

30 January – The first-ever World NTD Day

ITM joins the fight for permanent elimination of neglected tropical diseases.

29-01-20



Dit is de omschrijving

The first-ever edition of "World Neglected Tropical Diseases Day" (World NTD Day) is launched on 30 January 2020. This initiative brings together various civil society organisations, community leaders, global health experts and policy makers working in the field of NTDs. They share a bold ambition: #beat NTDs, a goal fully supported by the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) in Antwerp. In [an opinion piece published in BMJ Global Health](#), ITM scientists emphasise the need for strong action to tackle NTDs more effectively.

World NTD day

Neglected tropical diseases are a group of 20*, relatively old diseases, that occur primarily in low income countries and affect around 1.6 billion people worldwide. They are often referred to as diseases of poverty because their prevalence is high in poorer population groups. The infections are spread mainly through contaminated water, unhealthy living conditions and poor hygiene/sanitation. NTDs have always been overshadowed by "the big three": HIV / AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. This may now be changing as 2020 promises to be a decisive year in the fight against NTDs.

The aim of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations (UN) is to effectively eliminate all NTDs by 2030. We can therefore assume that the World Health Organization (WHO) will launch its new NTD recommendations early 2020 to achieve the health-related SDGs. All major leaders (G20 + BRICS) will (once again) get the opportunity and the responsibility to eliminate NTDs for ever. It is imperative that more financial, political and logistical resources are made available. In line with this perspective, the "World NTD Day" initiative could not be timelier and will ensure that NTDs (continue to) receive the necessary attention and support.

ITM joins the fight

ITM has been conducting intensive research into neglected diseases for decades. It has developed unique global know on-how to combat these infections. ITM scientists realise that a lot more action is still needed to achieve the SDGs, i.e. the elimination of NTDs. They published an opinion piece on the topic in *BMJ Global Health*. The article was written by the participants of SORT IT NTD**, a research training project in Gondar, Ethiopia, organised by (among others) ITM researchers. The training is designed for health professionals who want to improve their practical skills for operational research into NTDs.

The article questions the number of diseases that fall under this category: NTDs include parasitic, bacterial, viral and fungal infections but also snake bites. They are a very diverse group of infections and each of these requires a specific and thorough approach, such as in the case of HIV, malaria and tuberculosis. Due to a lack of financial resources it is currently not possible to tackle these separately. The development of an integrated approach which examines each NTD individually is crucial. To make the elimination of NTDs by 2030 feasible, we need widespread prevention, as well as a plan to remedy vaccine shortages and an adequate distribution of medicines. Unfortunately, as the list of NTDs becomes longer, financial resources per "neglected disease" are dwindling.

Neglected diseases are high on ITM's agenda and our researchers are working on a clinical, epidemiological and biomedical level, through fundamental (crucial for application development) and applied research. The Institute focuses, among other things, on the study of pathogen genomes that cause these diseases. Our new insectarium with a wide range of insects such as tiger mosquitoes, tsetse flies and sand flies will soon open and offer ITM researchers a unique chance of exploring the interactions between pathogen, insect and environment and gaining new insights into infectious diseases. The elimination of sleeping sickness is currently one of the Institute's largest projects in which scientists collaborate closely with Congolese and international partners.

Knowing that many NTDs can be prevented or even eliminated through better medicines and improved access to existing care, ITM scientists argue that much more attention and financial resources are vital. Hence, their urgent call for action. Not only a policy shift is needed. The mentality within the pharmaceutical industry also needs to be revised. The sector often considers NTDs as a low priority because the potential market for these medicines is too small to be economically attractive. We need a clear-cut "hands on" mentality and a strong sense of global solidarity if we want to achieve success in #BeatNTDs. ITM, with its interdisciplinary expertise in three departments, would like to play a leading role in this fight to make sure that the SDGs motto "leaving no one behind" does not remain a dream but becomes reality.

Neglected tropical diseases

- Buruli ulcer
- Chagas disease
- Dengue and Chikungunya
- Dracunculiasis (guinea-worm disease)
- Echinococcosis
- Foodborne trematodiasis
- Human African trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness)
- Leishmaniasis
- Leprosy (Hansen's disease)
- Lymphatic filariasis
- Mycetoma, chromoblastomycosis and other deep mycoses
- Onchocerciasis (river blindness)
- Rabies
- Scabies and other ectoparasites
- Schistosomiasis
- Soil-transmitted helminthiasis
- Snakebite envenoming
- Taeniasis/Cysticercosis
- Trachoma
- Yaws (Endemic treponematoses)