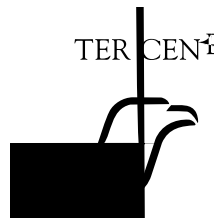


TER CEN'E



The review meeting consisted of program updates from the ministries of health of Ethiopia, Niger, South Sudan, and Sudan, special presentations from implementing and academic partners, and updates from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Expanded Special Project for Elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases (ESPEN), Pfizer Inc, and the International Trachoma Initiative (ITI). Together, these contributions made for a demonstration of partnerships that continue to aid in

Together, the National Eye Health Program and Ministry of Health in Mali combated trachoma, the leading cause of infectious blindness worldwide, from 1999 until April 27, 2023, when the World Health Organization (WHO) validated Mali as the 17th country to eliminate trachoma as a public health problem.

Over the 20-year period that it fought to eliminate trachoma using the WHO-endorsed SAFE strategy – surgery, antibiotics, facial cleanliness, and environmental improvement – Mali had to overcome many challenges. Mali was one of the most trachoma-affected countries at the start of its program, it endured numerous changes in government leadership after multiple coups, and insecurity throughout the country required tremendous bravery from teams and communities to provide necessary services. Teams had to innovate to find the remaining cases of trachomatous trichiasis so they could provide surgery to those in pain and at imminent risk of blindness.

Mali's prime minister, Ministry of Health, National Eye Health Program (PNSO), and implementing partners celebrated the elimination of trachoma as a public health problem in Mali in October 2023. The accomplishment was then celebrated at Pfizer Inc headquarters in New York City in December

2023, bringing together representatives from Mali, including professor Lamine Traoré, PNSO coordinator, who spoke of the determination of Mali and the partners to achieve what few others had done before.

The donors and implementing partners who supported Mali in its elimination efforts were also present, including Pfizer Inc, the International Trachoma Initiative, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, Lions Clubs International Foundation, RTI International, The END Fund, and the United States

Agency for International Development.

The global trachoma
program



(donated by GSK) and ivermectin treatments for lymphatic filariasis elimination in Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Sudan, reaching 45% of the target. Lack of praziquantel (donated by Merck KGaA) deeply impacted Nigeria's schistosomiasis program, which assisted with 2,296,735 treatments, just 37% of its target. There were 5,473,048 treatments for soil-transmitted helminthiasis control, reaching 40% of the program target. The medicines used for soil-transmitted helminthiasis treatment are donated by GSK (albendazole) and Johnson & Johnson (mebendazole) and are provided to school-aged children. A total of 50,716,047 treatments for the four diseases were assisted by the Center's River Blindness Elimination Program in 2023, with 64 million treatments targeted for 2024. Cumulative treatments for all four diseases reached more than 871 million in 2023.

In 2023, a total of 1.1 million people qualified to stop mass drug administration for river blindness in Uganda, and 4.2 million qualified to stop mass drug administration for lymphatic filariasis in Ethiopia and Nigeria, bringing the cumulative total of people who no longer need treatment for these diseases to 31.8 million and 28.1 million, respectively (see Figures 2 and 3).

These accomplishments would not have been possible without the Center's Ministry of Health partners and a grass-roots network of community-directed drug distributors and community supervisors who volunteered their time to treat their communities. A combined 527,336 distributors and supervisors participated in 2023, all of whom were mentored by district-level Ministry of Health personnel and trained with the Carter Center's assistance.

The Carter Center supports river blindness and lymphatic filariasis elimination activities in seven of Ethiopia's 12 regions. In 2023, the Center assisted in the delivery of 26,229,551 Mectizan treatments for river blindness, representing 86% of the 2023 treatment target. Nearly 460,000 people live in areas that qualified to stop mass drug administration for lymphatic filariasis in Carter Center-assisted areas, and post-treatment surveillance studies confirmed that 1 million people remain protected from infection. Cumulatively, river blindness transmission has been interrupted for around 3 million people, while 2 million are no longer at risk in Carter Center-supported areas to date. The current treatment goals for 2024 are 32.5 million for

(continues on p. 8)

Population currently and previously targeted for river blindness treatment with Mectizan, 2023. Approximately 31.8 million people in nine countries assisted by The Carter Center no longer need treatment as a result of its river blindness elimination partnership.

river blindness and about 3.6 million for lymphatic filariasis. Presenters also shared updates on studies of vector and parasite genetics, pragmatic approaches to defining transmission zones, and the use of remote sensing to evaluate vector habitats. The Center's work in Ethiopia reflects partnerships with the Federal Ministry of Health, the Lions Clubs of Ethiopia, the Lions-Carter Center SightFirst Initiative, and The Reaching the Last Mile Fund, housed within The END Fund.

Nigeria is based on partnerships with the federal and state ministries of health, USAID's Act to End NTDs | East, led by RTI International, and the IZUMI Foundation.

The Onchocerciasis Elimination Program for the Americas (OEPA) is a coalition led by The Carter Center that includes the ministries of health of the six originally endemic countries in the Americas, the Pan American Health Organization/WHO, and other partners. Four countries have received WHO verification of elimination in the Americas, and 93% of the population previously at risk no longer needs treatment. The last active transmission zone is in the Amazon Rainforest bordering Brazil and Venezuela, called the Yanomami Focus Area after the indigenous people residing there.

In 2023, OEPA assisted Brazil and Venezuela with 51,278 Mectizan treatments, representing 76% of the treatment target of 67,708. Brazil achieved 65% of its goal while Venezuela achieved 85% of its goal. Venezuela offered standalone treatments and continued four-times-per-year treatment of 10.5 million people (our)26 tizan

increasing treatment with Mectizan® (donated by Merck & Co., Inc., known as MSD outside the United States and Canada) from once to twice per

year – and in some cases even quarterly; second, the establishment of country-led national onchocerciasis elimination committees; and third, a pivotal change in World Health Organization policy from disease control to transmission elimination.

Frank was a believer in integrating NTD efforts well before this was commonplace, helping to launch the pilot project in Nigeria in 1999 and 2000 that integrated treatments for river blindness, lymphatic filariasis, and schistosomiasis and demonstrated that such

an approach could be both economical and ethical. Further, during his time as co-director of the Carter

