

Following Africa Day, the Basketball Africa League (BAL), Shooting Touch, and Speak Up Africa united organized a basketball and health clinic to equip youth and BAL Ambassadors with the knowledge and tools they need to drive effective change in support of NTD elimination.

The basketball and health clinic held in Nyamirama sector, Kayonza district on the sidelines of the BAL Finals attracted 80 youths and women.

With operations between Rwanda and Boston, Shooting Touch is using the power of sport to bridge opportunity gaps for youth and women.

“Today’s sport-for-health event marks an exciting new stage in our partnership with the Basketball Africa League. Along with Speak Up Africa, we were able to leverage the collective knowledge and strengths of all three organizations to increase awareness on Neglected Tropical Diseases among Shooting Touch’s youth and women athletes in Nyamirama.

“We look forward to continuing our work with Speak Up Africa and the BAL to drive positive health outcomes in Africa.” Christelle Umuhoza, In-Country Program Director.

NTDs are a diverse set of 20 diseases and disease groups that affect more than 1.7 billion worldwide. Over 40 percent of this global burden is concentrated in Africa.

Rwanda is endemic to Soil-transmitted helminthiasis and schistosomiasis and 4,785,693 individuals require preventive-chemotherapy for at least one NTD.

In its 2021-2030 Roadmap on NTDs, the World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes the importance of “mainstreaming the participation of young people across all NTD activities for the attainment of the goals of the road map”.

NTDs can be devastating, including causing severe pain, disabilities and deformities, malnutrition, stunted growth and cognitive impairment.

Young people are one of Africa’s greatest assets. But Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) continue to undermine Africa’s bright future as the continent bears 40% of the global burden of these diseases.

Youth engagement is key to influence positive change and harness energy, values-based motivation and social connectedness, in order to spread information,

generate innovative solutions and change communal behaviors and norms in favor of national NTD programmes.

As part of their partnership to enhance gender equality and achieve disease elimination, Speak Up Africa and the BAL gathered Boston-based influencer Jamad, ESPN Producer and talent Hannah O'Flynn, actress, model and host Britany Elena and former NBA player, Pops Mensah-Bensu.

“Basketball is a force for change for youth engagement across Africa. Through the power of basketball, we are able to unify Africa and attract, motivate and inspire young Africans to take action and responsibility to improve their health and well-being.” Said Pops Mensah-Bonsu, President of Minor League Operations for the New York Nicks and Basketball Africa League Ambassador.

“It is an enabling platform for conversation and engagement on critical issues outside of sports such as Neglected Tropical Diseases.” Pops Mensah-Bensu, President of Minor League Operations for the New York Nicks and Basketball Africa League Ambassador.” He added.

Dakar-based strategic communications and advocacy not-for-profit organization Speak Up Africa has been saying “No to NTDs” since 2016, working with the World Health Organization office for Africa and creating networks of civil society in Burkina Faso, Niger, Guinea and Senegal to accelerate the efforts to end NTDs.

“Youth leadership is critical for the elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases. Sports is a unique enabler to capture youth attention and passion. Through sports, and especially basketball, we can elevate youth to unlock their full potential and be agents of change to achieve a healthy and prosperous Africa.” Yacine Djibo, Founder and Executive Director of Speak Up Africa.