



**COMMUNIQUÉ OF THE 12TH MEETING OF NIGERIA ONCHOCERCIASIS
ELIMINATION COMMITTEE (NOEC), HELD VIRTUALLY
ON 18TH AND 19TH MAY, 2021**

Preamble

The 12th meeting of the Nigeria Onchocerciasis Elimination Committee (NOEC) organized by Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH) was held virtually, on the 18th and 19th of May, 2021, with support from The Carter Center (TCC). In attendance were members of the NOEC and representatives of TCC, Christoffel Blinden Mission (CBM), US Center for Disease Control (CDC), Health and Development Support Programme (HANDS), Helen Keller International (HKI), Mectizan Donation Program (MDP), Mission To Save the Helpless (MITOSATH), Act|East Program, Sightsavers, Sir Emeka Offor Foundation (SEOF), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) and Liverpool John Moores University. A total of 77 people attended the first day meeting and 76 the second day meeting.

The Chair of the Committee, Prof. B. E. B. Nwoke, welcomed members to the meeting and noted that the last NOEC was held in December 2019 and that throughout 2020 there was no meeting due COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown. The COVID-19 pandemic also affected 2020 MAM implementation which spilled into 2021. The committee had to hold this 12th NOEC meeting virtually due to COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr Joel Akilah gave the opening remarks on behalf of the Director Public Health, Dr. M. O. Alex-Okoh, and gladly noted the progress made in the program and thanked all

stakeholders. The National Coordinator (NC) Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD) thanked the NOEC and noted Nigeria's successful interruption of the transmission of onchocerciasis in three States (Plateau, Nasarawa and Kaduna) and provisional approval for interruption of transmission in Zamfara and Kebbi States. He thanked all the partners, and gave the assurance of the Federal Government's commitment to eliminate onchocerciasis in Nigeria. He listed current challenges and next steps of the program to include; laboratory capacity and analysis of specimen backlog, the need to finalize the national onchocerciasis implementation guideline.

Goodwill messages were given by all the partners who congratulated the country for the successes so far achieved and reiterated their commitment to partner with the Government of Nigeria until Onchocerciasis is eliminated.

The following conclusions and recommendations were made to the Honorable Minister of Health:

A. Two States have eliminated onchocerciasis (Green color on Flag/Map)

- i. NOEC reviewed post treatment surveillance data from Plateau and Nasarawa States which did not indicate any infection for the past three years after stopping Mass Administration of medicines (MAM) in 2017. The States have met WHO and NOEC guidelines and the NOEC recommended their reclassified as 'onchocerciasis transmission eliminated' (Green color - being the first two States in Nigeria to achieve this status). By this, about 2.0 million persons in Plateau and Nasarawa States are no longer in need of Mass Drug Administration for onchocerciasis.
- ii. The NOEC congratulated the states' ministries of health of Plateau and Nasarawa and their implementing partner, TCC, on this accomplishment. The NOEC recommended that this milestone should be celebrated with a media statement.
- iii. Continued surveillance in the two States is still required to prevent recrudescence until all States in Nigeria are free from onchocerciasis. The NOEC recommended that post elimination surveillance guidelines be developed.

B. Three States have been classified as ‘onchocerciasis transmission interrupted’ (Ash color on Flag/Map).

- i. NOEC reviewed the data for Zamfara and Kebbi States and changed its recommendation from ‘provisional’ transmission interrupted to ‘transmission interrupted’ (Ash colour), while noting these states were also endemic for lymphatic filariasis, thus MAM will need to continue in the LF endemic LGAs. With this, 4.0 million persons are no longer in need of MAM intervention for onchocerciasis in the two States.
- ii. NOEC noted that Delta State have satisfied NOEC and WHO guidelines for reclassification as onchocerciasis ‘transmission interrupted’ and recommended that MAM for onchocerciasis should be stopped, and 2.5 million persons are no longer in need of MAM intervention. The Committee noted that several LGAs in Delta State are still endemic for lymphatic filariasis thus MAM needs to continue in the LF endemic LGAs.
- iii. These three States namely Zamfara, Kebbi and Delta should commence post-treatment surveillance.
- iv. With the addition of six million persons coming off treatments in Zamfara, Kebbi and Delta States, in total, 10.7 million people no longer need MAM for onchocerciasis in Nigeria, an impressive world record. NOEC recommended that this milestone should be celebrated with a media statement.

C. Onchocerciasis Transmission Suspected Interrupted (Tan color on Flag/Map).

- i. Based on assessment results indicating that prevalence in children (aged 5-9) of Ov16 antibody is <1%, NOEC recommended that the following six States be re-classified as onchocerciasis ‘transmission suspected interrupted’ (Tan colour): Anambra, Enugu, Abia, Imo, Ekiti and Yobe States
- ii. All States classified in this category (‘Transmission suspected interrupted’) are approved to conduct stop MAM assessment through

entomology and serology studies in line with NOEC and WHO guidelines.

D. States on track for Elimination. (Yellow color on Flag/Map)

Ondo State Ov16 result showed a prevalence <5% that allowed reclassification of that State from 'transmission ongoing' (red) to 'on track for elimination' (Yellow).

E. Analysis of epidemiological evaluation samples

- i. NOEC noted, the incomplete analysis of Cross River State DBS samples and recommends that a full analysis should be carried out for a decision to be taken on its reclassification.
- ii. There was a further emphasis on the need for analysis of the 31,190 DBS backlog samples for Adamawa, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Gombe, Jigawa and Osun States.

F. Onchocerciasis Elimination Mapping (OEM)

The study on OEM project conducted in Kudan and Zaria LGAs of Kaduna State by Sightsavers was commended. The committee recommends that:

- i. The DBS samples should be analysis by Ov16 ELISA to confirm lab RDT.
- ii. A detailed desk review and prospection should be carried out to determine if there is any need to collect a second stage additional epidemiological sample.

G. Twice per year treatment

NOEC noted the onchocerciasis hotspots in Edo and Ondo States and recommends that twice per year treatment should continue.

H. 2020 MDA for Onchocerciasis and Mectizan supplies

- i. COVID 19 pandemic limited MAM in Nigeria in 2020. Treatment figures for 2020 were not presented. The Mectizan Donation Program(MDP) requested information on Mectizan inventory in country prior to shipping additional medicines for 2021 MAM.

- ii. FMOH reported 94,000,000 Ivermectin tablets currently in the country
- iii. MDP emphasised that donated Mectizan should not be used for treatment of COVID-19.

I. LF Assessment updates

- i. Updates on LF should be presented for the country, and especially for LGAs where MAM for onchocerciasis is recommended to stop (Kaduna, Zamfara, Kebbi and Delta) in the next NOEC meeting, so that the Committee would be better informed on launching of post treatment surveillance of onchocerciasis.

J. Laboratory Issues

- i. FMOH should find alternative laboratories other than the NCDC laboratory for analysis of the pending 36,000 DBS and additional samples from subsequent assessments.

K. Cross Border Issues

- i. NOEC recommends that to sustain gains in Nasarawa State, intervention and evaluation efforts should be intensified in the neighboring state of Benue, which is classified as 'Transmission Ongoing (RED)'.
- ii. The FMOH should address the recommendation of interacting with their Cameroon and Benin Republic counterparts to identify existing MOU for joint cross border surveillance.
- iii. There is need for international and national (state) cross border assessments and partners involved in these transmission zones are encouraged to meet to discuss formation of 'Special Intervention Zones' in key border areas. Similarly, NOEC requested information on internally displaced persons and camps in states with respect to onchocerciasis importation/exportation.

L. Other business

- i. NOEC reiterates that the protocol for any evaluation of the programme in any transmission zone should be shared with Members of NOEC and Chairman's approval met before commencement.

- ii. The National Flag and National Map should be updated by FMOH. The changes in endemicity should be communicated to WHO (ESPEN).

The 13th NOEC meeting has been scheduled for 7th – 9th December 2021 (Arrival on 6th).