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## Neglected tropical diseases in Burkina Faso: Control and awareness strategies

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### Abstract

This article looks at the problem of neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) in Burkina Faso, which affect millions of people and are undermining the country's fragile healthcare system. The main objective of the research is to analyse the control and awareness strategies implemented to combat these diseases. The methodology adopted is based on a documentary study, which will enable us to draw up and inventory of NTDs, identify the factors favouring their spread, and evaluate the interventions underway. The results show that NTDs, such as schistosomiasis and lymphatic filariasis, have a serious impact on people's quality of life, with significant socio-economic consequences. Aggravating factors include environmental conditions, cultural practices and limited access to healthcare in rural areas. Strategies identified for combating the disease include distributing medicines, raising community awareness, strengthening healthcare infrastructures and research initiatives. In terms of awareness-raising, the article stresses the importance of media campaigns, education in schools, and the involvement of community leaders to mobilise people. These integrated approaches aim to ensure greater understanding and commitment from communities, thereby contributing to a comprehensive response to the challenges posed by NTDs in Burkina Faso. The proposed recommendations aim to improve the health situation in this complex context.

**Keywords:** Neglected tropical diseases, awareness, prevention, Burkina Faso

### Introduction

Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are a group of diseases which, although they affect more than a billion people worldwide, are often underestimated and poorly understood, particularly in developing countries. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2024), these diseases, which include infections such as schistosomiasis, lymphatic filariasis and leishmaniasis, mainly affect poor people living in rural areas. On an international scale, these diseases cause considerable physical and psychological suffering, and have a major impact on healthcare systems and local economies (Nonvignon & *et al.* 2024) <sup>[7]</sup>.

In Africa, the situation of NTDs is particularly worrying. The continent is home to the majority of reported cases, with alarming prevalence in several countries. For example, studies show that in sub-Saharan Africa, around 200 million people are affected by at least one NTD, often exacerbated by factors such as poverty, food insecurity, and poor health infrastructures (Hotez & *et al.* 2014) <sup>[4]</sup>. This highlights not only the need to strengthen health systems, but also the urgency of community awareness and education initiatives.

In Burkina Faso, NTDs represent a major public health challenge. Reports indicate that nearly millions of Burkinabè are at risk of schistosomiasis, while lymphatic filariasis affects more than one million people (Ministry of Health, 2016). These diseases have devastating health consequences, leading not only to physical disabilities but also to social stigmatisation and economic decline for affected households. The country's already fragile healthcare system is overburdened by the management of these diseases, underlining the urgent need for a coordinated and effective response.

The scale of NTDs in Burkina Faso requires an in-depth understanding of the factors contributing to their spread. In this context, it is essential to look at the control and awareness strategies put in place to address the problem. This theoretical study, based on documentary research, aims to analyse the different approaches adopted in Burkina Faso to combat NTDs, highlighting both medical interventions and awareness-raising initiatives.

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How can control strategies be effectively integrated to ensure a holistic approach that meets the needs of vulnerable populations? What awareness-raising methods can be developed to increase community understanding and involvement in the fight against these diseases?

This article is divided into several sections. Firstly, an inventory of neglected tropical diseases in Burkina Faso will be drawn up, using documentary data to illustrate their impact on the population. The factors that encourage the spread of these diseases will then be examined. The control strategies implemented will then be discussed. Finally, the study will look at the awareness-raising strategies deployed to involve communities in the fight against NTDs. By integrating these different dimensions, this study aims to contribute to a better understanding of the issues surrounding neglected tropical diseases in Burkina Faso, while proposing concrete recommendations for improving the situation in this geographical area of West Africa.

### **Overview of neglected tropical diseases in Burkina Faso**

Burkina Faso faces a major health challenge with the prevalence of neglected tropical diseases (NTDs). According to a report by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2023), several NTDs are particularly widespread, including schistosomiasis and lymphatic filariasis. These diseases affect millions of people, compromising their health and quality of life. More than 4 million Burkinabè are exposed to schistosomiasis, while lymphatic filariasis affects more than a million individuals (Ministry of Health, 2016). These alarming figures illustrate the scale of the problem and underline the need for urgent action.

Schistosomiasis, often caused by parasites found in stagnant water, represents a major risk for communities living near rivers and lakes. Symptoms can range from abdominal pain to serious complications such as liver problems. Lymphatic filariasis, on the other hand, is transmitted by mosquito bites and can lead to severe body deformities, notably lymphoedema.

Although neglected in terms of research and health policy, these diseases have major socio-economic consequences. Affected populations often find themselves in a cycle of poverty, unable to work or support themselves due to the debilitating effects of the diseases. What's more, the country's already fragile healthcare system is sorely tested to cope with this situation. This reality demands increased attention and concerted efforts to put in place effective control strategies.

To better understand how these diseases continue to spread and impact populations, it is crucial to explore the factors that encourage their spread in Burkina Faso.

### **Factors favouring the spread of NTDs**

To better understand the situation of NTDs in Burkina Faso, it is crucial to examine the factors that favour their spread. Among these factors, environmental conditions, such as the presence of stagnant water, play a central role. These environments are conducive to the reproduction of transmission vectors, particularly mosquitoes, which are responsible for diseases such as lymphatic filariasis.

In addition, cultural practices such as the use of untreated water for daily activities increase the risk of exposure to diseases such as schistosomiasis. Lack of awareness of the importance of hygiene and sanitation exacerbates the

situation, as people do not always take the necessary steps to protect themselves.

Another decisive factor is the rapid urbanisation of Burkina Faso. Towns are expanding rapidly without adequate planning, creating densely populated areas with limited access to healthcare infrastructure (Zoma & al. 2022) <sup>[14]</sup>. This disorderly urbanisation has a direct impact on the spread of NTDs. Slums, which often lack basic services such as drinking water and sanitation, become fertile ground for the transmission of these diseases.

Alongside these environmental factors, it is also essential to consider the challenges of access to healthcare. In rural areas, health centres are often remote and poorly equipped, making it difficult to diagnose and treat NTDs. Health professionals often lack specific training in these diseases, which can lead to misdiagnosis or lack of treatment.

So the combination of these environmental conditions, rapid urbanisation and gaps in healthcare infrastructure creates fertile ground for the spread of neglected tropical diseases. The approach to combating these diseases must therefore be holistic, taking into account not only the medical aspects but also the socio-economic and environmental dimensions.

These efforts must include prevention initiatives, improved access to healthcare, and ongoing education of communities about the risks associated with NTDs.

In the light of these factors, it becomes imperative to explore the control strategies that can be implemented to curb this scourge and improve the situation of the populations affected.

### **Strategies for combating NTDs**

The fight against neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) in Burkina Faso requires a multidimensional approach, integrating prevention, strengthening of health infrastructures and research. These strategies aim not only to reduce the incidence of the diseases, but also to improve the quality of life of the populations affected.

### **Prevention and control**

Prevention and control of NTDs are essential elements in reducing their prevalence. Efforts in this area include the distribution of preventive medicines and awareness campaigns, which play a crucial role in the fight against these diseases.

In Burkina Faso, drug distribution campaigns have been set up to treat diseases such as schistosomiasis and lymphatic filariasis. According to the study by Zida & *et al* (2024) <sup>[13]</sup>, these initiatives have reached more than 80% of the target population in some rural areas. This broad coverage demonstrates the commitment of health authorities and organisations to improving the health of the most vulnerable populations.

As for hygiene awareness, alongside the distribution of medicines, educational programmes focusing on hygiene and sanitation are essential to prevent NTDs. UNICEF (2012) <sup>[11]</sup> stresses the importance of educating communities about hygiene practices, such as hand-washing and wastewater management. These initiatives aim to reduce the risk of infection and raise awareness of the importance of hygiene in the fight against disease.

The interconnection between prevention through medication and hygiene education underlines the importance of an integrated approach, where each action reinforces the other.

This creates a positive dynamic that can lead to a significant reduction in cases of NTDs.

### **Strengthening health infrastructures**

In addition to prevention initiatives, strengthening health infrastructures is also crucial to the fight against NTDs. Significant efforts are underway to improve health centres and increase the number of medical staff available, in order to ensure adequate case management.

The first step is staff training. Ongoing training of health professionals is essential to ensure that they are well informed about NTDs. Training workshops have been organised to raise awareness among healthcare staff about the detection and treatment of these diseases (Ministry of Health 2017). This not only improves the skills of health workers, but also optimises patient care.

Initiatives to improve access to healthcare are also underway. The construction of clinics in rural areas has been a direct response to the needs of these populations, which are often isolated and have little access to healthcare services. Zon & *et al.* (2021) <sup>[15]</sup> note that this improvement in infrastructure has led to a significant increase in the rate of treatment of NTD cases, saving lives and reducing suffering within communities.

Thus, strengthening health infrastructure is not limited to the construction of buildings, but also includes the training and support of medical staff, creating a more robust and accessible health ecosystem.

### **Research and innovation**

Research is a fundamental pillar in the fight against NTDs, as it enables new prevention and treatment strategies to be developed. In Burkina Faso, several research projects have been launched, aimed at improving knowledge of the diseases and finding innovative solutions.

With regard to local research projects, several researchers have carried out in-depth studies on the transmission vectors of NTDs. As Wilson & *et al.* (2020) <sup>[12]</sup> point out, this research is crucial, as it provides a better understanding of the transmission mechanisms and helps to identify appropriate control methods, whatever the geographical area. Innovation in treatment and prevention techniques may offer new prospects for eradicating these diseases.

In addition, cooperation with international institutions has helped to strengthen local research capabilities. This collaboration facilitates access to resources and expertise that can play a decisive role in developing new strategies to combat NTDs. Exchanges between local and international researchers enrich research projects and increase the chances of success of the initiatives implemented.

Thus, research and innovation, coupled with prevention efforts and the strengthening of health infrastructures, create a synergy that is essential for effectively combating NTDs in Burkina Faso. When integrated coherently, these strategies offer a holistic approach to tackling the challenges posed by these diseases, while improving the health of vulnerable populations.

However, these medical and structural efforts alone are not enough. It is just as essential to put in place awareness-raising strategies tailored to the realities of communities in order to ensure that people are genuinely involved in the fight against NTDs.

### **Awareness-raising strategies**

The fight against neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) in Burkina Faso relies not only on medical measures, but also

on awareness-raising strategies tailored to the needs of communities. Raising awareness is essential to changing behaviour and involving people in the prevention and control of these diseases.

### **Community awareness campaigns**

Community awareness campaigns are proving to be a key instrument in the fight against NTDs. To be effective, these campaigns must target the most vulnerable groups, who are often the most affected by these diseases. This requires a considered and inclusive approach.

Local radio stations play a key role in disseminating information about NTDs. Because of their accessibility, they can reach a wide audience, including rural populations. According to Heywood & Yaméogo (2022) <sup>[3]</sup>, educational programmes have been specially created to inform citizens about the symptoms of NTDs, as well as the preventive measures to adopt. These programmes, which are often interactive, encourage the involvement of listeners, who can ask questions and share their concerns.

In addition to the media, workshops have been organised to raise awareness of NTD-related issues among community and opinion leaders. These meetings not only provide information, but also mobilise local resources to support health initiatives. Sombié & Ilboudo (2023) <sup>[10]</sup> point out that the involvement of local leaders in these training sessions is crucial, as it creates a solid support network within the communities.

In this way, the combination of local media and community workshops helps to create a dynamic of information and commitment, which is essential for raising collective awareness of NTDs.

### **Education in schools**

Education plays a fundamental role in raising awareness of NTDs, particularly when targeting children. By integrating health issues into the education system, the foundations are laid for lasting awareness among future generations.

Specific educational programmes integrating NTDs into the school curriculum have been developed. These initiatives aim to raise awareness among pupils from an early age, by providing them with knowledge about the diseases, their symptoms and preventive practices. This preventive education in schools has led to a reduction in the incidence of disease among children. By learning to recognise symptoms and adopt healthy behaviours, pupils become agents of change within their families and communities.

In addition, many NGOs work closely with the Ministry of Education to raise awareness of NTDs in schools (Government of Burkina Faso, 2019) <sup>[1]</sup>. These partnerships make it possible to benefit from a variety of expertise and additional resources, thereby strengthening the impact of educational programmes. They also make it possible to develop appropriate teaching materials and train teachers to tackle these issues effectively.

By integrating health education into the school system, a framework is created that is conducive to raising awareness among young people, thereby guaranteeing a multiplier effect within communities.

**Involvement of community leaders:** The involvement of community leaders is essential to the success of awareness-raising programmes. Their influence and ability to mobilise



communities can significantly improve the acceptance and effectiveness of health initiatives.

Religious and traditional leaders often occupy a prominent place in communities, playing a key role in conveying health messages. Studies show that their involvement in awareness campaigns increases acceptance of health programmes. According to Heward-Mills & al (2018), when these leaders get involved in the fight against NTDs, they help to legitimise the interventions and reassure people that they are relevant.

To maximise their impact, specific training programmes have been set up for these leaders. The training aims to inform them about NTDs, their causes and the preventive measures to be adopted. By becoming health ambassadors in their communities, these leaders encourage the spread of knowledge and the adoption of healthy behaviours. By sharing this information with their fellow citizens, they promote a better understanding of health issues.

The combination of the commitment of community leaders and awareness-raising activities creates an environment that is conducive to the prevention of NTDs. By mobilising local resources and building people's confidence in health initiatives, we can hope to bring about a lasting change in behaviour and a significant reduction in the incidence of these diseases.

In short, all these awareness-raising strategies are part of a collective effort to combat NTDs in Burkina Faso. By combining community campaigns, school education and the involvement of leaders, it is possible to create a robust and sustainable prevention movement. These complementary approaches not only rely on knowledge, but also engage people in an active process of change, which is necessary to overcome the challenges posed by neglected tropical diseases.

### Conclusion

The fight against neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) in Burkina Faso represents a major health and socio-economic challenge. The alarming statistics on the prevalence of schistosomiasis and lymphatic filariasis illustrate the urgent need for an integrated response.

Neglected tropical diseases are a complex issue in Burkina Faso. The factors that encourage the spread of NTDs are multiple and interconnected. The environment, particularly the presence of stagnant water, and unhygienic cultural practices are factors that exacerbate the situation. Rapid urbanisation, often poorly planned, also contributes to the proliferation of vectors and the increase in densely populated areas without adequate access to healthcare. This picture underlines the need for a multi-dimensional approach to tackling these diseases.

To meet these challenges, several strategies need to be implemented. Firstly, the prevention and control of NTDs are crucial. The distribution of preventive medicines, accompanied by hygiene awareness programmes, is essential. The results of these initiatives show significant coverage of the population, indicating a collective desire to improve public health.

Strengthening health infrastructures is also a fundamental pillar. It is imperative to improve access to healthcare, particularly in rural areas, where health centres are often remote and poorly equipped. Ongoing training of medical staff is essential to ensure effective management of NTD cases.

In this context, research and innovation are of vital importance. Research plays a crucial role in the fight against NTDs, providing a better understanding of transmission mechanisms and identifying control methods. Local research projects, coupled with international collaboration, strengthen local capacities and pave the way for innovative solutions.

However, all these medical and structural initiatives must be accompanied by appropriate awareness-raising strategies. Community awareness-raising is essential if people are to be involved in the fight against NTDs. The use of local media and the organisation of community workshops are effective ways of educating people about the symptoms of the diseases and preventive measures.

Education in schools is also a fundamental lever for raising awareness of NTDs among the younger generations. By integrating these themes into school curricula, we can ensure that pupils become ambassadors for health within their families and communities.

The involvement of community leaders, whether religious or traditional, is crucial. Their influence on people's behaviour helps to legitimise health initiatives and encourage the adoption of healthy practices. Specific training for these leaders strengthens their ability to play this ambassadorial role.

The fight against neglected tropical diseases in Burkina Faso therefore requires widespread mobilisation and a long-term commitment from all players in society. This means coordination between the government, non-governmental organisations, communities and research institutions to implement effective strategies.

The results of the various initiatives must be evaluated on an ongoing basis, so that actions can be adapted to local realities. By integrating medical, structural and community-based approaches, Burkina Faso can hope to overcome the challenges posed by NTDs and improve the health and well-being of millions of Burkinabè.

Recognition of the devastating impact of NTDs on the lives of individuals and communities is essential to catalyse change. This requires not only targeted and effective interventions, but also a change of mindset towards these often neglected diseases. By consolidating efforts to combat NTDs, Burkina Faso can pave the way for a healthier and more prosperous future for all its citizens.

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