



## AFRICAN REGION

**African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control (APOC)**

**Programme africain de Lutte contre l'Onchocercose**

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## PRESS RELEASE

### **National Taskforces strategize on river blindness control in Africa**

**3 July 2008/Addis Ababa, Ethiopia** – The annual meeting of National Taskforces for Onchocerciasis (river blindness) Control (NOTFs) is underway here to review progress on the battle against one of the neglected tropical diseases by the World Health Organization (WHO) African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control (APOC).

“The future of onchocerciasis and other neglected tropical diseases is greatly dependent on a well-managed, resourced and strengthened health system that addresses the health needs of the community that is empowered to own, contribute to and direct any community level intervention,” Dr Fatoumata Nafu-Troare, WHO Country Representative in Ethiopia, said at the opening of the five-day Fifth NOTFs’ meeting.

She explained that as part of its continuing efforts to establish sustainable national onchocerciasis programme in countries under its mandate, APOC has been playing a significant role in building local capacities, implementing community-directed initiatives, mapping disease endemic areas and strengthening operational researches monitoring and evaluation activities.

The NOTFs play a key role in river blindness control programmes, whose remarkable success are driven by the highly effective community-directed treatment with ivermectin (CDTI), also known as community directed intervention (CDI). APOC has been using the CDI strategy since 1997 to empower poor and hard-to-reach communities in 19 countries to take charge of their own health.

The 1-5 July meeting being attended by river blindness programme coordinators from 10 countries – Cameroon, Chad, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Nigeria, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and host country Ethiopia – is to update data on CDTI activities, especially on government contributions (funds disbursed) to control activities

Participants will also share experiences on programme implementation, success stories, lessons learnt and strategize on how to address identified challenges and weaknesses to improve programme performance.

They will equally review some of APOC’s 108 CDTI projects in 127,000 communities in sub-Saharan Africa.

The meeting is also a forum for brainstorming on how to strengthen partnership and advocacy to ensure increased government financial and other contributions to CDTI activities preparatory to APOC's exit date of 2015.

Participants are to prepare countries' presentations to the APOC governing board, the Joint Action Forum (JAF), which holds its 14<sup>th</sup> session in Kampala, Uganda in December.

Welcoming the participants, APOC Director, Dr Uche Amazigo, described the NOTFs annual meeting as a gathering for action and less talk, stressing: "commitment to serve should be our guiding principle."

The NOTFs meeting followed a three-day international meeting on integration of river blindness control into health systems and co-implementation of Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) with some aspects of Malaria control, which ended in the Ethiopian capital on 27 June 2008.

The meeting urged countries to adopt the CDI strategy for scaling up integration and co-implementation of NTDs with malaria control interventions to increase access of hard-to-reach communities.

This is with the aim of strengthening national health systems through empowering communities to manage multiple health interventions whose control strategies are simple, and contribute to the attainment of health for all and the health Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Africa, which bears the greatest burden (about 90%), of NTDs and malaria.