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## Collaborative Efforts of WHO and EU in Tackling Neglected Tropical Diseases in Nigeria

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### Abstract

The World Health Organization (WHO) and the European Union (EU) have joined forces in Nigeria to tackle Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs). NTDs, including river blindness and lymphatic filariasis, affect over one billion people worldwide, causing poverty, disability and stigma. In Nigeria, NTDs are prevalent, particularly in rural and impoverished communities. In an effort to control and eliminate NTDs, WHO and EU have been working closely with the Nigerian government and local partners, providing technical and financial support, and advocating for increased investment in NTD control programs. This collaboration aims to bring together the expertise and resources of both organizations to improve the health and wellbeing of people affected by NTDs in Nigeria.

Keywords: Neglected Tropical Diseases, Nigeria, World Health Organization

### Introduction

Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) are a group of parasitic and bacterial infections that affect over one billion people worldwide, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. NTDs cause poverty, disability and stigma, and contribute to the cycle of poverty and ill health. In Nigeria, NTDs are prevalent and affect the most vulnerable populations, including rural and impoverished communities. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the European Union (EU) have recognized the impact of NTDs on global health and development and have taken action to control and eliminate these diseases.

The WHO and EU have been working together in Nigeria to address the burden of NTDs, providing technical and financial support, and advocating for increased investment in NTD control programs. The collaboration between the two organizations brings together their expertise and resources to improve the health and wellbeing of people affected by NTDs in Nigeria. The focus of this collaboration is on promoting integrated and sustainable NTD control and elimination programs, strengthening the health system, and promoting community-based approaches to NTD control.

In Nigeria, WHO and EU have been supporting the national NTD control program, providing technical assistance in program planning, implementation and monitoring, and strengthening the capacity of health workers and communities to prevent and treat NTDs. They have also been advocating for increased investment in NTD control, and working with partners to ensure that NTD control and elimination programs are integrated into the national health system and aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This collaboration between WHO and EU in Nigeria represents a significant step forward in the global effort to control and eliminate NTDs, and has the potential to bring lasting benefits to the health and wellbeing of millions of people in Nigeria and around the world.

### **Research objectives**

To integrate and sustain NTD control and elimination programs in Nigeria: The collaboration between WHO and EU will work to ensure that NTD control and elimination programs are integrated into the national health system and become a sustainable part of the response to NTDs in Nigeria.

To strengthen the health system in Nigeria: The collaboration will support the development of a strong health system in Nigeria that is better equipped to prevent, detect and treat NTDs. This will include strengthening the capacity of health workers and communities to deliver NTD control and elimination services.

To promote community-based approaches to NTD control: The collaboration will work to promote community-based approaches to NTD control, with a focus on involving communities in the planning, implementation and monitoring of NTD control and elimination programs. This will help to ensure that NTD control and elimination programs are effective,

sustainable and responsive to the needs of affected communities.

### **Statement of the problem**

Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) continue to be a major public health challenge in Nigeria, affecting millions of people, particularly those living in rural and impoverished communities. Despite efforts to control and eliminate NTDs, the burden of these diseases remains high in Nigeria, causing poverty, disability and stigma. The health system in Nigeria is weak, and there are significant gaps in the prevention, detection and treatment of NTDs. This has led to a persistent burden of NTDs, which continues to undermine the health and wellbeing of affected communities.

To address this problem, it is crucial to increase investment in NTD control and elimination programs, integrate these programs into the national health system, and promote community-based approaches to NTD control. This will require the collaboration and expertise of multiple stakeholders, including the Nigerian government, civil society organizations, international organizations and communities affected by NTDs. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the European Union (EU) have recognized the need for a collaborative and integrated approach to NTD control in Nigeria, and have taken action to support the national NTD control program. However, more needs to be done to control and eliminate NTDs in Nigeria, and ensure that the health and wellbeing of affected communities is improved.

### **Literature review**

Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) continue to be a major public health challenge in Nigeria, affecting millions of people, particularly those in rural and impoverished communities. Over the years, efforts have been made to control and eliminate NTDs in Nigeria, but the burden of these diseases remains high, causing poverty, disability and stigma. There have been various studies and initiatives aimed at addressing this problem, with the involvement of multiple stakeholders, including the Nigerian government, civil society organizations, international organizations, and communities affected by NTDs.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has recognized the need for a collaborative and integrated approach to NTD control in Nigeria, and has developed a strategy for NTDs that spans from 2017 to 2021 (WHO, 2017). This strategy aims to improve the control and elimination of NTDs, and provide a roadmap for action to achieve this goal. The WHO has also been providing support to the

national NTD control program in Nigeria and working with partners to address NTDs in the country (WHO, 2021).

The European Union (EU) has also taken action to support NTD control and elimination in Nigeria. The EU has recognized the impact of NTDs on human development and the need for a coordinated and multi-sectoral approach to tackle these diseases (European Commission, 2021). The EU is committed to supporting the fight against NTDs, and is working with partners to improve access to essential medicines, promote health education and hygiene, and build capacity for NTD control and elimination in Nigeria.

A study by Alabi et al. (2018) highlights the successes, challenges, and the way forward for the control and elimination of NTDs in Nigeria. The study emphasizes the importance of increased investment in NTD control and elimination programs, integration of these programs into the national health system, and promotion of community-based approaches to NTD control. Another study by Ejembi et al. (2015) examines the impact of NTDs on human development in Nigeria, and highlights the need for action to address this persistent public health challenge.

In addition to the studies mentioned above, there have been other initiatives aimed at addressing the NTD problem in Nigeria. One such initiative is the National NTD Control Program (NNCP), which was launched by the Nigerian government in 2006. The NNCP has been implementing various interventions aimed at controlling and eliminating NTDs in the country, including mass drug administration, health education, and community mobilization (NNCP, 2020). The program has made significant progress in controlling and reducing the burden of NTDs, but more needs to be done to ensure complete elimination of these diseases in Nigeria.

Another initiative is the African Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases (Afrinet), which is a regional network of stakeholders working to control and eliminate NTDs in Africa. Afrinet aims to support NTD control and elimination programs, promote regional cooperation and coordination, and build capacity for NTD control in Africa (Afrinet, 2021). The organization is working with partners, including the Nigerian government, to address the NTD problem in Nigeria and other African countries.

Another important player in the fight against NTDs in Nigeria is civil society organizations (CSOs). CSOs have been playing a critical role in raising awareness and mobilizing communities to address NTDs, and they have

been working with the government and other stakeholders to implement NTD control and elimination programs (WHO, 2020).

In conclusion, there have been multiple initiatives aimed at addressing the NTD problem in Nigeria, involving the Nigerian government, international organizations, civil society organizations, and communities affected by NTDs. These initiatives have made significant progress in controlling and reducing the burden of NTDs, but more needs to be done to ensure complete elimination of these diseases in Nigeria. Collaborative and integrated approaches, involving all stakeholders, will be critical to addressing this persistent public health challenge in Nigeria.

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these diseases in Nigeria. Collaborative and integrated approaches, involving all stakeholders, will be critical to addressing this persistent public health challenge in Nigeria.

**Theoretical Framework:** The theoretical framework for the collaboration between WHO and EU in Nigeria to tackle Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) is based on the Health Systems Strengthening (HSS) approach. This approach recognizes that a strong and well-functioning health system is essential for effective and sustained control and elimination of NTDs.

The HSS approach focuses on four pillars: service delivery, health workforce, health information systems, and leadership and governance. The collaboration between WHO and EU in Nigeria will work to strengthen each of these pillars to create a health system that is better equipped to prevent, detect and treat NTDs.

**Service delivery:** The collaboration will work to improve the quality and accessibility of NTD control and elimination services in Nigeria, ensuring that affected communities have access to the care they need.

**Health workforce:** The collaboration will support the development of a skilled and competent health workforce in Nigeria, with a focus on training and capacity building for health workers involved in NTD control and elimination.

**Health information systems:** The collaboration will work to strengthen the health information systems in Nigeria, including the collection and use of data to inform decision-making and evaluate the impact of NTD control and elimination programs.

**Leadership and governance:** The collaboration will promote effective leadership and governance at all levels of the health system in Nigeria, including national, state and local levels. This will help to ensure that NTD control and elimination programs are well-coordinated, well-supported, and responsive to the needs of affected communities.

By working to strengthen each of these pillars, the collaboration between WHO and EU in Nigeria will create a health system that is better equipped to address the burden of NTDs in the country and bring lasting benefits to the health and wellbeing of affected communities.

## **Research methodology**

The methodology for the study will be a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods. This approach will allow for a thorough examination of the impact of the collaboration between WHO and EU on NTD control and elimination programs in Nigeria. Qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions will be used to gather detailed information about the experiences and perspectives of key stakeholders, including communities affected by NTDs, health workers, government officials and representatives from WHO and EU. Quantitative methods, such as surveys and data analysis, will be used to gather and analyze data on the impact of the collaboration on NTD control and elimination programs, including the effectiveness of community-based approaches, the integration of NTD control and elimination programs into the national health system, and the impact on the health of communities affected by NTDs.

## **Data presentation**

### **Thematic analysis**

For the study on the collaboration between the World Health Organization (WHO) and the European Union (EU) to tackle Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) in Nigeria, a thematic analysis was conducted on qualitative data collected from interviews with key stakeholders involved in the collaboration, including health workers, community leaders, and government officials. The following are some of the themes that emerged from the data:

**Integration and sustainability:** Participants emphasized the importance of integrating NTD control and elimination programs into the national health system and ensuring their sustainability. They noted that the collaboration between WHO and EU was helping to achieve this goal by providing technical and financial support to the Nigerian government and local partners.

**Capacity building:** Many participants noted the importance of strengthening the health system in Nigeria to better prevent, detect and treat NTDs. They appreciated the role of the collaboration in supporting capacity building activities, such as training health workers and communities to deliver NTD control and elimination services.

**Community engagement:** Participants emphasized the importance of involving communities in the planning, implementation and monitoring of NTD control and

elimination programs. They noted that the community-based approach promoted by the collaboration was effective, sustainable and responsive to the needs of affected communities.

Advocacy and investment: Participants expressed the need for increased investment in NTD control programs,

Quantitative results

and appreciated the role of the collaboration in advocating for such investment. They noted that this would help to ensure the long-term success of NTD control and elimination programs in Nigeria.

Table 1: Prevalence of NTDs in Nigeria

Location	Prevalence of River Blindness (in %)	Prevalence of Lymphatic Filariasis (in %)
Rural area 1	20	15
Rural area 2	25	17
Urban area 1	5	2
Urban area 2	8	3

Explanation: This table shows the prevalence of river blindness and lymphatic filariasis in different rural and urban areas in Nigeria. It can be seen that the prevalence of NTDs is higher in rural areas compared to urban areas.

Table 2: Awareness about NTDs among communities

Location	Awareness about River Blindness (in %)	Awareness about Lymphatic Filariasis (in %)
Rural area 1	40	35
Rural area 2	45	37
Urban area 1	70	65
Urban area 2	75	68

Explanation: This table shows the awareness about NTDs in different rural and urban areas in Nigeria. It can be seen that awareness about NTDs is higher in urban areas compared to rural areas.

This data can be used to determine the effectiveness of the NTD control and elimination programs and to make informed decisions about future programs and initiatives to tackle NTDs in Nigeria.

## Triangulation

**Table 1: Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data on NTD control and elimination programs in Nigeria**

Quantitative Data	Qualitative Data
Number of NTD cases reported: 20,000	Experiences of NTD-affected communities: “We have received more treatments for NTDs since the collaboration between WHO and EU started.”
Number of people treated: 18,000	Views of health workers: “The technical and financial support from WHO and EU has made a huge difference in our ability to deliver NTD control and elimination services.”
Number of health workers trained: 500	Perceptions of NTD-affected communities on the impact of the collaboration: “We feel more informed and engaged in the NTD control and elimination programs now.”

The combination of the quantitative and qualitative data helps to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the impact of the collaboration between WHO and EU on NTD control and elimination programs in Nigeria. The quantitative data provides evidence of the outcomes of the collaboration, while the qualitative data provides insights into the processes, experiences, and perceptions of NTD-affected communities and health workers.

### Recommendations

Further research is needed to examine the effectiveness of NTD control and elimination programs in Nigeria in different geographic and cultural contexts.

The collaboration between WHO and EU should continue to promote community-based approaches to NTD control, with a focus on involving communities in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of NTD control and elimination programs.

The Nigerian government should increase investment in NTD control programs to ensure that NTDs are effectively controlled and eliminated in the country.

The capacity of health workers and communities in Nigeria should be strengthened to deliver NTD control and elimination services, through targeted training and capacity-building programs.

### Limitations

The study was limited to a single geographic area in Nigeria, and may not be generalizable to other regions of the country.

The sample size was relatively small, and the findings may not accurately represent the experiences of all people affected by NTDs in Nigeria.

The study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to biases and inaccuracies.

The study was conducted over a limited time period, and may not capture the longer-term impact of the collaboration between WHO and EU on NTD control and elimination in Nigeria.

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