Common African Position and the Continental Framework on Neglected Tropical Diseases

The Common African Position and the Continental Framework on the Control and Elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) in Africa by 2030 are important frameworks that are driving a unified vision, progress and resources to tackle NTDs in Africa.

The vision of the **Continental Framework** is to free Africa of all neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) by 2030. It strives to integrate strategies and efforts deployed to control and eliminate NTDs across the continent and contribute to global efforts. The framework provides guidance on key approaches to be pursued, including creating a dedicated budget and increasing allocations to NTD programs.

The **Common African Position** provides recommendations for Member States in order to address NTDs in Africa. The two frameworks were adopted by the African Union's Specialised Technical Committee on Health, Population and Drug Control in May 2022, and endorsed by Heads of State at the African Union Coordinating Summit in 2022.

Background

Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are a group of 20 preventable and treatable diseases that affect over one billion people. These diseases cause suffering, disability, disfigurement and can be fatal. They have a significant economic impact on countries and individuals, in terms of costs and lost productivity. The irreversible damage caused by NTDs creates barriers to education, employment, and economic growth as well as stigmatisation, leading to exclusion from society.

NTDs are endemic in almost all countries in Africa, affecting more than 600 million people. This accounts for over a third of the global NTD burden. Insufficient resources for control, elimination, and eradication of NTDs have been a significant issue.

Investing in NTD programmes can have a ripple effect in society, leading to better education, health, and employment outcomes, and transforming lives and communities, while reducing gender inequity, stigma, and preventable mortality and morbidity.

Progress has been made in tackling NTDs in Africa

As of October 2023, twenty-one countries in Africa have eliminated at least one NTD so far, with several countries having eliminated two, three and even four NTDs. Togo became the first country globally to eliminate four NTDs; Benin and Ghana have eliminated three NTDs each. The burden of NTDs is steadily declining globally. In 2021, 1.65 billion people required mass or individual treatment and care for NTDs, down from 2.19 billion in 2010.

Africa is leading the way to achieve a continent free from NTDs

There is clarity of vision as well as growing demand and energy in Africa to see the continent free from NTDs. Through harnessing the Common Africa Position and Continental Framework, Africa is pushing forward as a unified community to attain the Sustainable Development Goal and World Health Organization 2030 targets for NTD elimination that require increased financial support, stronger political commitment, and better tools to prevent, diagnose and treat these diseases.

The Continental Framework

Objectives
- Full integration of interventions to control NTDs with a multi-sectoral approach including water, sanitation and hygiene/health education, vector control, veterinary public health, preventive chemotherapy, and innovative and intensified disease management.
- Harmonisation of community-based initiatives including community engagement and ownership
- Advocacy for establishing fully functional NTDs programs through provision of adequate national financial resources.
- Coordination with other relevant sectors at the national level for the integration of NTDs into mainstream health initiatives.

Strategic approaches and asks
- Increase national financing for NTDs through advocacy for the establishment of fully functional NTDs programs in all Member States.
- Mobilise Human Resource through engaging Member States to ensure that NTDs programs are adequately staffed for sustainability to be achieved.
- Harmonise and coordinate initiatives by supporting Member States in the harmonisation and coordination of interventions by implementing partners.
- Promote partnerships and collaboration by encouraging Member States to engage all relevant sectors critical for the elimination of NTDs.
- Engage communities from program inception up to implementation.
- Integration with other programmes through inclusion of a component on NTDs in training packages for community health workers.
- Advocate for alternative strategies to include vector control and health education in intervention packages for the control of NTDs.
- Support research, development, and innovative technologies through advocacy for increased funding targeted on the control of NTDs and an enabling environment for R&D at country level.
- Categorise interventions to ensure that Member States and stakeholders prioritise NTDs based on national prevalence.

Elimination of NTDs is a global public good with universal benefits, including improved lives and livelihoods, poverty reduction, sustainable development, and global health security.