One, two, three, four staff members leaving at the same time. Staff, who worked for a long time period in the programme, never experienced in the past such a big number of staff members leaving the African Programme for Onchocerciasis control (APOC) “the same day”. Amado Congo working as reprographer/messenger, Sébastien Sawadogo, in charge of trips and transportation (TAT), Dr Mutabaruka, Acting Director of the Multi-Disease Surveillance Centre (MDSC) were all three taking retirement, while Benoît Koffi Agblewono, budget and finance officer (BFO) was to take on new duties at the WHO Office in Nigeria. Each of the four staff had their own background worth being revealed to the audience of the day: proven experience and competence and personality traits which were teased on the occasion. In turn, Roger Nabalma, President of ASOB celebrated the merits of the future retirees among whom, Dr Evariste Mutabaruka was considered as a real icon. He thanked them for the support provided to ASOB, particularly BFO for working with the APOC staff for the cafeteria project in its development stage.

Dr Laurent Yaméogo, Programme Manager and Coordinator of APOC Director’s Office, remarked that one of the colleagues that he didn’t name but was identifiable by the audience used to have a systematic response when a task was assigned to him: “This will be done right away!” Another staff to whom a tribute was paid never considered the number of working hours per day and used to see to it that a single cent spent be justified for the success of the Programme, and all this at the expense of his social life. As far as the third staff member was concerned, he could never lose focus unless a trip under his supervision was arranged. Finally, the fourth staff was depicted as obsessed by careful disease surveillance.
In turn, Dr Gilles Adjami from APOC/MDSC depicted how rigorous the retiring Director is. This rigor was reflected in the training on project writing, in constantly looking for results and visibility. The work pace was so tight that, soon, white hair and baldness had appeared on the collaborators’ heads.

The third speaker, Sambo Etienne Ilboudo, said he was well trained by TAT for trip and transportation duties. He talked of his admiration for the quietness and patience of this ‘older brother’ to whom he wished to live long until he joins him at the time of his retirement in 2029!

BFO’s merits were highlighted in remarks made by Mrs Thérèse Mossi, one of his collaborators. She commended him as financial officer who, in nine years, gave all he could to the Programme, leading a team that are used to finding solutions to any problems encountered in his office that they called “The clinic”.

There was a pause for the reading of a prose drafted by Rock Noël Léama, the in-house poet and read by Dr Fobi Grace, head of the Sustainable Drug Distribution Unit.

Then Dr Jean-Baptiste Roungou, the new Director of APOC, invited everybody to share the happiness of the colleagues whose merits were celebrated for contributing to the development of public health and mainly to the health of the African populations. He pronounced some kind words for Amado Congo and Sébastien Sawadogo that he recognized as hard workers, for Benoît Agblewenou Koffi considered as an exceptional person by the WHO Office in Nigeria for its management in the future, and Dr Evariste Mutabaruka for his love of a job well done.

In turn, Dr Djamila Cabral, WHO Representative in Burkina Faso, further highlighted the great values from different levels that are leaving the Organization: an administrative staff, a finance officer, and a versatile expert in the field of health. On behalf of the Regional WHO Director for the African Region and the WHO Director-General, and in her own name, she wished them well. In short, all the speakers wished them a peaceful, happy, and healthy retirement that will be an opportunity for them “to do what they want to do, determine when they want to do it, and with whom they want to do it, for the prosperity of their families”. In the end, ASOB presented them with gifts. Additionally, TAT was given an air ticket by Satguru, a travel agency. The persons concerned by the event expressed their gratitude to the colleagues and to WHO. The party continued with snacks that had been patiently waiting in heating dishes to be eaten.

Thérèse Belobo