Canadian Network for NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES

festmih
federation of european societies for tropical medicine and international health

WOMEN LEADING THE FIGHT AGAINST NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2026

WOMEN ARE AMONG THE MOST AFFECTED BY NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES (NTDS), YET THEY ARE ALSO LEADING RESEARCH, ADVOCACY, AND DISEASE CONTROL EFFORTS AROUND THE WORLD.

TO MARK INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY, WE SURVEYED FORTY WOMEN WORKING IN THE NTD FIELD ACROSS RESEARCH, POLICY, ADVOCACY, AND PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION IN MULTIPLE COUNTRIES.

WHERE WOMEN IN NTDS ARE WORKING

CANADA • BURKINA FASO • CÔTE D'IVOIRE • MADAGASCAR • ECUADOR • KENYA • JAPAN • GERMANY • INDIA • TANZANIA • GHANA • SIERRA LEONE • PAKISTAN • NIGERIA • BOTSWANA • SWITZERLAND • INDONESIA • UNITED STATES • MALAWI •NETHERLANDS • FRANCE

TWENTY-FOUR WORK IN RESEARCH AND ACADEMIA

TEN WORK IN ADVOCACY

SIX WORK IN PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

WHAT INSPIRES WOMEN TO WORK IN NTDS?

"I was inspired by the gap in knowledge about NTDs in my community and the high number of people affected — especially school-going children suffering from bilharzia, soil-transmitted helminths, and families struggling with jiggers"

"These diseases have long been neglected, and too many people suffer from them. It's time they were brought to light"

"My inspiration to work in NTDs comes from seeing how preventable diseases continue to affect vulnerable communities, especially in rural and underserved areas"

"I stumbled into NTDs when I started working as an intern, but was inspired to stay in this field by many women leaders who supported me through my career the last 10 + years"

"The fact that they are preventable yet very prevalent (An NTD course in my undergraduate level inspired me)"

"My journey began by seeing the suffering in my own community caused by NTDs, which motivated me to take action. But what truly guided me and helped me grow into a strong woman leader was mentorship "

WOMEN AS LEADERS IN THE FIGHT AGAINST NTDS

Survey Findings

"Being a woman leader in NTDs means carrying Responsibility to represent, mentor, and create space for other women. And opportunity to bring perspectives that strengthen programs, partnerships, and community engagement"

"Being a woman leader in NTDs means using my voice and influence to improve the lives of vulnerable communities affected by neglected tropical diseases. It means breaking barriers, promoting gender equity in global health, and inspiring other women to take leadership roles"

72.5%
Of Survey Respondants See Themselves as Women Leaders in NTDs

27.5%
Are Still Pursuing Paths to Leadership

"A woman leader can move mountains and get the stakeholder listen to the science behind the curtains"

"Being a woman leader in NTDs means leading with empathy, courage, and integrity, and showing that women can be powerful drivers of impact in global health"

CHALLENGES WOMEN IN NTDS FACE

Limited access to funding, mentorship, and professional networks

safety concerns during field work in endemic regions

gender discrimination

Cultural barriers

LIMITED ACCESS TO LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

LIMITED REPRESENTATON IN Decision-Making processes

DUAL BURDEN OF PROFESSIONAL AND FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

IMPLICIT BIAS IN AUTHORSHIP RECOGNITION, GRANT REVIEW, AND PROMOTION

OPPORTUNITIES WOMEN IN NTDS SEE

TALENTS AND STRENGTHS TO
HELP OTHER WOMEN AND FAMILIES.

WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES STRENGTHENING
INCLUSIVE NTD PROGRAMS

MAKING AN IMPACT THAT NOT ONLY
LEADS TO DISEASE ELIMINATION
BUT ALSO GENDER EQUALITY

INHERENTLY INTERDISCIPLINARY
AND COMMUNITY-FOCUSED
NATURE OF THE FIELD

PROXIMITY TO COMMUNITIES
— ESPECIALLY AS CAREGIVERS,
COMMUNITY MOBILIZERS,
HEALTH WORKERS, AND ADVOCATES

SKILLS IN IMPLEMENTATION SCIENCE,
ONE HEALTH APPROACHES,
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT,
AND TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

BRINGING UNIQUE PERSPECTIVES TO ADVOCACY, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, AND PROGRAM DESIGN

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNG WOMEN INTERESTED IN NTDS?

"[...] be bold and informed. Learn about NTDs, understand the realities in your community, and do not underestimate the power of your voice. Start where you are — through awareness, advocacy, research, or community engagement. "

"[...] speak up confidently, and don't wait for permission to lead. The NTD space needs your voice and expertise."

Finally, be patient and persistent. Careers in global health are rarely linear [...], support other women along the way, and remember that leadership is not just about position —it's about impact."

WHY DID WE JOIN THE FIGHT AGAINST NTDS?

"I am drawn to the fight against NTDs because of my commitment to health equity. These diseases affect communities that are too often overlooked, and women frequently carry the greatest burden while also leading the response. Empowering women to shape research, policy, and implementation is not optional but essential to ending NTDs."

– Amaanat Gill

"In med school, you learn about many diseases that have no cure. But realizing tHere's a group of diseases largely preventable and treatable, which still affect more than 1 billion people is striking. NTDs are above all a reflection of profound global inequalities, including gender disparities. Women are often among the most affected, while also playing a crucial role in prevention, care, and community health. To me, the future of NTD control must therefore place women's contributions at its core."

– Leonie Maier