



## NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASE NGO NETWORK

A global forum for nongovernmental organizations  
working together on NTDs

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# ***Sustainability: A statement from the NNN***

## **Background: Need and Purpose**

Over the last several years, the global fight against neglected tropical diseases (NTD) has seen immense progress towards important shared goals. While much of this has been driven by productive country- and disease-specific partnerships, there is now an increasing need to focus on our longer-term collective impact to advance critical objectives such as *sustainability*.

To date partners have not had a shared definition of sustainability, resulting in disparate ideas about what the concept means and how it should be operationalized to achieve a world free of NTDs.

Developed following extensive consultations by the NNN Sustainable Systems Working Group, this statement provides the NNN community with a starting point to speak the same language about sustainability, to articulate potential differences in opinions or approaches, and to identify ways we will work together to promote sustainable elimination and control of NTDs.

This is a working definition of *sustainability*, which will evolve as we continue to refine and realign with learnings and evidence generated through program implementation in endemic countries.

## **Working definition of Sustainability**

Sustainability, for NTD programming, is realized when the intended result is achieved for as long as required. Sustainability is not a binary achievement that either exists or doesn't; rather, it is a spectrum comprised of multiple context-specific factors.

A central theme of sustainability is a national government's long-term commitment to a goal or result with **multi-level, local ownership**<sup>1</sup>. Sustainability and ownership are further characterized by the three components of **domestic commitment**, **resource mobilization**, and **accountability**. The three components are closely linked and may not always be completely independent of one another.

1. *Domestic commitment* to NTD programming is multifaceted: it requires high-level political will and dynamic leadership at national, regional, and sub-regional levels. An effective, impactful program will ideally be driven by community demand for continued services and may have shared goals with health systems strengthening<sup>2</sup> and universal health coverage efforts (i.e., those Sustainable Development Goal 3)<sup>3,4</sup>.
2. *Responsive resource mobilization* means that countries are engaged in determining and mobilizing the inputs required to reach their NTD goals and are taking initiative to quantify and fill the resource gaps. Sustainable resourcing involves leveraging domestic investments alongside partner contributions<sup>5</sup>, as local ownership tends to be limited when a program is financially dependent on external sources.

3. *Accountability* is outcome-oriented, coupled with task-oriented *responsibility* to deliver high-quality results.

The NNN Executive Committee endorsed this Sustainability statement on September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019.



Gail Davey  
Chair, NNN

## References

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3. Ortu G, Williams O. Neglected tropical diseases: exploring long term practical approaches to achieve sustainable disease elimination and beyond. *Infect Dis Poverty*. 2017;6(1):147. Epub 2017/09/28. doi: 10.1186/s40249-017-0361-8. PubMed PMID: 28950893; PubMed Central PMCID: PMCPMC5615470.
4. World Health Organization. Fact Sheet: Universal Health Coverage. 5 December 2018. Accessed at [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/universal-health-coverage-\(uhc\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/universal-health-coverage-(uhc)).
5. Smith J, Taylor EM. What Is Next for NTDs in the Era of the Sustainable Development Goals? *PLoS Negl Trop Dis*. 2016;10(7):e0004719. Epub 2016/07/09. doi: 10.1371/journal.pntd.0004719. PubMed PMID: 27387209; PubMed Central PMCID: PMCPMC4936684.

## BACKGROUND NOTES

### 1. Proposed use of this Sustainability statement

The statement serves as a shared, working definition of sustainability. It is not perfect or static, and should continue to evolve over time along with the dynamic NTD landscape; for instance, working group and NNN community members may review the statement in concurrence with the periodic milestone timelines of the upcoming WHO NTD Roadmap (i.e., 2023, 2025, 2030). NNN members are encouraged to use the scope of this practical working definition during strategic planning discussions, partnership development or operational work planning meetings to foster a shared approach and embed the key components of sustainability.

To accompany this working definition, the Sustainable Systems Working Group plans to collate and/or develop complementary tools and resources to support partner contributions to sustainable NTD programs.

For any feedback to these plans or to offer support to the working group, please find contact information on the NNN website.

## **2. Developing this Sustainability statement**

The NNN Sustainable Systems working group has undertaken the following activities to develop this statement for NNN endorsement:

- Between July and September 2018, the working group surveyed over 50 NNN affiliates (NGOs, academia, government, WHO) about the most important components of sustainability and what the term and concept mean to them.
- At the NNN conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in September 2018, the working group reviewed a qualitative / thematic analysis of the survey findings and developed more specific and focused definitions of the most commonly emerging key concepts.
- Following the NNN conference, a smaller team of working group members drafted the first version of the statement, which was reviewed by the full group prior to circulation to a wider audience of NGOs, government officials and academia for iterative development.
- The working group coordinated their work with WHO and disease coalitions with similar sustainability focused discussions to ensure efforts would be aligned and not duplicative.
- A final draft of the working definition and context for sustainability was agreed by the working group for circulation to 18 reviewers from the WHO and national NTD programs in different regions in March 2019; reviewers were nominated by working group members and their feedback was discussed and incorporated to the statement during a regular working group call.
- In June 2019, the NNN Executive Committee reviewed the draft statement and agreed to endorse it as an NNN working definition, recognizing alignment with its other collaborative efforts towards a world free of NTDs.

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