

Tropical disease experts call for a 'Global Fund to Fight Neglected Tropical Diseases'

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An international team of tropical disease control experts has urged the global health and development community, and particularly the G8 leaders, to establish a new financing mechanism to combat the neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) of poverty.

A "Global Fund to Fight Neglected Tropical Diseases," say Professor Hotez (Sabin Vaccine Institute and George Washington University, Washington, DC, USA) and colleagues, would "satisfy an urgent need to support NTD control and elimination." Their argument is published in the March 26th issue of the open-access journal *PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases*.

The NTDs, such as intestinal worms, schistosomiasis, elephantiasis, and river blindness, represent the most common infections of the world's poorest—the bottom billion. They are a major reason, say the authors, why the world's poorest people cannot escape a vicious, downward spiral of poverty.

Fortunately, they say, "we are now in a unique position to control or eliminate some of the highest burden NTDs through integrated use of donated drugs." The mass administration of such drugs just once a year has been the cornerstone of global projects aimed at tackling several of the NTDs, and the launch of a dedicated fund to scale up these activities would be "one of the most cost-effective and urgently needed approaches for sustainable poverty reduction."

A blueprint for such a funding mechanism already exists: the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, established in 2002, has attracted \$4.7 billion in financing for these three diseases. Professor Hotez and colleagues argue that the mandate of this fund could easily be expanded to include the NTDs.

Thus a new fund for NTDs could be established that uses a similar mechanism to that of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. Countries burdened by NTDs would apply to the new fund for financing for NTD control efforts, and an expert board (supported by the expertise of the World Health Organization) could vet the applications.

"An important next step," say the authors, "would be to address global NTD control at the annual G8 leaders summit." The summit will be held in Hokkaido Toyako, Japan, later this year. "While gathered in Japan, the development community needs a robust discussion about the importance of the NTDs as global health, educational, and economic threats."

The G8 summit, they say, presents an opportunity for G8 leaders to consider earmarking specific funds for NTD control. "A comparatively modest amount of funds—in the range of \$2 billion in total over 5 years—should be deposited and earmarked for treatment programs targeting the poorest populations in the poorest countries."

The proposal to establish a "Global Fund to Fight Neglected Tropical Diseases" is co-authored by Professor David Molyneux (Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, UK), Professor Alan Fenwick (Schistosomiasis Control Initiative, Imperial College London, UK), Dr Lorenzo Savioli (Director, Department of Neglected Tropical Diseases, World Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland), and Professor Tsutomu Takeuchi (Department of Tropical Medicine and Parasitology,

Keio University, Tokyo, Japan).

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