

ESPEN: Expanded Special Project for Elimination of NTDs

Frequently Asked Questions

What is ESPEN? The Expanded Special Project for Elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases (ESPEN) was designed through collaborative conversations with key stakeholders within the NTD community, including endemic countries, to encourage continued momentum within Africa toward the 2020 targets for five (5) Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs): onchocerciasis, lymphatic filariasis, schistosomiasis, soil-transmitted helminths and trachoma. Under the direction of the African Regional Office (AFRO) of the World Health Organization, ESPEN is a five-year project (2016-2020) through which complementary gap-filling support (both technical and financial) will be provided to endemic countries in Africa to maximize their efforts to implement NTD national plans with the overall goal of attaining the 2020 goals.

Why is ESPEN needed? NTDs disproportionately affect the most vulnerable people and the poorest communities. It is estimated that more than one billion people including more than 500 million children are affected by NTDs, of which 40% live in the Africa Region. All 47 countries of the Region are co-endemic for at least two NTDs, with 36 of them co-endemic for at least five.

The Africa Region, through the African Programme for Onchocerciasis (APOC) and its predecessor, the Onchocerciasis Control Programme for West Africa, have provided direct financial and technical support to countries for onchocerciasis control and elimination for the past three decades. With the increased momentum to accelerate implementation of Preventive Chemotherapy NTDs interventions, as well as APOC's closure last year, it has become imperative to establish a new NTD entity that will ensure that gains made in onchocerciasis elimination in Africa are sustained while targeting the elimination of other NTDs in Africa.

How will ESPEN work? ESPEN will be a flexible and evolving platform of support to endemic countries and a new resource to support national NTD programmes. Under the leadership of the Regional Director and the AFRO team, ESPEN will facilitate a robust engagement with all local contributors and implementers to assess collectively how best to implement national NTD plans through: 1) maximizing the effective use of existing resources and technical contributions at the local level, 2) identifying where funding and technical gaps exist, 3) providing complementary support (both technical and financial) where critically necessary, and 4) identifying funding opportunities and investment targets for in-country programme sustainability.

What will be the impact of ESPEN? By addressing onchocerciasis and planning for coordination with the other Preventive Chemotherapy NTDs, ESPEN will maximize the value of resources and help countries integrate mass drug administration efforts where possible. ESPEN will backstop the national programmes of these endemic countries to ensure that they are able to maximize incoming resources and local expertise to carry out their national NTD plans, supplementing them where needed. The resulting strengthened national plans will ensure optimal drug coverage, stronger and more timely reporting, stronger evidence-based assessments to inform decisions, and a more effective use of programme resources.

What is the focus of ESPEN in 2016? The principal objectives of this first year are to: 1) formally establish ESPEN, 2) acquire appropriate staffing, 3) provide continued technical support to member states on NTDs, and 4) develop an advocacy and resource mobilization plan to fund the five-year goals of ESPEN. In 2016, ESPEN will mainly focus on the implementation of activities to fully establish ESPEN and to maintain the current level of Community Directed Treatment with ivermectin coverage in previously APOC-supported countries. As ESPEN establishes itself with member states, it will explore and refine how best to leverage its technical and financial resources to help endemic countries effectively implement their national plans.

How will ESPEN be funded? AFRO, with support from the NTD community and ESPEN's Steering Committee, will seek funding from bilaterals, multilaterals, public and private foundations, philanthropists and global implementing partners. Currently, ESPEN has garnered \$7.4 Million USD of the estimated \$10 Million USD needed to support the first year of ESPEN activities. AFRO has estimated that the full five-year project will require \$50-70 Million USD. AFRO is currently working with the ESPEN Steering Committee on the development of a resource mobilization plan for the global NTD community and its supporters to identify how best they can join in to maximize the leveraging impact of ESPEN.