

# River Blindness Elimination Program

THE  
CARTER CENTER



The Carter Center works through national ministries of health in Latin America and Africa to eliminate the transmission of river blindness, one of the leading causes of preventable blindness worldwide.

## ABOUT THE CARTER CENTER

A nongovernmental organization, The Carter Center has helped to improve life for people in more than 80 countries by resolving conflicts, advancing human rights, preventing diseases, and improving mental health care.



CAICET/Oscar Noya Alarcón

In South America, the area along the border between Venezuela and Brazil is home to nomadic native Yanomami people. This is the last area of ongoing onchocerciasis transmission in the Western Hemisphere.

## WHAT IS RIVER BLINDNESS?



River blindness, also known as onchocerciasis, is a parasitic infection that can cause intense itching, skin discoloration, rashes, and eye disease that often leads to permanent blindness. The parasite is spread by the bites of infected black flies that breed in rapidly flowing rivers.

## OUR STRATEGY



The Carter Center assists ministries of health in six nations to eliminate river blindness through **health education and mass drug administration** of the medicine Mectizan,<sup>®</sup> donated by Merck & Co., Inc. When necessary and feasible, the programs add black fly vector control as a complementary approach.



Mectizan kills the parasite larvae in the human body, **preventing blindness and skin disease** in infected persons, and stopping the transmission of the parasite to others. The Carter Center works through national ministries of health to provide health education and mobilize affected communities to distribute Mectizan.



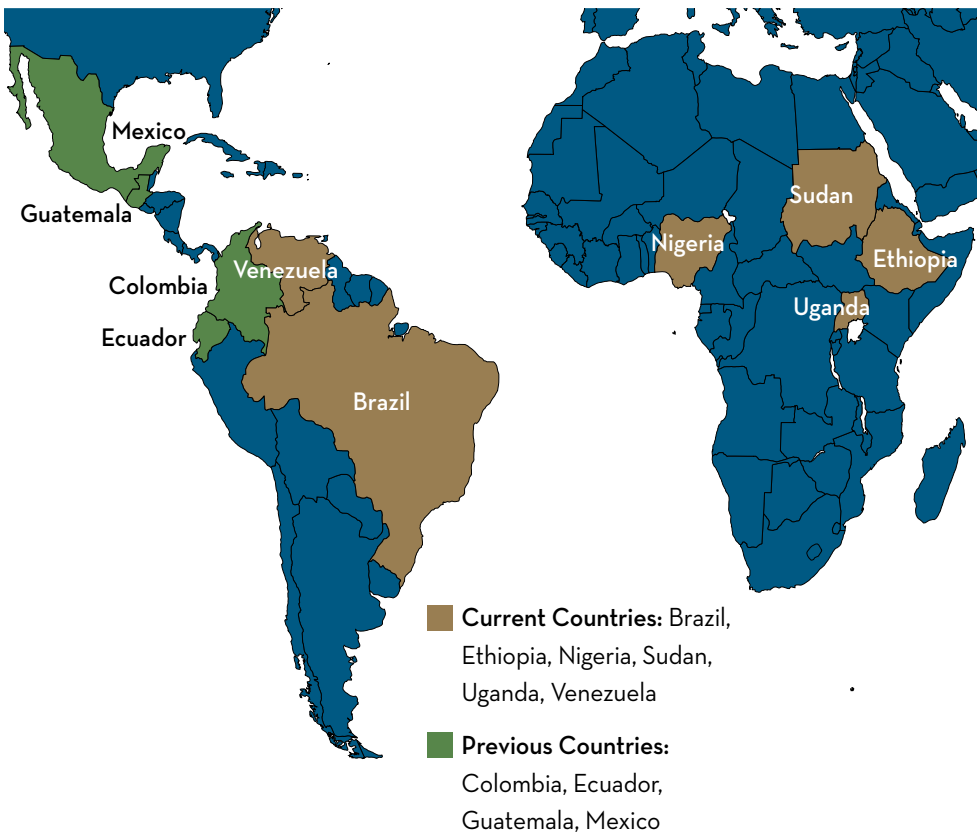
In Latin America, The Carter Center works through its Onchocerciasis Elimination Program for the Americas (OEPA) to **eliminate the disease** from the region by helping to provide multiple Mectizan treatments per year in endemic areas. Today, efforts focus on Brazil and Venezuela, where transmission still occurs in an isolated area on the border of the two countries.



In Africa, where more than **99% of the global cases exist** and most Mectizan treatments are annual, the Center and its partners have successfully interrupted or eliminated river blindness transmission in parts of Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sudan, and Uganda using a flexible strategy that at times includes twice-per-year treatment and vector control.

*The Carter Center is a leader in the elimination and eradication of neglected tropical diseases.*

## WHERE WE WORK



## RESULTS AND IMPACT

**> 455 million**

Number of drug treatments The Carter Center has helped distribute in Africa and Latin America since 1995

**4** Number of countries that have eliminated onchocerciasis with Carter Center assistance

- Colombia (2013)
- Ecuador (2014)
- Mexico (2015)
- Guatemala (2016)

### UGANDA

Uganda has eliminated river blindness in eight foci, interrupted transmission and stopped Mectizan distribution in seven foci, and reclassified the largest focus of northern Uganda from “ongoing transmission” to “interruption of transmission suspected.” Only one focus with potential cross-border transmission remains in the “ongoing transmission” status.

### NIGERIA

Nigeria’s Plateau and Nasarawa states eliminated transmission of river blindness in 2018. Covering about 2 million residents, this is the largest such achievement in the history of the River Blindness Elimination Program. Delta state will soon halt mass drug administration; its 3.6 million residents are protected from river blindness.

### THE AMERICAS

In the Americas, only two countries, Brazil and Venezuela, have ongoing river blindness transmission. In 2013, Colombia became the first country in the world to be granted verification of elimination of river blindness by the World Health Organization. Ecuador, Mexico, and Guatemala followed, receiving official verification of elimination in 2014, 2015, and 2016, respectively.



Blessing Udo, a community drug distributor in Enugu state, Nigeria, measures the height of a child to determine proper dosage of medication to prevent and treat river blindness.