

Uganda on road to eliminate river blindness

By TADDEO BWAMBALE

Every morning, 70-year-old Fabiano Olur of Agwechi village in Nebbi district sits by the door of his hut with strands of sisal dangling from his rough fingers.

Weaving ropes became his sole source of livelihood ever since he was blinded by Onchocerciasis (river blindness) eight years ago.

"It started with bites from flies that always hovered around our garden on the banks of River Namrwodho. My body started itching and later, I lost my sight," he narrates.

In 1993, Olur and over 600 people in his village started swallowing Ivermectin (Mectizan) pills which were supplied by the Ministry of Health.

"I don't feel pain anymore, but I wish this drug could restore my sight," he says.

In the neighbouring village of Eseyi in Arua district, residents have gathered to receive their doses of Ivermectin.

A few metres away, scientists from the Ministry of Health and the Carter Center comb through a nearby river for crabs, which carry larvae of the black fly.

A closer scrutiny of the crabs shows that none of them carries the worm. This was after a one-month long treatment of the river's waters using tephos, a larvicide.

Agonising disease

River blindness is caused by tiny worms transmitted by a small black fly, which breeds in fast-flowing



Experts preparing to treat the waters of River Wariki in Arua district to kill the larvae of the black fly

water.

After a bite, the larvae enter the host's skin, where they slowly grow into adult worms.

A female worm can produce 1,000 worms per day.

When the worms move into the upper layers of the host's skin and die, they cause skin rashes, intense itching and skin de-pigmentation.

"The worms that move to the eye cause severe lesions and blindness,"

explains Tom Lakwo, the head of the national river blindness control programme.

In Uganda, river blindness is endemic in 35 districts with an estimated 1.4 million people infected and at least 3.5 million at a risk of infection.

At least 5,400 people in Kitgum, Lamwo and Pader districts are either blind or visually impaired due to river blindness.

Using Ivermectin

In 1993, the Government started a river blindness control programme and Ivermectin was distributed to the affected communities.

This significantly reduced the prevalence from 70% in 1993 to below 7% at present.

The drug works by killing the larvae of parasites in the human body, helping to reverse the itching and preventing transmission.

Success story

Studies carried out in 2006 showed that treatment twice a year and the killing of black flies could eliminate the disease within six to 10 years.

In 2007, against skepticism, Uganda became the first African country to introduce the measure on a large scale. The results of Uganda's approach, now dubbed a success story, show that transmission of the disease has been interrupted in six focus areas out of the 18 existing ones.

These are Wadelai Focus in Nebbi district, Mt. Elgon Focus in Mbale, Sironko, Bududa and Manafwa districts. The others are Itwara Focus in Kabarole and Kyenjojo districts, Mpamba-Nkusi Focus in Kibaale district, Maracha-Terego Focus in Maracha district and Imaramagambo Focus in Bushenyi and Mitooma districts.

By the end of 2012, the treatment of more than 1.3 million people in those areas had been halted for a three-year period to observe the progress.

According to primary health care state minister Sarah Opendi, over 1,200 people are safe from infection, while 285,131 people now live in areas where transmission has been successfully interrupted.

Uganda's target is to eliminate the disease in the selected focus districts by 2015 and the rest of the country by 2020.

Following Uganda's success, Ethiopia and Nigeria are among other African countries that have recently adopted the model.



In the just concluded Kyabisse promotion, a first for Orient Bank Uganda, customers were rewarded for their loyalty and business through a promotion dubbed Kyabisse. The objective of the drive was to show customers how much they appreciate their business. Between the months of November 2012 and February 2013, new and existing customers won prizes worth over UGX 200 million. The prizes included Toyota Regius cars, Air tickets to China, Smart phones, Fridges, Generators, among others. Participants in the promotion were required to deposit and maintain UGX 300,000 or more on their account to get into the draws.



Board of Directors chairman Mr. Michael Cook handing over the car key to the winner of the first Kyabisse Toyota Regius, Ms. Brenda Jjiuko at Kisseka Branch

ORIENT BANK CUSTOMERS REAP BIG FROM KYABISSE

Speaking at the launch of the Promotion Campaign, the Executive Director, Mr. Ben Lewis expressed a lot of enthusiasm about the just concluded promotion. "It was our way of giving back to our numerous customers and providing non customers with an opportunity to try Orient Bank service."

The promotion was authentic and transparent. The draws were held fortnightly so that customers would not wait long to be rewarded. The prizes were evenly distributed enabling one lucky customer to win a family / business wagon, the Toyota Regius every month.

In the light of these events many customers expressed that Orient bank Limited is the

ideal bank for quick, customised effective financial packages & solutions. "In addition to its great services it welcomes everyone into their doors," a customer was quoted.

Orient Bank Limited is a leading private commercial Bank in Uganda that has been in operation for nearly 20 years. The bank has grown substantially over the years in both deposit and financial capacity earning a respectable place in Ugandan banking environment



The MD Orient Bank, Mr. Maxwell Ibeanusi, handing over the key to Mr. Magero Daudi the winner of the second Kyabisse Toyota Regius, as the ED Orient Bank, Mr. Ben Lewis cheers them at their William Street Branch.



The Board of Directors Vice Chairman Mr. Ketan Morjaria (right) handing over the key to Mr. Andrevele Nelson at Ntinda Branch who won the last Kyabisse Toyota Regius.

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