

School-aged children receive essential medicines to tackle schistosomiasis and soil-transmitted helminth infections. WHOSomalia/Khurram Sajjad.29 May 2022 – Neglected tropical diseases affect people who lack regular access to adequate sanitation, basic health infrastructure and health services. These diseases can lead to significant morbidity, mortality, stigma and discrimination in communities.

Of the 20 neglected tropical diseases listed by WHO as endemic in tropical countries, schistosomiasis and soil-transmitted helminth infections, along with leprosy and visceral leishmaniasis, are common in Somalia. About 5 to 6 million people in the country live in the areas that are highly endemic for these diseases.

Between 2016 and 2017, WHO and the Ministry of Health and Human Services of Somalia conducted a mapping exercise to determine where neglected tropical diseases affect people. They found unexpected cases of intestinal schistosomiasis due to *Schistosoma mansoni*, or snails, in the South West state and in Banadir. Hookworms are known to be common in these locations too.

Communities living in South West Somalia, across the middle and lower valleys of the Shabelle and Juba rivers, reportedly suffer the most from these diseases. Additionally, internally displaced persons are also among the most affected, due to their living conditions.

Reducing spread of infections

To reduce prevalence of these diseases, the World Health Organization (WHO) has been providing support to the Federal Government of Somalia to conduct mass drug administration campaigns since 2017.

On 7 May 2022, the country embarked on an 18-day effort to provide essential medicines, namely praziquantel and metronidazole, to around 2.48 million school-aged children (aged between 5 and 14 years) and adults in 39 districts. Health care workers have been visiting schools and madrasas to reach children and using community-based initiatives to target adults. These efforts will reduce the reservoir of infection and interrupt disease spread.

The last campaign, conducted in 2020, administered these essential medicines to around 2.6 million school-aged children and over 300 000 adults in 41 districts. It covered around 91% of a targeted 3.18 million people.

