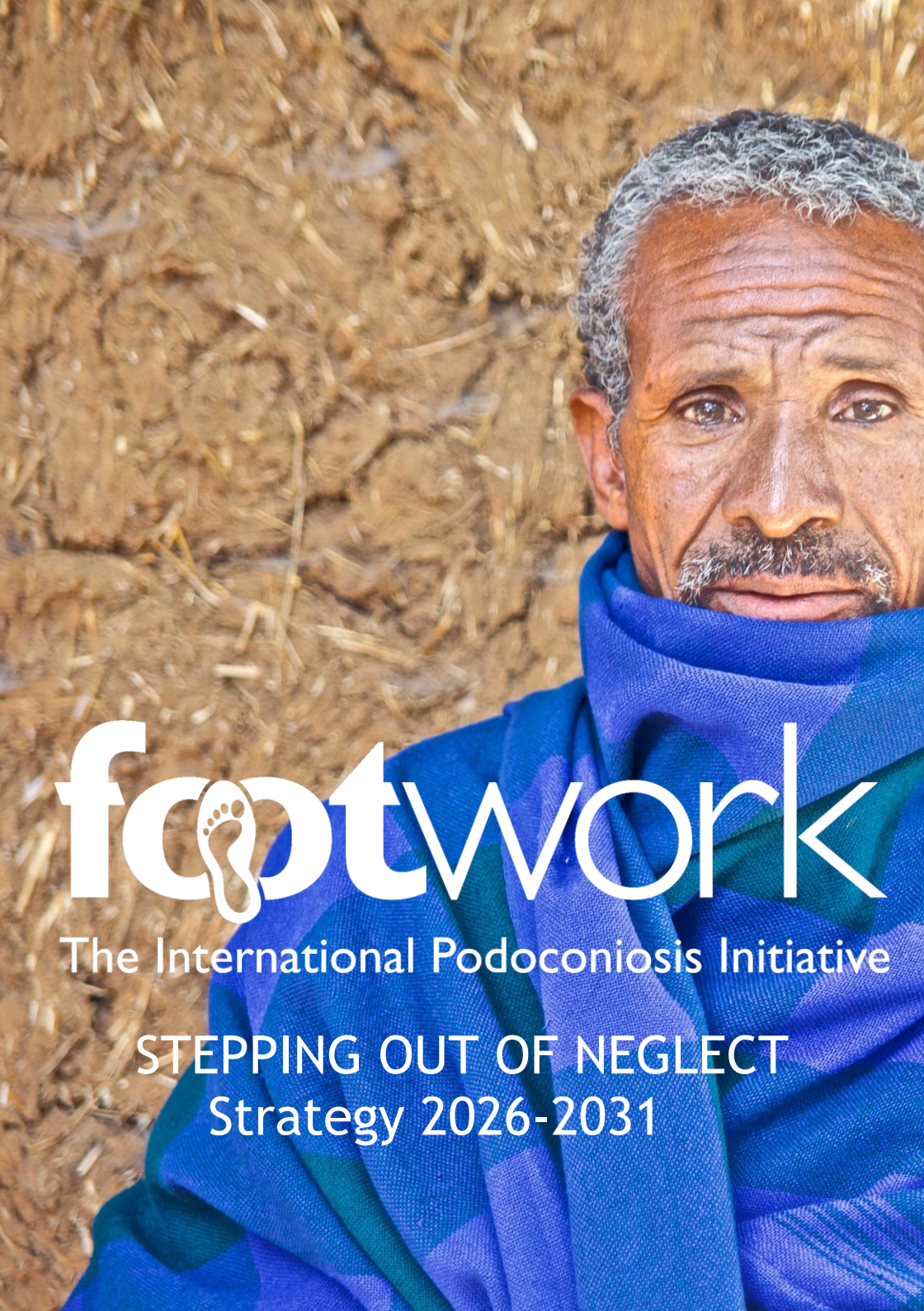




footwork

The International Podoconiosis Initiative

STEPPING OUT OF NEGLECT
Strategy 2026-2031

Vision

A world free of podoconiosis.

Mission

To improve the lives of individuals and communities affected by podoconiosis by bringing together public and private partnerships to accelerate treatment and prevention.

Podoconiosis (or podo) is a neglected tropical disease that affects some of the most disadvantaged people in 32 countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America. It is a form of tropical lymphoedema, a chronic condition that causes swelling in the body's tissues caused by many years of barefoot contact with irritant soil in highland tropical areas. Those most affected are subsistence farmers already living below the poverty line.



Podo is commonly misunderstood, causes great ostracism and distress, and ruins the livelihoods of people that suffer from it. There are an estimated four million people affected globally, with many more millions at risk, yet podo is preventable and treatable and may be the only non-communicable disease which can be eliminated in the foreseeable future.



Footwork is the only organisation in the world dedicated to enabling and championing a world free of podo. But Footwork cannot achieve this alone.



To realise this vision requires greater integration of interventions, improved access to health care, enhanced global coordination and understanding, expanded partnerships, and more focus on podo in relation to 21st century social, cultural and economic factors.

Top to bottom:
A family working
barefoot in
a field; signs of
early podo; and
patients
receiving
treatment at a
health clinic

Important milestones...



Two new countries have been mapped for distribution of the disease



The 2nd International Podoconiosis Conference was successfully held in Rwanda, an endemic country



One regional podoconiosis working group established to oversee Regional Podoconiosis Elimination Platform (R-PEP)



Six NGOs working on the prevention and treatment of skin-NTDs incorporated treatment of podo into their own strategies



Successfully entered in a partnership with IZUMI Foundation to support podo elimination in Ethiopia and Rwanda, raising \$250,000

Over the next five years, **Footwork** will build on the objectives of the first strategy document. The aim of the latest strategy is to champion the elimination of podoconiosis by continuing to develop on our three foundational strategic streams.



Improving lives:

Enable universal access to interventions to improve the lives of affected individuals and communities.



Bringing together:

Bring together national, regional and global actors to strengthen coordination, collaboration and mutual learning.



Evidence-based advocacy:

Harness evidence-based advocacy to accelerate the adoption and scale-up of interventions for treatment and prevention.

In 2025, World Health Assembly adopted resolution WHA78.15 recognising skin diseases as a global health priority. Through the strategic streams above, Footwork will explore opportunities aligned with resolution recommendations to maximise global impact.

Two vital ideas continue to underpin these strategic streams

Firstly, the voices of patients and affected communities
are heard and listened to.

Secondly, the importance of podo being
recognised as a challenge for human
development and social justice, and not
simply as a public health issue.



Improving lives:

Enable universal access to interventions to improve the lives of affected individuals and communities.



In many parts of the world, people affected by podo are held back from access to interventions by misconceptions about the cause of the disease among health professionals, low levels of competency in diagnosis and treatment, and a lack of basic resources such as emollients and bandages. Even where health care is available, people living in rural areas face barriers related to accessibility. A critical and highly effective preventive measure is consistent shoe-wearing. To reduce new cases of disease, the promotion of low-cost footwear through public health education campaigns must be prioritised.

The barriers to accessing treatment and support are complex but can be addressed effectively, as demonstrated in Ethiopia and Rwanda where podo is embedded in the national Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD) masterplan. Ensuring podo is included in the national plans of governments and relevant Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) strategies is central to sustainably improving the lives of individuals and communities.

Our focus will be to:

- ▶ Provide technical assistance to governments, non-governmental organisations, and international agencies
- ▶ Develop and support the implementation of guidelines, tools and resources
- ▶ Document, analyse and share evidence and experience of epidemiology and interventions

By 2031, our goals are:

- Goal 1.1** Ten countries have included podoconiosis in their NTD Master Plans and long-term health strategies, enabling better access to, and integration of, care
- Goal 1.2** Training material for integration of podoconiosis into primary health systems available across the WHO AFRO region
- Goal 1.3** Country programme managers in ten endemic countries have access training in podoconiosis diagnosis and programme implementation

Bringing together:



Bring together national, regional and global actors to strengthen coordination, collaboration and mutual learning.

The Second Podoconiosis Conference in Kigali, January 2025, focused on "From Neglect to Elimination with Country Ownership." Presentations highlighted new research and best practices, fostering a shared understanding of effective strategies. Discussions addressed scaling interventions, improving treatment access, and tackling social determinants. A strong global commitment to elimination was evident.

This momentum spurred further discussions at WHO, particularly with WHO AFRO during the March 2025 skin NTD meeting. A key decision emerged: to establish a dedicated regional platform under WHO AFRO. This platform will synergise efforts, enhance resource mobilisation, provide crucial coordination, accelerating podoconiosis elimination across Africa.

Our focus will be to:

- ▶ Convene and establish the International Podoconiosis Conference as the key global forum for actors concerned with podoconiosis
- ▶ Build and facilitate coordination and mutual learning mechanisms between national, regional and global actors to enable them to learn from one another about effective strategies for podoconiosis treatment and prevention
- ▶ Foster and maintain key bi- and multilateral partnerships for action

By 2031, our goals are:

- Goal 2.1** The 3rd International Podoconiosis Conference has been held in an endemic country
- Goal 2.2** A regional podoconiosis elimination platform aligned with WHO AFRO has been established
- Goal 2.3** Four new partnerships with relevant industries have been established

Evidence-based advocacy:



Harness evidence-based advocacy to accelerate the adoption and scale-up of interventions for prevention and treatment.

In the past, podoconiosis has been eliminated in endemic regions of North Africa and Europe due to socio-economic development and behavioural change such as shoe-wearing. Like many tropical diseases, podoconiosis is tropical only in its current prevalence.

That podoconiosis is now endemic only in tropical regions is testament to the poverty of those regions. While the cause of podoconiosis is geochemical and genetic, the reasons for its persistence in the 21st century are a combination of economic, cultural, and political issues.

To accelerate the scale up of treatment and prevention, Footwork will maximise connections within the research community and harness evidence-based advocacy to develop an elimination strategy for the WHO AFRO region.

Our focus will be to:

- ▶ Lead the development of a WHO AFRO Regional Strategy for Podoconiosis to help secure commitments and drive actions to eliminate the disease
- ▶ Identify, grow and support prominent individuals from health, business, industry, entertainment and sports sectors within and outside endemic countries to become podoconiosis advocacy champions
- ▶ Empower expert patients to advocate for podoconiosis elimination at national and global levels.

By 2031, our goals are:

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|-----------------|--|
| Goal 3.1 | The 1st WHO AFRO Regional Elimination Strategy for Podoconiosis has been created |
| Goal 3.2 | 10 countries have endorsed the WHO AFRO Regional Elimination Strategy for Podoconiosis |
| Goal 3.3 | 4 expert patients recruited and mobilised to advocate at national and global level |



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