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**Fifty partners** of the Carter Center's Onchocerciasis Elimination Program for the Americas (OEPA) gathered Oct. 31–Nov. 1 in Antigua, Guatemala, for the 27th InterAmerican Conference on Onchocerciasis.

Venezuela announced that its Northeast focus had successfully completed post-treatment surveillance, so now 90,000 fewer people are at risk of onchocerciasis, also known as river blindness. The only group now at risk in the Americas is comprised of 30,000 Yanomami indigenous people living along the Brazil-Venezuela border.

The theme of the meeting reflected this focus: "Improving health access in the Yanomami area with ingenuity and indigenous empowerment." Anthropologists Johanna Gonçalves and Alejandro Reig gave



### ONCHOCERCIASIS ELIMINATION

in-depth reports on the Yanomami cultural mindset regarding health and disease and Yanomami migratory movements across the border between Brazil and Venezuela. The Brazil and Venezuela programs are working to increase involvement of Yanomami health agents in the provision of Mectizan® (donated by Merck) treatment in their communities;

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**With target dates** for the elimination of trachoma as a public health problem on the horizon, organizations and their government partners celebrated successes and reviewed plans at October 2017 events in Mali and Niger. Representatives from Helen Keller International (HKI), Sightsavers, The Carter Center, and ministries of health attended,

Robert Miyashiro, program officer for the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, joined events in both countries following renewal of a three-year grant for the trachoma programs in Mali and Niger.

The Mali Ministry of Health hosted World Sight Day in Bamako on Oct. 12,

which included a lively celebration and powerful messages from the government and partners supporting eye health. Trachoma elimination was a key theme throughout the event, as was the focus of a press conference held after the festivities. Miyashiro, professor Lamine Traoré, who is national coordinator for Mali's National Eye Health Program, and Sadi Moussa, the Carter Center's country representative in Mali, presented a history of the trachoma program in Mali and answered questions from journalists about interventions to achieve elimination by the target of 2018.

After celebrating World Sight Day in Mali, the partners traveled to Niger to visit trachoma-endemic communities in the Maradi region. There, Miyashiro joined

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By Caleb Ebert  
Graduate Assistant,  
Trachoma Control  
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**NEMO** has become the newest champion for trachoma elimination. Not the Disney-Pixar clownfish with the lucky fin, but the tablet-based data collection system.

NEMO's alter ego ELMO has been waging peace and building hope with the Carter Center's Democracy Program since 2010. Now NEMO has added fighting disease to the repertoire. ELMO is short for ELECTION MONITORING; NEMO is an acronym for Next-generation Evaluation, Measurement, and Observation.

I took NEMO with me to eastern Amhara during my first trip to Ethiopia in late May 2017. Introducing NEMO to the Trachoma Control Program team was exciting, culminating nine



Caleb Ebert field-tested a tablet-based data collection system in eastern Amhara in May 2017.

months of exploring and testing the system.

Prior to training in-country colleagues on NEMO, I had the opportunity to observe the 18th mass drug administration (MDA) campaign in eastern Amhara. It was my first exposure to such a large-scale public health intervention (reaching almost 6 million individuals) and to Ethiopian society. Witnessing the campaign illuminated critical points of knowledge

like the social structure of Amhara, which allowed me to develop appropriate questions to add to this year's post-MDA coverage survey. In addition to the routine coverage questions, new ones were included to study the characteristics of individuals who do not participate in MDA campaigns.

Following the question design phase, a week of rigorous NEMO training was conducted with the staff and survey enumerators. Throughout this training I realized how much of

an advocate NEMO is for in-country capacity building. Coupled with a miniature router, NEMO empowers country staff to be fully involved from creating the survey to uploading the collected data without ever requiring an Internet connection. This ability has huge impacts. My in-country colleagues and I met in person every night to make changes based on that day's feedback. There was a noticeable increase in the confidence and sense of autonomy among the country staff as a result of using NEMO.

With the NEMO-supported survey ready for deployment, 10 teams scattered throughout four woredas, or districts, to collect data on 7,200 individuals from over 1,600 households. This was the largest survey to be completed by NEMO for health data collection.

NEMO is expected to make more appearances with the Trachoma Control Program, fostering a more resilient and versatile process for conducting surveys. And that's something no one would carp about. **E**

Review meeting participants included the head of the Amhara Regional Health Bureau, Dr. Abebaw Gebeyehu; head of the Amhara

**The work of a trachoma program officer** in Sudan is challenging, but love of country and love for people have motivated Zeinab Abdalla Mohammed Ahmed to press on for 10 years.

Abdalla joined the Carter Center's Trachoma Control Program in August 2007 and has been advancing the program ever since. She has planned and conducted more than 110 program surveys and 35 rounds of mass drug administration, organized more than two dozen sight-saving surgical camps, and developed and implemented health education programs in primary and secondary schools across multiple states.

The Carter Center currently works in five states in Sudan, mostly in remote areas. The rough, unpaved roads become extremely muddy during the rainy season. Many nights have been spent waiting next to a stream for the water to get low enough for the team to pass. Some areas have

cellphone coverage, but Abdalla remembers the first few years when it was difficult to communicate with team members and family back home.

Despite the challenges, Abdalla says she could not imagine doing anything else, "because it is part of my beloved country. I like to provide health services to those humble people."

Abdalla grew up in a rural town called El Kalakla el Weheda in Khartoum state. She earned a bachelor's degree in public and environmental health from Khartoum University in 2001. During her studies, she learned about the science of public health, epidemiology, environmental sanitation, and research methodology. She wanted to use her knowledge to support people's health, which led her

Zeinab Abdalla Mohammed Admed conducts mass drug administration and surveys in rural villages of Red Sea state, Sudan.

work in Amhara. Astale presented on self-reported side effects following mass administration of azithromycin. Sata presented data from the school trachoma health program baseline survey of facial cleanliness and latrine availability in primary schools. Slaven presented a cost analysis of conducting population-based prevalence surveys for the validation of elimination of trachoma as a public health problem. Nute presented prevalence factors of intestinal parasite co-infection among a population-based sample of school-age children from 2011 to 2015. Jordan presented on a village-level medication logbook audit following mass drug administration in 2016.

Attendees lined up to view the three-part virtual reality “Out of Sight” series on lymphatic filariasis, river blindness, and sleeping sickness, presented by the Huffington

On Nov. 15, 2017, His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan presented the inaugural Recognizing Excellence Around Champions of Health (REACH) awards to individuals who have made outstanding contributions toward eradicating infectious diseases.

Honoring the relationship between the U.A.E. and The Carter Center, awards were presented to several Guinea worm warriors: former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, whose son Chip accepted the award; Dr. Nabil Aziz Awad Alla, director, Sudan



Chip Carter (right) accepts the REACH award on behalf of his father, former U.S. President Jimmy Carter. The award was presented by His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan (left) and Bill Gates (center).

Guinea worm program; Dr. Adamu Keana Sallau, director, integrated health programs, Imo and Abia states, Nigeria; and two representatives of the South Sudan Ministry of Health: Regina Lotubai Lomare Lochilangole and Daniel Madit Kuol Madut.

The awards were given during a global health forum in Abu Dhabi co-sponsored by the U.A.E. Crown Prince Court, The Carter Center, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Dr. Ernesto Ruiz-Tiben, director of the Carter Center's Guinea Worm Eradication Program, was interviewed

by internationally known epidemiologist and author Dr. Larry Brilliant. Dr. Ruiz-Tiben was also recognized with a lifetime achievement award by the Crown Prince Court.

At the event, the Crown Prince and Microsoft founder Bill Gates launched two

initiatives: an Abu Dhabi-based research institute to promote disease-elimination science and a Reaching the Last Mile Fund, which aims to eliminate river blindness and lymphatic filariasis in Africa.

Among those attending the ceremony were President Idriss Deby of Chad; President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita of Mali; World Bank President Jim Yong Kim; Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the World Health Organization; and, representing Lions Clubs International Foundation, Most Hon. World Laureate Dr. Tebebe Berhan, Chairperson Bob Corlew, past International President Jim Ervin, and Augusto Di Pietro. Representing The Carter Center were Dr. Dean Sienko, vice president of health programs, and Dr. Frank Richards, director of the river blindness, lymphatic filariasis, and schistosomiasis programs.

Sheikh Mohamed has continued the support of Guinea worm eradication first begun by his father, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, founder of the United Arab Emirates. [E](#)

## New Post for Nigeria Director

Ifeoma Anagbogu, a longtime champion for neglected tropical diseases, recently was appointed the permanent secretary of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs in Nigeria. Anagbogu will leave her post as the director of the NTD program in Nigeria. Among many accolades, she was a finalist for the 2017 leadership award from Uniting to Combat NTDs and received a 2011 award from President and Mrs. Carter in recognition of her Guinea worm work.

## 100&Change Winner Announced

The Carter Center congratulates Sesame Workshop and the International Rescue Committee (IRC), winner of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's 100&Change grant competition. As reported previously, the Center was one of eight semifinalists for this \$100 million grant; the Center's proposal was to eliminate river blindness in Nigeria. The Carter Center and its partners will continue its elimination work in nine Nigerian states and wishes Sesame Workshop and the IRC and the other 100&Change competitors great success.

## Hispaniola Project Recognized

The Pan American Health Organization presented its 2017 Malaria Champions in the Americas award to the ministries of health of Haiti and the Dominican Republic for their binational malaria elimination efforts. The Ouanaminthe-Dajabon project was launched by The Carter Center in 2008 to promote binational cooperation to eliminate malaria and lymphatic filariasis from Hispaniola, the countries' shared island. Congratulations to both countries and to Dr. Phuc Nguyen-Dinh, Carter Center consultant. [E](#)

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**Results of recent surveys confirm**  
that lymphatic filariasis (LF) trans