Drug approvals for neglected diseases increase along with more R&D funding

HIV/AIDS and malaria drugs accounted for 81% of approvals in 2000-09

- The annual rate of new product approvals for neglected diseases increased from an average of 1.8 in 1975-99 to 2.6 in 2000-09.

- Tufts CSDD found that 33 drugs targeting tropical diseases and tuberculosis had been approved worldwide in 1975-99, compared to 16 approvals reported in a landmark 2002 study.

- Between 1999 and 2008, annual funding for neglected diseases had risen 25-fold to $2.5 billion.

- Vaccines have displaced drugs as the primary products being developed for neglected diseases.

- Public-private partnerships for new product development accounted for 46% of all approvals to treat neglected diseases in 2000-09, up from 15% in 1975-99.

- Government currently contributes 69% of all R&D funding for neglected disease drug development.

A widely circulated study in 2002 reported that only 16 of the 1393 new chemical entities marketed between 1975 and 1999 targeted tropical diseases and tuberculosis. However, a new Tufts CSDD analysis, summarized here, has found that the more accurate count is 33. Still, the earlier report served as a call to action for governments, nonprofit foundations, private-public partnerships, and private industry to devote more resources to battle neglected diseases.

Between 2000 and 2009, a significant increase in R&D for neglected diseases has led to 26 drugs and vaccines receiving worldwide marketing approval, over 80% of which target malaria and HIV/AIDS. While increased approvals are necessary to improve access, policymakers need to ensure that safe, effective, and easy-to-administer products are adopted by health care systems and providers on a consistent basis, that they are affordable, and that they reach the people who need them.