

NEWSLETTER



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On the Frontlines Together: Our Shared Commitment to Health in Sao Tome and Principe

Dr. Abdoulaye Diarra

WHO Representative in
Sao Tome and Principe

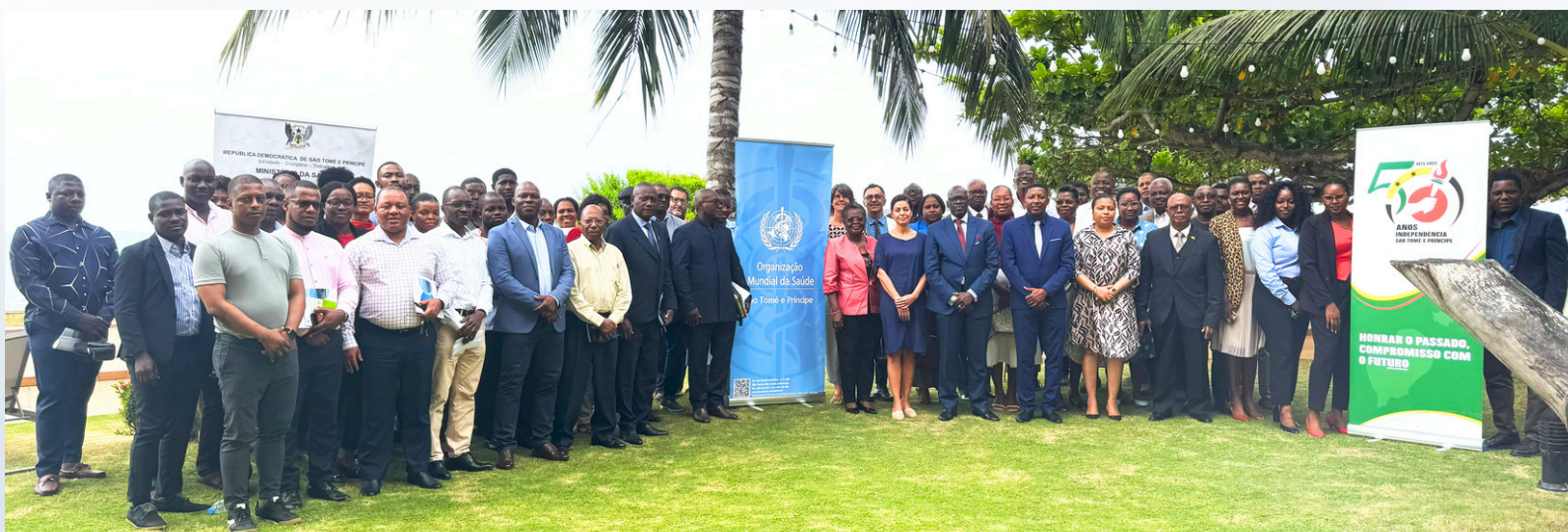
It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the third edition of our 2025 Newsletter. This issue highlights key strategic milestones that mark our continued progress toward strengthening health systems in São Tomé and Príncipe. Recent strategic milestones—the Sustainable Health Financing Plan, District Management Team Training, and the Meeting of the Directors of Immunization Programmes in Central Africa—constitute the menu of this Newsletter and represent significant steps forward in implementing the WHO Country Cooperation Strategy 2023–2027 and advancing Universal Health Coverage in São Tomé and Príncipe.

These initiatives to strengthening health systems are aligned with WHO's vision of "ensuring the human right to health by promoting physical, mental, and social well-being for all."

From July to September 2025, the Ministry of Health, with support of WHO, organized several events and activities that marked important progress toward building a stronger and more resilient health system. These include: i) the launch of the National Strategic Plan for Sustainable Health Financing 2025–2032, ii) the validation of the country's health map, iii) the training of the district health management teams, backbone of the leadership within the health system, iv) the strategic meeting of the Directors of Immunization Programs in Central Africa to redefine priorities, optimize resources and revitalize partnerships to sustain public health gains. Together, these advances form a virtuous cycle: predictable funding to invest in competent leaders for effective district health management, which in turn are vital for implementing equitable and effective immunization programs, for building a resilient health system and bringing Sao Tome and Principe closer to achieving Universal Health Coverage.

WHO reaffirms its unwavering support to the country and its partners on this vital journey. Together, we are transforming vision into reality – working to ensure that every Santomean has access to good quality health care without facing financial hardship. ■

São Tomé and Príncipe launches the National Strategic Plan for Sustainable Health Financing



On July 3rd, the Ministry of Health of São Tomé and Príncipe, launched the National Strategic Plan for Sustainable Health Financing (2025–2032) – the country's first of its kind – developed with the financial and technical support of World Health Organization (WHO). The launch event brought together four government ministers, the UN Resident Coordinator, as well as several bilateral and multilateral partners and academic institutions, reflecting strong national and international commitment to advancing sustainable health financing.

The plan aims to strengthen the sustainability of the national health system, improve service coverage and quality of care, and reduce the dependence on external funding. The Minister of Health, Dr. Celso Matos, described the strategy as a "guiding light" on the path to self-sustainability.

The Plan was developed using the WHO Health Financing Progress Matrix, making São Tomé and Príncipe the first African Portuguese-speaking country to use this innovative tool. The strategy is built on two pillars: optimizing the use of existing resources within the health sector (more health with available resources) and mobilizing additional financial resources for health (more resources for health).

The plan puts special emphasis on investing in Primary Health Care approach, considered as the foundation of a resilient health system. The WHO Representative, Dr. Abdoulaye Diarra, emphasized that the strategy is a "moral and political commitment" to achieve the Universal Health Coverage. The plan comes at a critical time, as the country faces a transition to non-communicable diseases and an increase of risk factors.

The Universal Health Coverage (UHC) rate in Sao Tome and Principe is 59%. In addition to this moderate level of coverage, significant challenges remain, as 2.8% of households face catastrophic health expenditures. ■

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Building a Strategic Collaboration between WHO AFRO and the WHO Country Office to Strengthening Health Systems in São Tomé and Príncipe

The collaboration between the WHO Regional Office for Africa (WHO AFRO) and the WHO Country Office in São Tomé and Príncipe has been important in reinforcing the national health system, aligning regional priorities with the country's specific needs. This technical partnership has provided crucial support for the development and implementation of effective public health interventions, with a strong focus on building local institutional and technical capacities in the following domains: i) District Health and ii) the control of NCD.

1. Strengthening District Health Management: A Strategic Investment in Service Quality

From July 7 to 18, the Ministry of Health of São Tomé and Príncipe, with the support of the World Health Organization (WHO), held an intensive training course on District Health Management. The initiative aiming to address leadership and managerial challenges of the district teams, brought together 39 professionals from all districts of the country. The challenges facing the district teams were identified during an assessment exercise done some months back by the ministry of health and the WCO team.

The Minister of Health, Dr. Celso Matos, emphasized that “strong leaders, capable of effectively managing operations and financial resources, while inspiring their teams, can make a



real difference in advancing primary health care.”

The training workshop was facilitated by a team composed of staff of the WHO Country Offices of São Tomé and Príncipe and Angola, the WHO regional office and the ministry of health. The methodology used by the facilitators participatory and practical group exercises and discussions. All the participants highly appreciated this interactive methodology, describing it as a “turning point” in addressing local health system challenges.

The success of this unprecedented collaborative experience in São Tomé and Príncipe has emphasized the importance of investing in management capacity development across the region. It has also inspired the regional focal point

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of the health system to establish a technical WHO working group tasked with developing a Standardized Training Programme for District Health Managers. This program will be standardized yet adaptable to each national context, multilingual (delivered in the three official languages of WHO/AFRO - Portuguese, French, and English), and grounded in evidence-based and proven practices to strengthen leadership and governance at the district level.

The WHO Country Offices of São Tomé and Príncipe and Angola will participate as members of the regional technical working group. This initiative is expected to help to address the financial constraints that often hinder the implementation of Universal Health Coverage initiatives across the WHO African region, fostering stronger

collaboration and more sustainable solutions.

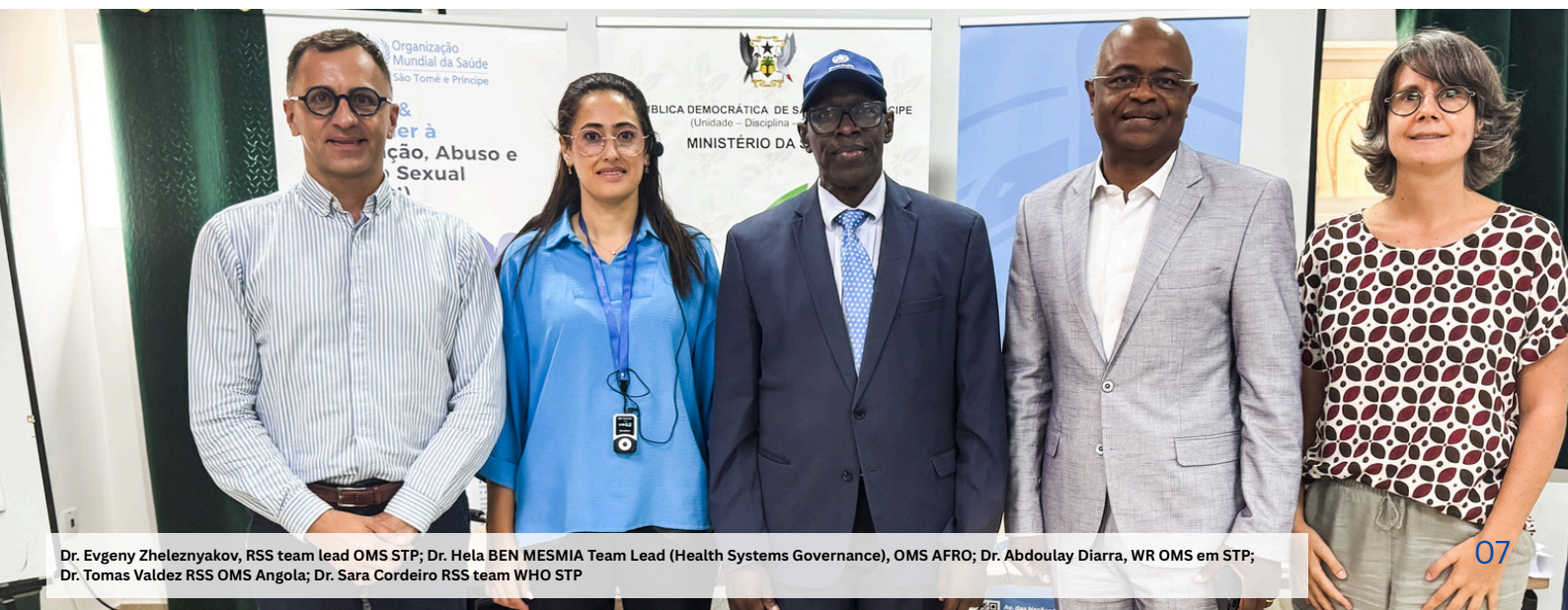
2. Strategic collaboration WHO/AFRO and WCO/STP in the control of NCD

In the domain of Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs), a joint effort between teams from WHO/AFRO and WHO Country Office of São Tomé and Príncipe has strengthened the capacity of the Ministry of health's Department of Non-communicable disease control to implement the WHO Package of Essential Noncommunicable Disease Interventions (WHO PEN) protocols.

This cooperation has significantly contributed to the development of the National NCD Strategy and the National Cancer Control Plan. A key highlight is the implementation of the WHO PEN protocols, which integrate NCD control into primary health care, fostering a more accessible and effective response.

Furthermore, the partnership has supported the development and consolidation of the National Community Health Strategy, promoting a more integrated, equitable, and people-centered approach.

This joint effort reflects WHO/AFRO's steadfast commitment to supporting São Tomé and Príncipe in addressing its key public health challenges, thereby contributing to a more resilient and sustainable health system that leaves no one behind. ■



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São Tomé and Príncipe hosts Central African Immunization Leaders meeting

From September 9th to 12th, 2025, São Tomé and Príncipe hosted the Annual Meeting of the Directors of Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) for Central Africa. This important meeting co-organized by the Ministry of Health, the World Health Organization (WHO), and UNICEF was attended by over 100 participants from ten Central African countries and representatives from institutions and agencies partners of the immunization programme (UNICEF, WHO, Gavi, regional and headquarters offices and international NGOs).

The meeting was held under the strategic theme of "Reprioritizing Immunization, Optimizing Resources, and Revitalizing Partnerships." The main objective was to accelerate the recovery of immunization services and strengthen the surveillance of vaccine-preventable diseases through shared learning and experience. The discussions focused on strategies to reach zero-dose children, to introduce new vaccines, and to identify sustainable financing mechanisms for immunization programmes in central Africa.

During the opening ceremony, the Minister of Health, Dr. Celso Matos, said " Vaccination is a fundamental right and a strategic investment" hence it is important to reinforce the regional solidarity. Echoing this sentiment, the WHO representative Dr. Abdoulaye Diarra emphasized that "immunization is not only a health priority, but also a social, economic, and even political investment."

This high-level meeting served as a platform to assess progress against the implementation of the Immunization Agenda 2030, to identify common obstacles, and to develop collaborative and context-specific solutions to overcome challenges. By fostering constructive regional cooperation, the meeting reinforced its role as an important forum for reinvigorating efforts to ensure equitable, sustainable vaccination for all children, women, and communities in Central Africa.

The meeting served as a vital platform to assess progress, identify common challenges, and align on collaborative solutions, solidifying its role as an essential forum for accelerating vaccination efforts across Central Africa. ■



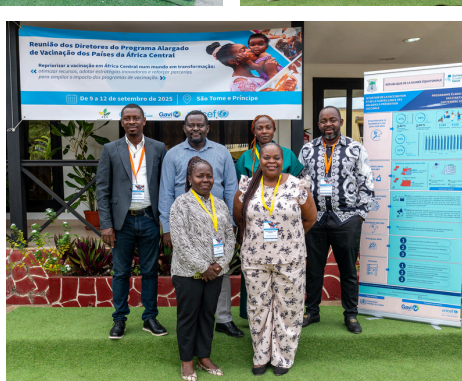


Central African immunization directors reaffirmed their commitment to prioritizing vaccination, discussing topics ranging from new vaccines to the digital tracking of unvaccinated children. The meeting's recommendations, supported by WHO, aim to strengthen health systems through equity and innovation, relying on country leadership to translate these advances into greater coverage and impact on population health.

Jessica Soares - Public Health Officer at WHO Sao Tome and Principe



Photo Highlights of the Central African Immunization Leaders meeting



Updating the Entomological Profile to fine-tune Malaria Elimination Efforts in São Tomé and Príncipe



With technical and financial support from the World Health Organization (WHO) and The Global Fund, São Tomé and Príncipe has finalized a comprehensive update of its malaria entomological profile. This exercise successfully mapped the distribution of malaria vectors nationwide, proposed effective control strategies, and strengthened the capacity of national technicians. The resulting document, Malaria Entomological Profile – São Tomé and Príncipe 2025, replaces the 2018 version and is fully aligned with the National Strategic Plan for Malaria Elimination (2023–2027). Key findings confirm that *Anopheles coluzzii* remains the primary vector, responsible for over 98% of collected specimens. The profile also provides crucial new data on vector bio-ecology and insecticide



resistance levels, offering a scientific foundation to guide future intervention strategies.

This update marks a significant public health milestone, equipping the country with the needed evidence to strategically enhance vector control interventions and surveillance and accelerate the country's progress toward elimination of malaria. ■



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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