

# Thirteenth meeting of the Strategic and Technical Advisory Group for Neglected Tropical Diseases

15–17 September 2020



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**World Health  
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# Contents

Abbreviations and acronyms-----	iv
1. Opening of the meeting and appointment of the Rapporteur-----	1
2. Commemoration of Professor Marleen Boelaert and Dr Ricardo Thomson -----	1
3. Director’s report on progress and challenges-----	2
3.1. Progress against NTDs-----	2
3.2. Impact of COVID-19 on NTD initiatives-----	4
3.3. New departmental structure and staffing change -----	4
3.4. Discussion -----	4
4. Perspectives from WHO regional offices -----	5
4.1. WHO Regional Office for Africa-----	5
4.1.1. <i>Expanded Special Project for Elimination of Neglected Diseases</i> -----	5
4.1.2. <i>Case management</i> -----	5
4.2. WHO Regional Office for the Americas-----	5
4.3. WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean -----	6
4.4. WHO Regional Office for Europe-----	6
4.5. WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia-----	7
4.6. WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific-----	7
5. Update on NTDs and WHO governing bodies-----	8
6. The 2021-2030 NTD road map: finalization, WHA resolution, launch and roll-out -----	8
7. Companion documents to the 2021–2030 NTD road map-----	9
8. Global framework for multi-disease elimination-----	11
9. Global Arbovirus Initiative and policy-making for vector control -----	12
10. Feedback from STAG working groups and the Diagnostic Technical Advisory Group-----	13
11. Revised terms of reference for STAG-----	14
12. Partners’ statements -----	15
13. Conclusions and recommendations to the Director-General-----	16
14. Closure-----	18
References-----	19
Annex 1. Agenda-----	20
Annex 2. List of participants-----	22
Annex 3. NTD departmental structure and roles and responsibilities -----	26

## Abbreviations and acronyms

DTAG	Diagnostic Technical Advisory Group
HAT	human African trypanosomiasis
IDA	ivermectin, diethylcarbamazine citrate and albendazole
LF	lymphatic filariasis
MDA	mass drug administration
NTD	neglected tropical diseases
OTS	Onchocerciasis Technical Advisory Subgroup
STAG	Strategic and Technical Advisory Group
STH	soil-transmitted helminthiasis
TDR	Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases
TPP	target product profile
UHC/UCN	Universal Health Coverage/Communicable and Noncommunicable Diseases
WASH	water, sanitation and hygiene
WHE	WHO Health Emergencies programme

The thirteenth meeting of the Strategic and Technical Advisory Group for Neglected Tropical Diseases (STAG-NTD) was held virtually on 15–17 September 2020. The agenda is attached as **Annex 1** and the list of participants as **Annex 2**.

## **1. Opening of the meeting and appointment of the Rapporteur**

Dr Mwelecele Ntuli Malecela, Director, WHO Department of Control of Neglected Tropical Diseases, opened the meeting and invited Dr Ren Minghui, WHO Assistant Director-General for Universal Health Coverage/Communicable and Noncommunicable Diseases (UHC/UCN), to address the meeting.

Dr Ren said that the COVID-19 pandemic touched nearly every aspect of life and work, and, for many people, had re-awakened their understanding of the importance of infectious diseases. That had brought new calls for the expertise of those involved in infectious diseases, such as those attending the meeting, and WHO appreciated the fact that they had taken the time to attend.

Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, new successes had been achieved in the response to neglected tropical diseases (NTDs). In 2020, Malawi had eliminated lymphatic filariasis (LF), Myanmar had eliminated trachoma, and Togo had eliminated human African trypanosomiasis (HAT). Those were significant milestones, and credit must be given to all those who contributed. A lot more remained to be done, and WHO looked forward to deliberations during the Seventy-third World Health Assembly in November 2020 on the NTD road map 2021–2030.

NTDs should also be part of the new Global Framework for Multi-disease Elimination, which was being considered in consultation with other WHO technical units and with external partners and would be discussed by STAG. Controlling, eliminating and eradicating NTDs were critical to promoting health, keeping the world safe and serving the vulnerable, and the deliberations of STAG kept WHO on track to achieving those goals.

The Chair, Professor David Mabey, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, confirmed that Dr Margaret Gyapong would continue as Rapporteur.

## **2. Commemoration of Professor Marleen Boelaert and Dr Ricardo Thomson**

Professor Mabey called on members to give thanks for the contributions of two former STAG members who had passed away since the previous meeting. In a video, Dr Marc-Alain Widdowson, Director, Institute of Tropical Medicine, Antwerp, Belgium, recalled the outstanding scientific and personal attributes of Professor Boelaert. In another video, Dr Armindo Tiago, Minister of Health, Mozambique, described the consistent, valuable contributions of Dr Thomson to work on NTDs.

### 3. Director's report on progress and challenges

The Director described progress that had been made by the NTD department since the previous (twelfth) meeting of STAG (Geneva, 29–30 April 2019) and the extraordinary STAG meeting (Geneva, 2–3 September 2019), the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their work and the new structure and staffing of the department.

#### 3.1 Progress against NTDs

Dr Malecela said that, in 2019, more than 1.7 billion people required interventions against NTDs, which was more than 500 million fewer than in 2010; over 1 billion people had received at least one intervention. At least one NTD had been eliminated in 42 countries. Preventive chemotherapy had been provided for most people who required it, with slight downward trends only for soil-transmitted helminthiases (STH) and schistosomiasis.

Between 2017 and 2019, donor commitment to NTDs had reached US\$ 1 billion. New medicine donations had been secured in 2020 for niclosamide and praziquantel from Bayer to treat taeniasis and cysticercosis and for benznidazole from Mundo Sano and nifurtimox from Bayer for treatment of paediatric Chagas disease. The NTD department was involved in high-profile webinars and an advocacy campaign for the new NTD road map.

Dr Malecela then presented progress achieved against each of the NTDs addressed by the department. With regard to **dracunculiasis**, 20 human cases had been reported in six countries up to July 2020, which represented a 49% reduction from the same period in 2019. Angola had been classified as endemic after 3 consecutive years of reporting laboratory-confirmed indigenous cases. The main problem remained dogs infected with *Dracunculus medinensis*.

Work to eliminate **HAT** as a public health problem was proceeding well, with a focus on treatment guidelines for gambiense HAT. The WHO **Onchocerciasis** Technical Advisory Subgroup (OTS) had set thresholds for stopping mass drug administration (MDA) and discussed new diagnostics and the mapping of elimination. A WHO informal consultation on a framework for **scabies** control had recommended mapping of the global distribution and identification of areas for MDA and case management. For **LF**, the number of infected people had been estimated in a geospatial model to have been reduced by 74% between 2000 and 2018 (1). MDA with ivermectin, diethylcarbamazine citrate and albendazole (IDA) had been conducted in 13 countries. For **trachoma**, the number of people requiring surgery for trichiasis had decreased by 74%, and the population requiring antibiotics, facial cleanliness and environmental improvement of the SAFE strategy for trachoma elimination had decreased by 91% between 2002 and 2020. New guidelines on elimination of **schistosomiasis**, being considered by the WHO Guidelines Review Committee, included recommendations for treatment of all at-risk groups, a single threshold for preventive chemotherapy, a strategy of integrated control and

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