



The Republic of Uganda

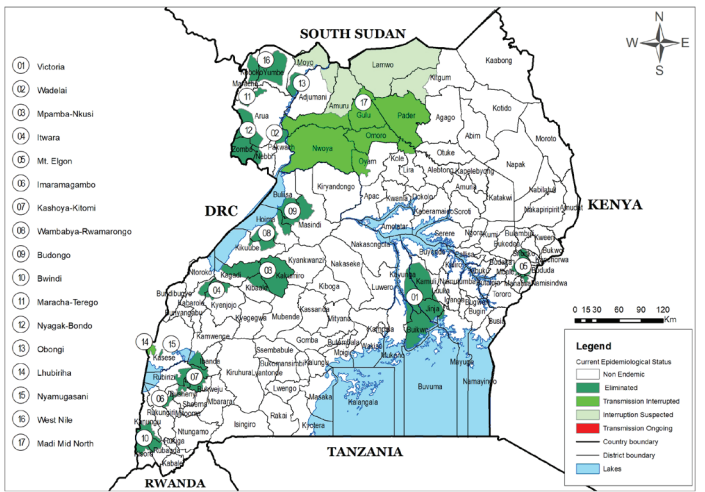
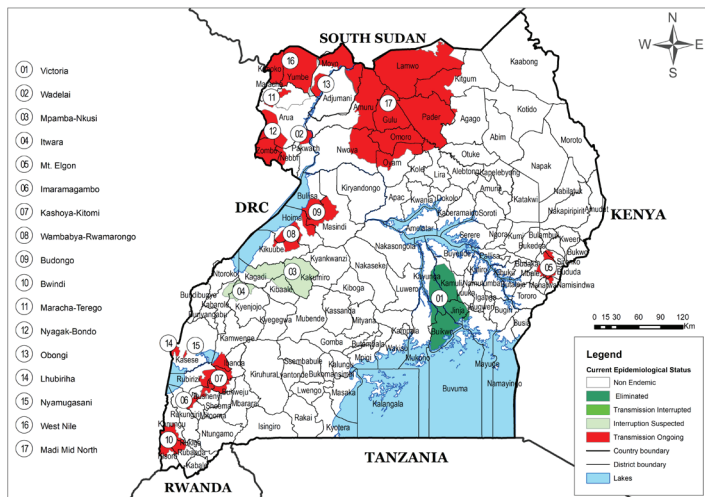
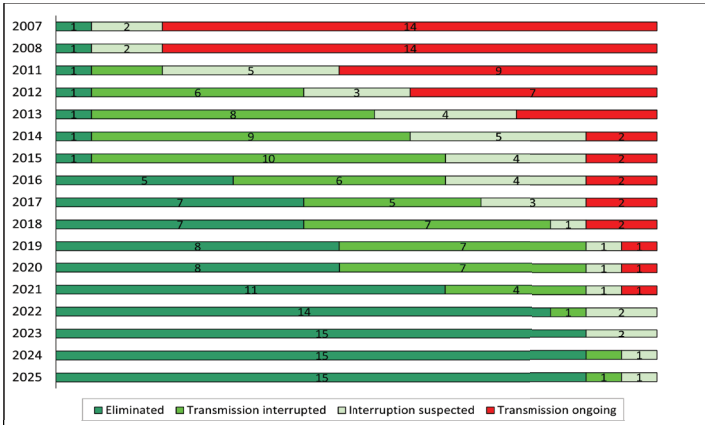
# MINISTRY OF HEALTH

## PRESS RELEASE

### UGANDA INTENSIFIES EFFORTS TO ELIMINATE ONCHOCERCIASIS (RIVER BLINDNESS)



Group photo of the participants: The Committee Chair from University of South Florida, USA Committee members; delegates from The Carter Center Atlanta - USA and Country office; WHO; Lions Club International; Partners; Republic of South Sudan; Democratic Republic of Congo; Ministry of Health officials and selected districts.



At the 18<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Uganda Onchocerciasis Elimination Expert Advisory Committee (UOEAC) of the Ministry of Health, held from 5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> August 2025 at the Sheraton Kampala Hotel, it was noted that the country is one step closer to halting transmission nationwide. Survey results from the five districts of upper Madi Mid North sub-focus, the last districts remaining under treatment, met the World Health Organization criteria to declare transmission interruption and to stop treatment. However, the UOEAC recommended continuation of treatment until additional entomological assessments confirm the interruption of local transmission in river systems surrounding refugee settlements in Northern Uganda, which host refugees from the Republic of South Sudan, Sudan, and Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

As of 2024, river blindness transmission has been interrupted in 45 districts across 16 of Uganda's 17 foci, halting mass treatment with ivermectin (Mectizan® donated by Merck & Co., Inc.). This implies that 6,529,419 people no longer require ivermectin, including 3,155,077 in the Victoria Nile focus, where transmission was eliminated in the 1970s through vector control only. A transmission focus refers to a geographic area sharing the same transmission source and may include part of a district or multiple districts.

Two foci are undergoing three-year post-treatment surveillance (PTS), while 15 are in the post-elimination surveillance (PES) phase. Those in the PTS phase are the Lower Madi

Mid-North sub-focus (the lower part of Amuru, Gulu, Gulu City, Lira, Omoro, Oyam, Nwoya, and Pader) and the Lhubiriha focus (Kasese). The foci under PES are: Ithara (Kabarole and Kyenjojo); Mt. Elgon (Bududa, Manafwa, Mbale, Mbale City, Namisindwa, and Sironko); Mpamba-Nkusi (Kagadi); Wambabya-Rwamarongo (Hoima and Kikuube); Kashoya-Kitomi (Buhweju, Ibanda, Kitagwenda, and Rubirizi); Imaramagambo (Bushenyi and Mitooma); Obongi (Obongi); Wadelai (Pakwach), West Nile (Koboko and Yumbe), Nyamugasani (Kasese), Budongo (Buliisa, Hoima, and Masindi); Bwindi (Kanungu, Kisoro, and Rubanda); Maracha-Terego (Maracha and Terego); Nyagak-Bondo (Arua, Madi-Okollo, Nebbi, and Zombo); and Victoria Nile (Jinja, Kamuli, Kayunga, Mayuge, and Mukono).

One sub-focus of Madi Mid-North (Upper) bordering South Sudan, covering districts of Adjumani, the upper part of Amuru, Kitgum, Lamwo, and Moyo is suspected of having interrupted transmission, and mass treatment continues.

River blindness was once a devastating public health problem in Uganda, initially affecting approximately 8.4 million people in 50 districts. Transmitted by black flies that breed in fast-flowing rivers, the disease causes severe eye and skin conditions that can lead to blindness.

In the early 1990s, Uganda initiated control of river blindness through annual mass treatment with ivermectin in affected

communities, later supplemented by vector control using Abate for river dosing. In 2007, the Ministry of Health launched the national onchocerciasis elimination policy, scaled up mass treatment to twice per year, and complemented it with vector control/elimination where feasible.

Uganda hosts refugees from Sudan, South Sudan and the DRC mainly within the foci in the north. The Government of Uganda has strengthened cross-border cooperation with these countries in the fight against river blindness activities. In October 2021, the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Office of the Prime Minister, and host districts, began mass treatment of refugees settled in Palabek (Lamwo) and Palorinya (Obongi), and extended to Adjumani settlements in June 2025.

Uganda continues to register success in the fight against river blindness through the effort of the Ministry of Health's National Onchocerciasis Elimination Program and with the support of partners, including The Carter Center; USAID's Act to End NTDs | East project led by RTI International; Sightsavers; ELMA Philanthropies; Reaching the Last Mile Fund; Lions Clubs International Foundation; Lions of Uganda; Merck & Co. Inc.; the Mectizan Donation Program; BASF; the World Health Organization; and the governments of Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Republic of South Sudan.

FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY  
  
**Dr. Jane Ruth Aceng Otero**  
 Minister of Health