



**MINISTRY OF HELTH
PRESS RELEASE**

UGANDA SHRINKS THE RIVER BLINDNESS DISTRIBUTION MAP

The Ministry of Health has declared the interruption of River Blindness transmission in Kasese district of the Lhubiriha focus, stopping treatment for 158,313 people.

At the 17th meeting of the Uganda Onchocerciasis Elimination Expert Advisory Committee (UOEEAC) of the Ministry of Health, held from 7th to 8th August 2024, at the Sheraton Hotel, Kampala, it was confirmed that the Kasese district of the Lhubiriha focus, a river blindness-endemic area, has met the World Health Organization's (WHO) criteria for interrupting transmission of river blindness. Mass treatments with ivermectin will be halted in this area, and a three-year post-treatment surveillance phase will commence. A river blindness transmission focus is a geographical area with the same transmission source, which can be a small portion of a district or encompass one or more districts.

The area will now join the Lower Madi Mid-North subfocus in transmission interruption. Lower Madi Mid North includes Southern Amuru, Gulu, Gulu City, Lira, Nwoya, Omoro, Oyam, and Pader. Together with Lhubiriha, these areas total to 1,279,833 people currently undergoing post-treatment surveillance.

This is a major milestone, as the Lhubiriha focus was one of the final two foci receiving treatments for river blindness. Located on the border of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Beni Butembo focus, a survey was conducted to ensure both areas were free from river blindness transmission. With just one more focus left, Uganda is on the brink of a groundbreaking achievement in the fight against this

debilitating disease!

River blindness was endemic in 17 foci, and to date, 15 foci have eliminated its transmission. These foci and their respective districts include Itwara (Kabarole and Kyenjojo); Elgon (Bududa, Manafwa, Mbale, Mbale City, Namisindwa, and Sironko); Mpamba-Nkusi (Kagadi); Wambabya-Rwamarongo (Hoima and Kikuube); Kashoya-Kitomi (Buhweji, 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 & Terego) and Nyagak-Bondo (Arua, Madi-Okollo, Nebbi & Zombo) and Victoria Nile (Jinja, Kamuli, Kayunga Mayuge, and Mukono). This indicates that as of August 2024, approximately **6,339,243** people are no longer at risk of onchocerciasis, including 3,063,182 living in the Victoria Nile focus, which eliminated transmission in the 1970s using vector control.

The Upper Madi Mid-North subfocus, with a population of 569,088, remains classified as "interruption suspected." Interventions will continue until the criteria to stop treatment are met.

Interventions to control river blindness started in the early 1990s. These included annual mass treatment of affected communities using ivermectin (Mectizan® —donated by Merck & Co., Inc.), supplemented by applying Abate in the rivers to control the vector black flies. In 2007, the government of Uganda launched the national onchocerciasis elimination policy, which increased the treatment frequency to twice every year,

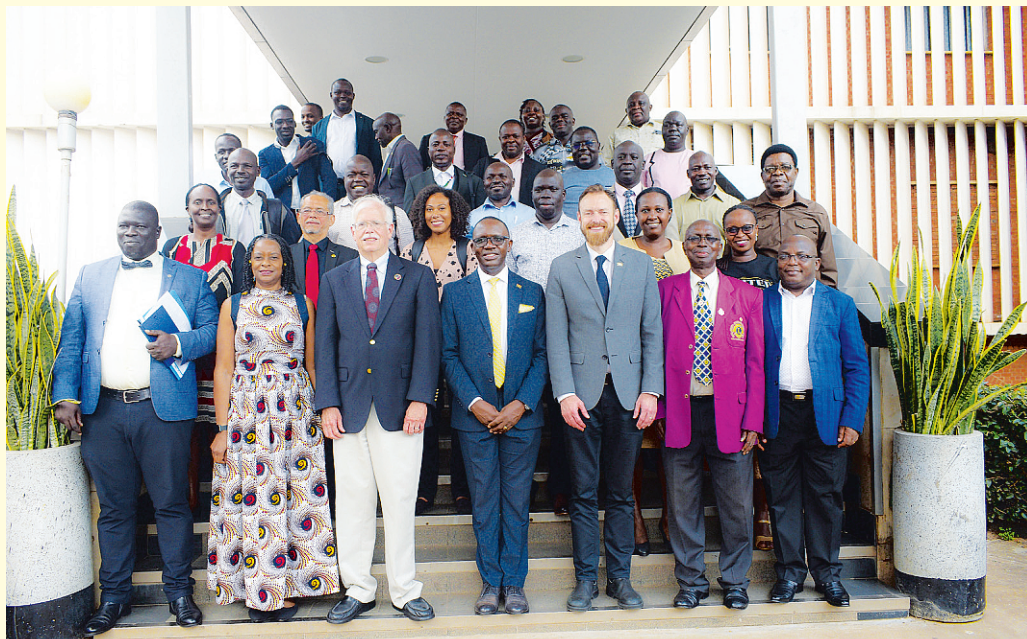
complemented with black fly vector control/elimination where feasible.

River blindness is a devastating public health problem that previously affected about 8.2 million people in 50 districts of Uganda. The disease is transmitted by black flies that breed in fast-flowing rivers. It causes severe eye and skin diseases that may result in blindness.

In cooperation with neighboring countries Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Republic of South Sudan (RSS), the Government of Uganda continues to promote cross-border river blindness elimination activities. The Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), and host districts, began mass treatment of refugees from endemic areas settled in Lamwo (Palabek) and Obongi (Palorinya) since October 2021. 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; Lions Clubs International Foundation; Lions of Uganda; Merck & Co. Inc.; the Mectizan Donation Program; BASF; the World Health Organization; and the governments of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of South Sudan.

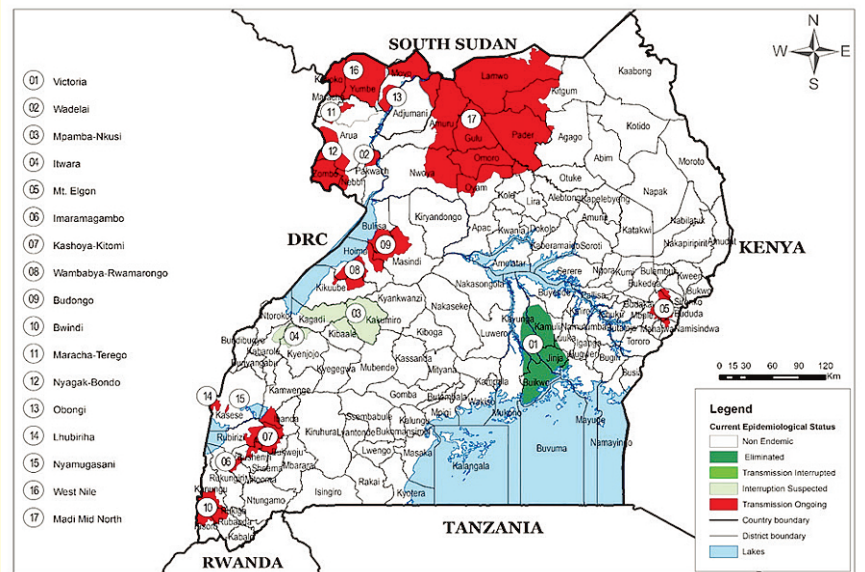
FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY

[Signature]
Dr. Daniel Kyabayinze
For Director General Health Services

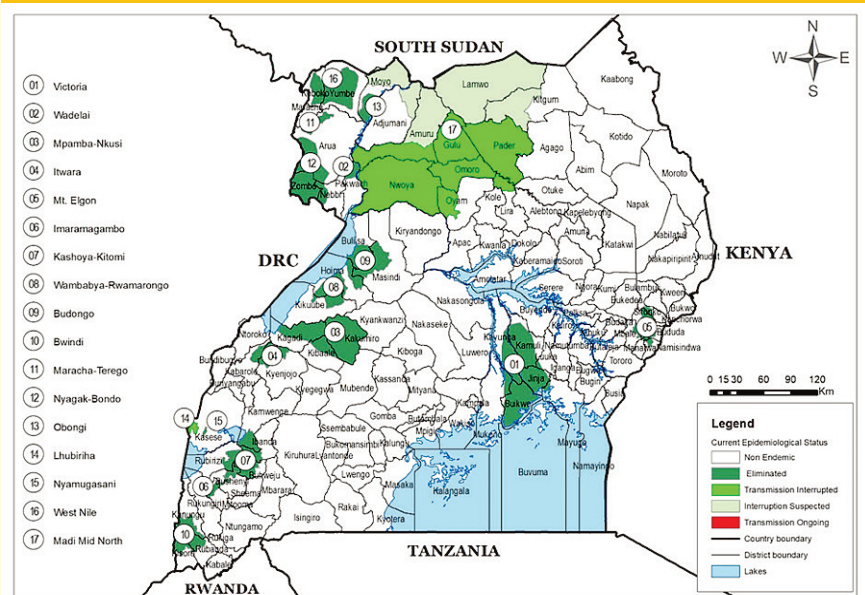


Some of the delegates pose for a photo with the Director Public Health; the Committee Chair, committee members and representatives from The Carter Center Atlanta - USA and Country office; USAID Act to End NTDs/East Program, RTI International; WHO; Lions Club International; Republic of South Sudan; Democratic Republic of Congo; Ministry of Health and selected districts officials

River Blindness Status in 2007



River Blindness Status in 2024



River Blindness Transmission Elimination in Uganda's 17 Endemic Foci

