



Joint Congress on Global Health 2020 in Osaka

# Symposium Report

**Neglected Tropical Diseases:**

Can Japan build strategies for the next 10 years?

**NTD**

2020

2030

Organizer: Japan Alliance on Global Neglected Tropical Diseases (JAGntd)

Co-organizer: SDGs Promise Japan (SPJ)

2/22/2021

# Table of Content

Greetings from the Organizers	3
1. Regarding this Report	4
2. Overview of the Symposium	5
(1) Background and Purpose <sup>1</sup>	5
(2) Panelists	6
(3) Program	7
3. Main Points from the Symposium	8
(1) Opening remarks from Chairman (Hiroyoshi Endo)	8
(2) Introduction (Kota Yoshioka)	8
(3) WHO roadmap for NTDs (Aya Yajima)	9
(4) Panel discussion	11
Satoshi Ezoe, Global Health Policy Division, MOFA	11
Hisakazu Hiraoka, JICA	12
Catherine Kaseri Ohura, GHIT Fund	13
Takayuki Hida, Eisai Co., Ltd.,	14
(5) Q&A	15
(6) A strategy for the next 10 years? Panelist Comments	16
4. Issues and recommendations for Japan - from the JAGntd's perspective	18



### **Japan Alliance for Global Neglected Tropical Diseases (JAGntd)**

JAGntd is a network that connects organizations, companies, and individuals involved in neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) elimination efforts from Japan, to promote Japan's participation in NTD control and to exchange information with global partners. The mission of JAGntd is to contribute to the control of NTDs by visualizing, streamlining and expanding Japan's contribution in the field. JAGntd is hosted by Institute of Tropical Medicine (NEKKEN), Nagasaki University.

# Greetings from the Organizers

The control of neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) is one of the most important issues in global health. The World Health Organization (WHO) has set a goal to control most of the NTDs by 2030, and in order to achieve this goal, it is essential to build and strengthen our network with each partner organizations, including those from developed countries. Therefore, in this symposium, we invited public and private stakeholders involved in NTDs from Japan as panelists to share their visions and initiatives. We hope that this symposium will help to rethink the current state of cooperation in Japan and stimulate discussions on the future direction and concrete measures to be taken.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to SDGs Promise Japan for co-hosting this symposium, and to all the related organizations for their cooperation.

Chair, Japan Alliance for Neglected Tropical Diseases (JAGntd) Steering Committee  
Professor, Department of Immunogenetics,  
Institute of Tropical Medicine (NEKKEN), Nagasaki University  
Kenji Hirayama

I would like to thank the Japan Alliance for Neglected Tropical Diseases (JAGntd) for hosting this important symposium at the Joint Conference on Global Health 2020 in Osaka in 2020, as the WHO adopts a new roadmap for neglected tropical diseases (NTDs). The global spread of Covid-19 has led to the postponement of several NTDs control programs, and unfortunately the proportion of the poor, which had been decreasing since the beginning of the 21st century, has been increasing. Global health cooperation is becoming more and more necessary, and I hope that with your guidance and cooperation, we will be able to work together to realize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Goal 3: “Health and well-being for all.”

Chair, Certified Specified Nonprofit Organization SDGs Promise Japan  
Rieko Suzuki-Kitaoka



# 1. Regarding this Report

This report summarizes Symposium 1, “Neglected Tropical Diseases: Can Japan build strategies for the next 10 years?”, organized by the Japan Alliance for Neglected Tropical Diseases (JAGntd) and co-organized by SDGs Promise Japan (SPJ) at the Joint Congress on Global Health 2020 in Osaka, held on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020.

Four experts in global health and neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) were invited to the symposium. In the panel discussion, the panelists first shared the activities of stakeholders working on NTDs in Japan and the foreseeable challenges ahead. The panelists then reaffirmed the need to develop strategies and collaborate across public and private sectors to achieve the goals laid out by the World Health Organization’s (WHO) roadmap for NTDs. We would like to take this opportunity to express our deepest gratitude to all those involved in the symposium and to the panelists for their cooperation. Please note that all names in this report are written without honorific titles.

The purpose of this report is to summarize and share the main points of the symposium, and to explore options to maximize Japan’s impact and contribution in this field. The report begins with an overview of the background and objectives of the symposium, followed by a summary of the main issues raised, focusing on the contents of the panel discussions. Due to space limitations, this report is not intended to be a comprehensive list of all the topics discussed at the symposium. In addition, at the end of the report, we present JAGntd’s perspectives to strategically promote Japan’s cooperation in the field of NTDs, based on the discussion points presented at the symposium.

The recent global epidemic of Covid-19 has changed the environment surrounding global health. We hope that this report will support Japan’s future contributions and effectiveness in the fight against NTDs.

## 2. Overview of the Symposium

### (1) Background and Purpose

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Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) is the general term used to represent a group of 20 diseases, such as onchocerciasis and schistosomiasis. It is estimated that more than one billion people worldwide, mainly the poor in developing countries, are infected with at least one of the NTDs. Combating NTDs is considered an important public health issue to lift people out of poverty and is included in the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, current measures are not sufficient to control and eliminate many of the diseases, and further global efforts are required.

Japan has been supporting NTD control efforts through various industries, academia, government, and private sectors. However, although multiple organizations and agencies are involved in Japan's efforts, these activities are implemented without a comprehensive strategy. As a result, it is difficult to see the larger picture and for Japan's contributions to be recognized by the international community. In order for Japan's contributions for NTD elimination efforts to be more effective and efficient in the future, it is essential to create a medium- to long-term strategy led by the government.

The WHO's policy document for NTD control (commonly known as the Roadmap) established in 2012 has played a central role in developing NTD control strategies around the world. This year marks the launch of a new roadmap for 2021-2030.

The purpose of this symposium was to position the new WHO Roadmap as an important document that will show the direction of the global NTD strategy, and to deepen the discussion on the Japanese government's NTD strategy for the next 10 years. We discussed how the WHO roadmap can be utilized by relevant Japanese organizations to develop Japan's NTD strategy for the next 10 years, and the possibility of collaboration across the boundaries of each organization.

With many other global health issues, including NTDs, it is becoming increasingly important to develop strategies to focus our limited resources on priority issues. It is thus imperative that we clarify what Japan can do to make a significant contribution to the global fight against NTDs.

The opinions expressed by the panelists in this report are theirs alone and do not necessarily reflect the intentions of their organizations.

### (2) Panelists

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#### Chairman

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Hiroyoshi Endo

Steering Committee Member, Japan Alliance for Neglected Tropical Diseases (JAGntd)  
Dean, Graduate School of Public Health, St. Luke's International University

#### Speakers

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Kota Yoshioka

Deputy Head, Japan Alliance for Neglected Tropical Diseases (JAGntd)  
Assistant Professor, Institute of Tropical Medicine, Nagasaki University

Aya Yajima

NTDs Control Specialist, World Health Organization Western Pacific Regional Office

#### Panelists

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Satoshi Ezoe

Director, Global Health Policy Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA)

Hisakazu Hiraoka

Deputy Director, Office for COVID-19 Response,  
Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)

Catherine Kaseri Ohura

CEO & Executive Director, Global Health Innovative Technology (GHIT) Fund

Takayuki Hida

Senior Director for Sustainability, Eisai Co., Ltd.,  
NTD Subgroup Leader, Global Health Group, Japan Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association  
(All titles listed as of November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020)

### (3) Program

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Date & Time: Sunday, November 1, 2020 13:15-14:45 (90 min)

13:20 Opening remarks from Chairman (Hiroyoshi Endo)

13:25 Introduction (Kota Yoshioka)

13:30 WHO roadmap for NTDs (Aya Yajima)

13:40 Panel Discussion

Satoshi Ezoe, Global Health Policy Division, MOFA

Hisakazu Hiraoka, JICA

Catherine Kaseri Ohura, GHIT Fund

Takayuki Hida, Eisai Co., Ltd.,

14:30 Q&A



### 3. Main Points from the Symposium

#### (1) Opening remarks from Chairman (Hiroyoshi Endo)

The purpose of this symposium is to deepen the discussion on Japan's NTDs strategy, taking into account the new WHO NTD roadmap, 2021-2030.

#### (2) Introduction (Kota Yoshioka)

The theme of today's session is how Japan can incorporate the WHO's new roadmap and utilize it in its policies. In Japan, various stakeholders from industry, academia, government and the private sector are contributing to the fight against NTDs (Figure 1). Particularly, the Japanese government's cooperation includes product development through the GHIT Fund, research and technical cooperation by JICA and Japan Agency for Medical Research and Development's (AMED), financial donation to Expanded Special Project for Elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases (ESPEN), which together is estimated to contribute about 3 billion yen per year.

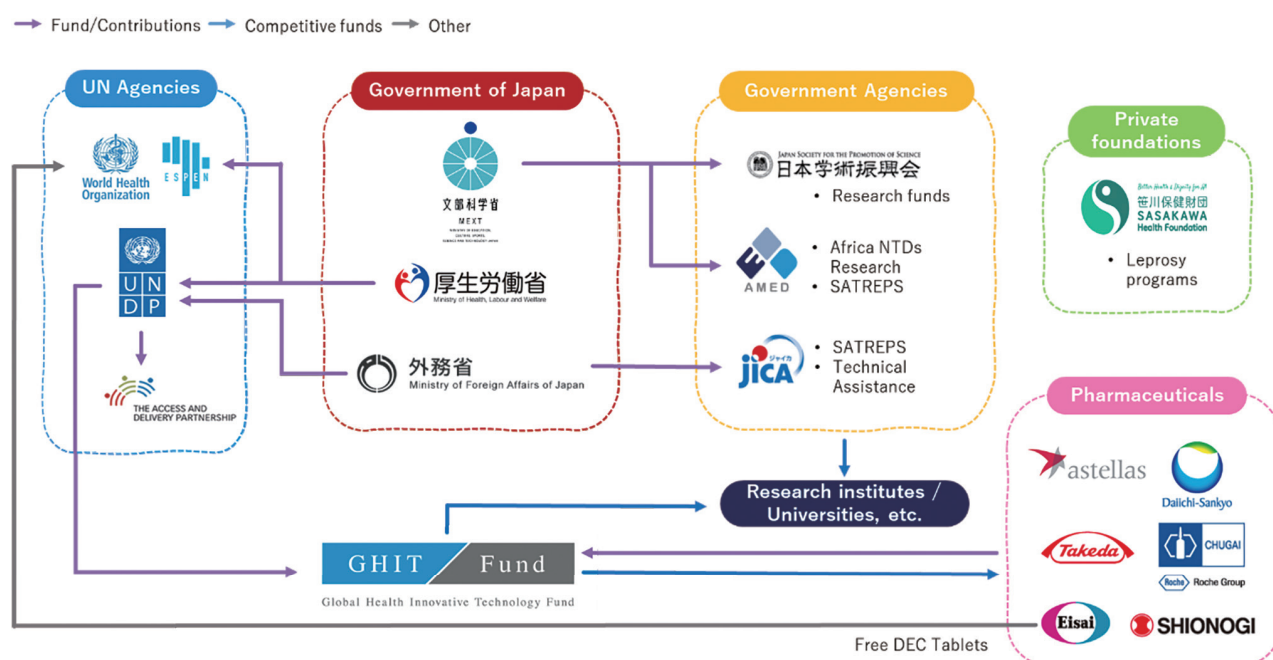


Figure 1: NTDs-related schemes and key actors from Japan Source: JAGntd

### 3. Main Points from the Symposium

The question we would like to raise here is who is leading NTD activities and whether we have a strategy for it. The topics to be discussed in the panel discussion are as follows:

- What are the roles and typical business examples of each panelist's entity?
- Can the WHO roadmap be applied to the activities of each entity? What are the possibilities and challenges?
- What are the NTD issues that Japan should address by 2030?
- Who should decide which priority issues Japan should address and how?
- What are the areas for improvement and how can they be addressed in Japan's overall NTD response?
- What ideas do you have for promoting cooperation and collaboration with other entities?

### (3) WHO roadmap for NTDs (Aya Yajima)

#### *Features of the new Roadmap*

The three main features of the new Roadmap are: ① it evaluates the results of NTD control activities in terms of impact, ② it encourages a comprehensive and cross-sectoral approach, and ③ it emphasizes the ownership of endemic countries (Figure 2). In addition to disease-specific achievement targets, comprehensive and cross-sectoral milestones are also set here.

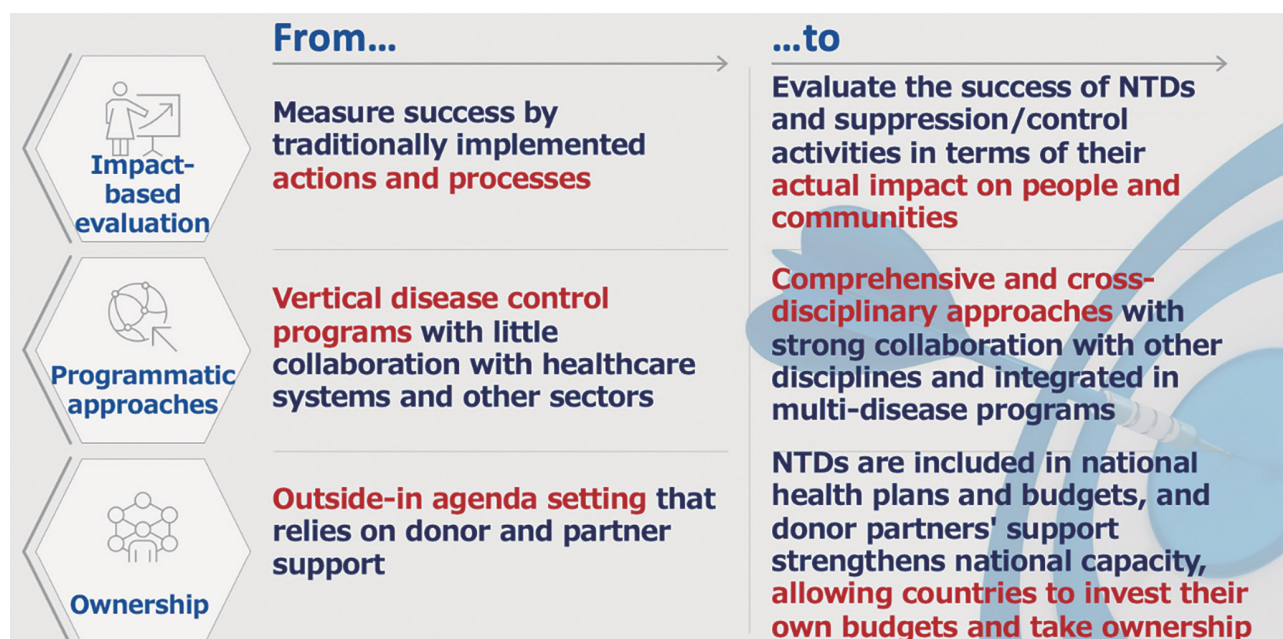


Figure 2: Shift from the old Roadmap to the new Roadmap Source: WHO

### 3. Main Points from the Symposium

In addition, a heat map of areas by disease and sector that need to be strengthened (Figure 3) is included in the Roadmap for efficient cooperation among all stakeholders in industry, government, academia, and the private sector. This is expected to induce cooperation that compliments the strengths of each stakeholder.

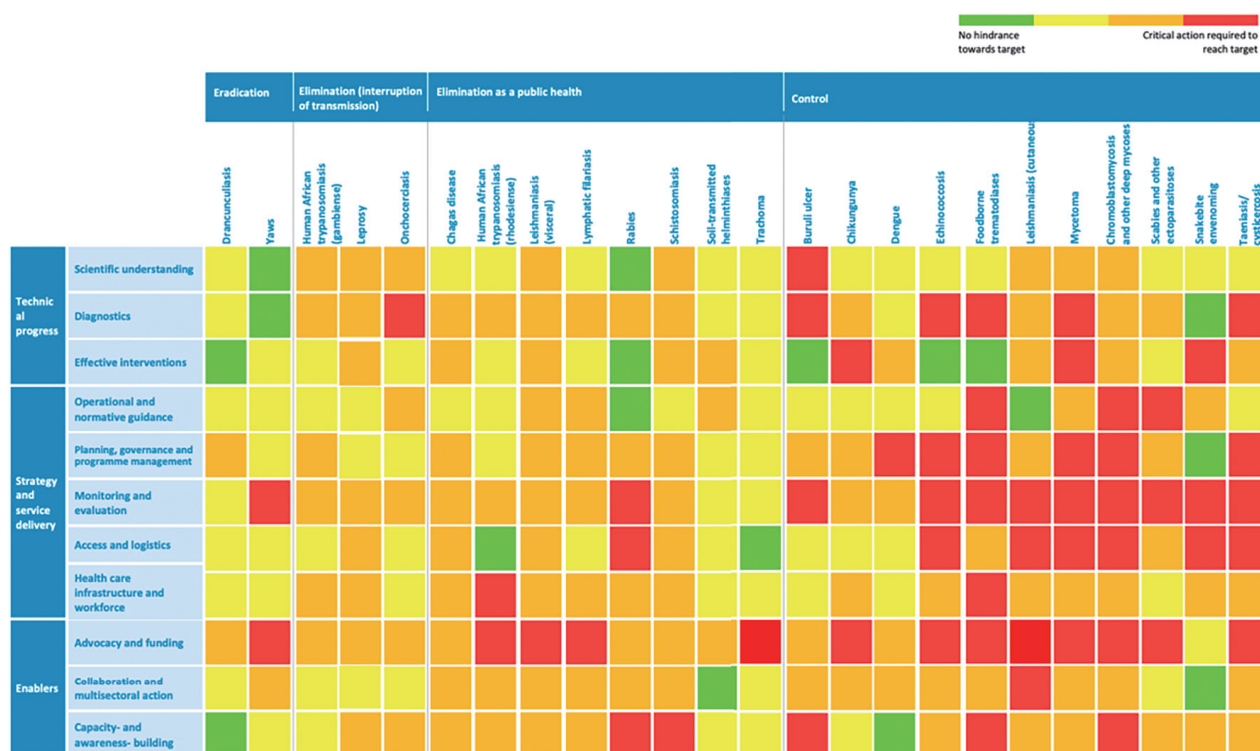


Figure 3: Heat map of areas by disease and sector in need of strengthening Source: WHO

#### The role of the WHO

The WHO's role is to develop actionable and evidence-based control programs and to support countries in their implementation. This includes supporting to strengthen health systems and coordinating at various levels with all stakeholders to achieve the goals of the Roadmap.

#### To achieve the goals of the Roadmap

For each of the 20 NTDs, there is a longitudinal process of drug development, manufacturing, regulatory approval, WHO guidelines, and country plans, and manuals. In addition, there is a need for a cross-disease approach to strengthen national health systems in a manner that is not specific to NTDs alone, including the strengthening of regulatory approval systems, supply networks, and the capacity of health workers. Based on a

comprehensive understanding, it is important to identify bottlenecks in NTD programs and weaknesses in endemic countries, and to provide support in a coordinated manner that leverages the strengths of each stakeholder.

#### (4) Panel discussion

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**Satoshi Ezoe, Global Health Policy Division, MOFA**

##### *The role of MOFA*

The government has been advocating the importance of countermeasures against infectious diseases at various international forums, such as at the G8 Denver Summit, the G8 Birmingham Summit where the Hashimoto Initiative was introduced, and the G7 Ise-Shima Summit. NTDs are challenging for private companies and organizations to combat alone, and public support is essential. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA) has been working with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), GHIT Fund, etc., and in cooperation with JICA, to contribute to global NTDs efforts from Japan.

In response to Covid-19, MOFA is promoting cooperation with the international community to achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC), aiming to “leave no one’s health behind” while utilizing Japan’s expertise in building health systems. Japan has already provided more than 170 billion yen in assistance and is taking measures to ① strengthen its capacity to respond to new coronavirus infections, ② build a robust health system that can respond to future health crises, and ③ improve the international environment to ensure health security.

##### *Possibilities and challenges of the WHO roadmap*

Possibilities include: ① setting a common global goal and direction makes it easier for countries around the world to work together; ② re-emphasizing the need for a cross-sectoral approach will further promote multifaceted measures against NTDs, including water and sanitation, education, food safety, and housing environment; and ③ emphasizing the ownership of national and local governments will increase the sustainability of the measures through domestic political commitment and mobilization of funds.

The challenge is how to ensure the effectiveness of the Roadmap. This



includes factors such as ① lack of know-how in planning and implementation; ② lack of financial and human resources; ③ program delays and interruptions due to the impact of new coronary infections; ④ realization of national and local NTDs programs; and ⑤ strengthening the capacity of developing countries.

#### ***What are the NTD issues that Japan should address by 2030?***

UHC has become a major target for Japan to tackle by 2030. UHC is a state in which all people have access to basic health care services at a cost they can afford. Achieving UHC is essential to address the more than one billion people infected with NTDs who are unable to receive appropriate treatment and preventive measures due to their economic situation, medical environment, etc. In order to achieve UHC, it is essential to control NTDs, and conversely, to achieve UHC, it is necessary to control NTDs. Specifically, we need to ① develop and ensure equitable access to vaccines and diagnostic and therapeutic agents; ② strengthen health systems (development and networking of core medical facilities, strengthening of community health systems, surveillance, human resource development, regulatory harmonization, etc.); and ③ work across various sectors such as water and sanitation, nutrition and food, education, gender, and infrastructure development.

#### **Hisakazu Hiraoka, JICA**

##### ***JICA's role and contributions to NTDs***

JICA provides technical and financial cooperation through bilateral assistance among its official development assistance (ODA). JICA has cooperated in 14 NTDs, including the Pacific Filaria Control Project and the Chagas Disease Control Project in Central America. JICA also provides research cooperation through SATREPS, a joint program with the Japan Agency for Medical Research and Development (AMED).

##### ***Cooperation with the WHO Roadmap***

JICA can promote cooperation through a common foundation based in the SDGs, and in particular, if multi-sectoral cooperation can be implemented, the measures against NTDs can be advanced. People affected with NTDs often have various problems not only in terms of infectious diseases but also in terms

of their life itself, and they live in a state where human security is threatened. We should promote cooperation from the perspective of “no one left behind.”

#### ***What Japan should do in global NTD cooperation***

The Covid-19 measures are working to improve inspection, equipment, human resources, transportation, and information systems in developing countries, which has led to the introduction of new technologies and the participation of the private sector. These efforts will have a ripple effect on the resolution of various issues, including NTDs. As for multi-sectoral cooperation, it is possible to promote cooperation in the areas of water, sanitation, education, economy, and society. For example, the spread of soil-transmitted parasitic diseases could be reduced through water, sanitation, and hand washing, and NTD infection could be reduced through urban development and slum poverty control. It is also necessary to work on fostering ownership in developing countries to build resilient health systems that can withstand any threat.

#### **Catherine Kaseri Ohura, GHIT Fund**

##### ***The role of the GHIT Fund***

The GHIT Fund promotes research and development in malaria, tuberculosis, and NTDs through international open innovation, connecting research institutions in Japan and overseas. Since its establishment in 2013, the fund has invested a cumulative 10.5 billion yen in 34 projects across 9 diseases for NTDs.

In addition to this, we are also involved in providing access to medication, although we do not provide direct funding. Together with the government of Japan and UNDP, we have established a framework called “Uniting Efforts for Innovation, Access and Delivery”, and we are working to build a platform for universal access.

##### ***GHIT's contributions to the Roadmap***

The WHO roadmap heat map (Figure 3) shows a number of areas that need to be strengthened, of which the GHIT Fund focuses on the most pressing technical components: generating scientific knowledge, developing diagnostic tools, and developing effective interventions.

#### Takayuki Hida, Eisai Co., Ltd.,

##### *The role of Eisai Co., Ltd.*

Eisai has provided 2 billion tablets of lymphatic filariasis prophylaxis to 28 countries. To date, the Global Lymphatic Filariasis Elimination Program has achieved elimination in 17 of the 72 endemic countries, reducing the estimated number of infected people from 200 million to 50 million. However, 850 million people, or more than 10% of the world's population, are still in need of mass medication, and we will continue to work together to achieve the WHO's goal of elimination by 2030.

##### *Current status and future challenges of NTD drug development by Japan*

An increasing number of pharmaceutical companies are taking advantage of the public-private partnership provided by the GHIT Fund to engage in research and development of NTDs drugs. For example, clinical trials for the treatment of schistosomiasis and mycetoma are currently underway under the auspices of the GHIT Fund. On the other hand, there are issues that need to be addressed in the future, such as regulatory approval of drugs, review capacity and manufacturing technology in endemic countries, burden of manufacturing costs, supply of drugs to remote areas, and management of inventory and usage.

The Roadmap assumes that pharmaceutical companies will provide drugs free of charge, but this is not a sustainable supply model, and we believe that a global framework similar to that of the three major infectious diseases needs to be established for NTDs.

Furthermore, capacity building of local communities is a common issue for a wide range of stakeholders. Currently, the Covid-19 epidemic has delayed the control of NTDs in many countries, and there are concerns about the spread of NTDs. On the other hand, Covid-19 has also strengthened cooperation and information exchange among international NGOs and government-related organizations.

##### *Priority issues that Japan should address*

Based on the successful track record of capacity building in the field of NTDs by JICA and the experience of establishing the GHIT Fund, Japan could take a leadership role in the field of NTDs in order to establish an

international mechanism for the supply of NTDs drugs. As a pharmaceutical company, we would like to cooperate in such a move. It is also important to communicate the actual situation and progress of NTDs to the international community, and as a pharmaceutical company, we would like to help.

#### (5) Q&A

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- Q1** Does the GHIT Fund provide support tailored to local conditions to ensure that residents take therapeutic drugs correctly?
- A1** Ohura: Although we do not provide direct support to the residents, we do provide indirect support by incorporating efficacy studies in the development of therapeutic drugs.
- Q2** How does WHO decide which diseases to put on the NTD list?
- A2** Yajima: The conditions for inclusion of a disease in the list of NTDs are: ① prevalence among the poor; ② high mortality and morbidity rates with significant social development implications that warrant action at the global level; ③ prevalence in the tropics and subtropics; ④ existence of the necessary tools for action (Category A); and ⑤ absence of such tools at all (Category B). When a new disease is to be considered, a formal request is submitted by a member state which is reviewed by the WHO Strategic and Technical Advisory Group (STAG) based on these conditions, while also considering whether limited resources can be focused effectively.
- Q3** How should NTDs measures be maintained under the influence of COVID-19?
- A3a** Hiraoka: We need to strengthen the system of access and delivery of medicines. One way to do this is through the proper allocation and education of human resources. In addition, as apparent in Covid-19 countermeasures, it is important to improve the efficiency of local health systems, especially in information collection.
- A3b** Ezoe: It is important to raise the level of the entire health system, not just the programs for each disease. For example, the UHC Friends Group, a high-level meeting launched by the Japanese government,



released a policy brief on Covid-19, which advocates ① the importance of strengthening core functions of public health; ② sustainable provision of essential medical and health services that are interrupted by Covid-19; and ③ ensuring economic access. NTDs are most relevant to the second point.

**Q4** What are the key perspectives for implementing new therapeutic interventions in “places where there is no concept of disease,” i.e., areas with traditional medicine and unique values?

**A4** Hida: As for Eisai’s experience in dealing with mycetoma, in parallel with the treatment, the professors at the University of Khartoum are teaching the village chiefs and leaders the concept of the disease and how they can be cured with treatment. It is important to have direct discussions and steady activities using tools such as the radio and other media to convey this message. For this purpose, we are promoting dialogue with NGOs/NPOs and advising the WHO to convene traditional healers.

#### (6) A strategy for the next 10 years? Panelist Comments

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Ezoe: The Japanese government has set the promotion of UHC as a major policy goal, and one of the criteria for realizing UHC by 2030 will be whether we can control NTDs.

Hiraoka: We need to draw up a strategy for the next 10 years. The growing interest in infectious diseases, especially with Covid-19, is both a once-in-a-century crisis and an opportunity. We need to consider how people from many fields, including healthcare, economics, anthropology, and sociology, can participate in the fight against infectious diseases, including NTDs. In particular, it would be good if we could formulate strategies while utilizing Japan’s experience in overcoming malaria, filaria, and other infectious diseases.

Ohura: As to whether we can draw up a strategy for the next 10 years, Covid-19 has heightened the sense of crisis about infectious diseases. I would

### 3. Main Points from the Symposium

like to see if we can use the new mechanisms, processes, and connections that emerged as a result of this, such as the ACT accelerator, for other infectious diseases and NTDs. I hope that after this pandemic, we can leverage these newly created mechanisms.

Hida: We need to think about what we will do in the next 10 years from now on. The solidarity between stakeholders have strengthened and communication has improved since COVID-19, and I would like to take that beyond this pandemic. I would also like to disseminate the achievements of JICA and GHIT Fund and create opportunities for Japan's presence in the global community to rise.

## 4. Issues and recommendations for Japan - from the JAGntd's perspective

### **The issue of access was repeatedly raised as a future challenge: how to deliver medicines and services to people in developing countries?**

On November 12, immediately after this symposium, the World Health Assembly approved the WHO's new NTD roadmap for 2030. The world's NTD control measures will now evolve around the new Roadmap. In order for Japan to show leadership in the field of infectious disease control, it is necessary to strategically develop NTD-related projects in accordance with the context of the new NTD roadmap.

This symposium showed that there are various forms of cooperation from Japan in the field of NTDs. Among them, the product development by the GHIT Fund has become increasingly pivotal. If a new drug is born from a project funded by the GHIT Fund, it will be a great contribution to the fight against NTDs.

On the other hand, even if an excellent drug is created, it will be meaningless if it is not used. The issue of access was repeatedly raised during the symposium as a future challenge: how to deliver medicines and services to people in developing countries. This will require strengthening the capacity of health systems and communities in developing countries, including the effective use of limited resources, sustainable cost management, and the establishment of multi-agency collaboration. If Japan were to face these challenges in the field of NTDs, what options would it have?

### **JICA's experience in health system strengthening is a unique strength of Japan and can be utilized to improve access to NTD medicines.**

One of the approaches proposed in the panel discussion is to support health system strengthening in developing countries to achieve UHC. JICA's experience in health system strengthening in developing countries is a unique strength of Japan and can be utilized to improve access to NTD medicines. However, we should not simply believe that all health system strengthening projects will contribute to NTD control. This is because NTDs are closely linked to poverty. For example, Japan is supporting core hospitals in developing countries as Covid-19 response, but it should be noted that the benefits do not necessarily reach low-income groups, i.e., the trickle-down of health care is unlikely to occur.

To avoid this pitfall, at the policy level, it would be useful to use the spread of NTDs as an indicator to measure UHC. Having NTDs is a sign that basic services such as health services, water and sanitation are not reaching those in need. NTDs can be used as a yardstick to estimate whether basic health services are reaching every corner of the society, i.e., whether “no one is left behind.”

At the project level, it is possible to involve experts who are familiar with the health problems faced by the poor, such as the NTD program officers of a target country's Ministry of Health, in the planning of projects. Alternatively, in designing SATREPS projects, where Japanese NTD researchers write proposals, JICA could provide its expertise to ensure that the projects are



### **Japan could also launch a global financial facility to expand supply of and access to NTD medicines.**

linked to health system strengthening. In addition, Japan's cooperation in the field of NTDs would be more strategic if it could focus on disease areas where new medicines are likely to be created with GHIT Fund funding and incorporate mechanisms that contribute to improved access.

Another approach that Japan could take is to launch a global financial facility to expand supply of and access to NTD medicines. Currently, most NTD drugs are supplied by donations from major pharmaceutical companies. As pointed out in this symposium, this donation model has a limit, and it is necessary to find an alternative model. Japan has the experience of establishing the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and participating in COVAX. If we can use this experience to advocate an international framework for the joint purchase and distribution of NTD drugs, Japan will be able to strongly demonstrate its presence in the NTD field. In addition to the G7 and G20, high-level meetings such as the UHC Friends Group, which was mentioned in this symposium, will be useful in creating opportunities for advocating such an idea.

In the coming era of living with Covid-19, there will be a greater need to select issues and focus resources in various areas in global health, including NTDs. However, NTD-related activities and projects in Japan is complex, and it is not easy to understand and organize the whole picture. In addition to those invited to this symposium, various Japanese actors are active in the NTD field. At

### **Advancing Japan's NTD policies requires a flat dialogue between industry, academia, government and the private sector.**

the beginning of this symposium, we posed the question, "Who plays the role of a control tower for NTD programs in Japan?" Unfortunately, the answer to this question could not be obtained during this symposium. It seems that Japan's NTDs cooperation will proceed without a commanding post, which indicates the importance of a flat dialogue among all actors involved, transcending the barriers between industry, academia, government and the private sector. We hope that JAGntd can facilitate to promote dialogue and collaboration.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to express our deepest gratitude to the panelists and all those involved in this symposium for their cooperation.

## **Joint Congress on Global Health 2020 in Osaka Symposium Report**

“Neglected Tropical Diseases: Can Japan build strategies for the next 10 years?”

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