



# Neglected Diseases: The Diseases of Poverty

**Neglected Diseases strike populations already crippled by poverty and inequity:**

**women, children,  
indigenous populations,  
the poor.**



**Neglected diseases are *stigmatizing diseases of poverty* and can be tackled only by *leadership* and a concerted *political and economic effort*.**

## Health Impacts of Neglected Diseases

Anemia.      Blindness.      Malnutrition and impaired childhood growth and development.  
Impaired memory, reasoning, and IQ.      Damage to internal organs.  
Permanent long-term physical disability and premature death.

## Economic Impact of Neglected Diseases

Unemployment. Decreased earning ability.

- In Brazil, **losses** of over USD\$1.3 billion in **wages and industrial productivity** were due to workers with Chagas Disease.
- Globally, lymphatic filariasis, the **second-largest cause of permanent disability**, results in USD\$2 billion in **lost productivity**.

## Important Neglected Diseases in the Americas

- **In shantytowns and slums**
  - Elephantiasis (Lymphatic Filariasis)
  - Weil's disease (leptospirosis)
  - Leprosy (Hansen's disease)
- **In rural and agricultural areas of several countries**
  - Snail fever (schistosomiasis)
  - Liver fluke (fascioliasis)
  - Kala-azar and cutaneous leishmaniasis
  - Chagas diseases (American trypanosomiasis)
  - Cysticercosis and trichinosis
  - Plague
- **In some indigenous communities**
  - River blindness (onchocerciasis)
  - Parasitic skin diseases (scabies, sand fleas and fungi)
- **In most impoverished populations**
  - Roundworms, hookworms and whipworms (soil-transmitted helminths)



People with leprosy and lymphatic filariasis are **socially stigmatized**, adding a **human-rights dimension** to the neglected-diseases issue.



## Tackling Neglected Diseases through Prevention and Treatment: The Case of Deworming



These Argentine children are about to receive **deworming** medicine that will **improve their growth, development, and school attendance.**



**Deworming in children** leads to improvements in intellectual development and school attendance that can increase income-earning ability in adulthood.

In Mexico, a 3-year-long child-deworming intervention saved \$US 15 million in medical consultation costs.



**Deworming in women** decreases iron deficiency and anemia among adolescent girls and women of child-bearing age and during pregnancy, resulting in the delivery of healthier babies and a lower risk of death at childbirth for women.

**Deworming supports every UN millennium development goal.**

### Response

#### Prevention and Treatment

- Chagas disease, lymphatic filariasis, and onchocerciasis are on the **verge of elimination** in the Americas due to PAHO/WHO technical cooperation with the health sector and other partners.
- Other Neglected Diseases such as schistosomiasis and soil-transmitted helminthiasis are **both preventable and curable using minimum drug-treatment packages**; but sustainability remains a challenge.

#### Intersectoral Solutions

- Intersectoral solutions seek to secure **sustainability** of mass drug-treatment interventions used for some Neglected Diseases, but other Neglected Diseases can be addressed effectively **only through concurrent actions with other sectors** (environment, education, agriculture).
- All sectors must take part to eliminate or control Neglected Diseases, with actions ranging from improving water supply and educating the community to environmental conservation and improved nutrition and food production.
- **PAHO's special contribution to WHO's Global Strategy includes**
  - A Regional Strategic Plan is being drafted and vetted that **synergizes and articulates** intersectorally and is based on two technical papers and informal consultations across sectors.
  - Evidence-based pilot interventions will soon be underway to demonstrate **feasibility and cost-effectiveness**, for future adoption by national disease-control programs.
  - Partnerships with local communities, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector will be fully explored.

