

**FEBRUARY
27, 2026**



**PROGRESS REPORT:
JANUARY 01, 2025, TO DECEMBER 31, 2025**

**THE MWELE MALECELA MENTORSHIP
PROGRAMME FOR WOMEN IN NEGLECTED
TROPICAL DISEASES**

**THE EXPANDED SPECIAL PROJECT FOR THE ELIMINATION OF
NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES (ESPEN)**

THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION – REGIONAL OFFICE FOR AFRICA

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PROGRESS REPORT TEMPLATE OUTLINE: THE MWELE MALECELA MENTORSHIP PROGRAMME FOR WOMEN IN NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES

SECTION 1. PROGRESS REPORT OVERVIEW

A. Progress toward achieving the project's desired outcomes

Throughout this reporting period, the Mwele Malecela Mentorship (MMM) Programme continued to strengthen its leadership development model for African women in NTDs by advancing implementation of Cohort I, successfully launching and operationalizing Cohort II, and institutionalizing governance improvements for Cohort III. The programme maintained momentum despite operational capacity constraints and funding limitations, ensuring continuity of mentorship, enhanced transparency in selection, and increased visibility of women leaders in NTDs.

- 1. Strengthened Community of Practice and Leadership Visibility:** The MMM community of practice continued to grow in depth and reach in 2025. Building on the MMM Journey Plan and the structures established in the previous period, mentees from Cohorts I and II engaged more systematically in peer learning, mutual support, and joint visibility opportunities.

A major milestone was the inCOR NTD event, where nine mentees—five from Cohort I and four from Cohort II—met in person for the first time, representing Ghana, Kenya, Cameroon, Senegal, Benin, Nigeria, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Their testimonies highlighted how the MMM Programme has opened access to high-level platforms and professional networks that previously felt out of reach, reinforcing the programme's role in catalyzing women's leadership in NTDs.

Over the course of 2025, 15 mentees (10 from Cohort I and 5 from Cohort II) were supported through structured mentorship, leadership goals in their Journey Plans, and ongoing peer exchange. The launch of a Cohort I end-of-journey reflection survey helped capture lessons learned, document individual leadership trajectories, and inform adjustments for subsequent cohorts. Together, these efforts strengthened the MMM community as a growing network of emerging leaders who are increasingly visible within the regional and global NTD ecosystem.

- 2. Relationships and opportunities from mentor–mentee pairings:** The quality and responsiveness of mentorship relationships remained a central focus in 2025. All five Cohort II mentees were successfully onboarded following the official launch of Cohort II on 23 January 2025 in Kigali (hybrid format), with clear expectations, goals, and timelines agreed for the two-year journey.

Throughout the year, mentor–mentee pairs engaged around leadership development, strategic career planning, and advocacy for NTD elimination. In one case, a mentee requested increased engagement and more structured support. In response, the Secretariat, in consultation with the mentor and mentee, revised the mentorship pairing to better align with the mentee's evolving needs. This adjustment, while regrettable given the mentor's valued contribution, demonstrated the Programme's commitment to maintaining high-quality, mentee-centred mentoring relationships and its ability to manage sensitive transitions while preserving goodwill for future cohorts.

These relationships also translated into concrete opportunities. Several mentees leveraged their mentorship to refine leadership projects, expand their regional networks, and access speaking and representation roles at technical and advocacy fora. The Programme's continued collaboration with partners (including Mentium and regional NTD networks) further reinforced the mentorship ecosystem, providing mentees with a broader circle of professional support.

3. **Standard annual timeline, selection processes, and operational management:** In 2025, WHO AFRO made substantial progress in institutionalizing a more predictable annual cycle for the MMM, especially the selection and launch of new cohorts, while integrating key recommendations from the After-Action Review (AAR) and the Steering Committee.

A major achievement was the refinement of the selection process for Cohort III. The Secretariat introduced a set of robust, multilingual tools to strengthen fairness, transparency, and comparability across reviewers:

- Evaluation & Scoring Instructions in English, French, and Portuguese, providing step-by-step guidance to reviewers on how to apply a standardized 0–10 scoring scale, justify scores, and align final recommendations.
- A Stage II Application Review Guide organized around three core domains—Leadership Potential, Vision & Goals, and Commitment—with clearly defined criteria.
- A new structured scoring table that pre-loads core criteria and sub-criteria, calculates total scores automatically, and improves traceability of reviewer comments.
- An applicant ID system to anonymize applications and reduce bias in a small, close-knit technical community.

Using the strengthened review tools, Cohort III achieved 100% completion of primary assessments and 70% completion of peer (secondary) reviews, marking a significant improvement in engagement and consistency compared with earlier cycles. The Secretariat then consolidated all “Strongly Recommend” candidates and applied a deliberate balancing lens to ensure geographical and linguistic diversity across Eastern, Central, Southern, Francophone, Anglophone, and Lusophone contexts.

This enhanced methodology strengthens the programme’s foundations for future cohorts and directly supports core objectives around equity, transparency, and fair representation. At the same time, WHO AFRO noted that the small size of the NTD leadership community means some candidates remain identifiable to reviewers. To further mitigate familiarity bias, the Secretariat recommended broadening the Selection Committee to include experts in gender, leadership, and organizational development.

While the overall annual cycle remained on track, certain documents and process outputs were finalized more slowly than planned. This was due to a brief pause in dedicated coordination capacity linked to contractual modalities. In an already stretched environment, redistributing tasks to cover this gap proved challenging. Nonetheless, key milestones—including the Cohort II launch, mentorship initiation, and Cohort III selection—were successfully delivered within the reporting period.

4. **Events and opportunities for mentees (webinars, conferences, trainings, travel awards):** The MMM Programme continued to adhere to a robust annual timeline, with milestones clearly established for the cohort selection process, management of Cohort I, and preparations for Cohort II. The application process for Cohort II, launched in December 2023, received 47 mentor applications and 213 mentee applications. While this represents a decrease of approximately 39% in mentee applications compared to Cohort I—which received over 350 applications—the quality and diversity of applicants improved notably due to enhanced dissemination strategies. In particular, the Secretariat actively engaged WHO Country Offices to circulate the call through their networks, resulting in increased representation from Lusophone and Francophone countries. A critical review of the selection process was undertaken, resulting in the refinement of the Stage II form and scoring criteria. While delays in the selection process were experienced, particularly in Stage II due to competing priorities from the Selection Committee, steps were taken to improve the efficiency of this process going forward. This includes expanding the Selection Committee from 10 to 14 members, with increased diversity to ensure a more thorough and inclusive review process.

5. **Events and opportunities for mentees (webinars, conferences, trainings, etc.):** A key focus of 2025 was to provide mentees with meaningful learning, visibility, and networking opportunities that actively reinforced their leadership journeys.

- a. **Participation in the NTD Programme Managers Meeting (15–17 April 2025):** Four of the five Cohort II mentees attended the meeting in person, gaining direct exposure to national NTD programme managers, WHO technical teams, and implementing partners. This high-level engagement strengthened their understanding of programme implementation challenges and enhanced their visibility as emerging leaders within the region.
- b. **Joint MMM–Injaz Fellowship Webinar: “Advocacy in Action – Championing the Elimination of NTDs” (25 June 2025):** The MMM Programme co-hosted a 75-minute webinar with the Injaz Fellowship, featuring Ms. Yacine Djibo (Speak Up Africa) as keynote speaker. The session brought together mentees and fellows from multiple countries, equipping participants with practical advocacy tools and underscoring the value of cross-programme collaboration in driving NTD elimination efforts.
- c. **Cross-Cohort Engagement at the NNN Conference (30 September–2 October 2025):** Mentees from Cohorts I and II participated in the NNN Conference. This gathering offered a unique in-person opportunity for mentees to connect across cohorts, exchange experiences, and deepen peer learning. Through joint attendance at panel discussions and side events, mentees strengthened professional relationships, identified common leadership challenges, and shared practical strategies related to advocacy, community engagement, and programme implementation. Their presence also amplified the visibility of the MMM community within a global NTD convening.
- d. **MMM Travel Award:** The MMM Travel Award remains an important mechanism to support mentee participation in global fora. However, no awardees were confirmed in 2025 due to timing challenges with visa processing. This highlighted the need for earlier planning and more structured coordination with host institutions. To address this, the Secretariat recommends establishing a dedicated focal point within ASTMH to guide mentees through the application timeline and requirements—potentially including an orientation session where ASTMH walks mentees through the process step-by-step. This improvement would help ensure that future award cycles are maximized for impact.
- e. **Additional Visibility and Learning Opportunities:** In parallel with these activities, the Secretariat continued efforts to advance the launch of the MMM Leadership Programme for Cohorts I and II. While the intent and demand for this component remain strong, organizational restructuring and shifting internal priorities required a temporary reset of earlier planning. This necessitated renewed internal engagement to identify the most feasible pathway for delivering a high-quality leadership curriculum within existing structures.

Additionally, funding constraints limited the ability to contract external providers during the reporting period, making it necessary to explore internal facilitation options and leverage in-house expertise wherever possible. Despite these challenges, the groundwork laid in 2025—including consultations, curriculum scoping, and cross-cluster discussions—positions the programme to move forward as internal conditions stabilize.

Beyond the leadership component, mentees continued to use their stipends and professional networks to participate in relevant conferences, trainings, and regional engagements. Several were also featured on the ESPEN Portal and partner platforms, further elevating their visibility as women leading NTD elimination efforts in their countries and regions.

Anticipated Work for the Next Period:

Looking ahead, the MMM Programme will build on the momentum established in 2025 by deepening programme quality, advancing leadership development, and strengthening governance systems to support long-term institutionalization. Four key areas of work will guide the next reporting period:

1. **Launch of Cohort III:** Building on the strengthened and more transparent selection process introduced in 2025, the Programme will move forward with the formal launch and operationalization of Cohort III. Newly selected mentees and mentors will be onboarded, introduced to the Programme's expectations, and guided through orientation sessions focused on leadership goals, engagement plans, and reporting requirements. The mentorship journey will begin with clearly defined milestones to ensure consistency, quality, and continuity across the two-year cycle. Cohort III will also be integrated into the broader MMM Community of Practice, helping to reinforce cross-cohort learning, expand visibility, and nurture a connected pipeline of emerging women leaders in NTD elimination.
2. **After-Action Review (AAR) to Refine the Programme:** During the next period, the Programme will undertake a structured After-Action Review to assess governance arrangements, selection processes, mentorship quality, and overall operational management across Cohorts I and II, as well as the Cohort III selection cycle. This review will gather reflective input from mentees, mentors, committee members, and partners to identify opportunities for improving efficiency, equity, and sustainability. Importantly, the AAR will also provide a diplomatic space to consider whether the current Steering Committee structure continues to meet the Programme's evolving needs, or whether transitioning to a more streamlined advisory modality would enhance clarity, agility, and long-term institutionalization. The insights generated through the AAR will guide refinements that strengthen accountability, reinforce quality assurance, and help embed the MMM Programme more firmly within WHO AFRO systems.
3. **Launch of the MMM Leadership Programme:** The coming period will also prioritise the launch of the dedicated MMM Leadership Programme for Cohorts II and III. This initiative will deliver a structured curriculum designed to build strategic leadership capacity, sharpen advocacy competencies, and strengthen institutional influence among mentees working in NTD elimination. Efforts will focus on operationalizing the curriculum, engaging internal expertise, and leveraging selective partnerships to ensure high-quality delivery within current resource constraints. Monitoring mechanisms will be established to capture participation, learning outcomes, and the application of leadership competencies within professional settings. By aligning leadership development directly with mentorship and peer learning, the Programme will provide a coherent and impactful pathway for advancing women's leadership across the NTD landscape.

B. Adjustments to the project

During the reporting period, the Programme required several operational adjustments to maintain continuity across Cohorts I and II as well as the launch phase of Cohort III. A temporary interruption in dedicated coordination capacity occurred at a critical stage of the Cohort III review, which slowed the finalization of documentation and the matching of mentees and mentors. Given existing funding constraints, the Secretariat was limited in its ability to redistribute responsibilities across colleagues who were already managing full portfolios, making it challenging to fully compensate for this short-term gap.

To mitigate the impact, the Secretariat prioritized core deliverables, maintaining active mentorship support throughout the year, completing primary and secondary reviews for Cohort III applicants, and delivering key visibility and learning activities such as the Injaz webinar and participation in the NTD Programme Managers Meeting. Non-urgent activities were sequenced more realistically, allowing the Programme to preserve quality while safeguarding the mentee experience.

Despite these constraints, the MMM Programme sustained momentum throughout 2025, upheld its commitments to equity and transparency in selection, and continued expanding opportunities for women leaders in NTD elimination. Lessons learned from this period will inform upcoming refinements—particularly the need for more predictable resourcing, contingency planning, and strengthened governance structures—to enhance the Programme's resilience in future cycles.

- Please fill in the following two tables

Progress Report Number	Reporting Period Start Date	Reporting Period End Date	Progress Report Due Date	Scheduled Payment Amount (if applicable)
1	January 1, 2025	December 31, 2025	February 27, 2026	\$ 112,228

Item	Any changes since initial draft (Yes or No)	Notes
1. Global Access Are there any updates to your responses to the Global Access questions in Section A ?	NO	
2. Roles and Responsibilities Update Do you represent that the project activities were conducted in compliance with all applicable ethical, legal, regulatory and safety requirements? Are all the project activities described in the documents previously submitted to the foundation?	Yes	If yes, R&R changes should be noted here

SECTION 2: FINANCIAL PROGRESS REPORT

The purpose of this section is to help the foundation understand expenditures in relation to the work performed under this grant during the most recent reporting period and the upcoming one(s).

Please provide actual expenditures for past periods and projected expenditures for future periods by updating the [Excel budget template](#) and use this narrative document to share additional explanations. Together, this narrative section and Excel budget should provide a complete quantitative and qualitative description of the current financial state of the project.

For additional instructions, see the [Grant Budgeting & Financial Reporting Detailed Instructions](#).

Latest Period Variance

“**Latest period variance**” compares expenditures that occurred in the most recent reporting period against the projections that were provided at the beginning of the same period. See the “Financial Summary & Reporting” sheet in the Excel budget template for the calculated variance (for example, column AD, starting on row 29 for period 1). The budget template also includes an “Analytics” sheet for convenient calculation of variances.

- Did the project spend more or less than anticipated? At a high level, what are the reasons for spending more or less than projected (such as, programmatic changes, delays in recruitment, etc.)?

The project was delivered within the parameters of the approved budget, with expenditures remaining aligned to planned allocations. Several activities referenced in the previous report, such as cross-cohort mentor exchanges and mentorship webinars, were not implemented because their projected costs exceeded the available grant envelope. Consequently, the Secretariat prioritized essential, grant-aligned deliverables to ensure sound financial stewardship, programme continuity, and optimal value for money.

1. Please provide a detailed explanation for any expense category in which the variance was greater than 10%. This should include an explanation of relevant project decisions or changes to actual costs compared to prior assumptions.

The following categories saw an increase in expenses during this reporting period:

- a. **Subcontracts:** The Secretariat implemented the agreed basic support package valued at USD 28,000, while deferring cost-intensive elements initially envisioned—such as expanded cross-cohort exchanges, additional facilitated sessions, and extended support modules—as these exceeded the available grant envelope. A formal commitment was made with the service provider within the reporting period; however, due to administrative processing timelines beyond the Secretariat's direct control, the corresponding disbursement will be reflected in the subsequent reporting cycle.
- b. **Other Categories:** All other budget categories remained within the approved annual budget, reflecting effective financial management and continued alignment with programme goals.

Future Period Projections

For the next reporting period, expenditures are expected to remain within the approved budget, with activities focused on the launch and operationalization of Cohort III. This will include the onboarding of mentees and mentors, delivery of kick-off orientation sessions, and the introduction of structured mentee progress reporting. These efforts are aimed at strengthening accountability, supporting learning, and ensuring a smooth start for the new cohort.

A second area of investment will centre on quality assurance and governance strengthening. The Secretariat will undertake an After-Action Review to refine implementation and selection processes, ensuring that lessons learned are systematically integrated into programme operations. Continued improvement of the review

tools and committee processes will also be prioritized, with specific attention to broadening the expertise involved in assessments and reducing familiarity bias. These measures are essential for maintaining fairness, transparency, and rigour across all programme cycles.

The programme will also continue advancing leadership development and visibility activities, subject to funding availability. The MMM Leadership Programme will be progressed using a cost-realistic approach that leverages internal expertise and strategically selected partnerships to reduce expenses. Priority learning and visibility engagements already budgeted will be maintained.

To maximize value for money and strengthen financial discipline, several efficiency measures are planned. These include earlier planning for travel-related items, particularly around visa timelines, as well as the establishment of a more structured annual calendar with earlier confirmation of key sessions. In addition, clearer costing and funding-coverage checks will be applied before committing to any add-on activities that fall outside the grant. These steps are intended to support proactive planning, mitigate delays, and ensure continued compliance with financial expectations.

SECTION 3. GENDER INTEGRATION PLAN

In 2025, the MMM Programme continued to apply a strong gender-responsive approach, ensuring that all activities created a safe, supportive environment for African women leaders. From the launch of Cohort II, mentees received clear orientation on expectations, confidentiality, and respectful engagement, while mentors were guided on gender-sensitive communication to promote trust and openness within each mentoring relationship.

The Programme remained attentive to individual needs. When a mentee requested more structured support, the Secretariat facilitated a respectful adjustment of her mentorship pairing. This action—handled with care toward both mentor and mentee—reinforced the Programme's commitment to a safe space where women can voice their needs and receive tailored support.

Gender integration was further strengthened in the Cohort III selection process. Multilingual tools, anonymized scoring, and standardized criteria reduced bias and improved fairness for women across diverse linguistic and regional backgrounds. These improvements helped broaden representation and ensure equitable access for women applicants.

Peer-learning moments, including the NTD Programme Managers Meeting, the MMM–Injaz webinar, and the NNN Conference, offered additional safe spaces for mentees to practice leadership, strengthen confidence, and build regional networks. These engagements contributed significantly to women's visibility and presence in technical and advocacy settings.

Visibility was also advanced through digital storytelling. The Secretariat regularly featured mentees on WHO AFRO and ESPEN platforms, highlighting their achievements and encouraging them to share their own leadership stories. This not only enhanced public recognition but also helped mentees build confidence in presenting their work and voices more broadly.

Despite temporary capacity constraints that slowed some processes, the Programme maintained a strong focus on safeguarding the mentee experience and providing an enabling environment for women's growth.

These efforts ensured that gender equity, safety, and women's empowerment remained central to MMM implementation throughout 2025.

B. Areas for Improvement and Recommendations

Despite strong progress in embedding gender-responsive practices within the MMM Programme, opportunities remain to further enhance the Programme's effectiveness and ensure that future cohorts benefit from an even more intentional approach to women's leadership development.

1. **Expanding Opportunities through Strategic Collaborations:** There remains significant potential to widen leadership pathways for mentees through cross-cutting partnerships, particularly with initiatives focused on gender equality and women's leadership in health. Such alignment would allow MMM participants to access new skills, platforms, and learning resources without requiring additional Programme funding.

Recommendation:

Partners with strong portfolios on gender equity—such as those within the Gates Foundation—may be well-placed to offer complementary technical insights, learning opportunities, or linkages with broader women's empowerment initiatives. Exploring these synergies, where feasible and mutually useful, could substantially enrich the leadership experience offered to MMM mentees.

2. **Enhancing In-Person Engagement to Strengthen Confidence and Safe-Space Dynamics:** Mentees consistently highlighted the value of in-person engagement as a powerful complement to virtual mentoring—helping build trust, deepen relationships, and create safe and empowering learning spaces. While the MMM model remains primarily virtual, the Programme can continue exploring targeted, cost-efficient options to integrate limited in-person touchpoints.

Recommendation:

Future cohorts may benefit from intentionally leveraging existing regional meetings and conferences that mentees already attend—using stipends strategically for side-meetings with mentors or peer gatherings. This approach maintains cost-discipline while enhancing the relational and confidence-building dimensions that women find crucial for leadership growth.

3. **Strengthening Gender-Responsive Monitoring and Feedback Loops:** While current feedback mechanisms (such as reflection surveys and mentor check-ins) provide valuable insights, future cohorts would benefit from more systematic tracking of gender-related outcomes—particularly confidence, leadership visibility, and barriers faced by women.

Recommendation:

Developing a light, gender-responsive monitoring framework would enable the Programme to better capture mentees' experiences, anticipate emerging needs, and refine support strategies. Engaging gender specialists in co-designing these tools would help ensure they are practical, ethical, and aligned with the Programme's vision.

SECTION 4. RISK REGISTER

Predicted risks at the start of the program:

Throughout 2025, the MMM Programme operated within a dynamic context shaped by shifting operational priorities, resource constraints, and evolving demands placed on the Secretariat. The Programme continued to closely monitor risk areas and applied proactive mitigation strategies to safeguard mentorship quality, gender equity outcomes, and the integrity of core programme processes. The following summarizes the key risks identified across the period and the measures taken—and recommended—for their mitigation.

- I. **Program Scope and Focus Risks:** As demand for MMM grows, there is a risk of scope creep—expanding activities beyond what is resourced—leading to dilution of focus away from the agreed outcomes, targets, and quality standards. While this risk remains low, its potential impact is moderate, especially as partners and stakeholders increasingly look to MMM to respond to broader leadership and visibility expectations.

Mitigation Measures:

1. *Sustained strategic oversight:* Continued use of the Steering Committee as the programme's accountability and strategic direction mechanism, including guidance on cohort sizing aligned to available resources and strategic priorities.
2. *Regular strategic review and alignment:* Annual review points and structured engagements with Steering Committee members and partners to reaffirm results priorities and adjust scope responsibly where needed.
3. *Results discipline:* Maintain a clear results framework and annual workplan that distinguishes between core deliverables (must deliver) and aspirational activities (deliver if resources allow).

- II. **Program Implementation Risks:** Implementation risks include delayed execution of activities, variable quality of mentorship outputs, challenges in recruiting and matching sufficient mentors, limited engagement of mentees and mentors, and cost pressures. The likelihood is medium, with moderate impact if not managed.

During 2025, the programme maintained delivery of key milestones (Cohort II launch, mentorship initiation, events, and selection enhancements). However, finalization of certain documentation and process outputs progressed more slowly than planned, reflecting temporary constraints in dedicated coordination bandwidth. In an already stretched operating environment, it was difficult to absorb additional tasks across colleagues without creating downstream effects on other priorities.

Mitigation Measures:

1. **Prioritization of critical-path deliverables:** Protect timely delivery of core milestones (cohort launch, mentorship continuity, selection completion), while sequencing non-urgent outputs realistically to preserve quality.
2. **Quality assurance through tools and standardization:** Strengthened selection tools (multilingual scoring guides, structured scoring table, applicant IDs, reviewer pairing) to reduce quality risk and improve consistency.
3. **Ongoing monitoring and follow-up:** Continue structured check-ins and pulse surveys with mentees/mentors to detect disengagement early and take corrective action.

- III. **Other potential risks and unintended negative consequences to be tracked include the following:**
 - a. The backlash against programmatic interventions or outcomes resulting in gender-based harassment/violence in the workplace, home, or community.
 - b. Exclusion of marginalized groups/women facing multiple forms of discrimination from the program's benefits, including the risk of reinforcing or increasing existing inequality through programmatic approaches that disproportionately reach and benefit those already in relatively higher positions of power and privilege.

- c. Increasing the representation of women in leadership positions without the corresponding increase in decision-making power or influence.
- d. Increased time poverty through increased tasks/responsibilities, without commensurate compensation/recognition or necessary support to fulfill responsibilities (e.g., childcare).

Mitigation Measures:

1. **Gender Inclusivity in Program Design:** The MMM Programme remains steadfast in prioritizing a gender-intentional approach to ensure the active participation of women from diverse backgrounds, particularly from Francophone, Lusophone, and Anglophone countries.
2. **Inclusion of Marginalized Groups:** the program's selection criteria are designed to promote equitable representation, especially for marginalized communities. As in the previous reporting period, outreach to marginalized groups, such as women facing multiple forms of discrimination, continues to be prioritized. Strategies, including the inclusion of marginalization survey questions in the selection process, ensure that women from diverse backgrounds have access to opportunities for participation.
3. **Safeguarding and Anti-Harassment Policies:** Leveraging the WHO AFRO PRSEAH policy demonstrates a commitment to best practices and ensures that the MMM Programme benefits from a comprehensive set of guidelines. This provides the foundation for a safe and respectful environment.

IV. Program Coordination and Partnership Risks.

The programme relies on strong coordination with mentors, selection committee members, and partners. Risks include reduced engagement, misalignment on expectations, and partners' shifting priorities.

A related risk is mentor attrition (a mentor unable to sustain the two-year commitment), which can affect mentorship quality and continuity if not addressed quickly.

Mitigation Measures:

- **Active coordination and communications:** Maintain regular formal/informal partner touchpoints and structured updates that keep stakeholders aligned and engaged.
- **Monitoring mentor engagement:** Regular check-ins with mentors/mentees, with readiness to adjust mentorship arrangements where necessary to protect mentee experience.
- **Selection process engagement controls:** Continue streamlining tools and strengthening follow-up mechanisms with selection committee members to reduce delays, including clearer timelines, reviewer pairing, and escalation pathways when needed.

V. External operational risks (travel, visas, and broader context)

Visa delays and travel barriers can prevent mentees from benefiting from planned international opportunities, including travel awards.

Mitigation Measures:

- **Earlier planning and guidance:** Build longer lead times for travel processes and provide step-by-step guidance and documentation checklists.
- **Host institution coordination:** Strengthen coordination with event organizers to support mentees with timelines and documentation requirements.
- **Virtual fallback options:** Ensure meaningful virtual participation when travel becomes infeasible.

SECTION 5. FEEDBACK FOR THE FOUNDATION

The Gates Foundation has continued to play a pivotal role in enabling the MMM Programme to deliver high-quality mentorship, strengthen women's leadership in NTDs, and maintain programme momentum despite resource constraints. The Programme deeply appreciates the Foundation's sustained financial support and its trust in WHO AFRO to adapt implementation to evolving needs. This flexibility has been essential for supporting the mentorship journeys of 15 women across Cohorts I and II, advancing transparency in selection, and expanding leadership visibility across the NTD ecosystem.

Opportunities for Further Strengthening the MMM Programme

To deepen impact and accelerate women's leadership in NTDs, we see several strategic opportunities where the Foundation—particularly through its Gender Equality and Women's Health teams—can meaningfully enhance Programme outcomes:

A. Leverage Foundation Gender Platforms to Elevate MMM Mentees:

The Foundation could facilitate more systematic participation of MMM mentees in its flagship gender-focused initiatives (e.g., WomenLift Health, gender leadership roundtables, and global women's health convenings). Such visibility would significantly amplify mentee influence, expand their professional networks, and position the MMM Programme as a model for gender-responsive leadership development in global health.

B. Strengthen Cross-Portfolio Linkages Between NTDs and Gender Equity

The Gates Foundation's Gender Equality team is uniquely positioned to support MMM by fostering cross-portfolio exchanges—linking mentees with experts, leadership trainers, and gender-intentional programme designers. This would reinforce MMM's commitment to women-centred leadership and help integrate gender-transformative practices more deeply into NTD programming.

C. Enhance Visibility of MMM Within Global NTD and Gender Ecosystems

Through its communication channels, partnerships, and convening power, the Foundation can help spotlight the achievements of MMM mentees, strengthening the pipeline of women leaders across the NTD landscape and inspiring more diverse applicants for future cohorts.

Grantee Confirmation

By submitting this report, I declare that I am authorized to certify, on behalf of the grantee identified under [Section A – Investment Details](#), that I have examined the responses provided and related attachments, and that to the best of my knowledge, they are true, correct, and complete.

I also confirm that the grantee identified under [Section A – Investment Details](#) has complied with all of the terms and conditions of the grant agreement, including but not limited to the clauses regarding Use of Funds, Anti-Terrorism, Subgrants and Subcontracts, and Regulated Activities.

Your Name	Report Submitted Date
Dr. Elizabeth Juma	28.02.2026