

# River Blindness

## Uganda Launches Bold Policy To Eliminate River Blindness

Uganda has unveiled a bold vision for its future—a country dedicated to reducing and eliminating onchocerciasis (river blindness). In January, Henry Kajura, second prime minister of Uganda, announced a new effort in which the disease would be eliminated in all foci where it is technically feasible.

Uganda's foci have been divided into four groups, based on feasibility of elimination. The first group represents

with southern Sudan or the Democratic Republic of the Congo (four foci). Although Uganda's ultimate goal is to move the groups up the priority list, group by group, until transmission has been eliminated throughout the country, the immediate objective is to launch focused elimination efforts within the second group (priority foci) to demonstrate success to the national and international communities.

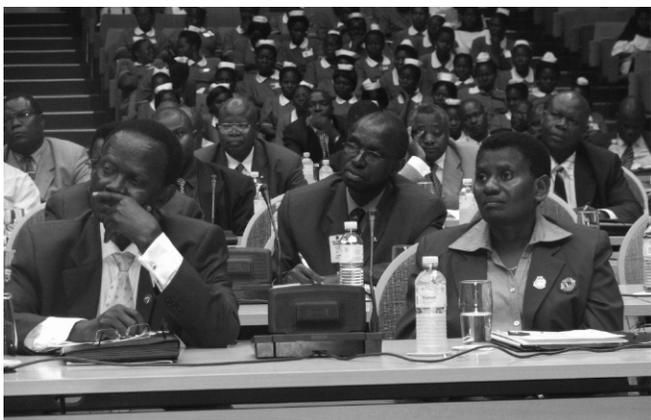
To achieve rapid interruption

of transmission of onchocerciasis in the second group, Uganda plans to carry out twice-per-year Mectizan treatments (i.e., every six months rather than annually) and provide targeted vector control or vector elimination through ground larvicide application. New epidemiological and entomological surveys will also be conducted as soon as possible in these zones.

The Carter Center announced that it would provide some financial and technical assistance to Uganda through a generous donation by John Moores, chairman of the Carter Center board of trustees. The Center is also supporting establishment of a laboratory at the Vector Control Division in Uganda with PCR analysis for black flies and sensitive serology testing to judge exposure to onchocerciasis transmission.

Merck & Co., through its Mectizan Donation Program, has agreed to provide Mectizan in sufficient quantities to allow twice-per-year treatments. Sightsavers International will intensify efforts in districts it has traditionally assisted that now are aiming for elimination.

Onchocerciasis control commenced in Uganda on a large scale in 1992 with annual mass treatment with Mectizan with financial support to the government by the River Blindness Foundation and Sightsavers International. In 1996, The Carter Center and the African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control (APOC) began to support established projects, and APOC also supported two successful elimination efforts in two foci using focal larvicide and annual Mectizan distribution.



Moses Katabarwa

*Lions who attended the launch of Uganda's onchocerciasis elimination policy included Dr. Batwara, chairman of SightFirst, Uganda; Jane Twinomujuni, past president of Lions Club, Kampala; and (seated behind) Polly Ndyarugahi, former Lions governor District 411B, Uganda and Tanzania.*

foci where transmission has already been stopped (three foci). The second group is the priority foci targeted for new elimination activities (six foci). The third group includes foci that require further assessment to determine whether elimination is feasible (five foci), and the final group includes foci that are unlikely candidates for elimination at this time because of proximity to international borders

The following people attended the Serena International Conference Center in Kampala where the new Ugandan plan was announced: Dr. Stephen Mallinga, minister of health; Dr. Samson Zaramba, director of health services; and Mohamad Kezara, the permanent secretary. Other top government and district officials and a host of Lions Clubs members in Uganda also attended. The African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control was represented by its director, Dr. Uche Amazigo, and the World Health Organization was represented by its Uganda director, Dr. Melville Goerge. Other representatives included Dr. Frank Richards for The Carter Center, Dr. Johnson Ngorok for Sightsavers International, and Mr. Apollo Ssemwogerere for Merck & Co.