Separation does not equate severance of ties. The expertise of these retiring staff could always be available for WHO to request. That was the message uttered repeatedly during the farewell ceremonies held from 24 to 27 June 2014 for six colleagues retiring from the World Health Organization in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Organized at the WHO Country Office and at the headquarters of the African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control, those events were a great opportunity for the WHO personnel to celebrate the qualities of the retiring staff and also to highlight their manias and verbal tics, without fear of causing ‘rancour’ or being summoned.

1. Dr Walker Oladapo, Coordinator of the Inter Country Support Team for West Africa
   He wonderfully used to combine rigour and lively mind

There was so much humor and so many fits of giggles at Dr Walker Oladapo’s retirement event! During the ceremonies organized successively by the WHO single staff Association, the WHO Representative in Burkina Faso, and the national administrative authorities, the former Coordinator of the Inter Country Support Team (IST) for West Africa spread good cheer all around.

First of all, we enjoyed his brave manipulation of the French language acquired in a French-speaking environment. We also appreciated his sense of humility listening to him declare that he didn’t have any personal merit but was granted with the capacity of “taking advantage” of the know-how of his colleagues. Before his departure for Nigeria, his native country, he told the APOC Director who is his long-time friend that he was convinced all that was done for him bodes well for a place in Paradise.

So, for this former teacher of pharmacology who joined the Organization in 1996 through the Malaria Unit within the DDC/AFRO of that time, irony has always been a permanent personality trait; the same has been his rigour at work.

After his outstanding positions as WHO Representative in Uganda, Focal Point for country support in the WHO Regional Office for Africa in Brazzaville, and Coordinator of the IST for East Africa in Zimbabwe, he was granted a medal of recognition by the government of Burkina Faso for the work carried out for the benefit of the populations of the sub-region, after serving for two years in Ouagadougou.

He considered it important to dedicate to the WHO Country Office a tablet on which were written the names of his 18 collaborators who have been very much dedicated to the current fight against the outbreak of Ebola in West Africa. ♦

Last minute info: Arrival of Dr Chris Ngenda Mwikisa at the headquarters of APOC.

Dr Chris Ngenda Mwikisa, Chair of the Committee of Sponsoring Agencies, recently appointed Manager of Corporate Services (MCS) by the WHO/AFRO Regional Director, will act as COORD until the appointment of a new Coordinator. Note that Chris Ngenda Mwikisa served as the APOC Programme Acting Director from January to May 2013. ♦

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Dr Maiga Alhousseyni has dedicated twenty five years, i.e., a quarter of a century for people’s health within the World Health Organization (WHO). His contribution to the forthcoming elimination of Guinea Worm on the African continent, as focal point/regional adviser for the eradication of Dracunculosis or Guinea Worm at the WHO Inter Country Team for West Africa, will be “recorded on the pages of the history of the Organization”, stated Dr Djamila Cabral, WHO Representative.

When he joined WHO in 1989, this Medical Officer of public health never imagined the enormous tasks awaiting him. The following figures speak for themselves: “440 support missions carried out for Guinea Worm activities through Africa and across the world, a distance of 1,902,410 Km covered, i.e., about 48 times a trip around the world, let alone the distances covered on motorcycles, on bicycles or on foot including the participation in 50 international meetings: regional conferences, review meetings of national programmes, cross-border meetings organized as part of the Guinea Worm control”.

Before getting back to Mali, his native country, he wished to thank all the stakeholders and partners, who created “a tremendous atmosphere and contributed to getting a reduction of more than 99.98% of the annual incidence of Dracunculosis in Africa in spite of the unavailability of vaccine or medicine». With the hope that between two and three years, Africa will be freed from this terrible disease forever, this expert nicknamed, “Haïwa” (after his favorite expression in Dioula meaning, All right), also remembered “the shepherds, the fishermen, and the farmers who, during this fight, made significant contributions by supplying food and accommodation, and by pushing or pulling vehicles stuck on muddy roads”.

At the time he was about to leave the country, he admitted he had a single regret: “not having been able to improve his level of Mooré, one of the languages spoken in Burkina Faso”.

3. Pierre Kaboré, Messenger & Driver at WHO Country Office

“Le Doyen” is leaving Health roads without ever breaking the driving rules

At the farewell party organized by ASOB on 26 June 2014, he was praised for his loyalty considered extreme and for his availability. An incredible number of miles covered with his “vehicle”, with technicians and administrative staff on board for fifteen years at WHO! Pierre Kaboré, nicknamed “Le doyen” or “the elder” by his colleagues, depending on what they expected from him, has had an exemplary career that many of those who are still in office admire with envy.

In a testimony, Etienne Bamogo, one of his colleagues, observed that his refusal to bypass the rules was almost uncompromising. A couple of examples were used to illustrate the case: one day, he refused to carry his boss’s calf in the service vehicle. Another one was the refusal to deviate from the officially planned itinerary; which other drivers, in the same circumstances, would not dare do. On behalf of the President of ASOB, Philippe Sow, Deputy Secretary-General, wished a healthy retirement to him whereas Dr Djamila Cabral, on behalf of WHO, expressed her gratitude for services rendered, while wishing him a lot of happiness.
Dr Noma Mounkaila, Chief of the Epidemiology and Vector Elimination Unit of APOC.
A commitment to Onchocerciasis control, strictly translated into producing results

If some completed their career paths within WHO as initially planned, Dr Noma Mounkaila, Chief of the Epidemiology and Vector Elimination Unit of APOC is retiring from the African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control for health reasons, four years earlier than planned. It is for this reason that ASOB paid him a visit at his home on 27 June 2014. The event was marked with the exchange of words of comfort and a presentation of gifts followed by sadness during separation. The visitors expressed appropriate appreciation of the professional qualities and the effective results produced by the efforts of the retiring staff.

Dr Noma joined the APOC Programme in 1997 as a biostatistician-epidemiologist and devoted his efforts in collaboration with few employees to set up the new structure which was to replace the finishing Onchocerciasis Control Programme in West Africa (OCP). Young Medical Doctor with a Master’s degree in biostatistics from the University of New Orleans (United States), Dr Noma became famous from the beginning, according to Dr Azodoga Sékétéli, because of “his solid knowledge of the Information Technology tool, his dedication, his endurance, his total availability and his capacity to create a pleasant atmosphere around him». Thanks to these values, he has acquired a remarkable knowledge of the history of the disease control and has had lot of anecdotes about it, in the 17 years spent in the EVE Unit and on the precarious roads of Oncho control.

At the end of the visit, the Chief of EVE Unit of APOC asked the colleagues that were present to extend his friendship to all those who were not able to be part of the group.

Dr Donald Bundy, Lead Health Specialist, Coordinator for Onchocerciasis in Africa and fiscal agent of APOC at the World Bank

For quite personal reasons, his departure from the position of fiscal agent of the African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control cannot be assimilated to retirement. But APOC wished to show him its gratitude for his outstanding assistance, the same way it did for Dr Laurent Yaméogo. Dr Donald Bundy affectionately called Don Bundy, worked conscientiously for fifteen years at the World Bank with the last years dedicated to the mobilization of funds for Onchocerciasis Control and for an adequate operation of the APOC Programme.

He has many vivid memories of the support provided. The worst that he remembers was when the Programme and subsequently the Trust Fund were to close in 2015. The best ones, on the other hand, arose from the appreciation of the partnership of APOC by the former and current Presidents of the Bank as “one of the most successful partnership in the public-private health sector in Africa and the decision to support the process for the creation of the future entity named PENDA, and finally the increase of direct support to Neglected Tropical Diseases control in the countries.”

In response to the tribute paid to him on 26 June 2014 in Ouagadougou, Don Bundy said that it had been a pleasure for him to be a member of this wonderful undertaking, having been part of the the battle led by APOC and the international community. He expressed this opinion extensively on 20 June 2014 during the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the contribution of the Bank to the control of river blindness.

The former fiscal agent of the Programme at the World Bank has planned to take a rest for six weeks in Scotland, his native land, before returning to academia, his former loves.
6. Dr Laurent Yaméogo, Coordinator of the African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control Director’s Office: Cornerstone and Oncho memory; he stayed the course without showing the slightest sign of fatigue.

He usually would not miss meetings but on 30 June 2014, the African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control Director’s Office Coordinator (COORD) apologized for not being able to attend a professional staff meeting. He needed to complete before the end of the day the assignments piled up on his desk, due to missions and meetings held during that period. He ended his last day at work prior to the first day of retirement very late as usual.

Indeed, several times since March 2014, you have read in the columns of this newsletter the praises from the members of the statutory meetings and representatives of APOC participating countries relating to Dr Laurent Yaméogo’s professional and human qualities. On 26 June 2014, Dr Yaméogo’s collaborators in APOC pointed out once again his knowledge of Onchocerciasis Control, his love of a job well done, his endurance, his calm and his humility during an event organized by ASOB.

“I always felt an huge workload each time he was absent”, said Dr Jean-Baptiste Roungou, Programme Director. “He is also a scientist and an administrator who knows how to work closely with his colleagues and is now the memory of the Programme. He left a gap in the management of APOC that will be difficult to fill”. For his farewell, COORD, nicknamed Dr LY by some because he used these initials for his signature, was granted a celebration and was presented with numerous gifts; some of which were shipped from abroad. Our newsletter will undoubtedly miss his eagle eye. We apologize beforehand for that. Good luck COORD!•

Celebrations in pictures

Covers of cushions from Sightsavers Nigeria

A last glass with Dr Oladapo

Their friendship to P. Kaboré and Dr Maiga

The team of 18 against Ebola !

friends of COORD outside APOC

CSA members were present

Mr and Mrs Noma in traditional attire

Wishes by Dr Cabral

Don Bundy; « Let’s go Brother ! »

Chief Editor:
Jean-Baptiste Roungou
Advisor:
Chris N. Mwikisa
Editor:
Thérèse Belobo
Assistant Editor:
Emma Kalsany
Translator:
Augustin R. Kima

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