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## UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event

***Integrating Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) and Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) to accelerate progress on the SDGs***  
**[Event ID: V179]**

Held on 21 March 2023, 11:00 AM EST, Virtual Side Event

**Organized by:** Sightsavers (also known as the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind); Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Germany; Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Republic of Senegal; World Health Organization; Uniting to Combat Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs); POSCEAS/CONGAD Network (Senegal); Youth Combatting NTDs Advisory Board

The event webpage can be accessed here: <https://unitingtocombatntds.org/events/un-2023-water-conference-wash-and-ntds/>

The recording can be found on Uniting's channel in English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2U7AQf1fl24&t=20s>

### Background

Water, sanitation, and hygiene are pillars of global public health. Well-implemented interventions that result in improved access to WASH for individuals and communities are also necessary for the control, elimination, and eradication of certain NTDs, a diverse group of 20 conditions that are widespread in vulnerable populations of the world's poorest regions. Despite this, not enough attention has been given to the links between WASH and NTDs. NTDs prevail among the world's poorest 40% of people, the same populations with the least access to sustainable, safe, and affordable WASH services. Both contribute to cycles of poverty and disease. Progress against certain NTDs can serve as a proxy for equity and effective targeting of WASH programmes. This side event "Integrating NTDs and WASH to accelerate progress on the SDGs" showcased the important synergies that arise from cross sectoral work between WASH sector and NTD partners, and how these synergies can support implementation of Sustainable Development Goals 3 and 6.

### Key issues discussed

- How WASH interventions can be better integrated into NTD control and elimination programmes to achieve more sustainable and equitable results. Critical to success is collaboration at the programmatic level, coordination at the country level, proactive joint planning of interventions, data sharing and progress monitoring, and epidemiological evidence and operational learning for joint WASH and NTD interventions.
- How WASH-NTD interventions are jointly implemented, with case studies including Senegal's integration of WASH as a key intervention in the control of Guinea worm, trachoma, and cholera, as well as Senegal's establishment of a National Multisectoral Committee that brings together all stakeholders working in the fight

against NTDs and the WASH sectors. Country and community ownership of these activities were critical to success.

- The importance of ensuring that marginalized and vulnerable populations have access to the knowledge, resources, and tools they need to protect themselves from NTDs and improve their WASH conditions. Women and girls are often among the most affected by NTDs, and addressing gender equity is a critically important factor.
- The contributions the integration of WASH and NTD programming make to the wider global health agenda, especially in times of global crisis. Integrating activities can lead to more efficient, effective, and resilient healthcare systems, building tools and approaches that can be leveraged to address multiple health challenges, reducing the logistical and financial burden on healthcare systems and freeing up resources for other health priorities.
- The importance of building global governance structures and policies related to health and development taking into account the linkages between NTDs and WASH, and building a more coordinated and effective intersectoral response to these issues. The closer cooperation of a number of large multilateral organisations as well as the establishment of the One Health High Level Expert Panel are an important step in the right direction.

### **Key recommendations for action**

- Resilient systems can only be created with strong political will. Strengthening relationships between the WASH sector and NTD communities from the local to global levels can play a leading part in the solution. This requires advocacy, partnership engagement, and awareness-raising efforts to build support among decision-makers and stakeholders.
- Strengthening cross-sectoral coordination, building an interdisciplinary workforce, and developing approaches that are replicable and scalable can ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of collaboration between sectors. This includes developing joint monitoring and evaluation frameworks, sharing data and information, and building the capacity of NTD and WASH stakeholders to work together effectively.
- Health governance efforts must use a multi-party approach that involves governments, non-governmental organizations, private sector, and communities. This will require the development of effective partnerships, coordination mechanisms, and shared decision-making processes.
- Integrating health into other global policy areas, such as climate change, will help ensure sustainable financing for NTD-WASH integration programs. This can be achieved by highlighting the critical linkages between human and animal health, environment, and development, and by advocating for increased investment in health as a key component of sustainable development.
- Building effective funding structures to support integration, as was called for in the 2022 Dakar Declaration, will help to ensure the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of NTD-WASH integration programs.
- Finally, the One Health approach must be put into action to address the complex and interconnected health challenges facing communities around the world. This includes raising awareness and fostering education initiatives on hygiene practices, disease transmission patterns between animals and humans, measures for NTD prevention, and measures safeguarding the environment. By working together across sectors, we can create a healthier, more sustainable future for all.