



# COVID 19 : MANAGEMENT OF NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES (NTD) PROGRAMS IN FRANCOPHONE AFRICA

As part of the Virtual Bridges initiative, Speak Up Africa organized a webinar on Thursday, June 18 to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on the implementation of activities to combat Neglected Tropical Diseases, and solutions developed by countries to maintain effective communication and implementation of NTD activities during this period.

## The following panelists partook in the webinar:

**Dr Aïchatou DJIBO**, Neglected Tropical Diseases Programme Coordinator – Niger

**Dr Fatoumata SAKHO**, Neglected Tropical Diseases Programme Coordinator – Guinea Conakry

**M. Dame Ndiaye**, President of the CSO No To NTD Coalition and Coordinator of l'Association Nationale des Jeunes pour la Santé de la Reproduction et la Planification Familiale (ANJ-SR/PF).

**More than 40 participants attended the webinar on Zoom and more than 600 viewers connected via Facebook Live.**

## Context

COVID-19 is restricting development momentum in African countries, particularly in West Africa where countries have made great strides in ensuring equitable access to basic health care for all. If diseases are not contained during this period, Africa may see a resurgence of diseases such as Guinea Worm or Leprosy.

Given the seriousness and extent of COVID-19, fields in health that are only indirectly linked - such as neglected tropical diseases - are deprioritized.

In most African countries, mass drug administration (MDA) campaigns have been postponed, NTD programmes no longer have the financial resources to implement their activities, and the media no longer communicates on the impact of NTDs on the population.

## Discussion Points

### Challenges for the NTD Programme Manager in Niger in the context of COVID-19:

- Halting the MDA campaigns to align with COVID-19 emergency measures have resulted in three (3) months of delay on the original schedule;
- Upcoming expiration dates of the drugs stored for the MDA campaign;
- Suspension of funding by two (2) partners out of three (3) of the NTD program, which will result in a shutdown of activities in all districts;
- Disrupting the activities implemented by the NTD programme with the integration of the measures of COVID-19 ;
- Reluctance of partners to lift restrictions and make funding available despite the government's green light to resume activities in the fight against NTDs.

### > **Challenges for the NTD Programme Manager in Guinea Conakry in the context of COVID-19:**

- The postponement of two (2) mass treatment campaigns planned this year;
- Increase in the number of districts endemic to NTDs and other diseases due to the cessation of control activities to align with COVID-19 regulations and guidance;
- Expiration of all drugs positioned in districts in October 2020;
- Uncertainty in the resumption of MDA activities and the compliance with the three (3) time limit required to certify the quality of medicines;
- Funding is blocked by programme partners on the recommendation of WHO.
- High numbers of Fake News around COVID-19 circulating

### > **Challenges for Senegalese and West African Civil Society in the context of COVID-19:**

- Late involvement of the Civil Society in the response committee against COVID-19 ;
- Restricting travel for large-scale awareness and communication on barrier measures;
- Difficulty in reaching targets in the execution of the response plan against COVID-19.

## Actions implemented in context of COVID-19 and NTDs

### > **Actions implemented by the NTD Programme in Niger:**

- Development of a plan to monitor the activities of the NTD programme with the secretariat of the Ministry of Health to ensure that the protection measures are properly taken into account;
- Integrating awareness of barrier measures to better prepare for MDA campaign;
- Training of community distributors on the practice and compliance of hygiene measures and awareness against COVID-19.
- Working closely with the Department of Education to facilitate distribution in schools;
- Set up the hand-washing device in the company of the educational staff;

### > **Actions implemented by the NTD Programme in Guinea Conakry:**

- Development of a contingency plan for the resumption of NTD activities addressed to the various partners of the programme;
- Integrating a door-to-door awareness campaign into the relaunch of the drug distribution campaign;
- Developing additional budgets by program partners that take into account the impact of COVID-19;
- Integrating educational staff into all interventions as part of the resumption of programme activities;
- Close and multifaceted collaboration with the Guinean Civil Society for the engagement of parliamentarians, journalists and in the mass treatment campaign.

### > **Actions implemented by Senegalese Civil Society:**

- The development of the response plan in March with active participation of civil society in communication and community engagement for the adoption of barrier measures;
- Adapting the communication strategy with the use of social media and other interactive platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter,)
- Awareness raising on barrier measures and against the community transmission chain on social networks.

## Next Steps

### > For the NTD Programme Manager in Niger:

- Finalization of the distribution campaign in July;
- Proposal to maintain the handwashing device to increase effectiveness in control and elimination of NTDs;
- Reflecting on the positive impact to be made of the implementation of hygiene measures in the fight against NTDs - in particular trachoma and intestinal worms;
- Follow-up of the new organization chart developed with financial and technical partners;
- Procedure for the lifting of the suspension of USAID funds.

### > For the NTD Programme Manager in Guinea Conakry:

- Resuming the first wave of mass treatment in June;
- Move to lift WHO sanctions;
- Receiving batches of medicines from Senegal;
- Prioritization of the distribution of near-expiration drugs;
- Start work plan surveys and evaluations;
- A process for the integration of the NTD program into the Covid-19 committee;
- Involvement of civil society to deal with fake news especially during MDAs.

### > For CSO No to NTD Network:

- Call to action to strengthen health systems in Africa through the strengthening of financial, technical and human resources to tackle NTDs and COVID-19;
- A call for strengthening the community approach by supporting Basic Community Organizations and Civil Society Organizations for the Control and Elimination of NTDs in Africa;

### About the Stay Safe Africa campaign

Launched in April 2020, the Stay Safe Africa campaign aims to promote the dissemination of key messages and advice tailored to African communities and leaders in the fight against COVID-19, while taking into account language, literacy and cultural barriers. This neutral-image campaign is open to all partners who are concerned about strengthening preventive measures and protecting Africa from this pandemic. More information about [www.staysafeafrica.org](http://www.staysafeafrica.org)

### About Speak Up Africa

Based in Dakar, Senegal, Speak Up Africa is a non-profit strategic communication and advocacy organization dedicated to catalyzing African leadership, fostering policy change and raising awareness around sustainable development in Africa. Through our programmes, networks and with the help of our partners, we ensure that decision-makers meet with stakeholders on the ground, that solutions are presented, and that every sector - from citizens and civil society groups to financial partners and business leaders - contributes critically to the dialogue and strives to take concrete action for health and sustainable development on the continent. More information about [www.speakupafrica.org](http://www.speakupafrica.org)