Neglected Tropical Diseases: what are they and who neglect them?

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A list of 13 diseases are recently assigned by the World Health Organization (WHO) and others as Neglected Tropical Diseases-NTDs, these are: Soil Transmitted Helminthiasis-STH (hookworms, ascaris, trichuriasis), Schistosomiasis, Lymphatic Filariasis-LF (Elephantiasis), Onchocerciasis (River Blindness), Dracunculiasis (Guinea Worm Disease), Trachoma, Leprosy, Buruli Ulcer, Foodborne Trematode Infections (Fascioliasis), Human African Trypanosomiasis (Sleeping Sickness), Visceral Leishmaniasis (Kala-azar), and Chagas Disease.

Although they are not given enough concern all over the world, these diseases are among the 10 leading causes of the DALYs lost (Disability-Adjusted Life Years). The NTDs burden when measured in DALYs, equal to 56.6 million, hook worms have great share of this (22.1 million). Therefore, NTDs are one of the determinants of poverty and poor school performance especially in the tropics.

These diseases are "chronic" and they are neglected simply because it is more difficult to put chronic disability and illness into the agenda of communities, official and professional bodies as well. In addition, the burden of these diseases is generally not known.

Despite that, these diseases could be brought to the domain if the ministries of health give little attention and concern to them. The opportunities that are available for the sustainable control of the NTDs include:

- Adoption of the recommended strategies can result in great impact in controlling these diseases. This will encourage people to participate.
- Preventive chemotherapy as a major intervention is available for seven NTDs (Schistosomiasis, trichuriasis, ascaris, hook worms, LF, onchocerciasis and trachoma) and the way the preventive chemotherapy is managed could help in bringing NTDs to community and media focus.
- great efforts are going on worldwide and in this respect WHO at headquarter and at regional levels formulate departments to deal with NTDs.

The situation of these NTDs in Sudan is not well known for the majority of the list but all of them were known to be prevalent except buruli ulcer and chagas disease. Considerable efforts were carried in previous years and are still going on targeting individual diseases control (onchocerciasis, trachoma, schistosomiasis…) with success stories in many areas. The emphasis now is to integrate the control of these diseases so that with little available resources one can show success and it is well known that 'success brings success".

For more information visit:

- http://www.who.int/neglected_diseases/en/
- http://gnntdc.sabin.org/what/poverty.html
- http://www.plosntds.org/