10 FACTS ON NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES

Fact 1
More than 1 billion people are affected by one or more neglected tropical diseases (NTDs). They are named neglected because these diseases persist exclusively in the poorest and the most marginalized communities, and have been largely eliminated elsewhere and thus are often forgotten.

Fact 2
There are primarily 14 diseases currently listed as NTDs. Most can be prevented and eliminated. They thrive in places with unsafe water, poor sanitation, and limited access to basic health care. They cause severe pain and life-long disabilities and are often less visible and have a low priority.

Fact 3
Neglected tropical diseases do not travel easily. They are mostly concentrated in settings of extreme poverty in remote rural areas, in urban slums or conflict zones and thrive in conditions of impoverishment. Those affected are poor and have little political voice.

Fact 4
For some NTDs, there are simple and affordable diagnostic tools which cost as little as four US cents per test. For the rest, the currently available diagnostic tools require skilled health workers and hospitalization. People in remote areas often become ill or die before the disease can be diagnosed.

Fact 5
The economic impact of NTDs can be staggering. People used to flee fertile river valleys infested with the black fly and settle in less productive regions. More than 25 million hectares of infested land have now been resettled, allowing people to plant crops and raise cattle. Similarly, the tsetse fly - one of the several insect vectors transmitting NTDs - has been eliminated through hanging traps.

Fact 6
Drugs for some of the NTDs are safe, inexpensive (as low as two US cents per tablet) or even distributed free. They can be administered by trained non-medical staff, like teachers, and community health volunteers. For other diseases, the medicines are old, toxic, expensive and often in short supply. They can even be lethal if they are administered poorly.

Fact 7
With the right medicines and services comes success. Over the past 20 years, 116 of 122 endemic countries have eliminated leprosy as a public health problem. Since the introduction of multidrug therapy in 1985, 14.5 million people have been cured of leprosy.

Fact 8
Dracunculiasis, also known as guinea worm disease, is transmitted through contaminated drinking water and is now found only in remote villages. It is now nearing eradication through surveillance, education and inexpensive interventions such as water filtering. The number of cases has fallen from 3.5 million in the 1980s to 4619 in 2008.

Fact 9
Buruli ulcer, leismaniasis and lymphatic filariasis all deform and disfigure to such an extent that those affected can be ostracized. New, inexpensive medicines now protect millions of people from these diseases, enabling them to live good social lives.

Fact 10
Neglected tropical diseases are now on the international agenda. The successes achieved to date prove that the interventions are technically feasible, immediate, visibly powerful and highly cost-effective. They demonstrate that programmes to tackle NTDs can be, and must be rapidly scaled up.

• Buruli Ulcer
• Chagas disease
• Dengue
• Dracunculiasis
• Fascioliasis
• Human African trypanosomiasis
• Leishmaniasis
• Leprosy
• Lymphatic filariasis
• Onchocerciasis
• Schistosomiasis
• Soil transmitted helminthiasis
• Trachoma
• Yaws

SOURCE: WHO website