

## Working to eliminate Neglected Tropical Diseases for a “Better Balance, Better World”



COUNTDOWN Dissemination Bong County, Liberia      Photo Credit: Laura Dean

It is International Women’s Day (IWD) and all week women in various spheres of life, including [science and health](#) have been celebrated through recognition of their contributions. The significance of this event is not simply relegated to the designated day of celebration but should also permeate our daily lives and continuous efforts.





Last year the theme for IWD was [#PressforProgress](#) and we looked at the need to increase the number of women in leadership positions especially in an industry such as health where women make-up the majority of the workforce. According to this article in [The Lancet](#), women make up over 70% of the health workforce and contribute \$3trillion annually to global health care, half of which they are not paid for.

The [COUNTDOWN](#) programme is a multidisciplinary research consortium made-up of expert practitioners from across Africa, the UK and the United States of America. Within COUNTDOWN, we have been conducting implementation research to address the gender disparities that influence progress for neglected tropical diseases (NTDs).

Working with our partners Sightsavers in northern Nigeria, COUNTDOWN piloted a Gender, Equity & Rights (GER) tool in the north and south of Kaduna which informed [this document](#) produced by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to better understand who is being left behind and why, in NTD programme delivery. COUNTDOWN is currently working with Sightsavers, the Nigeria Federal Ministry of Health (MoH) and Kwara State MoH to complete a second pilot of the revised toolkit.

Following a meeting on Women and Girls in late July 2016, it became apparent that gender was not adequately addressed in the NTD world and therefore the balance required for NTD programmes to be equitable and accessible to all was missing. This resulted in a publication on “20 years of gender mainstreaming in health: lessons and reflections for the neglected tropical diseases community” in the [BMJ Global Health journal](#).

COUNTDOWN partners from Ghana participated in the Photovoice competition at the 5<sup>th</sup> Global Symposium on Health System Research which called on advancing health systems for all in the SDG ([Sustainable Development Goals](#)) era. As seen from the experiences of the female community drug distributors, being part of the workforce can represent a loss in earnings.

 <p>By Ms Irene Honam Tsey Dodowa Health Research Centre, Ghana</p>	<p>LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND: USING PHOTOVOICE TO EXPLORE COMMUNITY HEALTH VOLUNTEERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES IN RURAL GHANA</p> 	 <p>Photo 2</p>
<p><b>Photo 1:</b> Shoes bought by CCD for her sibling who looks after her store when she must go distribute drugs.</p> <p><b>Description:</b> The picture represents cost incurred at a personal level because of her work as a CDD. “When she watches the shop for me I buy her a shoe as a gift since she is a school girl”.</p>		<p><b>Photo 2:</b> When it rains</p> <p><b>Description:</b> The picture shows how the terrain looks like in an already hard to reach area with scattered settlements and its implication for the Directly Observed Approach to MDA. This makes it very difficult and sometimes impossible for the CDD to visit each and every household to</p>

Though much progress has been achieved over the past three decades, gender balance still lags. Gender continues to affect health care, women’s progress in reaching leadership roles and gender roles and relationships still continue to shape experiences of women across the world.

This is why it is great to see [this call for papers](#) by PLoS NTDs for a cross-journal collection looking into Neglected Tropical Diseases and Gender & Equity Research. Please participate and contribute towards bringing that better balance to better the world. The deadline for submission is **1<sup>st</sup> June 2019**.