



Accelerating the Sustainable Control and Elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases

September 2020



ASCEND

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WHAT IS ASCEND?

Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are a group of infectious diseases that thrive in poor and often rural settings, affecting **more than 1 billion** of the world's poorest people. These diseases cause disability, disfigurement, stigma and death.

Accelerating the Sustainable Control and Elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases (Ascend) is The UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's (FCDO) **£200m** flagship health programme to advance the impact and sustainability of national programmes across the globe tackling NTDs. Ascend is focusing on controlling and eliminating five of the diseases:



LYMPHATIC FILARIASIS



ONCHOCERCIASIS



SCHISTOSOMIASIS



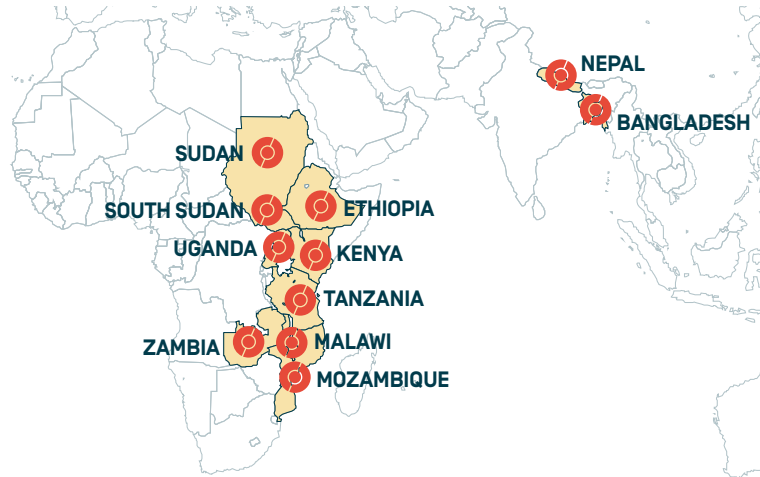
VISCERAL LEISHMANIASIS



TRACHOMA



FCDO's Ascend investment comprises of two lots, one focusing on South Asia, East and Southern Africa and the other on West and Central Africa. Crown Agents is leading a consortium of technical partners including Abt Associates, Oriole Global Health and The Royal Tropical Institute in the Netherlands (KIT), to implement the programme across countries in East and Southern Africa and South Asia.



DISEASES PER COUNTRY (ENDEMIC)	
COUNTRY	DISEASES
Sudan	
South Sudan	
Ethiopia	
Uganda	
Kenya	
Tanzania	
Zambia	
Malawi	
Mozambique	
Bangladesh	
Nepal	

Crown Agents have been working alongside government leaders to support them in delivering impactful programmes to accelerate prosperity in their countries since 1833. This history well places us to lead on delivering a range of key interventions for the control and elimination of NTDs in close collaboration with national governments and implementing partners, in order to enhance national approaches. By strengthening national health systems, Ascend is working in close collaboration with the host governments to provide the prevention, detection, treatment and surveillance activities necessary to maintain the reduced disease burden in the longer term, and to prevent disease resurgence. The expected results are a more integrated, cost-effective and sustainable approach.

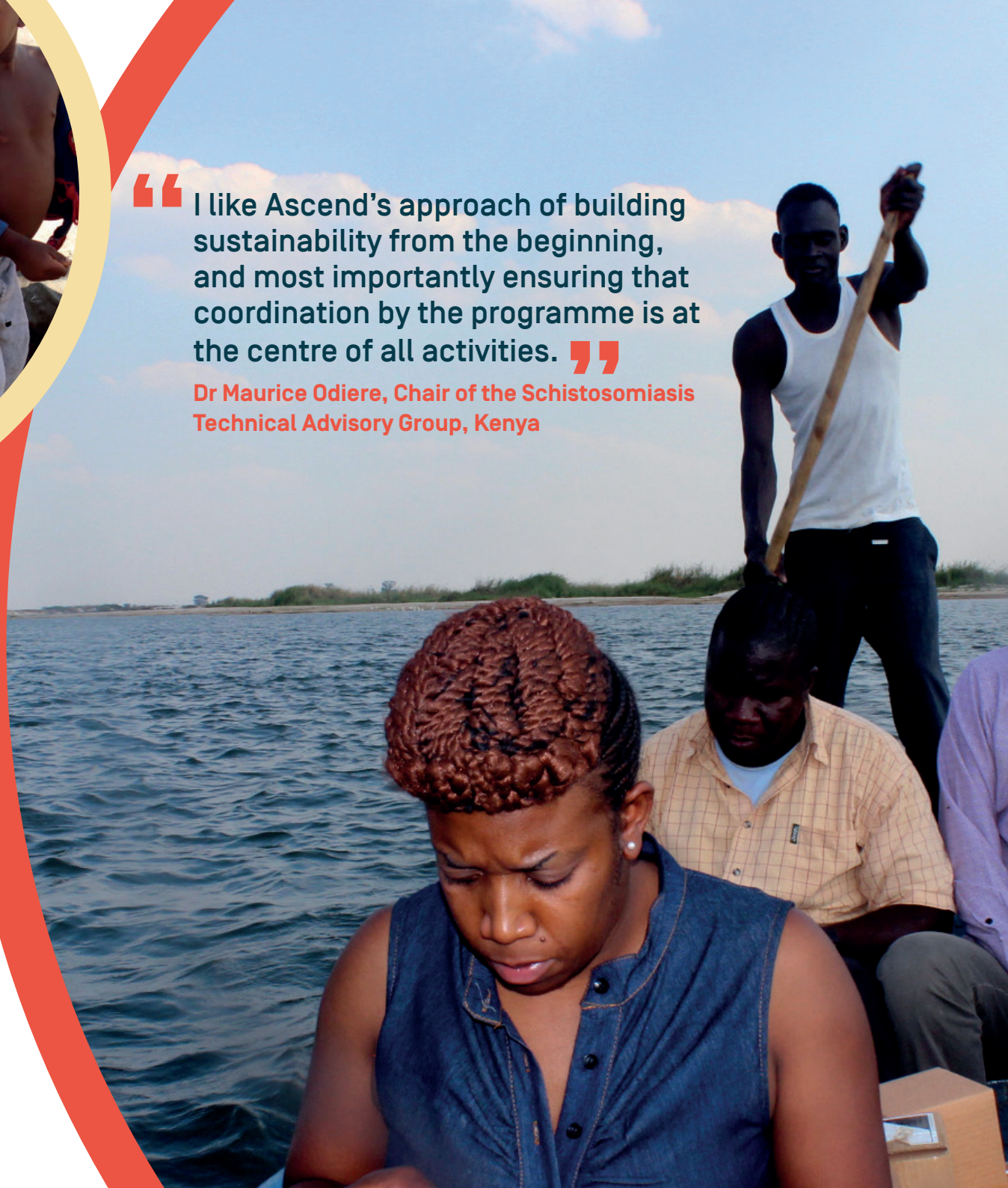
This delivery method is strengthened by the expert skills of our consortium. Abt Associates bring capabilities in political economy and health systems, whilst Oriole Global Health team have global expertise in NTD data modelling and mapping, alongside programme design and delivery.

The programme has offices in London, as well as regional hubs in both Africa (Nairobi) and Asia (Kathmandu). Regional Managers are supporting highly experienced Country Leads in each country, working in close partnership with the Ministry of Health and other NTD stakeholders. Ascend also benefits from an expansive pool of technical advisors in the disease and programme functions.



“ I like Ascend’s approach of building sustainability from the beginning, and most importantly ensuring that coordination by the programme is at the centre of all activities. ”

Dr Maurice Odiere, Chair of the Schistosomiasis Technical Advisory Group, Kenya



WHY IS ASCEND IMPORTANT?

Ascend is working with governments to strengthen their capacity to:



Strengthen health systems, to ensure sustainable delivery of NTD control and elimination activities



Increase case detection



Increase preventative treatment



Increase coverage of appropriate preventive measures, including WASH through improving collaboration and coordination between the health and WASH sectors

HOW WILL WE CARRY OUT THIS WORK?



Mass Drug Administration treatments (MDAs) delivered in target countries



The reduction of morbidity and disability of people with Lymphatic Filariasis



Surgeries provided to prevent cases of blindness, due to Trachoma



Increased early diagnosis and treatment of Visceral Leishmaniasis

Target numbers of MDA treatments by disease, per country

MDA	Lymphatic Filariasis	Onchocerciasis	Schistosomiasis	Trachoma	TOTAL
Ethiopia	4,758,559	11,821,092	11,813,661	13,520,650	41,913,962
Tanzania	13,674,538		9,801,502		23,476,040
Kenya			5,430,717		5,430,717
Uganda			12,225,158		12,225,158
Mozambique	22,963,735		15,571,585		38,535,320
Malawi		5,152,381	11,910,531		17,062,912
Zambia	11,869,368	11,869,368	4,624,550	2,519,566	19,013,484
Sudan	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
South Sudan	7,248,773	7,918,142	1,995,775	6,170,970	23,333,660
TOTAL	60,514,973	24,891,615	73,373,479	22,211,186	180,991,253

Target number of clinical treatments by disease, per country

MMDP	Hydrocele surgery	Lymphedema management	TT surgery	TOTAL
Bangladesh	3,032	30,000		33,032
Nepal	3,012	3,047		6,059
Ethiopia	1,500	20,000		21,500
Tanzania	6,250	3,012	5,000	15,800
Kenya	3,088	1,380		5,848
Uganda	6,000	2,470	10,532	19,002
Mozambique	1,719		1,520	3,239
Malawi	2,000	4,422	5,654	12,076
Zambia	1,000	500	2,000	3,500
Sudan	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC
South Sudan	1301	2,788	19,166	23,255
TOTAL	28,902	70,537	43,872	143,311



A photograph of a dirt road in a rural village. The road is reddish-brown and stretches into the distance. On the left, there are several small, simple huts with thatched roofs. A large, leafy tree stands on the left side of the road. In the foreground, a person in a green shirt is walking towards the camera. Further down the road, several motorcycles are parked, and a group of people is gathered. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds.

“ Given the scarcity of partners and resources invested in the NTDs programme in Zambia, it is difficult for the Ministry to successfully raise awareness of NTD control and elimination. Ascend's aid is pivotal, supporting the Ministry with essential logistics and ensuring that there is active participation of volunteers and other community members. Ascend has provided a platform for the Ministry to raise awareness on NTDs in the underserved communities of Zambia with an overarching goal of ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages - as enshrined in Sustainable Development Goal 3. ”

**Ms. Linda Lusaka District Health Office,
Zambia**

HOW IS ASCEND ALREADY HELPING?

- Established a monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) framework and a procurement mechanism to acquire the necessary medical supplies and drugs
- Gathered huge volumes of contextual information across the implementing areas to inform programme activity workplans and ensure immediate responses to programme gaps
- Successfully delivered Trachoma, Lymphatic Filariasis and schistosomiasis Mass Drug Administrations in Zambia, Mozambique, Tanzania and Ethiopia



- Enabling a cost-effective delivery approach with greater national ownership by prioritising sustainable forms of delivery
- Supporting the needs of national Governments in areas of instability within South Sudan, in order to prepare them to start mobilising drug procurement as soon as the climate becomes more stable
- Implementing WASH trainings and workshops to upskill and inform communities on how to prevent NTDs. Also working with government-led technical working groups to develop communication strategies, advocacy and social mobilisation plans to spread awareness amongst local communities
- Working with Ministry administration officials at all levels to raise awareness of NTD agenda and share learnings
- Raising awareness and improving understanding of NTDs among Central Medical Stores personnel, to secure fairer pricing of storage and logistics for the donated drugs for NTDs. We are also working to increase visibility of the entire NTD supply chain.
- Mapping the diseases in innovative ways, such as through the development of a Mobile Application in Bangladesh which can collect Visceral Leishmaniasis data in real time

COVID-19

All Ascend Lot 1 countries have been impacted by COVID-19, despite successful early efforts at lockdown. The Ascend programme has a delivery platform that can support governments to respond to the pandemic, as well as to NTDs, and has therefore adapted its support to countries, to address the underlying weaknesses in health systems that frustrate responses to the pandemic.

In the early stages of the global outbreak, the Ascend Country Leads team were rapidly deployed to various National Task Forces to support coordination and planning efforts in their countrywide COVID-19 response. This included conducting needs assessments with Ministries of Health across the programme's 11 countries. The Consortium is also leveraging and redirecting existing Ascend funds and resources to provide extra support to these country governments in the wake of COVID-19. This includes adapting 'Behaviour Change Communication' activities, originally planned to raise awareness of NTDs, towards 'Risk Communication' efforts for COVID-19. The programme's focus on improving information management for NTD control and prevention is also being pivoted towards case detection and surveillance of the virus. Another key focus is on mitigating the secondary impact of COVID-19, such as preventable deaths from Tuberculosis, Malaria, and during childbirth. The teams are working alongside the Ministries of Health to support Community Health Workers in their vital role preventing deaths caused by the reduction in health seeking behaviours due to the pandemic, and in mitigating other secondary impacts of COVID-19.



CASE STUDY

Nomadic communities along the banks of the Zambezi River in the Western Province of Zambia were among the first to benefit from our efforts to eliminate Trachoma under FCDO's new flagship NTD programme.

To manage the implementation of MDAs and surgeries for treatment and prevention in the area, Ascend partnered with local organisation, Lions Aid Zambia (LIAZ). It was vital to team up with a partners who had a contextual understanding of the Western Province and the rural districts, due to the scale of the logistics and the need to build relationships with a wide range of stakeholders at national, provincial, district and community level. Physically moving the drugs also required navigating tough terrain in four-wheel drives to reach the communities.

The Trachoma drug treatment was successfully administered to **80% of the population in the Western Province of Zambia** with the support of rural health workers and community volunteers. Alongside the Ascend team these volunteers worked over a five-day period to administer the drug treatment to 1000 people, as well as effectively communicating awareness of daily hygiene and sanitation measures to prevent re-infection.

“ Ascend is a unique implementing partner because it is directly working with the Vector-borne and NTD division. This will help the division to implement its master plan and annual work plan in time, unlike other implementing partners who are concentrating on one disease-specific area depending on resource envelop. ”

Dr. Alfred Mubangizi, NTD Program Coordinator,
Uganda





GET IN TOUCH

For further details please contact:

Kate Hargreaves, Ascend Team Leader
kate.hargreaves@crownagents.co.uk

Shodigul Alimshoeva, Ascend Programme Manager
shodigul.alimshoeva@crownagents.co.uk



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