Mr Bill Gates with his friend as well as his wife has been betting on a number of issues and picking ambitious goals that impact the world we live since forty years ago. We see most of them happening. We in APOC received the 2015 Annual letter of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation with great excitement and appreciation particularly their new bet ‘We’ll also see the last of diseases like elephantiasis, river blindness, and blinding trachoma, which disable tens of millions of people in poor countries.’ The publication of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s annual letter, further promotes the importance of 2015 as a year for change, and a turning point in the broader community embracing this opportunity to have a major impact. Next to the 2012 Paris Declaration which follows the roadmap from WHO outlining how to combat them and the London Declaration; this statement reveals their vision for the world by 2030. APOC as a partnership with the WHO as the implementing organization working tirelessly for the last half of a century fighting to see the disease River blindness eliminated in Africa, we view the letter as further encouragement to continue the fight to eliminate river blindness and other NTDs from Africa.

The statement brings a deserved attention towards elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) in Africa. The targeted diseases have been diseases of poverty trapping communities in a vicious cycle of disease and poverty, tackling them will release the poor from this chain. However, predicting the end of those diseases by the said year and putting them in history books entails finalizing the mapping of these diseases to identify all affected villages, scaling up of interventions to ensure they reached every person in every village affected by the disease and that those freed will not be re-infected.

APOC is a very successful African based partnership organization that includes 31 NTD endemic countries and communities, development partners, NGDOs, foundations and private sector for the last fifteen years. It supports the distribution of medicines in endemic countries by strengthening the health system through establishing a community-led health program that empowers communities to take charge of their health related issues. APOC is an enviable model for Public-Private Partnership in the fight against NTDs in Africa. Last year alone APOC led the treatment more than 100 million for river blindness and contributed to efforts to eliminate other NTDs such as elephantiasis and trachoma which are two of the other neglected tropical diseases betted for eradication by 2030.

Some years are bigger than others, and 2015 is one of those years. It’s a year that will see the sun setting on APOC as a successful program with all its achievement and define the future of a new program, and the expected launch of its successor PENDA (Program for the Elimination of Neglected Diseases in Africa) with a wider mandate to tackle all the five Preventive chemotherapy diseases (River blindness, elephantiasis, trachoma, bilharzia and soil transmitted helmenthiasis) three of which are targeted in the annual letter. Within this transitional environment we would like to welcome the 2015 Annual letter of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation as refreshing news for the NTD community.

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