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50 anniversary



SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE

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Building a Healthier Future Together

Dr. Abdoulaye Diarra

WHO Representative in Sao Tome and Principe



It is my pleasure to present the second quarter edition of our newsletter, which showcases the remarkable progress achieved through the strong partnership between the Government of São Tomé and Príncipe, the World Health Organization (WHO), the development partners, and the communities across the country.

This quarter has been marked by significant milestones that reflect our shared commitment to advancing health and well-being for all. As WHO celebrates 50 years of partnership with São Tomé and Príncipe, we will remind that the achievements highlighted in these pages are the result of decades of collaboration, dedication, and a common vision for a healthier nation.

Among the most notable accomplishments is the country's continued progress toward the elimination of lymphatic filariasis, bringing São Tomé and Príncipe closer to achieving a historic public health milestone. At the same time, efforts to eliminate malaria, strengthen immunization systems through digital innovation, and enhance the management of communicable and noncommunicable diseases demonstrate the country's determination to build a resilient and equitable health system.

This edition also highlights important investments in primary health care, district health management, evidence-based policymaking, and health workforce development. From strengthening the capacities of the National Immunization Technical Advisory Group and implementing WHO clinical protocols for noncommunicable diseases to piloting innovative management tools and advancing sustainable health financing, these initiatives contribute to stronger institutions and improved health outcomes.

Equally encouraging fact is the growing recognition that health extends beyond the health sector alone. The implementation of green infrastructure projects, the promotion of healthy lifestyles through community engagement, and the adoption of multisectoral strategies illustrate the importance of collaboration across sectors to address the determinants of health and achieve sustainable development of the national health system.

As we celebrate the progress made, we remain mindful of the challenges that lie ahead. Sustaining gains, addressing emerging health priorities, and ensuring that no one is left behind will require continued commitment, innovation, and partnership. WHO remains steadfast in its support to the Government and people of São Tomé and Príncipe as we work together toward Universal Health Coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals.

I extend my sincere appreciation to the Ministry of Health, the development partners, health workers, community leaders, and all those whose dedication makes these achievements possible. Together, we are transforming commitments into action and building a healthier future for every person in São Tomé and Príncipe.

I hope you will enjoy reading this edition and learning more about the inspiring work being carried out across the country.

WHO celebrates 50 years of partnership with São Tomé and Príncipe

At the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Government of São Tomé and Príncipe celebrated 50 years of cooperation, marking five decades of partnership dedicated to improving public health and strengthening the national health system.

The commemorative ceremony brought together the Prime Minister, Dr. Américo Ramos, the Minister of Health, Dr. Celso Matos, the WHO Representative in São Tomé and Príncipe, Dr. Abdoulaye Diarra, as well as representatives of UN agencies, development partners, the diplomatic corps, Ministry of Health officials, and former and current WHO staff. The event provided an opportunity to reflect on key achievements and reaffirm a shared commitment to improving the health and well-being of the population.

Over the past five decades, WHO's collaboration with São Tomé and Príncipe has supported the expansion of immunization coverage, improvements in maternal and child health, stronger health services, and better preparedness and response to public health emergencies. These achievements reflect the country's continued commitment to advancing public health through strong partnerships.

As part of the celebrations, WHO organized a press conference with public and private media representatives. Led by Dr. Abdoulaye Diarra and his team, the session highlighted major milestones of the partnership, discussed current health challenges, and explored opportunities to advance universal health coverage. Dr. Diarra also emphasized the media's vital role in promoting health awareness and supporting disease prevention.



During the ceremony, WHO presented certificates of recognition to the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) and the Government of São Tomé and Príncipe. A documentary showcasing WHO's work in the country was screened, while cultural performances celebrated five decades of partnership, solidarity, and shared progress. ■

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Strategic documents strengthen São Tomé and Príncipe's response to Noncommunicable Diseases



São Tomé and Príncipe launched three key strategic documents to strengthen the national response to noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), which account for about 70% of deaths in the country. Developed with technical support from the World Health Organization (WHO), the new strategies represent an important milestone for health promotion, disease prevention, and the strengthening of the national health system.

The documents adopted included the Multisectoral Strategic Plan for Noncommunicable Diseases 2026–2030, the National Strategic Plan for Cancer Control 2026–2030, and the National Community Health Strategy 2026–2030. Together, these instruments established guidelines for improving the prevention, early diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up of NCDs, while also strengthening the role of communities in health promotion.

As part of this commitment, an Interministerial Memorandum of Understanding was also signed, involving various government sectors with the aim of integrating health into all public policies and promoting a multidisciplinary approach to address the country's major health challenges.

The ceremony was attended by Prime Minister Dr. Américo Ramos, members of the government, representatives of the United Nations system, development partners, and other stakeholders in the health sector. On this occasion, the Prime Minister highlighted that, for the first time, the country now has three strategic instruments launched in an integrated manner, constituting a state commitment to the sustainable



development of the health system.

The United Nations Resident Coordinator, Eric Overvest, highlighted the WHO's role in drafting the documents and reaffirmed the United Nations' commitment to supporting their implementation. The launch of these strategies strengthened the country's capacity to address the growing burden of noncommunicable diseases and helped accelerate progress toward universal health coverage and better health outcomes for the entire population. ■

São Tomé and Príncipe pilots WHO training modules to strengthen district health management



São Tomé and Príncipe hosted a WHO strategic mission dedicated to strengthening the management of district-level health services, consolidating its commitment to improving primary health care.

The initiative brought together all three levels of WHO, a fruitful collaboration between WHO Headquarters, the Regional Office for Africa (WHO AFRO), and the WHO country offices of São Tomé and Príncipe and Cape Verde. São Tomé and Príncipe became the first country in the African Region to test the new WHO training modules designed for District Health Management Teams.

Developed by WHO AFRO, the district health management training modules are designed to strengthen leadership, planning, coordination, and service delivery competencies at the local level. To support this effort, the Ministry of Health and WHO piloted the modules in São Tomé and Príncipe, bringing together district health managers and health professionals to assess their relevance and effectiveness.

Through a competency-based and practice-oriented approach, participants took part in case studies, group discussions, and practical exercises aimed at strengthening district-level management capacities. The lessons and feedback generated during the pilot will contribute to finalizing the modules for wider rollout in the African Region.

The pilot exercise was successfully completed, culminating in the awarding of certificates to 21 participants.

The feedback collected from participants highlighted the teams' high level of engagement, the relevance of the discussions, and the practical usefulness of the knowledge acquired for their daily work. Participants noted that the training enabled them to develop new approaches to problem-solving and to make more efficient use of available resources.



The mission also highlighted the strong potential of national teams to lead processes aimed at improving the management of health services. Based on the recommendations formulated during this pilot phase, WHO will now refine the training modules before validating and expanding them to other countries in the African Region.

By hosting this pioneering initiative, São Tomé and Príncipe has positioned itself as a regional leader, contributing to the development of innovative tools designed to strengthen primary health care and promote more efficient, resilient, and people-centered health systems. ■

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World Health Day celebrated through dialogue, science and community engagement in São Tomé and Príncipe



As part of the World Health Day 2026 celebrations in São Tomé and Príncipe, the World Health Organization (WHO), in partnership with the Ministry of Health, organized activities to promote dialogue, science, and community engagement in health. To mark the occasion, WHO and the Ministry of Health brought together policymakers, health professionals, academics, students, and development partners for a roundtable discussion on the theme “Together for Health, with Science.” The event highlighted the role of scientific evidence in strengthening health systems and improving health outcomes.

Discussions showcased progress in health workforce development, immunization, epidemiological surveillance, decentralization of services, and diagnostic capacity. Participants also emphasized the importance of the One Health approach, recognizing the links between human, animal, and environmental health, and reaffirmed the value of science in informing public health policies and decisions.

WHO also launched the online survey “50 Years of WHO in São Tomé and Príncipe – Your Health, Our History,” as part of the Organization’s 50th anniversary celebrations in the country. The initiative aimed to raise awareness of WHO’s



contributions to disease control, emergency response, and health system strengthening over the past five decades.

On 7 April, WHO hosted an Open House at its country office, welcoming the winners of the survey contest. Participants had the opportunity to learn more about WHO’s work, engage with WHO Representative Dr. Abdoulaye Diarra and his team, and gain insight into the Organization’s mission and impact in the country.

Together, these activities reinforced the importance of science, partnerships, and community participation in advancing public health and universal health coverage in São Tomé and Príncipe. ■

São Tomé and Príncipe makes progress toward sustainable health financing through an innovative tax proposal

São Tomé and Príncipe has taken an important step toward strengthening sustainable health financing with the development of a national proposal for selective tax reforms, drafted by the National Health Financing Task Force with technical support from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and validated on June 10, 2026. The initiative translates the Strategic Plan for Sustainable Health Financing 2025–2031—supported by the WHO and adopted by the government in December 2025—into concrete actions, aligning it with the National Plan for Domestic Revenue Mobilization 2026–2030.

The proposal is based on international best practices and the combined experience of the WHO and UNDP, including the investment case on tobacco taxation developed in Cape Verde. It calls for measures such as increasing taxes on tobacco, alcohol, sugary beverages, and ultra-processed foods, thereby reducing consumption of harmful products while mobilizing additional resources for health priorities, such as essential medicines, vaccines, primary health care, and the prevention of noncommunicable diseases.

As a next step, the proposals are expected to be considered during the preparation of the next General State Budget. Their implementation will, however, require careful alignment— with the country's institutional capacity to ensure effective tax administration, compliance with tax obligations, robust transparency and accountability mechanisms, and the appropriate use of collected revenues. These elements will be essential to guarantee the sustainability of the reform, strengthen public confidence, and ensure that the new resources effectively contribute to better health outcomes. ■



From plan to action: WHO support accelerates São Tomé and Príncipe's Path toward the elimination of Lymphatic filariasis



São Tomé and Príncipe is nearing a major public health milestone in its efforts to eliminate lymphatic filariasis (LF) as a public health problem, with WHO's support and funding from the Government of Japan. Following the launch of the National LF Elimination Project in May 2026, the Ministry of Health, with technical assistance from WHO, implemented a series of activities to strengthen epidemiological surveillance, improve morbidity management, and prepare the national dossier for the validation of elimination.

Progress achieved over recent years has been significant. After three nationwide mass drug administration campaigns conducted between 2018 and 2020, evaluation studies showed that transmission levels had fallen below the threshold required for elimination, with microfilaremia prevalence rates under 1% in previously endemic districts.

To support the final phase of the process, two intensive training sessions were held from 23 June to 3 July, bringing together health professionals from all districts, the Autonomous Region of Príncipe, and central-level institutions. Led by WHO/ESPEN specialist Dr. Didier Bakajika, the training focused on preparing the validation dossier and strengthening post-elimination

and integrated surveillance systems for neglected tropical diseases.

WHO Representative Dr. Abdoulaye Diarra emphasized that the activities addressed two complementary priorities: achieving elimination and sustaining the gains already made. Minister of Health Dr. Celso Matos highlighted that while the country is on track to submit its validation dossier to WHO later this year, maintaining strong surveillance systems will be essential to prevent any resurgence of transmission. Supported by WHO and partners, including the Government of Japan, the Mectizan Donation Program, and EISAI, the initiative demonstrates São Tomé and Príncipe's commitment to eliminating neglected tropical diseases and ensuring a healthier future for its population.



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African Vaccination Week 2026 drives the digital transformation of vaccination in São Tomé and Príncipe



The introduction of digital solutions for immunization data management was one of the most significant achievements of African Immunization Week 2026, held from April 29 to May 8 in São Tomé and Príncipe. The initiative strengthened routine immunization and helped improve the tracking of unvaccinated children or those with incomplete vaccination schedules, with a special focus on the most vulnerable populations.

The campaign, organized by the Ministry of Health with support of WHO, was officially launched in the city of Angolares and focused particularly on the districts of Água Grande, Mé-Zóchi, and Caué, where vaccination coverage was below the national average. Under the slogan “Vaccines work for all generations,” the initiative aimed to promote routine vaccination throughout the life cycle, including the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, and intensified efforts to identify children who had not received any doses and vulnerable individuals.

As part of the preparations, the Ministry of Health, with technical assistance of WHO, trained 25 data collectors to use digital tools for collecting and managing vaccination information.

The digitization of records made real-time data available, strengthening activity monitoring, operational supervision, and evidence-based decision-making. The initiative is part of the modernization process of the national Immunization program, aimed at improving the quality of information and program management.

According to the WHO Representative in São Tomé and Príncipe, Dr. Abdoulaye Diarra, the goal was “to ensure that information is available in real time, enabling better monitoring of activities, faster decision-making, and more effective planning of vaccination efforts.”

In addition to vaccination efforts, the campaign included community mobilization and awareness-raising activities to build trust in vaccines and combat misinformation. The country has maintained vaccination coverage rates above 90% for all antigens in recent years.

The initiative demonstrated how the combination of digital innovation and community action can strengthen immunization programs and contribute to more equitable and effective vaccination coverage in São Tomé and Príncipe.

São Tomé and Príncipe approved the 2026–2030 integrated strategic plan for TB, HIV, STIs, and Viral Hepatitis



As part of efforts to strengthen the national response to priority communicable diseases, the Ministry of Health of São Tomé and Príncipe has completed the midterm review of the 2023–2027 Integrated Strategic Plan for TB, HIV, STIs, and Viral Hepatitis and approved its extension through 2030. The exercise, financed by the Global Fund was implemented by the National Center for Endemic Diseases, the National HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis Control Program, with the technical support of World Health Organization (WHO through an international consultant).

During the mission, the progress made and the limitations in the implementation of existing plan were analyzed. The strategic priorities required to accelerate progress towards national and global targets were also identified.

The review identified significant progress, particularly in the detection of tuberculosis cases and the HIV diagnosis. However, there are persistent challenges related to the viral suppression among people living with HIV, the achievement of the required therapeutic success rate for tuberculosis, the detection of multidrug-resistant TB, and access to screening and monitoring for viral hepatitis.

The revised plan has been aligned to existing strategic documents such as the WHO Global Health Sector Strategies 2022–2030, the 95–95–95 targets for HIV, the End TB Strategy, and the global targets for the elimination of viral hepatitis. The review contributed also to ensure the country's preparedness for the next Global Fund financing cycle (2027–2029).

The identified main priorities include the strengthening of combined prevention, expanding early diagnosis, improving the quality of treatment and follow-up services, strengthening epidemiological surveillance and programmatic monitoring, and paying greater attention to vulnerable and high-risk populations.



The approval of the 2026–2030 Integrated Strategic Plan for HIV, TB, Hepatitis, and STIs strengthens efforts to achieve a more integrated, effective, and sustainable response and better health outcomes in São Tomé and Príncipe.

A study on malaria-related behaviors guided strategies for eliminating the disease in São Tomé and Príncipe



For the first time, São Tomé and Príncipe carried out a Malaria Behavior Survey (MBS), led by the Ministry of Health through the National Malaria Elimination Program (NMEP), with WHO's technical support and funded by the Global Fund. The survey aimed to understand the population's knowledge, perceptions, and behaviors related to malaria, identify factors that may facilitate or hinder prevention and care-seeking practices, and generate evidence to guide and strengthen national malaria elimination strategies.

Conducted across the six districts of São Tomé and the Autonomous Region of Príncipe, the survey results revealed high levels of malaria awareness. All participants (100%) identified at least one symptom of malaria or a mode of transmission; 92.2% reported that they would seek care at a health facility and request a malaria test if they suspected they had a fever; and 93.7% believed that malaria medication should only be taken after diagnosis has been confirmed. However, important gaps in risk perception remain. Approximately half of respondents did not know that any malaria case can progress to severe and potentially fatal illness.

Regarding malaria prevention, the ownership of insecticide-treated mosquito nets was high, but the actual use remained below 77.3%. In addition, more than half of participants associated indoor residual spraying (IRS) with possible skin problems, a perception that may affect its acceptance and coverage. This finding highlights the importance of risk communication and community engagement efforts to build trust in vector control interventions.

The evidence generated by the survey will help the NMEP implement more targeted and locally tailored interventions, particularly in the areas of communication, community awareness, promotion of proper mosquito net use, and acceptance of vector control measures.

The MBS therefore provides an important evidence base to strengthen national strategies and accelerate São Tomé and Príncipe's efforts toward malaria elimination.

Implementation of WHO PEN Protocols strengthens the national response to noncommunicable diseases in São Tomé and Príncipe



São Tomé and Príncipe has strengthened its national response to noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) through the implementation of the World Health Organization's (WHO) clinical guidelines for the management of diabetes mellitus, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and early cancer detection. The initiative, led by the Ministry of Health with technical and financial support from WHO, strengthens the capacity of primary health care services to provide high-quality, evidence-based services, contributing to the prevention, early diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up of major NCDs.

The implementation includes the operationalization of the recently developed National Strategic Plan for Noncommunicable Diseases and the National Cancer Control Plan. The training, conducted in all districts of the island of São Tomé, adopted a practical, on-the-job methodology, enabling the immediate application of protocols in routine care.

Technical teams from the Ministry of Health and WHO worked directly with health professionals to strengthen their skills in screening, diagnosis, treatment, clinical follow-up, referral, patient monitoring,

and early cancer detection, promoting a multidisciplinary and integrated approach to care. In total, 103 health professionals were trained, including 34 physicians, 60 nurses, 6 pharmacy technicians, 2 laboratory technicians, and 1 nutrition technician. Strengthening the competencies of the health workforce is a strategic investment to improve the quality of care and consolidate primary health care.

NCDs are one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality in São Tomé and Príncipe. The adoption of WHO clinical protocols will improve early detection, increase adherence to good clinical practices, reduce preventable complications, and promote more integrated management of chronic diseases. This intervention reinforces the commitment of the Government and the WHO to Universal Health Coverage, helping to reduce premature mortality from NCDs, accelerating progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 3, and strengthen the resilience of the national health system.

Government, United Nations System and partners hand over green Infrastructure that strengthens health and education in São Tomé and Príncipe

On 8 May, the Government of São Tomé and Príncipe, the United Nations system and development partners officially inaugurated and handed over infrastructure developed under the Green Infrastructure for Health and Education project in the districts of Lobata and Lembá. The initiative has helped improve access to essential services and strengthen the resilience of health and education facilities across the country. Funded by the National Petroleum Agency (ANP), through the Government of São Tomé and Príncipe and the World Bank, the project represented an investment of US\$3 million and was jointly implemented by the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Through its support to the health sector, WHO contributed to improving conditions in seven health facilities in São Tomé and Príncipe, focusing on water, sanitation, healthcare waste management and the overall quality of services provided to the communities.

One of the most tangible improvements was the strengthening of water supply systems. In six health facilities across São Tomé and the Autonomous Region of Príncipe, water storage tanks were constructed and electric pumps installed, helping ensure a more reliable water supply for both patients and health workers. At Guadalupe Health Centre, WHO supported improvements to the facility's water supply system, ensuring continuous access to running water and contributing to better conditions for the delivery of healthcare services. The impact of this intervention was immediately felt. According to the Northern Regional Health Delegate, Dr. Alessandro Gomes, who has worked at Guadalupe Health Centre for eight years, it was the “first time the facility had access to regular and reliable running water”. For health workers and patients alike, this represented a major improvement in hygiene conditions, infection prevention and the delivery of care.

WHO also supported the construction of septic tanks and the rehabilitation of sanitation facilities in seven



health centers, creating safer and more dignified environments for both patients and healthcare personnel.

To address longstanding challenges in healthcare waste management, the project financed the construction of two Montfort-type incinerators serving the northern and southern parts of the country, alongside training for Ministry of Health personnel responsible for operating and maintaining the facilities. A morgue was also constructed in the Autonomous Region of Príncipe, helping improve the quality of care and patient dignity.

Quarterly Highlights

“Health in Movement” promotes healthy lifestyles in São Tomé and Príncipe

On 13 June, Yon Gato Square hosted São Tomé and Príncipe’s first-ever flash mob, launching the “Health in Motion” initiative led by the Ministry of Health and WHO. Through dance and collective movement, the event promoted physical activity as a simple and accessible way to improve health and prevent noncommunicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases and diabetes. Under the slogan “Get Moving. Get Inspired. Surprise Yourself,” the campaign encouraged healthier lifestyles and greater community engagement, highlighting the importance of regular exercise in improving well-being and supporting national efforts to prevent chronic diseases.

World Malaria Day: São Tomé and Príncipe Reinforces Commitment to Malaria Elimination

On 25 April, São Tomé and Príncipe marked World Malaria Day with an awareness march led by the Ministry of Health, with support from WHO and partners, reaffirming the country’s commitment to eliminating malaria. Held under the slogan “Determined to eliminate malaria. Now we can. Now we must,” the event brought together health authorities, experts, development partners, and community members to promote awareness and community engagement. The celebration highlighted progress in surveillance, diagnosis, treatment, and vector control, while emphasizing the need to sustain investments and political commitment to achieve a malaria-free future.

São Tomé and Príncipe strengthened NITAG’s capacities to enhance Immunization

São Tomé and Príncipe strengthened the capacity of its National Immunization Technical Advisory Group (NITAG) through the participation of six members in the Annual Vaccinology Course for NITAGs, held in Cape Town, South Africa and organized by the Vaccines for Africa Initiative (VACFA) in collaboration with WHO. The training enhanced participants’ knowledge of vaccinology, vaccine evaluation, scientific evidence analysis, and the development of technical recommendations to support evidence-based immunization policies. It also provided a valuable platform for exchanging experiences and best practices with experts from across Africa. This initiative reflects the country’s commitment to strengthening its national immunization programme and WHO’s continued support for building national capacity to improve vaccine decision-making and protect populations from vaccine-preventable diseases.

Health diplomacy in action to strengthen health in São Tomé and Príncipe

On 14 April, WHO and the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in São Tomé and Príncipe reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening cooperation in support of national health priorities. During a meeting between WHO Representative Dr. Abdoulaye Diarra and Chinese Embassy Counselor Ding Tian, discussions focused on primary health care, hospital strengthening, health workforce development, and the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases. The meeting also explored opportunities for collaboration with Chinese research institutions, particularly in malaria and traditional medicine, highlighting the role of strategic partnerships and South-South cooperation in building a stronger, more resilient health system and advancing universal health coverage in São Tomé and Príncipe.

Integrated supervision strengthens management and quality of care in the health regions of São Tomé and Príncipe

As part of efforts to strengthen primary health care, the Ministry of Health of São Tomé and Príncipe, with technical support from WHO, developed and pilot tested an Integrated Supervision Checklist to improve the management of health regions and the quality of health services. The tool supports evidence-based decision-making by monitoring the implementation of district action plans and assessing key areas such as leadership, data use, human resources, service delivery, health promotion, and emergency preparedness. Tested in Água Grande, Cantagalo, and the Autonomous Region of Príncipe, the checklist aims to reduce fragmented supervision, strengthen coordination, and promote continuous quality improvement across the health system.

Second phase of echocardiographic screening campaign strengthens early detection of heart disease in children

From 8 to 12 June 2026, the Ministry of Health conducted the second phase of a school-based echocardiographic screening campaign to prevent and control rheumatic heart disease in São Tomé and Príncipe, reaching 414 children aged 6 to 13 years at Pantufo Primary School and Francisco José Tenreiro School. The screening identified several cardiovascular conditions requiring follow-up, including 19 cases of mild mitral regurgitation and a small number of congenital and structural heart abnormalities. The campaign also included health education sessions for students, teachers, parents, and caregivers on rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease prevention, early diagnosis, and treatment. Supported by WHO and partners, the initiative strengthens early detection of cardiovascular diseases in children and contributes to improving long-term heart health outcomes in the country.



Videos

50 anniversary in
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Thank you for your collaboration with WHO in supporting the strengthening of the National Health System in São Tomé and Príncipe.



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