



**COMMUNIQUE OF THE 13TH MEETING OF NIGERIA ONCHOCERCIASIS
ELIMINATION COMMITTEE (NOEC), HELD ON THE
8TH AND 9TH OF DECEMBER 2021**

Preamble

The 13th meeting of the Nigeria Onchocerciasis Elimination Committee (NOEC) organized by Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH) held on the 8th and 9th of December, 2021, with support from The Carter Center (TCC), through Act to End NTDs | East. The meeting was virtual to accommodate international stakeholder and members of the committee who could not participate physically due to extant COVID-19 prevention guidelines. In attendance were members of the NOEC and representatives of TCC, Christoffel Blinden Mission (CBM), U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Health and Development Support Programme (HANDS), Helen Keller International (HKI), Mectizan Donation Program (MDP), Mission To Save the Helpless (MITOSATH), Act to End NTDs | East Program staff from Research Triangle Institute (RTI) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Sightsavers, Sir Emeka Ofor Foundation (SEOF), The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and Liverpool John Moores University. A total of 45 and 44 people attended the first and second day respectively.

The meeting was thereafter, declared open by the Chairman, Prof. B.E.B. Nwoke.

The FMOH and partners made the following updates on programme implementations:

A. Update on the Nigerian Onchocerciasis Elimination Map

- i. There was a successful epidemiological evaluation in Jigawa state. On that, NOEC approved the change for Jigawa State status from '*Blue*' (no data) to '*Tan*' (suspected to have interrupted transmission) on the elimination map.

In view of the above, the committee recommends a repeat of epidemiological evaluations in Jigawa as the results that qualified it for this change were from assessments conducted 3 years ago. The NOEC strongly encouraged partners to seek funding to complete assessments in the remaining eight blue states (Borno, Gombe, Sokoto, Katsina, Lagos, Bayelsa, Rivers and Akwa Ibom) as soon as possible.

- ii. The results of epidemiological evaluation conducted in the FCT qualified it for a status change from '*Yellow*' (on track for interruption) to '*Tan*,' (suspected transmission interrupted) on the elimination map. NOEC approved the change and recommended that the ongoing entomological evaluation in the state be continued.
- iii. Cross River was granted approval for reclassification from '*Red*' (transmission ongoing) to '*Tan*' (suspected transmission interrupted) on the NOEC map. Considering the long storage of the DBS samples, NOEC recommends a repeat of epidemiological and entomological evaluations in the state.

B. Post Elimination Surveillance

- i. At the 12th NOEC meeting the Committee approved the reclassification of Plateau and Nasarawa states to the color '*Green*' (transmission eliminated) and requested a plan for post-elimination surveillance (PES) be presented at the 13th meeting.
- ii. TCC, the supporting partner for Plateau and Nasarawa states, presented a plan for PES that was provisionally approved by NOEC, with the request that the Information Education and Communication (IEC) materials be pilot tested and then rolled out for use as soon as funds are available. NOEC recommends this be concluded before the next NOEC meeting.
- iii. Recommendation was made for the protection of the borders of Plateau and Nasarawa by ensuring that neighboring states have sufficient resources and

support to break transmission. High level awareness and sensitization is also needed in these areas.

C. Laboratory Analysis of DBS samples

- i. The committee noted that there is still a backlog of unanalyzed DBS samples due to lack of laboratory capacity to conduct the OV16 ELISA analysis. NOEC recommended that FMOH look into the option of identifying more laboratories that will be used to clear the backlog and for future analysis of samples.
- ii. Considering the fact that DBS specimens can degrade if they are improperly stored and the fact that some specimens have been stored for up to 2-3 years under questionable condition, the validity of the result of their analysis will be certainly called into question. The NOEC stressed the need for FMOH to urgently identify laboratories for onchocerciasis samples analysis, and that results from analysis of outstanding samples should only be used for reclassification decisions and not stop MDA..

D. Update on Lymphatic Filariasis (LF) Assessment

- i. Post Treatment Surveillance activities cannot be conducted in LGAs where onchocerciasis transmission interruption has been achieved but ivermectin-based Mass Drug Administration continues for LF is still ongoing. The FMOH LF Desk Officer reported that 51 of 582 LF endemic LGAs had stopped LF MDA, and that another 147 LGA would have a stop-MDA transmission assessment survey (TAS-1) in 2022. The NOEC recommends that the LF Desk Officer present precise MDA/pre-TAS/TAS-1 status of each of the LF-onchocerciasis co-endemic LGAs at the next meeting.
 - ii. NOEC requested that the FMOH maintain records of the populations residing in onchocerciasis endemic LGAs classified as ‘onchocerciasis transmission interrupted’ that have not yet begun PTS because LF MDA continues.

E. Improvement of blackfly habitat models

The Committee commended the BMGF for their interest in assisting the NOEC improve blackfly catching in the States using satellite imagery and looks forward to working with the foundation to validate results of

blackfly habitat models. The NOEC noted that TCC and Prof. M. Adeleke are working with the foundation on this project.

- F.** Towards achieving this objective, the NOEC nominated a small subcommittee to work closely with the BMGF scientists. These includes:
- a). Prof. B. E. B. Nwoke-Chairman
 - b). Prof. H. B. Mafuyai-Member
 - c). Prof. Ken Opara-Member
 - d). Prof. M. Adeleke - Member
 - e). A representative from FMOH to act as secretary
- G** The NOEC recommended that more efforts be put in collecting the required number of blackflies (minimum 6000) in each of the 9 States (Enugu, Anambra, Imo, Abia, Ekiti, Bauchi, Oyo, Yobe States and FCT) currently collecting vectors for PCR

H. Other business

- i. The National Elimination Flag and Map should be updated by FMOH. The changes in endemicity should be communicated to WHO (ESPEN) and the states affected.
- ii. NOEC recommended that from next the next meeting, partners should outline their upcoming plans of activities for the committee to review
- iii. **The NOEC noted that MDA does not have to be halted during entomological vector fly collection for PCR.**

The 14th NOEC was scheduled to hold in May 2022. The exact date will be duly shared with stakeholders.