

Addressing the Silent Scourge: A Editorial on Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs).

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Introduction

Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) affect over one billion people globally, primarily in the world's poorest communities. Despite their significant burden on health, economies, and development, NTDs remain under-prioritized in global health agendas. This Editorial highlights the challenges, progress, and future directions in the fight against NTDs [1, 2, 3, 4], calling for renewed commitment, integrated approaches, and equitable resource allocation. Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are a diverse group of communicable diseases that thrive in impoverished settings, particularly in tropical and subtropical regions. Spread by vectors, contaminated water, or soil, these diseases—such as lymphatic filariasis, schistosomiasis, leishmaniasis, and trachoma—rarely cause widespread mortality but inflict debilitating morbidity. They perpetuate cycles of poverty by impairing physical and cognitive development, reducing productivity, and stigmatizing the affected. Despite affecting over one-sixth of the global population, NTDs have historically received limited attention and funding, often overshadowed by higher-profile diseases like HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. The term "neglected" reflects not only the communities they impact but also the systemic global disinterest in addressing them effectively.

The Burden of NTDs

NTDs are endemic in 149 countries, disproportionately affecting populations with poor sanitation, limited healthcare access, and inadequate public health infrastructure. The burden of these diseases is measured not just in Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) but also in lost economic potential. For instance, children infected with soil-transmitted helminths may suffer from malnutrition and educational setbacks, compromising their future.

Social stigma is another dimension of the burden. Diseases like leprosy and lymphatic filariasis cause disfigurement and exclusion, further marginalizing affected individuals and undermining social cohesion in already vulnerable communities [5, 6, 7].

Progress and Success Stories

Over the last two decades, global efforts—spearheaded by the World Health Organization (WHO), governments, NGOs, and philanthropic initiatives like the London Declaration

on NTDs—have yielded encouraging results. Mass drug administration (MDA) programs have reached millions, and several countries have eliminated at least one NTD. Innovations in diagnostics, increased drug donations from pharmaceutical companies, and integration into broader health services have all contributed to progress.

However, this success is uneven. Political instability, weak health systems, and insufficient domestic investment continue to hinder efforts in many regions. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted MDA campaigns and NTD-related health services, threatening to reverse gains [8, 9, 10].

Conclusion

NTDs are a reflection of global inequity—a group of diseases that persist not due to biological inevitability, but because of societal neglect. As we move toward achieving Universal Health Coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals, eliminating NTDs should be seen not as a charitable cause but a moral and strategic imperative. With coordinated action, innovative science, and unwavering commitment, we can consign these ancient diseases to history.

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