irish Aid
- **Technical Advisory:** NTD Technical Advisory Committee
- **NGOs:** Helen Keller Intl, Sightsavers, Focus1000, WASH-NET, BRAC, Trocaire, World Hope International, Cooperazione Internazionale, Save, Concern, Catholic Relief Services, Traditional Healers

Using key informant interviews and qualitative and quantitative data analysis, the subsequent **Barrier Analysis** explores barriers to and opportunities for cross-sector coordination, such as existing cross-sectoral collaboration mechanisms for NTDs or related programming, and delivery platforms for NTD control integration. In **Sierra Leone**, for example, the Barrier Analysis captured that respondents viewed HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria programs as compelling partners with whom to integrate both service delivery and supply chain systems to share resources where few may be available. The analysis reported on the NTDP's opportunity to integrate into the logistics management information system by devising a drug distribution matrix and collaborating with the Directorate of Drugs and Medical Supplies and Central Medical Stores. This integration strategy could help the NTDP move away from independent procurement and storage, which risks drug shortages, to increased efficiency and cost-saving through combining forecasting, procurement, storage, and distribution efforts with other programs.

Following the Stakeholder Landscape and Barrier Analyses, Act to End NTDS | West supported NTDPs in a **guided self-assessment** to

evaluate their maturity levels across the functional areas of the Sustainability Framework (Figure 2). The process identified siloed budgets and program planning processes, limited NTD advocacy strategies, and the lack of national-level coordination with other programs as barriers to sustainable NTD services in multiple countries. Utilizing these findings, NTDPs refined education and engagement strategies for national stakeholders and identified opportunities to integrate the impact NTDs have on public health and economic growth into national advocacy and awareness campaigns. Additionally, NTDPs identified that joint planning, decentralization of NTD services, and use of existing district-level structures provided opportunities to mainstream NTD programming. For example, in **Mali**, the NTDP determined that its multisectoral coordination is largely informal and that it can strengthen its relationships with cross-sectoral partners through formal documentation and hosting regular meetings with partners. In other countries, district and central-level government programs, such as the School Feeding Program in **Sierra Leone**, the School Health and Hygiene unit's School Health Education Program in **Ghana**, and the Sexual Reproductive MCH platform in **Senegal**, have all been identified as major actors with whom to coordinate to achieve sustainable NTD services. The process NTDPs undertook in Phases 1 and 2 is crucial to galvanizing multisectoral coordination efforts, as these activities compiled details on the NTD landscape, stakeholders, and existing platforms necessary to develop and refine sustainable NTD strategies for elimination and control in Phase 3.

DEVELOPING MULTISECTORAL COORDINATION SERVICES FOR NTD SUSTAINABILITY (PHASE 3)

Through the development of the **Sustainability Plan in Phase 3**, NTDPs refine strategies for multisector coordination mechanisms and opportunities identified in previous Phases. This Plan outlines the milestones, activities, and actors necessary to progress towards achieving sustainable NTD services. The influence of the Sustainability Plan as a policy document relies on the backing of high-level stakeholders and decision-makers within and outside of the health sector. Furthermore, a critical aspect in the successful implementation of the Sustainability Plan requires a **well-established forum** that regularly engages key cross-sector stakeholders on NTD sustainability.

Act | to End NTDs | West provides technical assistance to NTDPs in designing, developing, and launching **multisectoral coordination mechanisms** to continuously engage stakeholders, in line with country contexts and priorities, throughout the sustainability process. In some countries, these mechanisms already exist or are dormant and require revamping or revitalization; in others, they must be established. The objectives of these mechanisms are to convene stakeholders, provide oversight in ensuring cross-sectoral coordination and collaboration, and act as a national advisory body on mainstreaming NTD programming, which involves identifying opportunities for resource mobilization, integrating NTD service into the national health system, and overseeing the implementation and monitoring of the NTD sustainability priorities and services. As such, the NTDP's engagement with these mechanisms throughout Phase 3 is essential.

For example, the **Ghana** Ministry of Health officially relaunched the Intra-Country Coordination Committee (ICCC) in October 2020. The ICCC, along with other national stakeholders, contributed to the Sustainability Plan workshop in October 2021, during which they offered diverse perspectives that strengthened the Plan. In February 2021, **Sierra Leone's** Ministry of Health and Sanitation established and officially launched the Partners Network Forum (PNF), which was a major contributor to the drafting of the country's Sustainability Plan. Additionally, the Ministry of Health and Social Action in **Senegal** established and launched the National Committee for the fight against NTDs (CNM) in August 2021. These accomplishments were followed by Niger and Mali in August 2021: **Niger** established the NTD Intersectoral Coalition (CMLMTN) and **Mali** established the National Multisectoral Coordination Committee by ministerial decrees in August 2021.

Continuously engaging national stakeholders across sectors through multisectoral coordination mechanisms during the phased sustainability process strengthens the NTDP's and Ministry of Health's ownership of sustainable NTD services. It has enabled high-level national stakeholders to identify mainstreaming opportunities and synergies that can lead to sustained services under the NTDP's leadership. For example, Sierra Leone's PNF has engaged District Health



Engaging High-level Stakeholders to Mobilize Political Commitment for NTD Sustainability: Ghana

In December 2021, political leaders in Ghana came together to increase NTD visibility and discuss country ownership in eliminating and controlling NTDs and ensuring sustainable solutions. Ghana's NTD Ambassador hosted the meeting, the technical advisor to the Minister of Local Governance and Rural Development, chaired it, and the Minister of Health and Deputy Minister of Education participated as guest speakers. Also present were the President's Special Advisor on Health, Coordinating Director-Technical of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, General Director of Ghana Health Services, Directors from the Ministries of Health, Education, Water & Sanitation, national research institutes, Chair of ICCG, SCH/SHT Expert Committee and NTDs experts, among others. The participation from high-level actors in Ghana's fight against NTDs heightened the commitment to explore the integration of NTD services into malaria and HIV programs; to ensure better ways to support those with disabilities caused by NTDs; to consider ways to allocate more resources to community volunteer workers; and to strengthen community-led data collection to bolster bottom-up advocacy and policies among other solution areas for sustainable NTD intervention.

Management Teams (DHMTs) to integrate NTD services into their action plans and existing coordination structures in their respective districts. This demonstrates how national stakeholders and multisectoral coordination mechanisms' advocacy can influence policies and strategies that strengthen the implementation of NTD activities at local levels.

MULTISECTORAL ENGAGEMENT PERSPECTIVES FOR NTD SUSTAINABILITY (PHASES 4 & 5)

As NTDPs implement **Phases 4** and **5**, the multisector coordination platforms are well-positioned to drive forward the integration of NTD services into national systems and accelerate approaches for NTD sustainability. Phase 4 will focus on implementing Sustainability Plans following their political validation, while Phase 5 will evaluate the success of this implementation. Embedding multisectoral engagement throughout the process is a key strategic action behind moving NTD intervention away from siloed planning and implementation to **collaborative planning and implementation** across health and adjacent sectors. This strategy drives sustainability forward through **mutualizing resources** across sectors and increasing the prioritization and delivery of NTD services. Multisectoral coordination and engagement shift NTD services from partner-driven to country-driven and strengthen **holistic commitments and mainstreaming of** NTD functions across government strategies and universal health care efforts.

Read more about Act to End NTDs | West's support for NTD sustainability in the Program's NTD sustainability technical brief series and on the Act to End NTDs | West website, which contains a detailed overview of the Act to End NTDs | West Sustainability approach, country sustainability profiles, and other resources.

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