

Why Nigeria Must Care for, Eliminate and Eradicate Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs)

Stanley Onyeka Etokwudo

Preventive and Social Medicine, School of Public Health, University of Port Harcourt

Dr Obinna O. Oleribe

Preventive and Social Medicine, School of Public Health, University of Port Harcourt

Citation: Stanley Onyeka Etokwudo and Obinna O. Oleribe (2022) Why Nigeria Must Care for, Eliminate and Eradicate Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs), *International Journal of Public Health, Pharmacy and Pharmacology*, Vol. 7, No.2, pp.29-33

ABSTRACT: *This paper thoroughly reviewed why Nigeria needs to care for, eliminate, and eradicate the neglected tropical disease (NTDs). The paper relied on the review of related literature to sufficiently expound on intervention, accomplishments, disadvantages, and techniques of eradication and elimination of NTDs in Nigeria. It has been documented that NTDs affect about two billion people worldwide, accounting for a quarter of the world's population, with Africa accounting for over 40% of those affected. Although neglected tropical diseases are preventable and treatable, a significant amount of funds has been invested to eradicate and eliminate them. NTDs are diseases of the poor, according to reports, and efforts to eradicate them must address the causes of poverty as NTDs can cause a variety of problems. This paper suggested ways to eradicate NTDs in Nigeria including strengthening public health systems and supporting governments in the elimination of NTDs and limiting the transmission of disease pathogens by effective vector control among others.*

KEYWORDS: NTDs, preventable diseases, CDC, elimination, intervention, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

It has been stated that Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) affect about 1.7 billion people around the world. The disease burden of NTDs disproportionately affects those in low and middle-income countries. Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are a group of preventable and treatable diseases that affect over 1.7 billion people globally with 40% of those affected in Africa. The diseases are found to be prevalent in the poorest regions and most vulnerable people who live in hard-to-reach parts of Africa. They disfigure and disable, keep children out of school and parents out of work while also limiting their potential and leaving communities stuck in poverty. Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) are also classified as groups of parasitic and bacterial diseases that cause substantial illness. NTDs are the source of tremendous suffering because of their disfiguring, debilitating, and sometimes deadly impact. They are referred to as “neglected” because they have

been largely wiped out in the more developed parts of the world but persist in the poorest, most marginalized or isolated communities of the world such as in Nigeria.

Nigeria is a country with many ethnic groups that confers constantly the diversity of its cultural settings. There are about 350 ethnic groups, the predominant ones being the Hausa in the North, the Yoruba in the South West and the Igbo in the South East. There are three main languages, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba and most communities have settlement patterns characterized by nucleated villages with satellite hamlets and dispersed settlements with generally large family compounds of many related families. In all the regions, the average community size is approximately 2,500-12,000 persons with approximately 30-50 per cent of the population living in hamlet-sized settlements. The healthcare delivery system in Nigeria consists of both orthodox and traditional healthcare delivery systems. Both systems operate side by side but with minimal collaboration. The national health policy was put in place in part to prevent NTDs and bring about a comprehensive health care system based on PHC that is promotive, protective, preventive, restorative and rehabilitative to every citizen of the country within the available resources so that individuals and communities are assured of productivity, social well-being and enjoyment of living. This is the reason the Federal Ministry of Health prioritized the NTDs and included them among the forty (40) communicable and non-communicable diseases and conditions for Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response (IDSR).

LITERATURE/THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

The Burden of NTDs in Nigeria

Nigeria is unarguably the most populous nation in the world and according to UNICEF, 70% of the population live on less than \$1 per day. This comes with several challenges as Nigeria is laden with 25% of the burden of NTDs in Africa. Due to the deep-rooted poverty in about 51% of the population, about 10 million Nigerians are at risk of contracting NTDs or already have untreated cases of NTDs. A large share of the NTDs recognized by the WHO have their abode in Nigeria. Notable ones include; trachoma, Buruli ulcer, Human African trypanosomiasis, Dengue fever, Schistosomiasis, lymphatic filariasis, onchocerciasis and soil-transmitted helminths among others. The prevalence of NTDs in Nigeria stems from the extreme levels of poverty in the country and this begs the question; why must Nigeria care? A rhetorical question of some sort, but the answer is not far-fetched. The moment we realize the negative impact of these neglected diseases, we will see the reason we need to care. The economic impact of NTDs cannot be overemphasized, but, ironically, the economic burden of these diseases is undervalued. The high cost of drugs to treat NTDs also poses a challenge in the elimination of several neglected diseases. Pharmaceutical companies in Nigeria are less likely to commit large funds to the research and development of drugs required to combat NTDs, especially as their target audience is largely poor and unable to afford the high cost of drugs.

NTDs have a profound effect on the economy of a country; they have the potential to significantly reduce productivity and increase the dependency ratio of a country, impeding economic and social

growth. A study conducted in Kenya showed that mass deworming of persons increased average income by 40%. This is an indication that if the “Neglected Diseases” are eliminated or perhaps drastically brought under control, there will be most likely an increase in economic development. Sadly, it has been documented that each untreated case of trachoma is estimated to cost Nigeria \$118 million in terms of productivity loss. Nigeria can save \$12billion in 19 years (2011-2030) if she meets up with the WHO (2020) target for controlling and eliminating NTDs. As a nation presently in an economic downturn and security instability, the focus should be on prevention which may be more cost-effective than treatment.

Interventions, Methods of Elimination and Eradication of NTDs.

The need to tackle NTDs has been propelled to the forefront of the global health agenda following the reconvening of key stakeholders in the fight against NTDs at an event hosted by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The event which concluded with the signing of the Geneva Commitment in April 2017 was a follow-up to the 2012 London Declaration where pharmaceutical companies and donor agencies committed to “controlling or eliminating at least 10 NTDs by 2020”. External donor agencies and pharmaceutical play an essential role in the eradication of NTDs in terms of technical assistance and drug donations. However, there is a need for governments to take on more of the responsibility in providing treatments for individuals with NTDs, the first step however is in developing affordable drugs for many of the neglected diseases.

The repercussions of untreated NTDs are numerous and variable in intensity. Hookworm infestation has been linked with cases of malnutrition among children in Nigeria. Co-infection of NTDs with other prevalent diseases has lethal effects as they have the potential to augment and accentuate the potency of other co-infections. Some of the NTDs, particularly Helminthes infestation diminish the efficacy of the immune system thereby accelerating the progression of HIV and other prevalent diseases in affected individuals. NTDs generally worsen disease prognosis and severe cases can culminate in death. Furthermore, the social impact of these diseases should be enough to spur a nation into action. The stigma associated with NTDs is referred to as the hidden burden of NTDs. Diseases like leprosy, lymphatic filariasis, and Buruli ulcer are all associated with a saddening level of social stigmatization.

The most effective method of intervention and possible eradication of NTDs in Nigeria stems from the collaboration between Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), the World Health Organization (WHO) and other partners to develop a solid scientific foundation on which to inform policy and craft guidelines for control programs. Using evidence-based programs, NCDC would work with the global community toward a consensus on best practices for controlling and, when possible, ending transmission of NTDs. This includes developing guidelines on (1) how best to measure a country’s burden of disease, as interventions are based on this information, (2) how to best measure program impact, and (3) how to best deliver programs, including how often and to whom.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the paper shows that NTDs are diseases of poverty and efforts to eliminate them need to get to the roots of that poverty. NTDs can therefore be used as an indicator to attract development to where it is most needed and will have the most impact. The global response to neglected tropical diseases has been mounted to expressly help the poor and pull their poverty-related health problems out of neglect. Driven by novel thinking and boosted by the strong public-private partnership the effort has taken proportions that are unmatched in scope today. But there is no room for complacency. All neglect has not been resolved in Nigeria and sub-Saharan Africa, and despite unprecedented progress, the job is not finished. It is hoped that during the coming decade the global response will further be able to build on successes achieved today, align with the new global health and development frameworks while keeping very focused attention on the development of novel products, the filling of knowledge gaps associated with implementation, and the generation of evidence-based science from field and laboratory for NTDs that are still lagging. It is also hoped that at the renewal of the London Declaration commitment, enough resources can be mobilized to see this global response in all its aspects through to its projected end in 2030.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on the literature reviewed and discussions above, the suggestions of this paper will align with The World Health Organization (WHO) declaration that the “last mile is now”. Hence to overcome the last few hurdles in the total elimination of NTDs in Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa following significant progress will require the following;

1. Strengthening public health systems and supporting governments in the elimination of NTDs
2. Enabling countries with high prevalence rates of NTDs to have access to more affordable drug therapies
3. Limiting the transmission of disease pathogens by effective vector control
4. Improving diagnostic capabilities and using modern technology where possible
5. Citizens of poor countries should have easy access to clean drinking water and sanitation, improved nutrition and hygiene in line with the SDGs
6. Mass drug administration (e.g administration of Ivermectin to school children)
7. Handing over greater ownership and responsibility for the eradication of NTDs to governments in endemic countries
8. Ultimately, not letting the guard down, ensuring continued surveillance and monitoring of NTDs.

REFERENCES

- CDC. Which diseases are considered neglected tropical diseases? [Internet. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019:1<https://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/ntd/diseases/index.html>
- Mackenzie CD, Homeida MM, Hopkins AD, Lawrence JC. Elimination of onchocerciasis from Africa: possible? *Trends Parasitol* 2012; 28:16–22.
- The London Declaration on Neglected Tropical Diseases. <https://unitingtocombatntds.org/london-declaration-neglected-tropical-diseases/>. Accessed 11 March 2022.
- Uniting to Combat NTDs. Powering our partnership to fight all 20 neglected tropical diseases [Internet],2018. Available: <http://unitingtocombatntds.org/resource/london-declaration> [Accessed cited 2022 March 12].
- WHO/Department of control of neglected tropical diseases. Crossing the billion. Lymphatic filariasis, onchocerciasis, schistosomiasis, soil-transmitted helminthiases and trachoma: preventive chemotherapy for neglected tropical diseases. Geneva: World Health Organization;2017.<https://www.who.int/neglecteddiseases/resources/9789240696471/en/>. Accessed 11 March 2022.
- World Health Organization (2007). Everybody's Business: Strengthening Health Systems to Improve Health Outcomes. WHO's Framework for Action. Geneva: WHO (2007).