



# Early-Career Perspectives in NTDs: In Conversation with Dr. Fatima Elbasri

At the British Society for Parasitology, we believe the field advances most effectively when global voices come together to share knowledge, experience, and innovation. In that spirit, we are launching a new interview series in which our International Representative hosts conversations with parasitologists from around the world.

In this episode, we are joined by Dr. Fatima Elbasri, a Sudanese physician with a growing focus on neglected tropical diseases. She shares her journey as a young NTD advocate and offers reflections and advice for early-career researchers in low- and middle-income countries.

I am a recently graduated doctor who aspires to drive change in my community by empowering youth and women to take the lead and co-create decisions that affect their health. My journey began as a local public health officer at my university, where I organized awareness campaigns on various public health issues. I later served as the National Officer on Public Health within the Medical Students' International Network of Sudan, then as External Affairs Assistant at the International Federation of Medical Students' Associations, and currently, I represent Sudan in the Youth Combating NTDs network.

Balancing these roles has given me invaluable opportunities to learn, connect, and grow—both personally and professionally. The cumulative experiences have strengthened my leadership, advocacy, and communication skills, and deepened my commitment to advancing health equity in my community and beyond.



The NTD field deeply reflects the situation we face in Sudan—a country that has long suffered from systemic neglect. We are, unfortunately, rich in neglected diseases as well. Witnessing my people suffer, die, or live with disabilities, trauma, and mental health challenges caused by these diseases—while many remain unaware of them or unsure how to seek help—has been truly disheartening. Moreover, the lack of commitment and funding from politicians and decision-makers toward addressing NTDs makes this field even more critical. That is why I believe it is essential for health professionals to dedicate time and effort to advocate for this cause.

# Youth Leadership

There are various tools that youth can use to influence the global health agenda.

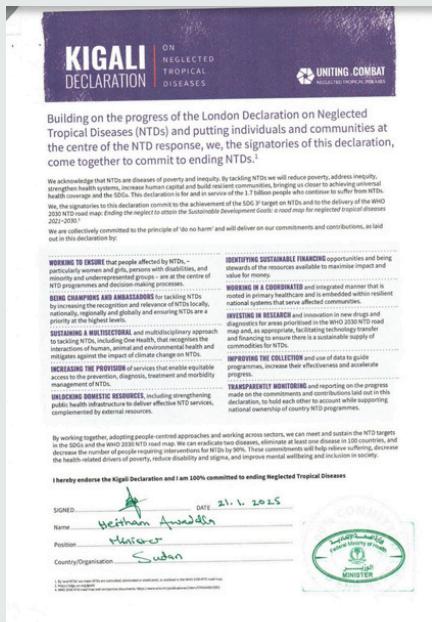
At the local level, young people can organize both on-ground and online campaigns to raise awareness and mobilize action. Peer-to-peer capacity-building initiatives and community mobilization activities also play an essential role in driving public and global health priorities forward.

Moreover, youth can contribute by participating in high-level meetings, for instance by applying for youth delegate positions within their national delegations. Although not all countries currently offer such opportunities, young people can advocate for the establishment of youth delegate programs. I have seen many successful examples where youth took the initiative to reach out to their Ministries of Health to create these programs.



I believe that strategic advocacy and consistent, sustainable communication are key to making such initiatives succeed. Most importantly, collaboration between youth networks and civil society organizations is crucial before formally engaging with government ministries to present proposals and push for meaningful inclusion of youth voices in global health decision-making.

## Kigali Declaration



One of the most memorable moments in my journey was when the Government of Sudan signed the Kigali Declaration on NTDs. I saw that milestone as a reflection of the cumulative efforts I had dedicated over the years. My involvement in this field began nearly six years ago, when I served as Project Coordinator for NTDs in the National Medical Students' Society of Sudan. It was a challenging experience, as I had to balance the interests of medical students with community priorities and stakeholder expectations while still being a student myself.

Over time, I continued advocating for NTDs through research, peer-to-peer education, and participation in regional and global forums. Later, as a Youth Champion with Youth Combating NTDs, I deepened my understanding of political commitments toward disease elimination and the significance of the Kigali Declaration. Drawing on the professional relationships I had built with the Federal Ministry of Health and the national NTD program, I was able to help organize meetings and advocate directly with the Minister of Health — an effort that contributed to Sudan's eventual signing of the Declaration.

# Research & Scientific Work

Although I am still an early-career researcher, my experience coauthoring 19 papers, reviewing manuscripts, and presenting at international conferences has given me a close look at where major gaps remain in NTD and global health research. One of the most significant challenges is that NTDs remain profoundly under-researched compared to their global burden. Increased funding and sustained global attention are essential, but neither is possible without stronger political commitment and more effective resource mobilization.

Another gap lies in the fragmentation of research priorities. For early-career professionals engaged in NTD advocacy, it is crucial to clearly define priority areas—whether operational research, surveillance, implementation science, or community-driven interventions. Aligning our advocacy and research agendas with actual community needs and our long-term professional goals will help ensure that the work we produce is both meaningful and impactful.



# Collaboration & Support

I think that building a structured mentorship and collaborative program between Sudanese scientists and BSP expert researchers is essential for fostering meaningful knowledge exchange. Such partnerships can help bridge capacity gaps, support early-career professionals, and create sustained pathways for research development.

In addition, regular capacity-building webinars and online sessions, particularly those focused on clinically relevant case reports and emerging research updates in the field of NTDs would provide valuable continuous learning opportunities. Joint research activities, co-authored publications, and platforms for sharing research experiences would further strengthen cross-institutional collaboration and contribute to a more resilient and informed NTD research community.



If I could change one thing, it would be to secure stronger political commitment paired with increased and sustained funding. Ending “the neglect” requires that NTDs become a true global priority—supported by national leadership, integrated into health systems, and backed by resources that enable long-term, community-centered solutions.

# Future Vision & Advice for young researchers in LMICs

My vision is to empower young professionals—especially those living and working in endemic countries—to take the lead in ending NTDs. This means investing in capacity-building initiatives, establishing mentorship networks, creating funding opportunities, and elevating the visibility of youth-led efforts. By equipping the next generation with skills, support, and platforms to influence policy and practice, we can accelerate progress toward sustainable NTD elimination across Sudan and the African region.

I strongly encourage youth to participate in extracurricular activities and leadership training programs, as these provide valuable foundations for understanding the principles of strong leadership. Applying this knowledge through fieldwork and community engagement allows young people to put these principles into practice and demonstrate their leadership potential, ultimately contributing to both personal development and community transformation.