



MINISTRY OF HEALTH

UGANDA LEADS IN MAKING PROGRESS TOWARDS ELIMINATION OF RIVER BLINDNESS/ONCHOCERCIASIS IN AFRICA

Ministry of Health declares elimination of river blindness in Budongo focus (Buliisa, Hoima and Masindi districts) and Bwindi focus (Kanungu, Kisoro and Rubanda districts).

Uganda has successfully freed 1,469,147 people from river blindness (onchocerciasis), based on the current World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, bringing the country closer to achieving its goal of eliminating river blindness nationwide by the year 2020. River blindness has been known as a health problem affecting a significant population of Uganda since early 1950s. It was until 2007, when the government of Uganda declared a national wide elimination policy.

River blindness is a vector borne disease that is transmitted by the black flies which breed in fast flowing rivers. It causes serious eye and skin diseases that may result in blindness. The disease is endemic in 41 districts in Uganda with about 6.7 million people at risk, excluding districts in the Victoria Nile focus that was eliminated in the early 1970s. The strategy for elimination of river blindness from Uganda is mass drug administration with ivermectin and vector control.

The eleventh session of Uganda Onchocerciasis Elimination Expert Advisory Committee (UOEAC) of the Ministry of Health that met from 7th to 9th August 2018 concluded that two more river blindness foci of Budongo (Buliisa, Hoima and Masindi districts) and Bwindi (Kanungu, Kisoro and Rubanda districts) with a combined population of 311,844 have met the WHO criteria for stopping mass treatment and other interventions. These two have now joined; Obongi (Moyo District); Maracha-Terego (Arua District); Nyamugasani (part of Kasese); Wadelai (Pakwach District) and West Nile (Koboko and Yumbe districts) foci that are undergoing post-treatment surveillance.

One river blindness focus, Nyagak-Bondo (Arua, Nebbi

and Zombo districts), remains classified as transmission suspected interrupted due to potential cross border transmission.

River blindness was eliminated in one focus (Victoria, including Jinja, Mukono, Kamuli, Mayuge and Kayunga districts) in the 1960s. Since the beginning of the elimination program in 2007, six additional foci have been added to Victoria focus: Mpamba-Nkusi (Kagadi district); Mt. Elgon (Bududa, Manafwa, Namisindwa, Mbale and Sironko districts); Itwara (Kabarole and Kyenjojo districts); Kashoya-Kitomi (Kamwenge, Ibanda, Buhweju and Rubirizi districts), Imaramagambo (Bushenyi and Mitooma districts), and Wambabya-Rwamarongo (Hoima and Kikuube districts). It is estimated that this has added a total of 1,469,147 people that are no longer at any risk of onchocerciasis to the 2,314,700 living in the Victoria focus, where onchocerciasis had been eliminated prior to the start of the program. In total, river blindness in seven out of 17 foci has been eliminated and 3,783,847 Ugandans living in these districts are no longer at risk of acquiring the river blindness disease. In addition to the seven foci where elimination has been confirmed, 8 other foci: Wadelai, Maracha-Terego, Obongi, Nyamugasani, Budongo, Bwindi, West Nile and Nyagak-Bondo are believed to have been protected from onchocerciasis and are awaiting final confirmation.

Transmission of river blindness continues in two of Uganda's original 17 foci: the large Madi-Mid North focus (Pader, Lamwo, Kitgum, Gulu, Omoro, Amuru, Nwoya, Oyam, Lira, Adjumani, and Moyo districts), with a population of 1,437,565; and the smaller Lhubiriha focus in Kasese district, with a population of 135,046. The Madi-Mid North focus shares a border with the Republic of South Sudan (RSS). The Lhubiriha focus is on the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) border.

The governments of Uganda, in cooperation with neighboring countries, DRC and RSS continue to promote cross border activities. In fact, the governments of DRC and RSS have

agreed to work to develop a flexible approach towards River Blindness elimination that includes vector control.

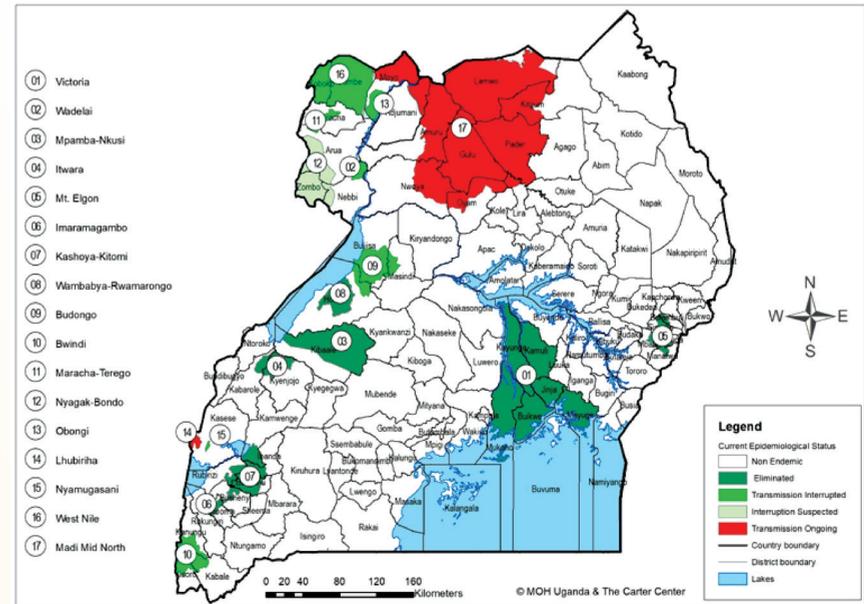
Uganda continues to register success in the fight against River Blindness, through the effort of the Ministry of Health's River Blindness Elimination Program, with the support of partners including; The Carter Center, Sightsavers, UKAid, USAID's ENVISION Project led by RTI International, the Lions Clubs International Foundation and the Lions of Uganda, Merck, the Mectizan Donation Program,

BASF, and the Governments of Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of South Sudan, and World Health Organization.

Uganda's accomplishment is evidence that total elimination of River Blindness is possible in Africa.

FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY

**Hon. Dr. Jane Ruth Aceng
Minister of Health**



Uganda: Location and status of Onchocerciasis foci