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The German Network against Neglected Tropical Diseases (DNTDs) addresses this letter to political, economic and social decision-makers with the appeal to focus more strongly and concretely on poverty-associated neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) in current debates and decisions on global health - pandemic prevention - climate change - feminist foreign and development policy.

Open letter¹

- on the German government's initiatives to combat neglected tropical diseases
- Response to the Federal Government's answer to the small question of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the Bundestag, Printed Paper 20/6744, June 2023

The German Network against Neglected Tropical Diseases (DNTDs) welcomes the response of the German Federal Government to the Questions of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group - Printed Matter [20/7155](#) - Measures taken by the Federal Government to combat neglected tropical diseases. The assessment that the successes achieved so far are fragile and that further support is needed in the fight against neglected tropical diseases.

Good role model for interdepartmental cooperation

The Federal Government's response rightly notes that the first voluntary commitment by the G-7 countries in this regard in Elmau in 2015 visibly increased Germany's commitment to combating these infectious diseases. Since then, new projects have been launched that focus on combating neglected tropical diseases. Due to the increased discussion in recent years of the interrelationships between human medicine, veterinary medicine and environmental sciences, the One Health approach and the promotion of interdisciplinary cooperation, the need to integrate measures against the neglected tropical diseases in corresponding programmes is also increasingly being recognised nationally and internationally in the health systems.

The promotion of the Health Product Access Programme by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in this legislative period shows that close interministerial cooperation is also important and possible. The aim is to enable improved access to effective, safe and affordable health products in low-income countries for the prevention, diagnosis and

¹ This letter is addressed to the Federal Chancellor, Members of the German Bundestag, the Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Federal Minister for Health, the Federal Minister for Education and Research and the Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development.

treatment of poverty-related diseases - including NTDs - on the basis of the product development partnerships funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

The joint coordinated approaches with other important donor states or international institutions such as the WHO in the fight against NTDs, such as in the "Expanded Special Project for Elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases" (ESPEN), based in the WHO's African Regional Office in Congo with activities in all African countries and Yemen, also show the Federal Government's commitment, which should urgently be maintained in the future.

However, the answer to the Question also points to numerous deficits: It continues to be very difficult for the Federal Government to present a consistent, transparent list of current activities in the field of combating neglected tropical diseases. Although a list of ongoing programmes from the departments of three ministries - the Federal Ministry of Health (BMG), the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) - is attached, in the DNTD's view, this paints an incomplete picture that only provides fragmented information about the annual commitment of the departments with regard to NTD control.

Although activities to combat NTDs in the BMZ's multilateral and bilateral cooperation are described, there is a lack of projects that are implemented across sectors. Examples include measures in the area of WASH, those in the "Fit for School" programmes or in the area of irrigated agriculture.

The enumeration of BMBF funding includes research networks and involvement in product development partnerships. However, funding measures in the fight against neglected tropical diseases in the European & Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP) are not included.

In the answer to the small question, it is stated that the Federal Government wants to create links with partner countries for NTD control programmes in international organisations or financing instruments, for example in programmes for the development and promotion of social security systems or also for sexual and reproductive health. We very much welcome this announcement, but so far we are still waiting for visible projects or concrete programmes.

Recommendations

I Draw up an action plan with measurable targets and monitoring by civil society.

We suggest that the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) draw up an action plan with indicators, measurable targets and time-bound implementation steps in the context of combating NTDs. For the sake of transparency, efficiency and accountability, we recommend that funds for combating NTDs be visibly allocated in the federal government's budget. Ideally, there should be a title "Combating NTDs". In planning, implementation and monitoring, we recommend the continuous involvement of the respective local population groups affected by NTDs as well as the specialised organisations associated in the DNTDs. The BMBF could expand research efforts in the field of NTD research and not just remain in the previous concepts, and also take up or expand the funding of research institutions associated with Germany (e.g. African Partner Sites of the DZIF) in the local countries. The budgeters should enable this funding as continuous institutional research funding on the ground in the tropics.

II Commitment to pandemic preparedness and response

We ask the parliamentarians and the representatives of the Federal Government to do their utmost to ensure that NTDs are taken into account in the pandemic preparedness treaty currently being negotiated. In the answer to the small question, it is emphasised that they can be well integrated, e.g. in the area of surveillance for infectious diseases - both often involve the same decision-making bodies, implementation structures and institutions - or in the maintenance of routine health care during pandemics, which also benefit NTD control.

III Advocacy at the World Climate Conference

We recommend that the documents currently being prepared for the World Climate Conference in Dubai (COP 28) include the fight against neglected tropical diseases. In this way, the German government can present its commitment to combating neglected tropical diseases to the international public, show how it supports health measures in poor, low-income regions and encourage others to do the same. A suitable platform is the "Last Mile Forum Event" on 3 December 2023, which will take place on the "Health Day" of COP 28. This forum should, among other things, generate momentum for the fight against NTDs. The German government could present its Health Product Access Programme to the international community.

IV visibility in feminist foreign and development policy.

We recommend that within sexual and reproductive health programmes, the fight against neglected tropical diseases be visibly integrated. Measures could include: Education and training of e.g. midwives on Female Genital Schistosomiasis (FGS) or the stronger integration of NTD control components in WASH programmes.

V Integration of private sector involvement

We suggest that when planning programmes in low-income regions, economic efficiency, the so-called "best buy" in the fight against neglected tropical diseases, should be considered. Research-based pharmaceutical companies donate drugs on a large scale to fight NTDs. As little as €50 cents can protect or cure a person from NTD infection - if the drugs can be brought to those affected. NTD control programmes can be proactively linked by government-funded One Health and climate research networks with private sector and civil society offerings. Research-based pharmaceutical companies are working worldwide on vaccines and medicines also against neglected tropical diseases. The German government should provide even stronger support in mobilising domestic resources.

Conclusion

The need to integrate measures to combat neglected tropical diseases into global health projects became clear during the COVID 19 pandemic, as NTD control programmes were interrupted in many cases and set back by years in their pursuit of goals. Although the German government has so far supported the fight against neglected tropical diseases, it has not been consistent enough in the areas of pandemic preparedness and climate change.

Some governments of endemic countries are leading the fight against NTDs and thus contributing to the global challenges. Especially if health is a priority issue for the German government, the fight against neglected tropical diseases should be part of corresponding programmes.

The German Network against Neglected Tropical Diseases with its experts is happy to participate in the design and implementation of the recommendations to combat neglected tropical diseases and to support the Federal Government in an advisory capacity.

Yours sincerely



Speaker

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