

# BRINGING NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES OUT OF THE SHADOWS TROPICALES NÉGLIGÉES



## ABOUT SPEAK UP AFRICA

We are an African-led, Africa-based organization working with leaders and change-makers in Africa and beyond to solve our continent's pressing sustainable development challenges.

We convene, enable and advocate. Focusing on strategic communications, policy and advocacy, we are dedicated to supporting African leaders and citizens to take an active role in identifying and developing solutions to tackle the challenges facing our continent – including malaria, NTDs, immunization, sanitation, gender equality and global health research and development.

## ABOUT NTDs

Neglected tropical diseases, also known as NTDs, are destructive, dangerous and communicable diseases that affect more than 1.5 billion people globally. In Africa, almost all countries (47 out of 54) are endemic for at least one NTD, and over 600 million people require treatment for NTDs. Yet only **0.6% of global healthcare funding goes to controlling NTDs.**

NTDs can cause not only long-term disabilities, but also severe disfigurement that hinders the health and productivity of those affected. NTDs such as bilharzia, trachoma, river blindness and elephantiasis **disproportionately affect women and children**, specifically those living in impoverished conditions, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). They create obstacles to education, employment, economic growth and overall development. Yet NTDs can be prevented and treated.

# OUR APPROACH

Speak Up Africa has set out to alleviate suffering from NTDs by galvanizing action among policymakers, civil society organizations and citizens. We also work closely with government departments and the WHO Regional Office for Africa's Expanded Special Project for Elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases (ESPEN) to build sustained leadership, mobilize foreign and domestic resources, and improve the use of NTD data for decision making.

To bring these diseases out of the shadows, we have organized sporting events to engage youth and highlight the neglect of NTDs; partnered with media to increase the volume and quality of reporting on NTDs; launched a large-scale "No to NTDs" campaign to increase awareness, prioritization and national commitments to accelerate the control and elimination of NTDs in Africa; and more.

The campaign is implemented in 5 countries: Senegal, Burkina Faso, Benin, Niger and Guinea, with an impact at the regional level.

## Our specific objectives include:



Increasing leadership for, and political commitment to, the fight against NTDs

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Supporting resource mobilization activities for the control and elimination of NTDs

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Supporting the implementation of strong partnerships working in synergy to control and eliminate NTDs

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## More specifically, we aim to:



Build coalitions with government and private sector decision-makers and influencers to advocate for the prevention, treatment, care and elimination of NTDs

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Engage traditional media and use social networks to mobilize grassroots support for NTD goals and motivate specific target audiences, including opinion leaders and public and private sector leaders, to make NTD goals their priority and take the necessary actions

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Develop tools to help stakeholders mobilize support and resources for the prevention, treatment, care and elimination of NTDs

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# OUR IMPACT AT A GLANCE

## Regional Level:



Launched the “No to NTDs Movement” in 2019 to increase awareness, prioritization and commitment for the control and elimination of NTDs



Supported the adoption of the NTD Continental Framework by African Union (AU) member states



Launched «March to Kigali» (MTK), a regional campaign that urged global leaders to prioritize the elimination of malaria and NTDs at the Kigali Summit that took place alongside the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2022

## National Level:



Supported the African Leaders Malaria Alliance (ALMA) with the development of the 1st ALMA NTD scorecard in Senegal, Burkina Faso and Niger



Advocated successfully for the design and adoption of comprehensive national advocacy plans in Guinea, Senegal, Burkina Faso and Niger



Supported the Alignment of Senegalese Master Plan with the NTD continental framework through our participation in the national reviewing technical committee



Created the first multisectoral Coalition for the Fight Against NTDs in Guinea, regrouping government, civil society organizations, and the private sector to avoid duplication of efforts and maximize the use of financial resources



In 2023, engaged 50 young leaders from six regions and young students from two regions in Senegal to encourage policymakers to increase domestic funding for NTD control



In 2023, 15 articles published by our Media Fellows on the Youth Talk journalists as part of the media tour in celebration of World NTD Day

## EXAMPLES OF OUR WORK

### **For an Africa free of NTDs: Africa's Expanded Special Project for Elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases (ESPEN)**

Since 2016, Speak Up Africa has supported WHO's ESPEN, which was established to mobilize political, technical and financial resources to reduce the burden of the five most prevalent NTDs in Africa: lymphatic filariasis, onchocerciasis, soil-transmitted helminthiasis, schistosomiasis and trachoma.

Speak Up Africa has been using its expertise in partnership-building and strategic communication to help people gain a better understanding of the progress achieved in terms of controlling and eliminating NTDs on the African continent, while also stressing the importance of increasing funding for programs aimed at controlling NTDs. Among other activities, Speak Up Africa has supported ESPEN's resource mobilization efforts, resulting in US\$29 million mobilized. In 2017, for example, we also supported ESPEN's efforts to reach 30 million people through mass drug distributions in 17 African countries and recovery of 132 million tablets through supply chain analysis and improvement in seven countries across the continent.

### **"No to NTDs Movement"**

In 2019, Speak Up Africa launched the "No to NTDs Movement," bringing together individuals, political leaders and civil society organizations to increase awareness and prioritization of, and commitment to, the control and elimination of NTDs.

Following the launch, Speak Up Africa supported Senegal, Guinea and Niger to design NTD advocacy plans aligned with their national objectives, engaging 126 stakeholders from national and sub-national levels to develop these plans.

Under this movement, Speak Up Africa also created a coalition of civil society organizations to improve governance at the national and regional level, build accountability, and increase ownership of NTD-related issues. The coalition now has 12 members.

At the first AU Experts' Meeting on NTDs in 2020, Speak Up Africa met with member states and other partners to discuss the AU's role in eliminating NTDs on the continent. As a result, the AU Continental Framework on NTDs was developed to guide control of these diseases on the continent.

To date, this movement has exponentially increased media interest and awareness of NTDs, with hundreds of articles and news segments published in Africa every year. Since 2019, there have also been thousands of mentions of NTDs on social media: the hashtag #WorldNTDDay reached an estimated 65 million people in 2020 alone.

## Creating an International Day for NTDs

In January 2020, Speak Up Africa supported the launch of the first-ever World NTD Day, bringing together stakeholders from various sectors around the world to call attention to the impact of these neglected and destructive diseases, and what can be done to prevent and treat them. That year, we supported the movement by collaborating with champions worldwide, including the acclaimed Senegalese artist Youssou N'Dour, to specifically engage the youth in the fight against NTDs. With Guinea's NTD control program, we also hosted an event to highlight the role of youth in advocating for the fight against NTDs, providing them with a platform to share their powerful stories and experiences living with NTDs.

In 2021, World NTD Day was officially recognized by the World Health Assembly as an awareness day, with 350 partners signing up to celebrate hard-earned progress and take action to end NTDs. More than 40 cities across 24 countries helped light 60 iconic landmarks in a worldwide demonstration of unity in the fight against NTDs. We partnered with creative agencies, private companies, sports groups, communities and the media to create a steady drumbeat of conversation to raise awareness of NTDs and amplify the voices of people impacted across Africa.

## Young Leaders Initiative

Recognizing the critical role that the media and youth can play in NTD elimination efforts, Speak Up Africa and Reaching the Last Mile launched the Youth Leadership Initiative (YLI) and co-hosted the first in a series of youth talks in Senegal. The talk brought together young advocates, government leaders, civil society organizations and private sector representatives to debate how young people can best be engaged in decision-making spaces to help cross the last mile of NTD elimination. The talks bring together youth from various fields to shape sustainable and innovative solutions to global health challenges, particularly NTDs.

## An integrated approach to fighting malaria and neglected tropical diseases: March to Kigali

Malaria is not the only disease that takes a heavy toll on our continent's human and financial resources. Every year, NTDs — a family of debilitating and life-threatening diseases — affect more than half a million people in Africa. NTDs and malaria share sad similarities, in that they are entirely preventable and treatable, yet continue to prevail.

As eliminating both malaria and NTDs is a critical priority for our continent, we launched the "March to Kigali" campaign to demand that leaders across the African continent prioritize and fund the end of these epidemics. The campaign aimed to engage all sectors of society in the process and was created in the lead up to the summit on NTDs and malaria taking place ahead of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Kigali, Rwanda in June 2022. Campaign activities have focused on raising awareness and inspiring action and included the creation of an online Call to Action.

Today, more than 150 civil society and local organizations, media, and individuals across the sub-region have signed the "March to Kigali" Call to Action.

## **Lines of Impact: Harnessing the power of the media**

To raise public awareness of NTDs and other health issues facing our continent, hold decision-makers accountable, and ultimately create sustainable change, the media has an essential role to play. Through regular, quality reporting on key public health issues, journalists can be powerful agents of change.

Since our founding, we have always promoted citizenship engagement – and that citizenship includes the media. Our “Lines of Impact” initiative aims to strengthen journalists’ capabilities to report on the challenges affecting our continent – including NTDs – to increase both the quantity and quality of reporting on these issues. By working in partnership with journalists, we are ensuring that these issues – and, importantly, their solutions – are at the heart of public discourse. Not only does media coverage help bring issues to the attention of citizens and decision-makers, but when done well it can also amplify the voices of those whose lives are affected by the issues being covered.

Launched in 2021, the first edition of “Lines of Impact” worked with a cohort of seven journalists and focused solely on the fight against NTDs. On the first World NTD Day, these journalists from Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo, produced 13 articles and one video. Find out more about the journalists and their stories.

In 2022, we have broadened the themes so that the journalists can tackle the wide spectrum of issues affecting our continent, engaging influencers and key voices in the process. Find out more about the 2022 cohort .

[www.speakupafrika.org](http://www.speakupafrika.org)

