

# Philippines Work Plan

**FY 2022**

**Program Year 4**

**October 2021–September 2022**



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## ACT | EAST PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Act to End Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) | East Program supports national NTD programs in reaching World Health Organization (WHO) goals for NTD control and elimination through proven, cost-effective public health interventions. The Act to End NTDs | East (Act | East) Program also provides critical support to countries on their journey to self-reliance, helping them create sustainable programming for NTD control within robust and resilient health systems. The Act | East Program is being implemented by a consortium of partners, led by RTI International and including The Carter Center; Fred Hollows Foundation; Light for the World; Results for Development (R4D); Save the Children; Sightsavers; and Women Influencing Health, Education, and Rule of Law (WI-HER).

In the Philippines, Act | East program activities are implemented by RTI International.

## COVID-19 PANDEMIC IMPACT ON ACT | EAST ACTIVITIES AND WORK PLANS

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic continues to impact neglected tropical disease (NTD) programs. On April 1, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) issued guidance to NTD programs, recommending that almost all in-person activities be postponed until further notice. With the support of USAID, Act | East stopped all activities that matched the criteria outlined.

On July 27, 2020, WHO issued further guidance on assessing whether NTD activities could restart safely. Act | East, in collaboration with Act | West and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), developed activity restart guidance and resource documents to support each country to adapt activities appropriately.

Decisions on all supported activities continue to be made in close coordination with ministries of health and are context-specific, varying by country, region, and activity type, and are subject to changes in COVID-19 dynamics. Act | East continues to provide regular updates to USAID on the plans for specific activities through the submission of monthly updates.

Unless noted, work plans for fiscal year 2022 assume a full year of activities and are written with the best information available at the time of submission. Nevertheless, the situation may change in some countries and will result in adjustments to work plans. Act | East will continue to communicate with USAID to discuss these changes as the situation evolves.

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## ACRONYMS LIST

Act  East	Act to End Neglected Tropical Diseases   East
ALB	Albendazole
CHED	Commission on Higher Education
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
DEC	Diethylcarbamazine
DOH	Department of Health
DSA	Disease-specific assessments
EU	Evaluation Unit
FY	Fiscal Year
Global Fund	Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria
IDA	Ivermectin, diethylcarbamazine citrate, and albendazole
IVM	Ivermectin
LF	Lymphatic filariasis
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MDA	Mass drug administration
NTD	Neglected tropical disease
PhilHealth	Philippine Health Insurance Corporation
R4D	Results for Development
SCH	Schistosomiasis
STH	Soil-transmitted helminths
TAS	Transmission Assessment Survey
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization

## **1. NATIONAL NTD PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND SUPPORT**

The Philippines is the world's 13th most populous country with an estimated 2021 population of more than 112.9 million people across 17 regions. The Philippines consists of three island groups—Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao—comprising 7,107 islands. The Philippine Government system is decentralized, with autonomous government systems in each of 82 provinces. Implementation, operational planning, budgeting, and funding for neglected tropical disease (NTD) activities is the responsibility of the provincial health authorities or of city or municipality governing authorities. The Department of Health (DOH) is the national health governing authority and works through DOH regional offices in coordination with provincial health departments and city or municipality health offices. The Government of the Philippines funds its NTD activities, including mass drug administration (MDA) and disease-specific assessments (DSAs) for lymphatic filariasis (LF) in areas determined endemic by the results of surveys and mapping activities conducted by the national program in 1994; MDA for schistosomiasis (SCH) in provinces deemed endemic by focal surveys conducted from 2015 to 2017; and nationwide bi-annual deworming for pre-school and school-age children, organized through rural health units and the Department of Education.

## **2. PLANNED ACTIVITIES: LF**

### **PROGRAM CONTEXT**

At the start of the Global Program for the Elimination of Lymphatic Filariasis in 2000, 45 million people in 44 provinces in the Philippines required LF MDA. Redistricting in the Philippines governance system since 2000 has changed the number of endemic provinces to 47, according to Act | East.<sup>1</sup> Forty-three provinces are expected to be under post-MDA surveillance by the beginning of fiscal year 2022 (FY22), with a population of more than 44.5 million living in areas that have achieved the criteria for stopping MDA. The Philippines aimed to have all provinces in the post-MDA surveillance phase by 2020, although focal MDA is expected to continue. Due to COVID-19, this milestone was shifted to 2021. Currently, the LF elimination plan includes the use of IDA; the government issued an Administrative Order in January 2021 authorizing guidelines for the use of IDA for LF MDA and plans to pilot the triple drug MDA in parts of two provinces.

School-based Transmission Assessment Survey (TAS) is the principal strategy used to determine if MDA can stop (TAS1) and for post-MDA surveillance (TAS2 and TAS3), although the Philippines adapted protocols and guidance to provinces to undertake community based pre-TAS and TAS during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the 31 provinces that had passed TAS3 by the end of 2019, ongoing surveillance systems are being piloted by the national program with technical support from WHO and

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<sup>1</sup> The DOH recognizes 46 endemic provinces. It does not officially count Davao Occidental, which split from Davao Del Sur in 2015. MDA continues in Davao Occidental.

the Task Force for Global Health. The DOH uses filariasis test strips in *Wuchereria bancrofti* areas and *Brugia* rapid tests in *Brugia malayi* areas for TAS. The Government of the Philippines funds and implements its own TAS and pre-TAS and Act | East does not provide technical assistance to the national program for DSAs.

## **ACT | EAST FY22 ACTIVITIES**

**Provincial planning meetings to prepare for IDA MDA.** Act | East continues to provide focused, ongoing support to Sultan Kudarat. In FY21, Act | East worked with the DOH to analyze population and geographic risk factors and agreed to split the province into one high and one low risk Evaluation Unit (EU). Act | East also supported a series of planning meetings in the province to sensitize municipality officials to the new EU split, and work with the highest risk municipalities to plan for IDA, now planned for FY22. One in-person meeting will be planned in the first quarter of FY22 to re-orient municipality officials to IDA plans. The low-risk EU is undertaking sentinel and spot check surveys in June and July 2021 and is expected to move on to TAS1 soon after.

Act | East will also support IDA planning meetings to orient local administration and health officials to IDA protocols and provide planning support in Oriental Mindoro in FY22. In FY21, Act | East participated in a DOH-led meeting of global LF experts to discuss concerns about persistent positive cases. This resulted in provincial officials re-testing and treating individuals who were positive in the previous TAS (all individuals belonging to migrant indigenous groups in the area) to rule out testing-related issues.

**Provincial planning meeting for TAS.** Act | East will host one in-person provincial planning meeting in Zamboanga Del Norte to support planning for TAS1. TAS1 planning will include an MDA review of municipality-level MDA coverage data facilitated by Act | East staff. TAS protocols will also be reviewed, with input from WHO and the medical technologists who will make up the TAS teams.

**Costing analysis of NTD targeted interventions at the municipality level.** In FY21, Act | East consortium partner Results for Development co-authored a case study with Dr. Leda Hernandez, Division Chief of the Infectious Disease Office of the Philippines DOH on the Philippines' successful mobilization of domestic resources for its NTD program, along with its effective positioning of NTDs within larger health initiatives. Based on lessons from the case study, R4D will work with the DOH in FY22 to generate robust evidence to sustain domestic financing for NTDs at the local level in one province selected by the DOH, developing costing analysis and budget tracking tools to better understand how NTD funding is managed at the subnational level. Province selection will be based on municipality financing needs and implications of Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth)<sup>2</sup> primary care package benefits.

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<sup>2</sup> PhilHealth is a government-owned and controlled corporation, attached to the DOH, that was created to implement universal health coverage in the Philippines.

**NTD pre-service curriculum evaluation.** Act | East will support the DOH and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to develop evaluation protocols, tools, and timelines for a program evaluation of the use and impact of the pre-service curriculum to be implemented by CHED. The evaluation may include a combination of pre- and post-tests to document improved knowledge, attitudes, and practices, confidence in implementation, and NTD related monitoring and evaluation (M&E) for students, along with interviews with instructional staff and administrators on perceived quality and utility of training. Specific evaluation design will be determined based on what priority evaluation questions can be answered within the constraints of government resources. The evaluation will build on an M&E framework currently under development by the DOH with support from Act | East.

**LF-related support through integrated elimination hubs.** Act | East will coordinate a national-level workshop to develop a plan to further integrate vector management and disease surveillance activities in provincial and regional hubs. The national-level workshop will include representatives from the DOH infectious disease program's malaria and LF teams, WHO country office, the Global Fund, and Act | East. These stakeholders will develop a plan to further integrate vector management and disease surveillance activities in provincial and regional hubs.

Based on outcomes of the national-level workshop, Act | East will also organize and provide technical support for meetings in three of the 46 LF and malaria co-endemic provinces. The meetings will bring together regional and provincial LF and malaria focal points with vector management teams to help prioritize LF skills-building for local integrated vector management teams in two hubs where malaria surveillance activities are already established, but where integration of LF surveillance is not as highly prioritized, and at least one location for a meeting where an integrated elimination hub has not yet been set up. Act | East will work with local health officials to accelerate establishment of the integrated elimination hub in this location, ensuring that filaria surveillance activities remain a priority from the beginning.