



ASCEND

Accelerating Sustainable Control and Elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases

Taking 'Neglected' Out of Neglected Tropical Diseases: The UK Government's Ascend Programme

Accelerating the Sustainable Control and Elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases (Ascend) is The UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's (FCDO) £200m flagship health programme to protect millions of people worldwide from Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs).

NTDs are a group of infectious diseases that thrive in poor and often rural settings, affecting more than 1 billion of the world's poorest people. These diseases cause disability, disfigurement, stigma and death.

The three-year programme aims to support national governments in sustainably tackling NTDs, with a focus on the control and elimination of five preventable NTDs across 24 countries.



-  **Onchocerciasis** (also known as river blindness) - a parasitic worm infection transmitted by infected blackflies, causing severe itching, disfiguring skin conditions, and visual impairment, including permanent blindness.
-  **Trachoma** - a bacterial eye infection spread through personal contact, with repeated infections causing permanent damage and vision loss. It is the leading cause of infectious blindness worldwide.
-  **Schistosomiasis** (also known as bilharzia) - an infection spread by parasitic worms found in freshwater that enter the body and lay eggs, which become trapped in tissues and cause damage.
-  **Lymphatic Filariasis** (also known as elephantiasis) - a parasitic infection spread through the bite of infected mosquitoes, causing tissue swelling and thickening that can lead to permanent disability.
-  **Visceral Leishmaniasis** (also known as Kala Azar) - a parasitic infection spread through the bite of infected sandflies, causing fever, weight loss, enlargement of the spleen and liver, and anaemia.

THE COUNTRIES ASCEND WORKS IN:

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|------------------------------|--------------|
| Bangladesh | Liberia |
| Benin | Malawi |
| Burkina Faso | Mozambique |
| Central African Republic | Nepal |
| Chad | Niger |
| Côte d'Ivoire | Nigeria |
| Democratic Republic of Congo | Sierra Leone |
| Ethiopia | Sudan |
| Ghana | South Sudan |
| Guinea | Tanzania |
| Guinea Bissau | Uganda |
| Kenya | Zambia |



WHY IS ASCEND IMPORTANT?

Ascend is working with governments to:

-  **Strengthen health systems -- to ensure sustainable delivery of NTD control and elimination activities beyond the programme's lifetime**
-  **Increase detection of NTD cases**
-  **Increase treatments to both prevent infection and treat symptoms**
-  **Advocate for greater allocation of governments funds to NTDs**
-  **Integrate NTDs within universal health care and their Covid-19 response**
-  **Increase coverage of preventive measures through better collaboration between government departments, including Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)**

HOW WILL THIS BE ACHIEVED?

- **Mass Drug Administration of treatments (MDAs) delivered in target countries**
- **Surgeries provided to prevent cases of blindness due to Trachoma**
- **Treatments to reduce morbidity and disability of people with Lymphatic Filariasis**
- **Increased early diagnosis and treatment of Visceral Leishmaniasis**



WHAT ASCEND HAS ACHIEVED AT A GLANCE

Supported the delivery of over **156 million** neglected tropical disease (NTD) treatments in the countries where it works.

Increased country capacity by supporting the training of over **434,000 people**, including community volunteers and teachers.

Supported ministries with their COVID-19 response, reaching more than **115 million** people with mass media behaviour change campaigns.

Leveraged a vast network of volunteers and health workers to **raise awareness of COVID-19** and conduct 'track and trace' within targeted communities across West and Central Africa.

Designing, building, testing and rolling-out a **monitoring and information system for NTDs** built on the widely-used DHIS2.0 software platform. This will enable Ministries of Health to better monitor the NTD situation in their countries and plan effective interventions.

Improving supply chains by **tracking the movement of NTD drugs**, ensuring visibility of the last mile of distribution using a real-time data platform called NTDdeliver.



ADDITIONAL BENEFITS OF THE PROGRAMME:

Harnessing the skills and research of European academia in global NTD control through its partners, including:

- The NTD Modelling consortium
- The London Centre for NTD Research
- Imperial College London
- The Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine
- The KIT Royal Tropical Institute
- The SCI Foundation

Supporting countries where elimination of a disease is within reach:

- Eliminating Visceral Leishmaniasis in Bangladesh by 2022
- Elimination of Visceral Leishmaniasis in Nepal by 2024

Value for Money:

- Supporting governments to implement national NTD services directly
- The cost per treatment can be as low as \$0.03 - achieved in both Sudan and Mozambique

Strengthening health systems through:

- Supply chain management
- Data systems to improve monitoring and evaluation
- Pioneering new ways of delivery during the pandemic
- Supporting the Leave No-One Behind Agenda (LNOB)
- Reaching the truly marginalised and remote communities of the countries it works in

