In the context of the transition from control to elimination of onchocerciasis, the role of entomology has become crucial in confirming the interruption of transmission. To this effect, APOC has set up an entomological surveillance working group which, on the occasion of its third annual meeting in Ouagadougou from April 9 to 12, 2013, brought together entomologists and entomology technicians from Ethiopia, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi, Nigeria, Uganda, Tanzania, Chad, and of course, experts from the working group.

On this occasion, the participants reviewed the results of the entomological evaluations conducted in Nigeria, Chad and Uganda, as well as the sites to be monitored in each country; they also assessed the need for equipment and materials, the funding needed, and finalized the protocol for entomological evaluations. The countries represented committed to rapidly provide to the APOC Management their budget proposals to be finalized with actual field data. Following receipt of these proposals, the APOC Management will strive to make available the resources needed, including technical training, for the implementation of the plans of action that were developed during the four days of the workshop.

Reflection on atypical responses to treatment with Mectizan and on the drug distribution chain

From April 22 to 26, 2013, were held in Accra, Ghana, two meetings organized by the Mectizan Donation Programme. The first meeting which concerned atypical responses to treatment with ivermectin brought together experts from various African countries including Cameroon and Ghana, from different universities and research institutes of Canada, the United States, England and Australia, two representatives of APOC (Dr Laurent Yaméogo, Program Manager and APOC Director’s Office Coordinator, and Dr. Mounkaila Noma, Head of the Epidemiology and vector elimination Unit), members of the Mectizan® Expert Committee and officers of the Mectizan® Donation Programme. The participants reflected on the recrudescence of increased parasite loads or the premature resumption of skin reactions in some subjects. How to quickly detect these cases (diagnostic tools) and what solutions to apply (alternative medicines) in effective operational programmes were the subject of intense debate.

The second consultation, which took place from April 25 to 26, allowed the experts of the Mectizan Expert Committee and Albendazole Coordination (MEC / AC) to review the issues related to the drug distribution chain, the barriers to adequate coverage, the search for alternative solutions to the use of ivermectin in areas of co-endemicity of onchocerciasis and loiasis, as well as the delays in supplying the countries / communities with the drugs needed.

The Committee of Sponsoring Agencies meeting in Paris paves the way for a transformation of APOC

From April 3 to 5, 2013, the Committee of Sponsoring Agencies (CSA) met in Paris. The focus of their discussions included the possibility of transforming the African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control (APOC) into an overall management structure that would provide substantial support to the elimination of onchocerciasis as well as to the control or elimination of various other neglected tropical diseases.

The participants came from the African Development Bank (ABD), Merck & Co. Inc., the WHO headquarters in Geneva, the WHO Regional Office in Brazzaville, the World Bank, the NGO coalition, the Mectizan Donation Program® and APOC.
As every year, the international community celebrated World Malaria Day on April 25, 2013. It was an opportunity for many countries around the world, especially in Africa where malaria is responsible for 90% of the 660,000 victims of registered deaths per year, across continents, to focus on the overall theme: "Invest in the future: Defeat malaria."

Despite the great efforts made by Africa, as pointed out by the Regional Director of WHO / AFRO, Dr Luis Gomez Sambo, in his message for Malaria Day, to achieve the Millennium Development Goal related to the elimination of this scourge, everyone must resolutely get involved. Hence, he invited men and women politicians, parliamentarians, governments, private sector leaders, the civil society, religious organizations and the media to strengthen multidisciplinary and multisectoral collaboration. For greater effectiveness of control interventions, Dr Sambo urged "regular monitoring of resistance to insecticides and antimalarial drugs, as well as further research to develop new efficient and cost-effective tools for prevention and treatment."

Data managers from Liberia and Cameroon are better equipped

From April 25 to May 3, 2013, a training session was held at the APOC headquarters in Ouagadougou for two data managers. Under the coordination of Honorat Zouré, the APOC officer in charge of Biostatistics and Mapping, Wesley Massaquoi from the Liberia National NTD Control Programme and Dr. Henshaw Eyambe Mandi from the National Onchocerciasis Control Programme (NOCP) of Cameroon were trained in data management and verification methods as well as the use of the GIS for the spatial analysis of the data reported by communities and health workers under the community-directed treatment with ivermectin (CDTI). Particular emphasis was placed on the learning of some advanced features of Microsoft Excel and the use of the free Quantum GIS software. The capacity of the Cameroon and Liberia programmes should thus be improved in the management and use of reliable data for decision making. ♦ Honorat Zouré

Mission to Uganda for the audit and certification of APOC projects 2011 and 2012 financial accounts

The Republic of Uganda is one of the first participating countries in the African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control. It has seven projects in operation to date. In accordance with the administrative and financial provisions of APOC, project accounts audit and certification missions must be undertaken every year in 18 countries. Therefore, a team of the APOC Finance Department composed of Arlette Agboton (Financial Assistant) and Thérèse Mossi (Secretary) went on mission to Kampala, Uganda, from April 15 to 25, 2013. The main objective was to verify and certify APOC projects accounts for the years 2011 and 2012 before electronically archiving the financial reports and financial statements of the accounts.

It is interesting to note that the Ugandan public administration is highly decentralized, with a full management autonomy of health districts. However, the management system of the Onchocerciasis Control Programme projects in Uganda is an exception to the rule and remains very centralized. Hence a significant delay in the provision of funds to the health districts and in the submission of expenditure reports by the latter to the central level, resulting in a low rate of implementation of the annual budgets allocated by APOC for onchocerciasis control activities in the country. This rate was approximately 31% in 2011 (all financing combined) with a slight increase to about 40% in 2012. It is also worth noting the need for additional human resources at the NOCP level, both in Kampala and in the health districts in charge of project activities within the country.

Nonetheless, at the end of the eleven days spent working in Kampala, the mission’s objectives were achieved at the cost of much effort on the part of the APOC team as the duration of the mission was inversely proportionate to the volume of work that had to be done. The APOC Management team bases its hope that an improvement of the situation will be achieved based on the recommendations it made, if they are effectively implemented. ♦ Arlette Agboton

News from our Partners

WHO / AFRO: World Malaria Day

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Current news was also marked by the taking up of his post by the new Representative of the WHO office in Angola. Dr. Hernando Agudelo, a Colombian national, officially presented his credentials to the Angolan Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Georges Chikoti, on March 13, 2013, as shown in the photo opposite.

Another important event to note is the training of trainers workshop on the strategy of community–directed treatment with ivermectin (CDTI) held in Lubango from March 4 to 8, 2013. As part of the intensification of onchocerciasis control in Angola, the training aimed at strengthening the capacity of thirty participants from CDTI projects’ coordinating teams in the correct implementation of this strategy. These participants will in turn train the staff responsible for the implementation of CDTI.

The opportunity was also provided to experiment with the new training tools developed in 2012 by APOC, in adapting them to the Angolan context. On the last day of the training, the four facilitators that were Prof. Sidi Ahmedou and Dr. Françoise Sobela of APOC, Julie Akame and Dr. Floribert Tepage, both technical advisors, with the collaboration of Dr. Pedro Vandunem, NOCP Coordinator, of the chief medical officer of the province of Huila and the WHO country office team, led a field trip to the town of Matala, Mucossa district, 150 km away from the training venue.

DRC: The proposed splitting of the Bas-Congo/Kinshasa Project is on track

The first NOTF meeting of the year was held on April 30, 2013 in Kinshasa. Chaired by the Director of Primary Health Care representing the Secretary General of the Ministry of Health, unable to attend, it had two main agenda items, namely the achievements of the NOCP in 2012 and the proposal to split the Bas-Congo/Kinshasa CDTI project. It is worth noting that the proposal has received a favorable opinion from the NOTF and will be rewritten to be submitted to the approval of the Technical Consultative Committee of APOC at its meeting of September 2013. It should also be noted that in the context of elimination of onchocerciasis, other proposals are expected at the next meeting of the NOTF in June, 2013, including those of the CDTI projects of Kasai and Uélés.

Cameroon: Briefing on the key activities the NOCP

The NOTF of Cameroon held its monthly coordination meeting on April 24, 2013, at the WHO country office. The meeting was attended by the central level staff of the NOTF Secretariat and the Heads of the NGDOs involved in the control of NTDs. The agenda items of the meeting comprised the last NOCP core activities, namely: participation in the meeting on the elimination of onchocerciasis held in Ouagadougou from March 4 to 8, 2013; participation in the 36th session of the Technical Consultative Committee (TCC) which took place from March 11 to 15, 2013; stock taking of the status of preparations for the 2013 onchocerciasis control campaign.

From this meeting, it was clear that the 15 CDTI projects are ready for the launch of the 2013 campaign. Regarding the projects of the West and Central provinces, top-down cascade training meetings for health professionals and community distributors are underway. The only concern was the arrival of albendazole at the port of Douala, which eventually materialized, and which will allow the start up of the 2013 campaign in June.

Dr. Benjamin Biholong, NOCP Coordinator, Cameroon

The list of the new focal points for APOC countries has just been released by the Programme Management

Mr Yacouba Niandou: Burundi, Congo, Benin, Gabon and Ghana;
Pr Sidi Ahmedou: Cameroon, Guinea-Bissau, Niger and Guinea Conakry;
Dr Léonard Mukengue: Central African Republic, Chad, Mali and Côte d’Ivoire;
Dr François Sobela: Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Senegal, Malawi and South Sudan;
Mr Honorat Zoure: Burkina Faso, Equatorial Guinea, Liberia and Togo;
Dr Hailemariam Afework: Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Sierra Leone.
Our sincere condolences to the families of the deceased.

**Diary entries**

**Weddings:**
- Abu Brigitte, daughter of Beyon Camille Neya, driver at IST, with Ange Eric Romuald on Saturday, May 4, 2013 at Signoghin town hall and John XXIII chapel;
- Pavan Segal, technical officer, with Chrystèle Bonkian, on Saturday, April 20, 2013 at Koubri town hall and John XXIII chapel;
- Mariétou, daughter of Ousmane Nadia, driver at IST, with Baguibié Jacques, on Saturday, March 2, 2013 at Bogodogo town all and Karpala mosque.

**Happy marriage to the newlyweds!**

**Births column:**
- Rock Noël Leama, Switchboard operator, WCO/BFA /IST, is the proud father of a baby girl born on April 30, 2013 in Ouagadougou;
- Prosper Compaoré, Financial Assistant, WCO/BFA, is the proud father of a baby girl born on March 14, 2013 in Ouagadougou.

**Congratulations to the happy parents!**

**Obituary:**
- Abdoulaye Touré, father of Ibrahim Touré, AO/APOC, on April 19, 2013 in Conakry ;
- Kambiéré Gilbert, brother of Georgette Kambiéré previously head of the Documentation Department, MDSC, on March 4, 2013 in Paris ;
- Kamagaté Mandjou, brother of Kamaté Idrissa, laboratory assistant at the MDSC microbiology laboratory, on February 17, 2013 in Côte d’Ivoire. **Our sincere condolences to the families of the deceased.** Emma Kalsany

Nearly forty members of the WHO staff and a dozen of their dependents heartily enjoyed the activities of the recreational day organized by the Association of WHO staff in Burkina Faso (ASOB).

Gathered this Wednesday morning of May 1st in a convoy of WHO buses and personal vehicles, they traveled in a festive mood the 35km separating Ouagadougou from the small town of Koubri. In as much as most had never set foot in this locality, the little town had rarely seen so many people in one day. Immediately after arriving on the vast grounds of the Bougainvilliers camp site, young and adults engaged in several board games, swimming, salsa dance learning and leisurely walking activities. Lunch was served to all and prizes were awarded to staff members present by drawing of lots.

On the way back, shopping at the nearby monastery and at the fish market of Koubri provided participants with happy memories. And in many, the excursion that was a first of its kind, created a desire: to renew this successful experience.

Thérèse Belobo

**Recreational day at Koubri: May 1st celebration by ASOB**

Family spirit

Emma Kalsany

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