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May 15, 2012

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Managing Director, Global
Network for Neglected
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Elephantiasis, Snail Fever, Roundworm, More: Eliminating 7 Neglected Diseases that Affect World's Poorest by 2020

Posted: 05/15/2012 9:14 am

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This piece is part of a series of blogs by leading NGOs to call attention to a range of issues that should be raised at the G8 summit at Camp David in rural Maryland from May 18-19.

While G8 countries have led global development efforts for decades, the past several years have been especially important for commitments related to improving the health of the world's poor. We have seen great progress in immunization, HIV/AIDS treatment and anti-malaria efforts.

Nonetheless, we're at risk of failing the poorest nations if we don't step up our efforts to address a health concern that's connected to the success of nearly every important socio-economic development milestone. I'm talking about neglected tropical diseases (NTDs).

Most people have never heard of elephantiasis, river blindness, snail fever, trachoma, hookworm, whipworm or roundworm. These seven parasitic and bacterial infections [impact](#) one in six people worldwide, [including](#) half a billion children. Without treatment, NTDs can lead to anemia, malnutrition, blindness and other severe physical and cognitive disabilities, perpetuating a cycle of poverty that continues from generation to generation.

The story of one girl in Bihar, India represents an experience shared by hundreds of millions of other children around the world. Twelve-year-old Jyoti recently battled an NTD infection that filled her body with intestinal worms, causing her to experience terrible bouts of nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. She grew weak and whenever she tried to eat, she felt like she couldn't get food down her throat. And though she was an excellent student, Jyoti lacked the energy to perform well in school.

Thankfully for children like Jyoti, the solution to these diseases is readily at hand. A simple packet of pills, donated by pharmaceutical companies, can be used to treat and prevent infection from all seven NTDs for an entire year. The treatment programs are so simple that volunteers, community health workers and even teachers can administer them, bringing the annual cost of NTD prevention to about 50 cents per person and making it one of the most cost-effective public health programs around today.

Last year, Bihar provided an example for the potential success of NTD treatment programs available in other areas of the world. In a period of less than three months, a group of partners including [Deworm the World](#), the [Global Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases](#) and the Ministries of Health and Education in Bihar orchestrated the single [largest school-based deworming program](#) in history. More than 17 million children received treatment -- including Jyoti.

NTD treatment extends far beyond improving physical health. Studies [have shown](#) that NTD control contributes to increased school attendance and higher worker productivity. It can also help reduce the spread of other diseases like HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. The cross-cutting benefits of NTD control mean that these programs have the power to help individuals break free of the cycle of poverty, eventually giving communities and entire regions the opportunity to achieve higher levels of development.

Because NTDs are so interrelated with existing global development challenges, we've seen a diverse group of champions become involved in a coordinated effort to tackle these diseases. In [January](#) of this year, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the WHO, leading pharmaceutical companies, national governments and multilateral organizations pledged to eliminate or control 10 neglected tropical diseases by 2020. Former president of Ghana, John Kufuor, a global champion for food security, recently [joined](#) the Global Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases to advocate for NTD control and elimination.

While some members of the G8 are contributing to NTD control, there is still much room for improvement. We were glad to see that this year the British government [increased its commitment](#) to NTD control five-fold, to £245 million over five years. The United States' [support for NTD control](#) has grown every year for the past five years, providing 387 million treatments to individuals in 20 countries to date. The leadership of these two governments is critical to sustaining treatment programs and encouraging other nations to join in the fight against NTDs.

We have an opportunity to do something truly amazing if G8 governments honor their commitments and work to encourage other donor governments to join them in the fight to expand NTD control efforts. We can actually control and eliminate the most prevalent NTDs by 2020, giving more than a billion people the opportunity to live healthy, successful and productive lives.

To learn more about NTDs or to get involved, please visit www.End7.org.

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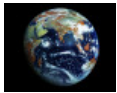
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