Refugees as a threat to sleeping sickness elimination: integration challenges from Uganda

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The case for integrating refugees into sleeping sickness elimination plans

• SDGs commit us to NTD control as well as the tenet to “leave no one behind” –which includes people displaced by conflict

• *All* sleeping sickness endemic countries currently host forcibly displaced populations

• Sleeping sickness outbreaks historically associated with war & population displacement

→ But is this being done?
Uganda: A promising policy context for elimination & integration

- Sleeping sickness RDTs available in all govt facilities (green dots)
- Refugees seen in all govt facilities

Yet:
- Refugees mostly excluded for 3y
Unrecognised problems

• Political will in assigning blame to refugees did not translate into mandate for action
  → Sleeping sickness historically a ‘humanitarian’ responsibility
  → Vertical disease programmes not supported by UNHCR

• Donor norms
  → Desire to demonstrate success meant withdrawing surveillance resources from facilities using RDTs infrequently

• Humanitarian primary care response led to unrecognised sleeping sickness programme failure
  → RDT training lost during expansion
  → Difficulties communicating increased complexity of health provider syndromic decision-making
Unanticipated outcomes

- RDTs withdrawn (greyed dots) from refugee areas (red arrows)
- Refugees said: sleeping sickness control better in South Sudan
- Transmission in refugee populations unknown
Lessons learned

• Shift in international actors interested in sleeping sickness brings new set of norms about refugees
  Humanitarians → PDPs & governments

• SDG focus on migrants is an opportunity, but remains to be operationalised
  • Planning & monitoring incentives can be created
  • International SDG norms may conflict with international donor norms (eg value for money)

• Threat posed by refugees = threat that programmes are not adaptable
  • Both parasites & populations change
  • Include interdisciplinary perspectives to adapt