A Future Free of Lymphatic Filariasis: Reaching the vision by scaling up, scaling down, and reaching out

Seventh Meeting of the

Global Alliance to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis
REPORT FROM THE 7th GAELF MEETING, NOVEMBER 2012

7TH MEETING OF

GAELF

Global Alliance to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis

Washington - USA
18 - 19 November 2012

Report prepared by Dr Molly Brady on behalf of
the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis

For more information on the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis please visit www.filariasis.org
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- Miss Sara Holmes

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# Abbreviations and Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFR</td>
<td>African Region of WHO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMR</td>
<td>Americas Region of WHO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APOC</td>
<td>African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMGF</td>
<td>Bill &amp; Melinda Gates Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDC</td>
<td>(United States) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDD</td>
<td>Community drug distributor</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDTI</td>
<td>Community-directed treatment intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNTD</td>
<td>Centre for Neglected Tropical Diseases (Liverpool)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEC</td>
<td>Diethylcarbamazine (citrate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFID</td>
<td>Department for International Development, UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMR</td>
<td>Eastern Mediterranean Region of WHO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAELF</td>
<td>Global Alliance to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis</td>
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<tr>
<td>GNNTD</td>
<td>Global Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPELF</td>
<td>Global Programme to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis</td>
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<tr>
<td>GSK</td>
<td>GlaxoSmithKline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HKI</td>
<td>Helen Keller International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Immunochromatographic test</td>
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<tr>
<td>IU</td>
<td>Implementation unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LF</td>
<td>Lymphatic filariasis</td>
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<tr>
<td>LLIN</td>
<td>Long-lasting insecticide-treated net</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDA</td>
<td>Mass drug administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>MMDP</td>
<td>Morbidity management and disability prevention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M&amp;E</td>
<td>Monitoring and evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGDO</td>
<td>Non-governmental development organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>NTD</td>
<td>Neglected tropical diseases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAHO</td>
<td>Pan American Health Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>PCT</td>
<td>Preventive chemotherapy</td>
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<tr>
<td>PNG</td>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCG</td>
<td>Representative Contact Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>RPRG</td>
<td>Regional Programme Review Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAE</td>
<td>Serious adverse event</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEAR</td>
<td>South-East Asia Region of WHO</td>
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<tr>
<td>STAG-NTD</td>
<td>Strategic and Technical Advisory Group – Neglected Tropical Diseases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STH</td>
<td>Soil-transmitted helminthiases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>Transmission assessment survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>WPR</td>
<td>Western Pacific Region of WHO</td>
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Executive Summary

The 7th Meeting of the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis (GAELF) was held 18-19 November, 2012 in Washington, DC. The theme of the meeting, “A Future Free of Lymphatic Filariasis: Reaching the Vision by Scaling Up, Scaling Down and Reaching Out”, emphasized new strategies and partnerships necessary to reach the 2020 goal of elimination of lymphatic filariasis (LF) as a public-health problem. The meeting was held at the World Bank, back to back with a Uniting to Combat Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) forum, in order to capitalize on common themes, participants, and support (http://www.unitingtocombatntds.org).

Current status

The World Health Organization’s overall goal is universal health coverage with essential public health interventions, including access to preventive chemotherapy (PCT) for NTDs. The goal of integrated PCT is to eliminate LF, onchocerciasis, blinding trachoma and, in some cases, schistosomiasis as public-health problems and eliminate childhood morbidity related to soil-transmitted helminthiases (STH). Given that 1.4 billion people require mass drug administration (MDA), a type of PCT, for LF, the LF programme’s community-based MDA is often used as the platform for integrating PCT diseases. Successful scale up for LF MDA can also cover the majority of the 1.9 billion people needing PCT for at least one NTD.

The current status of the Global Programme to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis (GPELF) is that 73 countries are endemic, with 1.39 million people at risk, 120 million people infected, and 40 million people affected by LF-related morbidity. The goal of global elimination has two parts: i) to stop the spread of infection and interrupt transmission through MDA and ii) to reduce human suffering through managing morbidity and preventing disability (MMDP). The first part of the goal is realized through the sequential activities of mapping, MDA, post-MDA surveillance and verification. In 2011, 53 countries implemented MDA, with nearly 539 million people treated, and 12 countries are under post-MDA surveillance. The second part is achieved through analyzing the MMDP situation in country, developing a plan, and providing access to a minimum package of MMDP care. In contrast to the success at scaling up MDA, only 27 countries have reported MMDP activities.

Progress towards milestones in the GPELF Strategic Plan 2010-2020 has been impressive. Revised M&E guidelines, including information on implementing Transmission Assessment Surveys (TASs) and verifying absence of transmission have been published. A provisional strategy for interrupting transmission in loiasis co-endemic areas, where MDA with ivermectin cannot be implemented due to concerns of serious adverse reactions (SAEs), will be presented to the Strategic and Technical Advisory Group on NTDs (STAG-NTDs) for endorsement in April 2013. Revised MMDP programmatic guidance, including metrics for reporting on MMDP activities to WHO, will be finalized in 2013.

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Country case studies
A series of country case studies highlighted common themes necessary to achieve success and overcome challenges. Success in scaling up was bolstered by cultivating dedicated programme managers, maintaining government commitment at all levels, and building on existing delivery platforms. Presentations on success in scaling down showcased the importance of government support lasting beyond MDA, as well as providing ongoing technical assistance for post-MDA surveillance and dossier development for verification of the absence of transmission. Countries facing significant challenges were often those in post-conflict situations, with poor infrastructure and weak health care systems. Overcoming these challenges requires innovative thinking about delivery strategies, the creation of novel ways to motivate volunteers, and external financial and technical support. Finally, case studies on accelerating progress showed the importance of improving coverage in areas with ongoing MDA before scaling up, and the critical need to build the capacity of LF programme managers to plan, budget and monitor programmes, especially in large, decentralized countries.

Participants learned about pioneering efforts to manage morbidity and prevent disability, including Togo’s national lymphoedema programme, a community-based lymphoedema project in a highly-endemic area of India, and the African LF Morbidity Project. Providing care for LF-related disease was shown to increase acceptability and compliance with MDA. The group welcomed the results of a clinical trial which showed that doxycycline reversed or halted progression to later stages of lymphoedema more effectively than amoxicillin or placebo, in patients with and without active LF infection. The importance of linking MMDP with other diseases, reporting on MMDP activities to WHO, and collecting data on surgical complications and recurrence was discussed.

A session on linking LF programmes with other disease programmes explored the rationale and opportunities for coordinating with onchocerciasis, STH, trachoma, and malaria activities. Opportunities for synergy with onchocerciasis and trachoma activities include integrated mapping, joint training, combined treatment registers, simultaneous MDA where feasible, and joint M&E. STH activities greatly benefit from the LF programme; in 2010, WHO reported that 57% of the school-aged children treated for STH were given these medicines through national LF programmes. However, like MMDP activities in LF programmes, interventions related to water, sanitation and hygiene often lag behind PCT interventions in STH programmes. Both programmes need to bolster these supportive activities if the 2020 goal to eliminate LF is to be achieved. LF and malaria activities also complement each other: LF MDA helps to reduce anemia, provides community networks for bednet monitoring (particularly LLINs), and influences adults to use bednets to avoid LF-related disease, while LLINs help reduce LF transmission. An animated discussion followed the presentation of data from ongoing entomological monitoring in Nigeria which found no infective mosquitoes after bednet distribution in areas with LF MDA.

Moving forward
Various speakers highlighted challenges to achieving the 2020 goal, including: i) building the capacity of LF programme managers and NTD teams to plan, implement and monitor activities; ii) scaling up to 100% geographical coverage for MDA while coordinating with other PCT diseases and vector control
activities; iii) planning for TAS, including ensuring the availability and affordability of diagnostic tests; iv) developing effective post-MDA surveillance tools and methods; and v) scaling up MMDP activities to provide access to all patients.

To respond to these challenges, policy, advocacy, implementation and operational research should be approached using a network of partners, including Ministries of Health, WHO, GAELF, GPELF, academia, and non-governmental development organizations (NGDOs). Developing strategic partnerships based on understanding the motivations of each partner was seen as a key to success to collaboration with other disease programmes, private businesses, and media based organizations. Presenters also stressed the need to build capacity of programme managers, increase support for MMDP, use integration as an opportunity to scale up, and continue to galvanize government commitment to LF programmes.

The continuing importance of GAELF as one in a mix of NTD alliances was evident, with the GAELF 7 meeting providing an opportunity to recognise successes, reflect on ongoing challenges, and share information among circa 250 representatives from country programmes, donors, and the research community. The future of GAELF as a forum for discussion and advocacy will be improved by increasing country participation and engagement in the daily work of the GAELF. The group was challenged to continue GAELF’s evolution – already a great example of a ‘mass uprising of compassion’ through its treatment of millions of at-risk people - by maintaining focus on interrupting LF transmission while expanding its peripheral vision to include those with LF-related disease.
Opening Session – Are We on Track for 2020?

Welcome by the Chair of the GAELF

Dr Patrick Lammie welcomed participants to the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lymphatic Filaraisis (GAELF) meeting, following on from the successful Uniting to Combat NTD forum. He thanked Dr Don Bundy and his team at the World & Melinda Gates Foundation for hosting the meeting, the Bill (BMGF) team for arranging the meeting venue and logistics, as well as GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) for their support of GAELF. He also gave a special welcome to the newest GAELF partner – diethylcarbamazine (DEC) – which will donate starting in 2013.

He asked the group to remember two colleagues, Dr Vely Jean Francois the programme manager for LF and malaria in Haiti and Dr Likezo Mubila the WHO Africa Region focal point for GAELF meeting in South Africa. Dr Jean Francois’ health was a source of inspiration. During a period of civil strife, he was kidnapped and held to stay in Haiti and continue his public health work. Sadly, he died before seeing the LF programme reach national coverage in 2012. Dr Likezo Mubila, was ‘our conscience’, always reminding the group of the countries and communities left behind. Dr Lammie expressed hope that when GAELF members debate ways to reach our targets in all communities, we hear her voice reminding us of that obligation.

He closed by noting while we can celebrate successes, we need to be mindful about finding new strategies and partnerships to reach the ambitious 2020 objective of elimination of LF.

Welcome by the Minister of Health, Tanzania

Dr Hussein Mwinyi, Honorable Minister of Health of Tanzania, remarked that it was good to be back among old friends, having been involved in the early days of GAELF. Dr Mwinyi was first struck by the suffering of elephantiasis patients when he was a member of parliament from a highly-endemic district. That experience motivated the Ministry to start the Tanzanian LF programme as a way to signal hope for the neglected populations in endemic communities.
He expressed delight at the progress GAELF has made in a relatively short time, including the number of people treated and the number of countries with active programmes. The clear goal of elimination – with the countries at the core – has resulted in tremendous achievements, although it is essential to upscale faster, especially in parts of sub-Saharan Africa and Indonesia, and monitor progress closely.

He noted many of the outstanding needs of the GAELF, such as improved tools for ongoing post-MDA surveillance, stronger morbidity programmes, strategies for MDA in urban areas, and operational research to guide programme needs. He highlighted how the Tanzanian President established a fund to support LF patients, but there is still a major backlog of hydrocele surgeries needed. He challenged the group to report on progress of morbidity burden assessment and activities at the next GAELF meeting.

Dr Mwinyi emphasized that partnership and coordination are key components of the effectiveness of GAELF, encouraging the group to re-examine what the GAELF can learn and share with other NTD alliances and to use GAELF’s momentum to meet NTD goals.

Preventive Chemotherapy and WHO’s strategic plan for NTDs

Dr Dirk Engels, Coordinator of Preventive Chemotherapy and Transmission Control at WHO’s Department of Control of Neglected Tropical Diseases in Geneva, reported on how WHO is focusing on universal health coverage with essential public health interventions, including access to preventive chemotherapy (PCT) for NTDs. The medicines used in PCT for LF, onchocerciasis, soil-transmitted helminthiases (STH), schistosomiasis and trachoma are all safe, single dose medicines that can be used without prior individual diagnosis. The rationale for expanding integrated PCT is that the same individuals in poor environments are affected by multiple diseases and programmes have an ethical responsibility to treat all diseases. Integrating and coordinating PCT interventions can result in increased cost-effectiveness, feasibility, visibility, acceptability, and can reduce the risk of drug resistance. Given that 1.4 billion people require PCT for LF and that LF drug distribution is community based, LF is often used as the platform for integrating PCT diseases. Other strategic components overlap among the disease programmes, such as morbidity management (LF, schistosomiasis, trachoma), vector control (LF, onchocerciasis, schistosomiasis) and water and sanitation (schistosomiasis, STH, trachoma).

He noted that the goal of integrated PCT is to eliminate LF, onchocerciasis, blinding trachoma and in some cases schistosomiasis as public health problems and eliminate childhood morbidity related to soil-transmitted helminthiases by 2020. This will be achieved by scaling up PCT for all diseases to full
national scale as quickly as possible, and enhancing these interventions through integrated planning, implementation and management. Steps for rolling out integrated PCT include: i) institutionalizing an NTD task force, ii) developing a national plan of action through a situation analysis, action planning and mapping, and identifying funding gaps, and iii) holding a stakeholders meeting to mobilize resources and coordinate partners.

Currently, 1.9 billion people in 124 countries require PCT for at least one of the diseases, with 710 million treated in 2010. The WHO South-East Asia Region (SEAR) has 53% of the global NTD burden and the African Region (AFR) has 31%. Specifically for LF, 1.4 billion people in 73 countries require MDA, with 539 million treated in 2010-2011. SEAR has 63% of the global burden of LF, while AFR has 31%. Thus successful scale up for LF MDA can also cover the majority of the global burden of PCT (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Overlap between populations requiring PCT for all diseases and populations requiring MDA for LF

However, Dr Engels cautioned that there is still a need to sustain the impact of LF MDA through non-LF PCT once the LF programme scales down, particularly for STH and onchocerciasis. While there often will be a shift to school-based PCT after LF MDA ends in some areas thus some programmes will still need community-based interventions.

**LF Strategic Plan**

Dr Kazuyo Ichimori, LF focal point at WHO Geneva, presented the current status of the Global Programme to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis (GPELF) as 73 countries1 endemic for LF, 1.39 billion people at risk, 120 million infected, and 40 million people affected by morbidity. The goal of global

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1 When South Sudan became independent in 2010, the number of endemic countries rose from 72 to 73.
elimination has two parts: i) to stop the spread of infection and interrupt transmission through MDA and ii) to reduce human suffering through managing morbidity and preventing disability (MMDP). In 2011, 53 countries implemented MDA, with 538.6 million people treated in 2010-2011, and 12 countries under post-MDA surveillance. However, only 27 countries reported MMDP activities to WHO. Baseline sentinel site data from 37 countries showed an average microfilaraemia prevalence of 12.6%, which dropped to 2.7% according to mid-term sentinel site data from 36 countries.

Dr Ichimori then summarized the GPELF Strategic Plan 2010-2020 [1], which was developed following discussions at the last GAELF meeting in Korea [2]. The vision of the strategic plan is a world without the risk of LF through global elimination of LF as a public-health problem. The objective for the MDA component is to reduce infection prevalence below target thresholds in all endemic areas, with targeted prevalence levels defined for various species/vector complexes. This is achieved through stepwise activities of mapping, MDA, post-MDA surveillance, and verification (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Programmatic steps: MDA component

In order to achieve the MDA goal, the strategic plan included four milestones for 2011-2013: i) revised monitoring and evaluation (M&E) guidance, ii) criteria for verifying absence of transmission, iii) provisional strategy for interrupting transmission in loiasis-endemic areas, and iv) final strategy for interrupting transmission in loiasis-endemic areas. The M&E manual, which includes guidance on verifying the absence of transmission, has been published [3]. The provisional strategy for loiasis-endemic areas has been recommended to the Strategic and Technical Advisory Group for NTDs (STAG-NTDs) for endorsement in April 2013 [4]. The MDA target is that by 2020 70% of countries will be verified free of LF and the other 30% will be under post-MDA surveillance. As of 2011, 19 countries had not started MDA, 41 were implementing MDA, 12
were under post-MDA surveillance, and nine had been verified free of LF.

The target for the MMDP component is no new clinical cases, measured by i) reduction in the number of acute attacks, ii) the number of hydrocele patients cured, and iii) the MMDP geographical coverage in LF-endemic countries. This is achieved through analyzing the MMDP situation in country, developing a plan, and providing a minimum package of MMDP care (Figure 3).

Figure 3 Programmatic steps: MMDP component

In order to achieve the MMDP goal, the strategic plan included two milestones for 2011-2013: i) revised guidelines and training modules for MMDP, and ii) metrics developed for annual reporting on MMDP activities to WHO. A position statement has been published [5] and the MMDP manual for programme managers, which includes indicators and forms for reporting to WHO, is currently in draft. The MMDP target is that by 2020 100% of endemic countries will have achieved full geographical coverage and access to basic MMDP care.

Critical challenges include: increasing LF MDA coverage to 100% while coordinating with other PCT diseases and vector control; planning for TAS; ensuring availability and affordability of diagnostic tests; developing effective post-MDA surveillance tools; defining the role of the Regional Programme Review Groups (RPRGs) and the STAG-NTD in the verification process; scaling up MMDP activities; and collecting evidence on best practices of linking MMDP activities with health services. These challenges can be best met by using a network of partners and integrated approaches (Figure 4) to work on policy, advocacy, implementation, and operational research.
Regional Progress
Dr Ricardo Thompson, Senior Researcher at the National Institute of Health in Mozambique, presented the status of the Programme to Eliminate LF in each of the WHO Regions: AFR, Americas Region (AMR), Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR), SEAR, and the Western Pacific Region (WPR). Despite success in scaling up MDA, regions face challenges as they reach the peak of delivering required treatments, while simultaneously needing to build capacity to implement TAS to evaluate success. He presented regional statistics on the number of countries and people requiring MDA, the number treated, and country status (Table 1 and Figure 5).

Table 1 Number of countries and people requiring MDA and number treated, by WHO Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>No. of countries requiring LF MDA</th>
<th>Total population (m) requiring MDA</th>
<th>No. people (m) treated in 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFR</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMR</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMR</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22§</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEAR</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>879</td>
<td>414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WPR</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>1,393</td>
<td>557.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
African Region
The African Region has achieved remarkable progress in scaling up effective MDA since 2000, with 76% coverage of total population in areas with MDA in 2011. However, by 2015 both the number of countries conducting MDA and the number treated must be doubled. In particular, the countries which have not finished mapping or started MDA, mostly in Central Africa, must start, especially now that guidelines for MDA in loiasis-endemic areas are available. The region faces logistical and political challenges which have delayed completion of mapping and initiation of MDA. Heavy burden countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria and Ethiopia need specific plans to aid in scaling up, including consideration of alternatives to annual MDA to accelerate the progress of interruption of transmission. The regional partnership is being strengthened to support country implementation.

Americas Region
The high burden of LF in Haiti, which constitutes 80% of the AMR burden, presents a special situation, especially after the earthquake in 2010 which destroyed much of the government’s infrastructure. However, LF MDA in 2012 achieved full national coverage for the first time helped, in part, by the strong regional partnership that includes Ministries of Health and Education, IMA World Health, University of Notre Dame, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Inter-American Development Bank, and the Global Network for NTDs (GNNTD). In addition, a bi-national project to eliminate malaria in Haiti and the Dominican Republic will also have positive effects for the LF programme.
Eastern Mediterranean Region
The EMR showed a peak in treatments in 2004, with numbers of people treated drastically falling off from 2005 onwards, since two of the LF-endemic countries are moving towards elimination and scaling down treatments, while the fragile infrastructure in Sudan and South Sudan has made it difficult to upscale MDA. Yemen and Egypt now need to procure immunochromatographic tests (ICTs) to carry out TAS since all implementation units (IUs) have implemented at least eight rounds of MDA and achieved <1% microfilaraemia rates in sentinel and spot-check sites. In addition, the region needs to strengthen morbidity management.

South-East Asia Region
All the LF-endemic countries in SEAR are implementing MDA, except Sri Lanka and Maldives which are under post-MDA surveillance. While the high-burden countries of Bangladesh and India have made significant progress in implementing MDA, they are facing difficulties procuring ICTs for implementing TAS. Political instability in Timor Leste led to the interruption of MDA, which has not restarted. The region also must strengthen the commitment of implementation partners in the region and scale up MMDP activities.

Western Pacific Region
In the WPR, three countries have not started MDA, nine have ongoing MDA and ten are under post-MDA surveillance. Challenges include availability and affordability of ICTs, reaching prevalence goals in areas with Aedes vectors where repeated MDA rounds have not lowered levels of microfilaraemia and prevalence adequately, and strengthening MMDP activities. Scaling up MDA in Papua New Guinea (PNG) continues to be a major challenge. Finally, there is a lack of country-level capacity to prepare dossiers for verification, which will also become a challenge in other regions as countries progress towards elimination.

Discussion
In order to truly analyze regional progress, participants suggested that presenters provide details of the epidemiological situations and implementation progress at an IU level. In addition, the most appropriate way to provide support to countries – given the multiple demands on WHO and RPRG members - was debated, with a suggestion to allow decisions by a country-level review group under the auspices of the RPRG for larger countries. Given the need to build country and regional capacity to analyze country situations and review programme progress, participants were asked to give specific ideas on short- and medium-term capacity strengthening needs to Professor David Molyneux, who is chair of the WHO NTD/STAG working group on capacity building. Finally, an update on the new ICT platform was provided: it is currently undergoing field evaluation, and the effect of the new test format on TAS guidance will be reviewed after the results are compiled. A small group of partners is in discussion with Alere, the company that produces the ICTs who have requested accurate demand forecasts from country programmes in order to ensure supplies are adequate and timely.
Highlighting Success

Highlighting success in scaling up
Moderator: Andy Wright

Haiti: Triumph over adversity
Dr Abdel Direny, Senior Program Manager and NTD Advisor at IMA World Health in Haiti, described the LF situation in Haiti, where 88% of communes have Bancroftian filariasis, transmitted by Culex mosquitoes. MDA began in 2000 in the Leogane commune and scaled up to 24 communes by 2005, when it was stopped due to lack of funding. Since 2008, with help from GSK, IMA World Health/USAID, University of Notre Dame, CDC, and Partners in Health, the programme has gradually scaled up, reaching full coverage of the 140 endemic communes in 2012. Coverage in the 2011-2012 round of MDA averaged 90% of total population, with a range between 80-116% (using population numbers based on 2003 census data without accounting for migration). Drugs are administered at distribution posts and schools, with three community drug distributors per post. Social mobilization is accomplished through radio spots, announcements from trucks, and community leader announcements. The community drug distribution networks are also used to distribute shoes, water filters, and essential medicines.

Dr Direny recounted the many challenges of the Haiti programme, including the 2010 earthquake, the cholera outbreaks, and political instability. The programme needs to scale up morbidity management, latrine construction, hygiene activities, and determine how to continue with STH MDA after LF MDA is stopped. He emphasized that these challenges can only be addressed through collaboration; integration of LF and STH programmes; and participation of community leaders, health promoters and community drug distributors in population sensitization to ensure sustained interest in participating in MDA. The success of the programme overcoming unavoidable and unpredictable adverse situations was feasible due to the commitment of government and partners, the ability to immediately assess and plan programme activities after the earthquake, the contributions from volunteers, and the consistent use of monitoring and evaluation to measure impact.

Malawi: An inspirational personal story
Mr Square Mkwanda, LF Programme Manager, discussed the history of the LF programme in Malawi, where 26 of 28 districts are endemic, with 14.1 million people at risk. While the country was mapped in 2003, MDA did not start until 2008, after the Minister of Health was influenced by hearing about other countries’ progress at the 2008 GAELF meeting in Tanzania. Even though there was no LF-specific budget, Mr Mkwanda was tasked with rolling out LF MDA in eight districts, which he achieved through integration with other health activities, such as distribution of bednets. In order to show political will and convince the public the drugs were safe, drugs were distributed in parliament and the state house. After achieving 80% coverage, the programme scaled up in 2009 to total geographical coverage, and was able to use the results of 2008 and 2009 MDA to secure support from the Centre for Neglected
Tropical Diseases (CNTD), Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine for 2010 onwards. He noted that challenges to eliminate remain, including cross-border issues, morbidity management, and competing government priorities. Although morbidity management is ongoing, with 3,201 hydrocelectomies and 2,008 lymphoedema patients treated over the past four years, there are gaps in supervising self-care groups and building capacity of health workers in case management.

India: Impact of government commitment
Dr V Kumaraswami, Consultant, presented the status of LF in India, which accounts for 40% of the global burden with 600 million people at risk and 509 million targeted for MDA in 20 endemic states. MDA for LF was piloted in the 1950s, with a 2002 national health policy calling for elimination by 2015. Single-dose DEC MDA covered all endemic areas by 2004 and DEC+albendazole MDA covered all areas by 2006; however, issues of social mobilization and compliance still exist. Sentinel sites show a positive impact of MDA – with an average 1.2% mf rate in 2004, compared to an average of 0.35% in 2011.

In 2011, the programme was supported by US$10 million for MDA and morbidity activities from the central government, state budget contributions, and a donation of 300 million albendazole tablets by GSK. Other partners include medical colleges to implement independent coverage assessments, the Indian Council of Medical Research to assess MDA coverage and implement operational research, the national Centre for Disease Control to train, and non-governmental development organizations (NGDOs) to implement and evaluate morbidity activities.

He noted some of the complexities of the Indian programme, including drug needs (1 billion DEC tablets and 500 million albendazole tablets a year), quality-assured drug procurement, storage and distribution of drugs, training of 2.5 million peripheral health workers, and treatment of 250 people per day per worker during MDA. Current critical issues include scaling up morbidity training, hydrocele surgery, and home-based lymphoedema care, as well as strategies and funding for scaling down, as 170 IUs are ready for TAS there is a need to procure 150,000 ICTs in 2013 when TAS activities are conducted.
Liberia: Capitalizing on existing platforms

Dr Karsor Kollie, Programme Manager, described Liberia’s LF programme, which covers the 13 endemic counties and an at-risk population of 3.4 million, in a country that is post-conflict, with a weak health system. The LF programme built on the success of the onchocerciasis programme, which uses community drug distributors (CDDs) for MDA and has a mechanism in place to monitor the impact of MDA. The programme targeted 1.6 million people in the 13 endemic counties in 2012, with an aim of 100% coverage in the next two years. The most significant challenges have been the turnover of CDDs due to poor motivation and logistical issues, such as the need for motorbikes to reach isolated areas. Integration with the malaria programme has been helpful to determine the impact of vector control on MDA and determine the existence of urban LF transmission. Lessons learned included: integration can enhance coordination and outcomes, use of existing structures increases the ability to scale up, and collaboration with malaria programmes on integrated vector management might speed up LF elimination.

Support for the programme is provided by CNTD, Sightsavers, WHO and the African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control (APOC). In addition, LF is now included in the 10-year national health policy and essential package of health services, so government funding will hopefully increase. Continued government advocacy will be important, especially as the President of Liberia is now co-chairman of the United Nations committee shaping the post-Millennium Development Goals priorities.
Highlighting success in scaling down

Moderator: Dr Adrian Hopkins

**Togo: A first in Africa**

Dr Monique Dorkenoo, LF Coordinator, discussed how Togo – the only country in Africa that has been able to stop MDA – was able to scale down. Togo had 1.3 million people at risk of LF in seven districts. MDA started in one district in 2000, with full geographic scale achieved in 2003 and continued for at least six years in all districts until 2009. Every district had a sentinel site with regular evaluation of microfilaraemia levels. In 2008, all districts were assessed for stopping MDA using the 2005 WHO guidelines. MDA was stopped in five of seven districts after the 2008 MDA and in two districts after the 2009 MDA. She noted that the critical challenge is how to monitor for, and avoid, resurgence. A first round of post-MDA surveillance using TAS was implemented in Kozah district in December 2009 as part of the BMGF-supported global operational research project and a second round will be implemented in 2012. The programme aims to maintain advocacy to ensure funding for post-MDA ongoing surveillance, currently focused in border areas. It also is working to increase bednet coverage and usage to ensure interruption of transmission.

**Ghana: Gradually scaling up and down**

Dr Nana-Kwadwo Biritwum, NTD Programme Manager, described how LF activities in Ghana are administered in the context of the NTD programme, as every district in Ghana is endemic for at least three NTDs. The population at risk of LF in Ghana is 12 million, in 74 of 170 districts. From 2001-2006, Ghana scaled up MDA from five districts to all 74 endemic districts. Coverage surveys were completed in three to ten districts each year. As of 2010, four districts have stopped MDA. He noted that the three greatest challenges were i) urban MDA and community fatigue in rural areas, ii) tools for post-MDA and non-endemic district surveillance, and iii) limited human and financial resources. In order to overcome these challenges, the programme is working to develop alternative social mobilization and distribution strategies for urban MDAs, implementing operational research with CDC on surveillance, and building technical capacity.

**Vietnam: Planning for dossier development**

Dr Do Trung Dung, LF Programme Manager, described LF in Vietnam, where both Bancroftian and Brugian filariasis are present. One and a half million people are at risk in 12 districts, which were combined into six IUs for MDA implementation. From 2003-2008, all six IUs underwent five rounds of MDA. In 2009, all districts were assessed for stopping MDA using the 2005 WHO guidelines. Post-MDA TAS surveys will be implemented in 2013 and in 2015, grouping districts into four evaluation units. He noted that a major challenge is to conduct TAS in schools in rural and minority areas due to difficulties obtaining consent for blood collection. The programme aims to involve teachers and parents with...
survey teams when collecting blood in these areas. In addition, the programme will need external financial and technical support, as it has limited government funding and limited ability to collect data and technically write the verification dossier.

**Philippines: Ensuring government support at all levels**

Dr Leda Hernandez, Division Chief, explained that 28-30 million people are at risk of LF in the Philippines in 44 endemic provinces. MDA has been ongoing since 2001 in selected areas, with a peak of 37 IUs conducting MDA in 2007 and 2009. As of 2011, 12 provinces have stopped MDA, with TAS scheduled for eight more in 2012. Three IUs have finished post-MDA surveillance, and six others have ongoing surveillance. She noted that the key drivers of this success have been a government budget (to purchase DEC), partnerships to fill gaps and address morbidity, presence of committed health workers, and external technical assistance. The programme is addressing the challenge of ownership and commitment of local government units by offering performance-based incentives for IUs which achieve elimination goals. It also is holding regular stakeholder meetings to increase coordination of, and feedback to, partners, especially those from other sectors; training health workers on new guidelines; and conducting rapid assessment surveys, operational research, and post-MDA surveillance in order to strengthen M&E. Finally, the programme is lobbying for the sustainability of the annual LF budget until the elimination goal is reached – not just until MDA is stopped.

**Discussion**

Four main issues were highlighted during discussion following these presentations. First, the importance of collecting data on baseline prevalence was stressed, as it is a factor in determining how many rounds of MDA are necessary. Second, the challenges of cross-border collaboration and synchronizing MDA cycles were brought up, with a suggestion to intensify surveillance in cross-border areas. Third, the suggestion of twice-yearly treatment was put forward to speed interruption of transmission, especially in places with twice-yearly onchocerciasis treatment. Finally, it was suggested that it would be helpful if countries found a way to acknowledge donors and partners to encourage sustained donations in the prevailing financial climate.
Meeting Programme Challenges

Reaching the unreached
Moderator: Professor Moses Bockarie

Sierra Leone: How did Sierra Leone do it?
Mr Mustapha Sonnie, NTD Programme Manager at Helen Keller International (HKI), described the LF situation in Sierra Leone, where LF is co-endemic with onchocerciasis and transmitted by *Anopheles* vectors. Despite prior conflict, a poor health system, and limited technical capacity, the programme is on track to eliminate LF transmission by 2015. Building on the well-established community-directed onchocerciasis MDA system, the LF MDA was scaled up to national coverage in the three years from 2007 to 2010. Training and advocacy follow a cascade from national supervisors to district health management teams to primary health unit staff to community drug distributors, with targeted messages for each. Social mobilization activities include community meetings, interactive programmes in urban areas, and radio programmes.

Mr Sonnie noted that the programme faces challenges of competing health priorities such as cholera, high infant and maternal mortality and malaria; poor road infrastructure; and motivation of community volunteers. Community leaders are asked to find ways to motivate volunteers, such as exemption from communal work, helping CDDs with farming activities during the harvest season, and recognition by the community. The national NTD programme and partners have over the years provided motivation to volunteers such as free t-shirts and certificates. In addition, traditional beliefs that equate elephantiasis with witchcraft mean that the programme has to reach out to traditional healers to ensure their buy-in to the MDA. Partners include USAID, DFID, HKI, Sightsavers, and CNTD.
Liberia: Why is Liberia so optimistic?
Ms Marnijina G. Moore (Marjin), LF Focal Point, described Liberia’s plan to scale up to 100% geographic coverage of LF MDA in the next two years. The programme's strategy relies on an integrated programme with onchocerciasis, STH, schistosomiasis, Guinea worm and Buruli ulcer, led by a single director and a motivated young team. MDA for LF and STH are being added to the onchocerciasis community-directed treatment intervention (CDTI) platform, which covers the entire country. Success is helped by the relatively small size of the country of 3.4 million people, and a decentralized health system that enables counties to plan and implement their own NTD interventions. Commitment from the government of Liberia and donors such as APOC, DFID, CNTD and Sightsavers allowed the programme to add more trained health workers and CDDs after LF was added to the CDTI platform. She remarked that even though people might not understand the details of the NTD strategy, there is a demand for ivermectin from communities which made it easy to add albendazole to the MDA. Challenges of infrastructure, motivation of volunteers, vertical programmes, a limited government budget, poor inter-sectoral collaboration, and lack of a mechanism for morbidity management were noted.

Papua New Guinea: Why is PNG struggling?
Dr Leo Makita, Principal Advisor for Malaria and Vector Borne Diseases, discussed the LF situation in PNG, where LF is endemic in most districts and transmitted by the Anopheles vector. Seventy-five percent of the population lives in rural areas. He noted that PNG’s challenge to find enough resources to deliver health services to all areas remains unmet. While the LF programme achieved success at scaling up MDA in 2004 by integrating with malaria programme bednet distribution, in the following years there were insufficient resources to implement LF MDA alone.

Using the health system to reach those at risk has produced limited results, due to areas that have no access to any health services (where health posts might be closed due to tribal fights), a decentralized system where civil servants in each district have to be convinced to implement MDA, the relatively high cost of MDA, the length of time needed to complete an MDA using health staff, and unsatisfactory reporting. In addition, finding health staff to supervise volunteer distributors, drug logistics, and developing social mobilization strategies for many unique communities has proven difficult. Other health programmes, such as malaria, have been successful using private partners to implement health activities, such as Rotary’s attainment of 95% national coverage of bednets in a short time frame.

Dr Makita summarized PNG’s plan to move forward by grouping villages into manageable populations for MDA, appointing and training more volunteers, having MDA on an appointed day in a district, recruiting extra national staff, and ensuring availability of drugs and adequate information. The new PNG Minister of Health has renewed the government commitment after attending a NTD meeting in Australia, and partners such as WHO, James Cook University, the Institute of Medical Research, and the private sector are becoming more involved.
Discussion
Participants offered suggestions for the PNG programme, including a cost comparison of using community volunteers versus hiring a third party to implement, piggybacking on the Expanded Programme on Immunization activities, examining cross-border solutions with Indonesia, and exploring private sector infrastructure networks such as those distributing cell phones, liquor, etc.
How can we accelerate the process?

Moderator: Dr Frank Richards

Indonesia: Moving from partial to full coverage

Dr Rita Kusriastuti, Director of Vector Borne Disease Control, summarized the LF situation in Indonesia, where 368 of 497 districts are endemic, with 125 million people at risk of Bancroftian and/or Brugian filariasis. The programme defines the district as the IU, but many districts are only able to support MDA in some sub-districts each year. In 2011, 98 districts conducted MDA, with 61 covering the entire district and 37 covering only some sub-districts. In addition, some districts have conducted more than five MDA rounds, but are still endemic. These issues have led to problems in fully implementing the elimination strategy, which called for MDA implementation in 80 districts per year from 2012-2018. To accelerate progress the programme needs to improve programme management by strengthening case finding, reporting and recording; involve the community in the population registration; increase monitoring of ingestion of the drugs; and improve the referral system for SAEs. In addition, human resource capabilities need to be improved through training in planning and surveillance, managerial skills, communication skills, and monitoring and evaluation.

Dr Kusriastuti noted that expansion of the national LF committee to cover NTDs, advocacy to both high-level leaders and local government leaders to support operational costs, integration with the school health programme for STH, partnerships with other sectors, involvement of local NGDOs, and assistance from international partners such as WHO, USAID, AusAID, RTI, Rotary, World Vision, and the Global Network for NTDs (GNNTD) is all critical to achieve the elimination goal. Although $12 million is already committed by donors and the government, the Indonesia programme has a funding gap of $10 million in 2013.
Nigeria: Improving integration to assure funding

Mr Chukwu Okoronkwo, NTD Programme Officer, explained the LF situation in Nigeria, where over 106 million people are at risk in 541 local government units (LGAs) of the 705 that have been mapped. Only 175 LGAs (32%) implemented MDA in 2011, covering an at-risk population of 33 million, but with less than half of the LGAs achieving the coverage goal of 80% of eligible population treated. The programme started scaling up MDA in 2009 in areas co-endemic with onchocerciasis, with 4.7 million treated in 2009, 10 million treated in 2010 and 22 million treated in 2011. He noted that the programme intends to complete mapping by March 2013 with USAID and DFID support, conduct baseline surveys in sentinel sites, provide adequate management and technical training to improve planning and coordination skills of State Coordinators, and conduct comprehensive census updates. However, plans to accelerate progress have been hampered by ineffective coverage of MDA in urban areas, which has brought overall coverage rates down. Financial issues of inadequate funding, late release of approved funds by partners, and dependency on assisting NGDOs can be solved by advocacy and sensitization at the highest levels, improving the integrated NTD platform implementation to share resources, and mobilizing additional partners. The programme also needs to address the issue of incentives for CDDs and health workers, as funds are insufficient. Policymakers’ desire to extend MDA to areas that are not yet mapped or are non-endemic have been problematic, so the programme aims to target more sensitization and advocacy activities to policymakers at all levels.

Tanzania: Phasing in integrated MDA

Dr Upendo Mwingira, National NTD Coordinator, discussed the integrated NTD programme on mainland Tanzania, which includes five PCT NTDs and ten case-management NTDs, targeting 44 million people. The programme follows a NTD master strategic plan, implemented by NTD coordination units at national, regional and district levels. It uses the LF MDA as the platform, training health workers, school teachers and CDDs, and is scaling up MDA through a phased approach of adding one region each year. In 2011, 11.3 million people were treated for NTDs in 76 implementation units (50% geographic coverage), with the goal to reach full geographic coverage by 2014. She noted that the programme needs a NTD database system that can send data collected at health center level directly to national level and can be integrated into the health management information system in order to overcome challenges of delays in data collection and reporting. The programme will encourage increased programme monitoring, using partner support to maintain at least one sentinel site in each region and will increase advocacy and support for morbidity management at all levels. Other technical issues include the need for clear tools for all NTDs, more training, and support for a drug logistician. In terms of administrative issues, Dr Mwingira remarked that an integrated country strategic plan and joint planning meetings are necessary when dealing with multiple partners and donors, including CNTD, the Schistosomiasis Control Initiative, RTI, IMA World Health, Sightsavers, and HKI. Local advocacy is necessary to ensure local government contribution and engage partners from other sectors. The programme sees opportunities in a strong health system, existing partnerships, links to interventions such as Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), indoor residual spraying for malaria, and the global momentum resulting from the London Declaration.
Discussion
Participants remarked on the tension between scaling up and ensuring appropriate treatment coverage in current MDA areas, advising that it is important to meet treatment coverage in current areas first before expanding geographic coverage. Suggestions on improving advocacy and funding included the use of ministers/members of parliament and involving African and Asian Development Banks. Decentralized systems that have power at district level can help accelerate progress as services are delivered nearer the community, freeing the central level to focus on advocacy and coordination. The issue of finding hot spots, e.g., clusters of residual transmission, in large districts was also raised.
Strategies for Achieving Disability Prevention and Morbidity Management

Moderator: Ann Varghese

Togo national programme for lymphoedema management

Dr Monique Dorkenoo, LF Coordinator, summarized the three elements of the national lymphoedema management programme: detection and referral of cases, treatment and management of cases, and follow up and evaluation. In every village, village chiefs and community leaders are asked to inform the communities that anyone with a large swollen leg should go to a clinic and this is enforced through TV and radio announcements, posters and public criers.

A national training-of-trainers model trains nurses throughout the country and community health workers in seven endemic districts. The national programme does periodic supervision of nurses and patient visits.

She described how the programme started in June 2007 in the seven endemic districts and was scaled up within two years to the entire country. Even though LF MDA ended in 2009, the number of patients continues to increase, with over 1,200 patients currently under treatment, and 32% of patients living in non-endemic districts where LF MDA was not needed. Operational research funds to determine the feasibility of a countrywide morbidity control program included start-up funding for training, IEC material, washing kits and supervision. The well-functioning and decentralized health system is a good platform for the programme, with the aim to continue providing services even after the LF elimination target of 2015. The Ministry of Health continues to maintain the LF programme coordination staff posts, even though MDA has stopped, and provides support for supervision activities. However, Dr Dorkenoo noted challenges with a high turnover of trained staff and long-term compliance of patients, necessitating refresher training and continuing behavior change communication activities.
Community-based support for lymphoedema patients
Mr Jonathan Rout, Programme Officer from Churches Auxiliary for Social Action in India, described their project to provide community-based support for lymphoedema patients in the highly-endemic state of Orissa, where 3.5 to 6.3 million people are estimated to be infected with LF. The multi-faceted approach includes health education to entire communities, patient registration, extensive training, patient follow up, and impact assessment. In a census of 215,515 households, 27,671 people with hand swelling, breast swelling, hydrocele or lymphoedema were found. At least one LF task force volunteer per village was trained and certified in lymphoedema management and basic first aid and, in turn, distributed posters and leaflets door-to-door. They continue to follow closely 20 patients each. The project also supports wall paintings and street plays to raise awareness of MDA and foot-care management, and implements classroom and field training in lymphoedema management for school children, family members, village volunteers, and paramedics. Patients are provided with soap, antifungal cream, towels, shoes, and a 365-day booklet to track exercises and routine hygiene. An impact study found that quality of life improved significantly among patients, with daily washing associated with lower disability scores. The frequency of acute attacks was the strongest predictor of disability. In addition, a CDC study found that MDA coverage in districts with the lymphoedema management programme (90.2%) was better than in districts with MDA only (52-59%) or a community-based pre-MDA education programme only (75%) [6].

New therapeutic options for lymphoedema
Dr Achim Hoerauf, Chair of the Department of Medical Microbiology at the University of Bonn, presented the results of recent research that aimed to determine whether doxycycline improves filarial lymphoedema in filarial antigen-positive patients (e.g., those with ongoing infection) as well as antigen-negative patients [7]. In addition, it compared the effect of doxycycline, an antibiotic which targets Wolbachia as well as exogenous bacteria, to amoxicillin, an antibiotic which targets exogenous bacteria only. The study had three treatment arms: i) doxycycline 200mg/day for 6 weeks and hygiene management, ii) amoxicillin 1000mg/day for 6 weeks and hygiene management, and iii) placebo drug and hygiene management. Approximately 40 patients were in each arm, the majority of whom were in stages 1-3. Dr Hoerauf presented results that doxycycline was beneficial in reverting or halting progression of early stage lymphoedema, regardless of whether patients had active infection. The results suggest that doxycycline might have an anti-inflammatory effect that makes it superior to other antibiotics. Of those patients treated with doxycycline, 37% showed improvement in stage, compared to 3.2% of those treated with amoxicillin and 5.6% of those treated with placebo. A lack of progress to more severe stages was shown in 95% of those treated with doxycycline, 71% with amoxicillin, and 44% with placebo. There is a need to extend this research to patients with stages 4 and higher, as well as to replicate it in other settings. The study recommended that a 6-week course of doxycycline be given to lymphoedema patients once every two years as part of morbidity management.

African LF Morbidity Project
Dr Sunny Mante, Surgical Coordinator of the African LF Morbidity Project, explained its goal to build capacity for filarial hydrocele surgery, reconstructive plastic surgery for genital lymphoedema, and
hygiene therapy for lymphoedema. A 2006 evaluation of the BMGF-supported pilot project to train hydrocele surgeons reached 399 of the 1,771 patients who had received hydrocelectomies and found that 92% were “very satisfied” with the surgery. Many patients were lost to follow up because they had gone back to work or were away for seasonal agriculture.

The project was scaled up in 10 West African countries plus Tanzania, and Malawi through funding from Health and Development International and International Volunteers in Urology, training 469 people in 12 countries in hydrocele surgery and operating on 3,975 patients during training. A 2007 revised surgical manual details the technique used, which includes total removal of the sac and no drains [8]. Since 2011, training on hernia surgery has been explicitly included in these trainings, as it is difficult to differentiate between hydrocele and hernia patients pre-operatively and many hernia patients present for surgery when free hydrocele surgery is offered.

Dr Mante noted that currently four workshops are planned (two each in Ghana and Sierra Leone) through support from International Volunteers in Urology and Johnson & Johnson, although the project would like to extend to East Africa and Asia. Because 25-40% of adult males have hydrocele in highly LF-endemic areas, there is a need to scale up provision of surgeries, provide support to hernia patients, report and evaluate surgeries ongoing in all countries, and ensure hydrocele surgery techniques are included in routine medicine training in endemic countries. Capacity building of plastic surgeons on reconstructive surgery for genital lymphoedema is also needed. Finally, while two articles on hydrocele surgery were recently published [9], [10], there is a need for more advocacy and publishing of results.

Discussion
Integration of these activities with other diseases was the major topic of discussion. The African LF Morbidity Project is in discussion to have joint workshops for hydrocele, genital lymphoedema, and urogenital fistula, although it was noted that it might be difficult to combine trainings of district surgeons responsible for hydrocele with gynecologists who are responsible for urogenital fistula. Treating podoconiasis patients in conjunction with lymphoedema patients was seen as useful, given that management is similar. In addition, the importance of having countries report on these activities to WHO and collecting data from the hospital system on number of operations, complication rate, and recurrence was raised.
Linking the Programmes

New partnerships with onchocerciasis

Dr Adrian Hopkins, Director of the Mectizan® Donation Program, presented a rationale for partnering with onchocerciasis: the diseases affect overlapping populations, have similar filaria disease agents, recommend similar treatment, employ similar M&E methods, and face common challenges. While countries where LF and onchocerciasis are endemic completely overlap, co-endemicity only occurs in some districts (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Overlap between LF and onchocerciasis in Africa

Sources: LF map: AFRO NTD programme; Onchocerciasis map: APOC

Both adults of LF and onchocerciasis produce microfilaria, LF microfilaria in night blood and onchocerciasis in the skin, but both are susceptible to treatment with Mectizan, although albendazole is also necessary for LF. Distribution strategies are the same, both using MDA. However the specificities are important for monitoring and evaluation for elimination strategies. During preventive chemotherapy, both diseases use ivermectin, while the LF programme adds albendazole. For M&E, both programmes need better diagnostics, as skin snips for onchocerciasis and night blood films for LF are not popular and existing serological tests require additional validation. There is a related need to build human and laboratory capacity to carry out entomological and parasitological surveys in both programmes. In addition, existing M&E methods are costly and would need to include parasitological, entomological and serological surveys for onchocerciasis elimination.

In terms of challenges common to both programmes, there are mapping gaps for both LF and onchocerciasis, as well as cross border issues in conflict areas, such as South Sudan and neighbouring countries. Both programmes are lagging behind goals for scaling up. Particularly if onchocerciasis moves towards an elimination strategy, there are 18 million people (not including the Central African
Republic, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo) who live in areas with a nodule prevalence between 5-15% that are not currently being treated. Eighty percent of the people not yet covered by LF treatment live in nine countries, many of which are either treating for onchocerciasis, such as Nigeria, or have found new areas of onchocerciasis endemcity that also need treatment, such as in Ethiopia. Finally, loiasis presents a major obstacle for both programmes in co-endemic areas in central Africa, such as Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Congo, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea, with 30 million people at-risk for loiasis (based on those living in areas with greater than 20% on the RAPLOA scale). In areas where onchocerciasis is meso- or hyper-endemic and co-endemic with loiasis, treatment can still occur. However, given that only 1-2% of people might be infected in areas where LF treatment is prescribed, it is too risky to treat with ivermectin in areas with loiasis, given the chance of serious adverse events due to high levels of Loa microfilaremia. The LF programme is now moving forward with a strategy of using twice annual albendazole and bednets in these areas.

Dr Hopkins concluded that there are many opportunities for synergy including integrated mapping, joint training, combined treatment registers, simultaneous MDA, joint M&E, and joint epidemiological evaluations. He challenged the group to not just see the benefit in exploiting synergies for the two programmes, but to see the LF and onchocerciasis activities as one programme in Africa.

**Extending the benefits**

Dr David Addiss, Director of Children Without Worms, presented a summary of ancillary benefits from the LF MDA programme. The LF programme has given the STH community a bold vision of elimination, with a platform for integrated NTD activities related to MDA and M&E. From 2001 to 2011, LF MDA included two billion treatments with albendazole that also treated STH. For example, in 2010, WHO reported that 57% of the school-aged children treated for STH were given these medicines through national LF programmes. In areas with LF programmes, entire communities are treated for LF, which likely gives a greater impact than those areas that only implement school-based STH treatment. In terms of M&E, the LF TAS platform could be used to collect information on STH as well.

However, Dr Addiss cautioned that often the benefits of LF programme have not been fully extended to those with LF-related disease. The rationale for the two pillars of the LF programme stems from the wording of the World Health Assembly resolution – elimination as a public-health problem – which includes those with clinical disease, and not just infection. Providing care for LF-related disease has also been shown to increase acceptability and compliance with MDA. Furthermore, providing care for those
with LF-related disease was considered the right and compassionate thing to do. But as of 2010, only 27 (33%) of endemic countries had active morbidity management programmes.

The four basic components of NTD control include preventive chemotherapy (which is usually the largest component and often has a direct clinical benefit); vector control; water, sanitation and hygiene; and clinical care. In the LF programme, morbidity management and disability prevention (MMDP) lags behind PCT, while in the STH programme, the water, sanitation and hygiene activities likewise take a back seat to PCT. The trachoma programme, however, has a more balanced approach with the four components of the SAFE strategy – surgery, antibiotics, facial cleanliness, and environmental improvement. For the LF programme to truly achieve elimination, it needs to be both internally integrated in terms of MDA, vector control and MMDP activities, as well as externally integrated with other health programmes. A model for how MMDP can be integrated externally has been described in the Legs to Stand On framework, which identifies the common elements of treatment across diseases such as LF, diabetes, leprosy, and Buruli ulcer.

Dr Addiss related another benefit of the GPELF in context of a quote from Bill Foege about ‘seeing the faces’ behind everything we do - i.e., having a compassionate response to suffering. The GPELF represents a compassionate response to LF-related suffering, and has included the three main elements of compassion, which include: i) awareness of suffering, ii) empathy, and iii) action. Publications focusing on the awareness of suffering include studies of psychological distress and disability caused by LF-related diseases. In terms of emotional attunement with patients, he related the power of the personal story - of ‘seeing the faces’ for those who work in LF elimination. Finally, compassion must lead to action. The magnitude of action in the global LF programme is, by any standard, impressive. Although the GPELF is a great example of a ‘mass uprising of compassion,’ the expression of that compassion faces several important challenges. It is difficult to keep seeing the faces when working with populations in the millions and billions, and across great geographical distances. In addition, a global programme requires acting through complex systems of institutions, each with its own agenda, and with competing motivations. Dr Addiss challenged the group to try to maintain focus on interrupting LF transmission while expanding its peripheral vision to include those with LF disease; to unite the LF programme activities across different sectors in the health system; to see faces and numbers at the same time; and to combine compassion for individuals with action at the population level.

Two programmes: a shared goal – LF and Trachoma
Dr Teshome Gebre, Regional Representative for Africa at the International Trachoma Initiative (ITI), discussed the shared goals and commonalities between LF and trachoma. Both diseases are acquired in childhood, with terribly painful and severely incapacitating complications that appear later in life. In Africa, there are mapping gaps in nine countries for LF and 19 for trachoma; coordinated mapping could occur in areas of potential overlap to leverage resources. Both programme strategies include MDA and morbidity management, while trachoma also includes the preventive activities of face washing and environmental improvement. In order to achieve trachoma goals by 2020, there is a backlog of 4.6 million trichiasis patients that need surgery, which means scaling up from 160,000
surgeries to 500,000 surgeries a year. While more than 200 million trachoma treatments have been delivered since 1998, 380 million more are needed before 2020. Dr Gebre discussed various ideas for linking the programme interventions including: i) empowering CDDs to handle all MDA through joint planning, training, and implementation; ii) co-administration of drugs where feasible, depending on results of clinical trials underway for ivermectin, albendazole and azithromycin; iii) joint M&E, and iv) initiation of regional, sub-regional, and national NTD coordination mechanisms or annual reviews which are smaller and more technical, using the sub-regional forums to address cross-border issues. Beyond just LF and other NTDs, he proposed links with HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, such as a ‘MalTra’ week approach to reach several million people with MDA and bednets in Ethiopia.

He then discussed the unresolved issues that are hampering achievement of goals, such as gaps in behavior change, hygiene and sanitation, and effective community mobilization strategies. There are concerns with results of MDA coverage surveys; for example, Ethiopia found less than 49% coverage in surveys when health facilities reported over 85% coverage. This has translated into impact assessments that have shown that very few districts showed infection levels of TF less than 10% after three or five rounds and so must continue MDA. Finally, the NTD community needs to find the most effective level of integration and coordination among partners and donors at all levels. He cautioned that if the LF and trachoma programmes do not start doing things differently, the 2020 elimination goal will not be achieved.

A partnership with malaria programmes
Dr Frank Richards, Director of the Malaria, River Blindness, Lymphatic Filariasis and Schistosomiasis Programs at the Carter Center, discussed the Nigerian experience in linking LF with the malaria programme, where *Anopheles gambiae* is the primary vector of both diseases. A 2011 WHO position statement on integrated vector management (IVM) made the case that the policy of using IVM to control malaria and LF makes epidemiologic sense [10]. In Plateau and Nasarawa States in Central Nigeria, the Carter Center has been implementing LF activities integrated with onchocerciasis, schistosomiasis and malaria since 1998. During that period the programme has dissected over 80,000 mosquitoes as part of LF entomological monitoring, using the percentages of any larval stage (L1, L2, and L3 but not including mf stages) and only infective stage larvae (L3) as the critical indicators. The programme saw mosquito rates of infection with any stage larvae decrease during MDA, for an average reduction of 85% from 3.1% to 0.3% in 2010, after at least 7 years of MDA (Figure 7). L3 also were sporadically found in dissections.
In 2010, several million long-lasting insecticidal nets (LLINs) – two nets for every household - were distributed in Plateau and Nasarawa States as part of a massive campaign throughout Nigeria to distribute over 65 million LLIN. A year after LLIN distribution, entomological monitoring in LF sentinel villages recorded 0% mosquitoes infected with L3 larvae, as well as 0% mosquitoes infected with any larval stage. 2012 preliminary results are also showing no infected mosquitoes. Thus, there is synergy between LLIN and MDA.

In southeastern Nigeria, where MDA cannot be provided due to concerns about adverse reactions from co-endemic loiasis infection, the Carter Center has studied the entomological impact of LLIN alone (without MDA) in reducing LF transmission. The use of LLIN alone showed an 84% reduction in all larval mosquito infection rates, compared to areas with LLINs and MDA, where 100% reduction was shown. In 2011 in both these areas, no L3 stage larvae were found. This indicates that transmission of *W. bancrofti* has stopped – although in LLIN areas it might not be interrupted since halting LLIN use could result in a rapid return of transmission.

Over 90% of Nigeria has been mapped for LF, with over 106 million people found to be at risk in 541 local government areas (LGAs). However, only 19% of LGAs are currently implementing MDA for LF. In contrast, almost all states completed the distribution of LLINs in 2012, and will complete the process in early 2013. If the results from the entomological impact studies hold true elsewhere in areas with good LLIN coverage in Africa, LF programmes can celebrate a major impact on LF transmission now, despite the fact that MDA scale-up is lagging. GAELF partners should encourage, and indeed help, the malaria programme reach its LLIN coverage and usage goals, as it is to the LF programme’s advantage!

Building on advocacy efforts using political figures such as former head of state General Dr Yakuku Gowon, the Carter Center sponsored a national combined LF and malaria programme meeting in March 2012. The meeting presented the entomological monitoring findings, planned scale up of both LF and
malaria activities, and created awareness about the benefits of integration, such as the fact that infection with intestinal worms can worsen malaria outcomes. Another benefit is that LF MDA, which intensively targets hookworm through distribution of albendazole to entire communities, results in lower anaemia prevalence. Severe anemia accounts for half of all malarial deaths in African children and women, co-infection with malaria and intestinal worms has been shown to result in greater anaemia. In addition, LF community-based networks can be used by the malaria programme to mop up LLIN distribution, and implement annual monitoring of LLIN ownership, usage and condition. Finally, behaviour change communication can be strengthened by showing the protection offered by LLINs from both malaria and LF, as focus groups showed that adults are more motivated to sleep under nets to protect themselves from lymphoedema and hydrocele than from malaria fever, which is seen as an infection of young children.

Discussion

Dr Onyeze asked how the global LF community could scale up these approaches at national or regional levels. He related the WHO African Region strategy of the ‘4 1’s approach’ that includes common partnership, planning, delivery and M&E, with a goal of making life better for fellow human beings at risk or already infected. The African Region’s priority is to have NTD national plans and fora by 2013, with new RPRG mechanisms at a regional level. The most difficult component of the NTD work in Africa goes beyond the availability of drugs and tools to figuring out how to bring various targets, organizations and personalities together.

Participants agreed that there is a moral imperative to look at synergies in collaboration and coordination. It is important to clearly state the LF community’s needs from other programmes, e.g. what exactly do we want from the malaria, water, morbidity and health system strengthening programmes and organizations? We need to articulate how the LF programme can help other programmes achieve their goals. The LF programme needs strong advocates and quality data to persuade other programmes that “we are not just there for the money”. The challenges of translating the good examples of collaboration in these presentations into other country settings was discussed, including the difficulties of replication in different settings, and the need for new programmes to have access to this information.
GAELF: The Next Chapter

Moderator: Dr Mwele Malecela

Dr Malecela, Director General of the National Institute for Medical Research in Tanzania, opened the final session by sharing a Swahili saying: ‘in order to see how far you have come, look back and see where you were.’ She reflected that GAELF has made great progress since 2000 – with stronger national programmes, great country leadership, a focus on countries and the patients, and an acknowledgement of the importance of good data and research.

Strategic partnerships

Dr Neeraj Mistry, Managing Director of the Global Network for NTDs, discussed the key elements to strategic partnerships at a country level, including trust, clear objectives, and specific roles and responsibilities. Contributions to a LF programme should focus on partner competencies, such as involving business people who have better training in logistics and distribution than medical doctors. Programmes need to understand the motivation that each partner has to be involved, whether it is the use of their logo, a free t-shirt, or raising their public profile. For programmes (and partnerships) to work, charismatic leadership is necessary to convince governments and partners to support NTD work. The GAELF should cultivate national programme leaders who have the ability and trust to negotiate partnerships at country level.

He then offered some examples of potential partnerships, such as car dealerships lending vehicles during MDA, mobile phone companies donating costs of texting MDA reports, cinema groups showing awareness raising short movies in mobile cinemas in rural areas, local artists or celebrities advocating for NTDs, or companies donating t-shirts. Dr Mistry recommended that national programme reviews include outsiders from business or media in order to get a different perspective on programme success and challenges. He mentioned that a full assessment of the links between HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria and NTDs has been sent to the Global Fund for AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM) to encourage them to approve proposals which include NTD activities. Finally, he implored the group to use its anger at injustice to advocate on behalf of NTDs as we are the only voice of many of these communities.
The future of GAELF post the London Declaration - Professor David Molyneux

Following the London Declaration meeting in January and the follow-up Washington meeting just finished it is appropriate to reflect on the GAELF as a partnership in a changing environment – a changing environment not only in terms of global health but also in the global economic and political environment. In that context it is worth looking back to 2000 when GAELF was initiated in Santiago de Compostela. The term neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) had not been coined; there were only some donations for specific diseases, only 9 million people were treated in the first year during the launch of the Global Programme to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis (GPELF) and the true force of combined and now expanded pharmaceutical donations had not been garnered. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation was in an embryonic form. In the early years of the decade the respective role of the GPELF and the GAELF was confused and confusing. This created tensions between WHO and its partners with both parties struggling to understand how a programme and an Alliance interacted. These tensions existed between 2000 and 2004 when at GAELF3 (Cairo) the clear separation of roles between the programmatic responsibilities which were vested in WHO and its member states was clarified. The GAELF function was recognised as being focussed on partnership, resource mobilisation and advocacy providing as a forum for interaction of all interested parties, irrespective of their constituency, but with a Secretariat based outside WHO. The model was developed by the now Deputy Director General of WHO, Dr Asamoah Baah, to reflect the global nature of the programme and the disease, the regional specificities and differences and the need for a representative governance system.

LF specific resource mobilisation was difficult during the early years until a sea change occurred with the emergence of the NTD Department under Dr Asamoah Baah in mid-2005 following the 2nd WHO/GTZ meeting in Berlin. This meeting provided the platform for the expansion of the NTD brand and the development of the idea of integrated NTD control through preventive chemotherapy, a strategy articulated in a WHO document in 2006. Only when concerted advocacy emerged on both sides of the Atlantic did increased funds begin to emerge in 2006, initially from USAID then in 2008 through then UK Department for International Development (DFID). The significant extra funding obtained in 2006 sustained the further expansion of GPELF. GAELF can take credit for providing an advocacy platform to convince the key bilateral donors of, not only, the NTD case but the importance of LF within that portfolio. The very obvious fact that LF country programmes in Africa became the major platform for integrated NTD control via the broad spectrum efficacy of ivermectin and...
albendazole also highlighted the relevance of LF in a broader context. Indeed an LF programme can best be described as a “three in one”. With an active LF programme at least for the duration of the annual distributions onchocerciasis and soil transmitted helminth control is also achieved at no extra delivery cost. Hence such programmes are high value for money. Indeed they are more health for less money, thus cost effective, low unit cost and with few recognised side effects. Globally around 2 billion LF treatments have been given to date and the rate of up-scaling justifies the claim that “this is the most rapidly upscaling public health programme in history” with the lowest unit cost of treatment certainly in Asia where DEC costs are US$0.01 per treatment. History will also show that the 1999 WHO Strategic Plan to 2010 developed by James Cheyne on LF remarkably matched the targets laid down in that document. Since 2001 the global LF community has benefitted from generous LF specific grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and DFID and GSK through the Lymphatic Filariasis Support Centre (now the Centre for Neglected Tropical Diseases) in Liverpool to support both the operational activities and the Secretariat function of GAELF.

Why do I recall history in the context of the future? For the reason that in global health few lessons are learnt, mistakes are repeated, policy changes are slow and the requisite field applicable research is too slow in being applied at scale. Biennial GAELF meetings have provided an informal yet focussed topic orientated environment to re-assess where we are, receive feedback from countries and exchange views between many diverse countries.

GAELF acts as an umbrella for that diversity of partners; its governance is representative; it recognises the freedom of action that endemic countries must have, yet facilitates partnerships with countries regionally or globally. GAELF strongly supports regional diversity exemplified in epidemiology, in health systems and in communities. Programmatically LF is not the same in the Pacific, in urban Pondicherry or in a savanna setting in West Africa - different vectors, different drugs, different community structures, different health systems, different country financing, different regional offices yet GAELF can provide that umbrella of committed partnership focussing on a particular problem. The advocacy message is similar- the need for implementation resources, for operational research including social science, for monitoring and evaluation towards the elimination goals and expansion of morbidity control interventions.

The London Declaration is an embodiment of commitment from many parties for 10 tool ready NTDS:

- To expand programmes towards elimination;
- Expand access to drugs;
- Advance R&D for the next generation of products;
- Enhance collaboration to better work together;
- Enable adequate funding to implement MDA;
- Provide support for M&E;
- Provide updates on progress towards 2020 goals.
How does GAELF now respond to the London Declaration in terms of commitment and responsibilities? A key element emerging from the meeting over the previous days was the need for partnership, cooperation and coordination. GAELF is the manifestation of those aspirations which are, and will be, central to success.

Should GAELF, as an entity, do anything different post London and Washington? Frank Richards points out there is a dilemma and tension created by the need for greater integration of NTD programmes as the “E” in GAELF is not necessarily compatible with integration if there is a loss of focus on the elimination target. GAELF as an entity is there to remind the wider NTD community as well as ourselves that we have the 2020 target. GAELF provides countries through its meetings that we have a shared vision and enables us to keep our eyes on the ball.

There is a view that GAELF has many advantages as a partnership. These advantages stem from a loose structure. I have considered what the strengths of GAELF are:

- It has become a respected brand and model;
- It is communication hub and forum for the exchange of experience;
- GAELF is an advocate for WHO in its normative role and fosters a strong mutually supportive relationship between the Programme and Alliance;
- It is a focal point for partners to communicate;
- It does try its best to allow the countries to have the voice; It recognises regional identity and respects diversity within the partnership;
- It advocates for operational research and has worked closely on grants with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation on successful productive and relevant grants which have progressed the LF cause significantly;

GAELF has benefitted from the long-term support of the pharmaceutical industry to maintain its endeavours as well as the support of DFID in recognising the value of GAELF as a key partnership and as a result being prepared to cover the Secretariat costs in Liverpool.

Discussion

The possibility of having a resident technical advisor in place for key countries (following the example of the Guinea worm eradication programme), who sits with the national programme but has the freedom to talk with other ministries, private sector and stakeholders was discussed. Other methods of providing support included i) continuing forums like GAELF to ensure opportunities for discussion among many stakeholders, ii) twinning successful countries with those needing assistance or just starting, and iii) broadening GAELF’s reach to include more African and Indian research centres and universities. While participants agreed with keeping the GAELF as an LF-specific alliance, the idea was put forward of a three-in-one concept of combining parts of LF, STH and onchocerciasis meetings or holding them back-to-back.
Next steps

Dr Lammie introduced the newly elected Executive Group members: Pat Lammie, Moses Bockarie, Frank Richards, Adrian Hopkins, Charles Mackenzie, and Njeri Wamae. He then thanked all the speakers for preparing thought-provoking, quality presentations and listed five key recommendations that had emerged from the meeting:

1. Inspirational stories from countries showed clear examples of the quality of country leadership in the GAELF, with leaders who are problem solvers and have the ability to motivate governments and partners to contribute. Since good programme managers make good programmes, support needs to continue to these programme managers. The idea of a mentorship programme, perhaps through the WHO capacity strengthening working group, in which new programme managers could shadow more experienced managers through an MDA cycle, should be explored. In addition, the idea of resident advisors should be taken forward, especially in countries with a single NTD programme manager.

2. The concept of integration has changed from a potential threat to the GPELF to an opportunity to scale up LF, as well as other NTD activities. Countries provided examples from building LF MDA onto onchocerciasis CDDs in Sierra Leone and Liberia to child health days in the Philippines to lowering LF prevalence through use of bednets in Nigeria to the use of LF MDA as the single largest mechanism for STH delivery. However, evaluation of the impact of integration is missing, with priorities to strengthen evaluation capacity and operational research in mapping, elimination criteria and post-MDA surveillance needed.

3. The willingness to see the faces in the data is a clear challenge. Thus far, in many countries, the programmes have been highlighting people with disability to leverage community compliance with MDA without providing care for them. This needs to change by the time of the next GAELF meeting.

4. The single greatest determinant of success at country level has been government commitment. The idea of GAELF representatives visiting key countries with WHO and other donors to galvanize support at country level should be taken forward.

5. There is a challenge to be innovative in the way GAELF is organized, both in terms of the mechanism of engaging the Representative Contact Group and in how it coordinates with other disease-specific and NTD meetings. Anyone with suggestions on how best to ensure greater country participation and engagement, as well as more effective use of meeting time, was encouraged to send an email through the GAELF website.

Dr Lammie expressed gratitude to Don Bundy and the World Bank, Julie Jacobson, and the Global Health Strategies team and the CNTD team for organizing the meetings and to the outgoing Executive Group members for putting together the series of panel discussions. Finally, he gave thanks to the 65 countries represented, and the enormous commitment by donors including Merck & Co. Inc. and GSK, as well as the many partners that have supported NTD programmes at country level and supported partners to attend the meeting.

For more information on the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis please visit www.filariasis.org
Don Bundy closed the meeting by sharing his impressions of the NTD and GAELF meetings. In the 1980s, LF control was based on vector control, with the only medical input at the clinical and immunological levels. The community is now too focused on preventive chemotherapy, a change facilitated by the drug donations targeting LF. Since incentives are the key to change, he challenged GAELF to continue exploring the reasons for working together and what information needs to be shared.
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Participant list

Argentina
Jorge Arguello, Ambassador of the Argentine Republic, Embassy of Argentina, Argentina. Email: ambassador@embassyofargentina.us

Bangladesh
Be-Nazir Ahmed, Director General of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Bangladesh. Email: dbenazirahmed@yahoo.com
Israt Hafiz, Technical Consultant, Filariasis Elimination Program, Disease Control Unit, Directorate General of Health Services, Dhaka, 1206, Bangladesh. Email: israthafiz@yahoo.com; Tel: +88 01552 415 070; Fax: +88 02986 2994
Rouseli Haq, LF Programme Manager, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Email: dr.rouseliahag@gmail.com

Benin
Etienne Batcho, Coordonnateur du Programme National de Lutte Contre les Maladies Transmissibles, Ministère de la Santé, Benin. Email: wbatcho@yahoo.fr; Tel: +229 9702 7728

Brazil
Regiane Cardoso, SVS / Health Ministry, Brazil. Email: reeqiane.paula@saude.gov.br
Elaine Ignotti, Doctor, Ministry of Health, Brazil. Email: eignotti@uol.com.br
Rosa Castália Soares, Coordinator of Leprosy and Diseases under Elimination Program, Ministry of Health, Brazil. Email: rosa.castalia@saude.gov.br

Burkina Faso
Francois Marie Didier Zoundi, Ministry of Budget, Burkina Faso. Email: francois.zoundi@finances.gov.bf
Windtare Roland Bougma, NPELF Coordinator, Ministry of Health, Burkina Faso. Email: wrolandbougma@yahoo.fr; Tel: +226 702 703 33
Inoussa Ouminga, Directeur général de l'économie et de la planification, Ministère de l'Economie et des Finances, Burkina Faso. Email: jouiminga@yahoo.fr
Piga Prosper Tapsoba, Director of Administration and Finance, Ministry of Health, Burkina Faso. Email: tapspiga@yahoo.fr

Burundi
Sabine Ntakarutimana, Minister, Burundi Ministry of Public Health, Burundi. Email: ntakarutimana2006@yahoo.fr
Onésime Ndayishimiye, Director, Burundi Ministry of Public Health, Burundi. Email: ndayones@yahoo.fr; Tel: +257 799 100 36 or +257 77 735 102

Cameroon
Ondobo Andze Gervais, Inspector of Health Services, Ministry of Public Health, Cameroon. Email: andzegervais@yahoo.fr
Alphonse Um Boock, NTDs regional coordinator, Fairmed Foundation, Cameroon. Email: umboock@yahoo.fr

Cote d'Ivoire
Aboulaye Meite, LF, Schisto and STH Programme Manager, Ministry of Health, Cote d'Ivoire. Email: aboulaye_meite77@yahoo.fr; Tel +225 6729 0000

For more information on the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis please visit www.filariasis.org
Democratic Republic of Congo
Benoit Kebela Ilunga, Directeur de la Direction de la Lutte contre la Maladie, Ministère de la Sante, DRC
Email: Kebelailunga@gmail.com

Dominican Republic
Manuel Gonzales, National Manager of DR PELF, CENCET, Dominican Republic. Email: manuelgonpe@gmail.com

Ethiopia
Kesetebirhan Admasu Birhane, Minister for Health, Federal Ministry of Health, Ethiopia. Email: kesetemoh@gmail.com

Hassane Mahamat, Coordinator, AU_PATTEC, Ethiopia. Email: hassanehm@africa-union.org

Egypt
Reda Ramzy, Professor, National Nutrition Institute, General Organization for Teaching Hospitals &
16 Kasr El Aini St, Cairo 71556, Egypt. Email: reda_m@masrawy.com

Gabon
Julienne Atsamae, Directeur Maladies Parasitaires, Ministère de la Santé, Gabon. Email: ntseme2007@yahoo.fr

Ghana
Irene Ayi, Research Fellow, Memorial Institute for Medical Research, University of Ghana, PO Box LG581, Legon, Accra, Ghana. Email: IAyi@noguchi.mimcom.org

Nana-Kwadwo Britwum, Programme Manager, NTD Control Programme, Ghana Health Service, PO Box MB-190, Accra, Ghana. Email: nkadbritwum@gmail.com or nanakwadwo@ghsmail.com; Tel: +233 20 823 2286; Fax: +233 21 226 739

Daniel A Boakye, Head of Parasitology Department, Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research, University of Ghana, PO Box LG582, Legon, Accra, Ghana. Email: dboakye@noguchi.mimcom.org; Tel: +233 302 501 178 or +233 302 502 182

Johnny Gyapong, Pro Vice Chancellor, University of Ghana, PO BOX LG571, Legon, Accra, Ghana
Email: jgyapong@ug.edu.gh; Tel: +233 202 213 820 ext 2711 or +233 244 265 081

Haiti
Abdel Direny, Senior Program Manager / NTD Advisor, IMA World Health, Haiti. Email: abdeldireny@imaworldhealth.org; Tel: +509 2942 1513

India
Manokaran Gurusamy, Senior Consultant, Apollo Hospital, India. Email: dr.g mano@gmail.com

Jonathan Rout, Project Officer, IMA / CASA, India. Email: jroucasa@gmail.com

Kapa Ramaiah, Consultant on NTDs, Control and Neglected Tropical Diseases, India. Email: ramaijhk@yahoo.com; Tel: +91 791 3862

Pradeep Srivastava, National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 22 Sham Nath Marg, New Delhi 100 054, India. Email: pkmalaria@yahoo.co.in; Tel: +91 11 239 68576

Indonesia
Rita Kusriastuti, Director of Vector Borne Disease Control, Ministry of Health Republic of Indonesia, Jln. Percetakan Negara No.29, Jakarta Pusat, Indonesia. Email: ritkus@yahoo.com; Tel: +62 214 287 7586; Fax: +62 214 246 7573

Kenya
Mary Amuyunzu-Nyamongo, Executive Director, African Institute for Health and Development, Kenya
Email: Mnyamongo@aihdint.org

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Doris Wairimu Njomo, Research Scientist, Kenya Medical Research institute, 54840, 00200, Kenya
Email: dnjomo@kemri.org; Tel: +254 020 272 2544; Fax: +254 020 272 0030

Kiribati
Teiti Bwenawa, Filariasis & Deworming Program Manager, WHO SSA, Kiribati. Email: bwenawat@wpro.who.int; Tel: +686 28317

Liberia
Karsor Kollie, Programme Manager, Ministry of Health, Liberia. Email: tanue15@yahoo.com; Tel: +231 886 532 903
Louise Kpoto, Epidemiologist, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Liberia. Email: lkpoto@gmail.com
Marnijina G Moore, Programme Manager, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Liberia. Email: mgeorgiamoore@gmail.com; Tel: +231 886 586 924
Charles Mwansambo, Secretary for Health, Ministry of Health, Malawi. Email: cmwansambo@gmail.com

Malawi
Khumbo Kachali, Vice President / Minister for Health, Malawi. Email: kachalkhumbo@yahoo.com

Square Zakariya Mkwanda, LF Programme Manager, Ministry of Health, Box 30377, Lilongwe, Central Africa, Malawi. Email: smkwanda@yahoo.com; Tel: +265 8888 54425

Malaysia
Rita Kusriastuti, Intensified and Integrated Malaria Control, Malaysia. Email: mila_mayangsari@yahoo.com

Mozambique
Nazira Abdula, Vice Minister of Health, Ministry of Health, Mozambique. Email: nazvabd@yahoo.com.br
Olga Amiel, Head of Department of NTD and LF National Coordinator, Ministry of Health, Mondlane/Salvador Allend Av. Nu. 1008 Maputo, PO Box 264, Mozambique. Email: olgaamiel@yahoo.com.br
Ricardo Thompson, Senior Researcher, National Institute of Health, Av Eduardo Mondlane, 1008 Maputo 264, P.O Box 264, Maputo, Mozambique. Email: rthompsonnz@gmail.com; Tel: +258 823 0600 36

Myanmar
Ni Ni Aye, Deputy Director (Dengue / Filariasis), Department of Health, Naypyitaw, Myanmar Email: niniaye2009@googlemail.com

Nepal
Shanker Shrestha, Deputy Health Minister, Ministry of Health, Nepal. Email: ppdfamd@mos.com.np

Netherlands
Gabrielle Breugelmans, North North Networking Manager, EDCTP, Netherlands. Email: breugelmans@edctp.org

Niger
Adamou Bathiri Salissou, Onchoceriasis and Lymphatic Filariasis Programme Manager, Onchoceriasis and Lymphatic Filariasis Programme, Niger. Email: sadamouba@yahoo.fr; Tel: +227 207 22879

Nigeria
Uche Amazigo, Freelance Consultant, Nigeria. Email: amazigo4@yahoo.com
Abel Eigege, Director, Plateau / Nasarawa Integrated Programs, The Carter Centre, 1 Jeka Kadima Steet, Jos Plateau State, Nigeria. Email: eigegea@yahoo.com; Tel: +908 037 022 967
Chukwu Okoronkwo, NTD Programme Officer, Federal Ministry of Health, Nigeria. Email: chukoro_christ@yahoo.co.uk; Tel: +234 803 361 98 94

For more information on the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis please visit www.filariasis.org
Papua New Guinea
Leo Makita, Principal Advisor, Malaria and Vector Borne Diseases, Department of Health, Papua New Guinea. Email: leo.makita@gmail.com; Tel: +675 301 3972

Ross Hutton, Manager – Health Services, Oil Search Health Foundation, Papua New Guinea
Email: ross.hutton@oilsearch.com; Tel: +675 322 5597

Philippines
Leda Hernandez, Division Chief, Department of Health, Philippines. Email: dr.ledamher@yahoo.com; Tel: +900 632 711 6808

Rwanda
Irenee Umulisa, Director of NTD Unit, Rwanda Ministry of Health/ RBC / IHDP / MOPDD, Rwanda
Email: umulisa5@gmail.com

Senegal
Serigne Magueye Gueye, Professor, Universite Cheikh Anta DIOP, Senegal. Email: smgueye@orange.sn; Tel: +221 338 694 061

South Sudan
Mounir Lado, Director for Neglected Tropical Disease Control, Ministry of Health, South Sudan
Email: mounir_lado@yahoo.co.uk; Tel: +211 955 194603

Sri Lanka
Udaya Ranasinghe, Director, Anti Filariasis Campaign, Ministry of Health, Sri Lanka. Email: usbranasinghe@yahoo.com

Switzerland
Graeme Bilbe, Director of Research and Development, Drugs for Neglected Tropical Diseases, Switzerland. Email: gbilbe@dndi.org

James Cheyne, Independent Consultant, Health Service Logistics, Switzerland. Email: james@cheyne.net

Janis K Lazdins-Helds, Advisor, Mundo Sano, Switzerland. Email: lazdinsj@gmail.com

Konji Sebati, Senior Director, World Health Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), Switzerland
Email: konji.sebati@wipo.int

Tanzania
Hussein Mwinyi, Hon. Minister, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Tanzania. Email: minihlth@yahoo.com

Khalfan Mohammed
NTDs Control Programme Manager, Ministry of Health, Zanzibar, Tanzania. Email: kamsharjyy@yahoo.com; Tel: +255 777 432 370

Mwelecele Malecela, Director General, National institute for Medical Research, Tanzania
Email: mmalecela@hotmail.com; Tel: +255 222212 400

Upendo Mwingira, National Coordinator, Ministry of Health, P.O Box 9083, Dar-Es-Salaam, Tanzania
Email: umwingira@yahoo.com; Tel: +255 713 262 865

Timor-Leste
Telma Joana Corte-Real de Oliveira, International Public Health and Health Management, Ministry of Health Timor-Leste, Timor-Leste. Email: ninatelma@yahoo.com

Togo
Ameyo Monique Dorkenoo, LF Coordinator, Ministry of Health, Togo. Email: monicadork@yahoo.fr

Uganda
Gabriel Matwale, Program Manager, Program to Eliminate LF, Vector Control Division; Ministry of Health, P.O Box 1661, Kampala, Uganda. Email: gkmatwale@yahoo.com; Tel: +256 414 251 927

Edridah Tukahebwa, Assistant Commissioner Health Services (Vector Control), Ministry of Health, Uganda. Email: edmuheki@gmail.com; Tel: +44 256 772 443 659

United States of America
William Campbell, Senior Finance Executive, JPMorgan Chase, USA. Email: bill@nrrpartners.com

Philip Coyne, Professor Uniformed Services University, USA. Email: philip.coyne@usuhs.edu

B Fenton Hall, Chief, Parasitology & International Programs Branch, DMID/NIAD/NIH/DHHS, USA
Email: lhall@niaid.nih.gov

Julie Hliboki, Consultant, 99 Names Peace Project, USA. Email: juliehliboki@gmail.com

Stewart Marsden, Director, Product Portfolio/Global Health, BD, USA. Email: Stewart_Marsden@bd.com

Chandrakant Revankar, Consultant in Neglected Tropical Diseases, Freelance Consultancy, USA
Email: revankarccr@gmail.com

Vietnam
Do Trung Dung, Medical Doctor, NIMPE, Ministry of Health, Vietnam. Email: dotrungdung.nimpe.vn@gmail.com

Yemen
Abdul Samid Al-Kubati, National Focal Point for LF, Ministry of Public Health, PO Box 6593, Taiz, Yemen
Email: a-samidku@hotmail.com; Tel: +967 777 92603

PRIVATE SECTOR

Children Without Worms
Kim Koporc, Director of Program Implementation, Children Without Worms, Task Force for Global Health, USA. Email: kkoporc@taskforce.org

Kerry Gallo, Senior Program Associate, Children Without Worms, Task Force for Global Health, USA
Email: kgallo@taskforce.org; Tel: +1 404 401 16 52

David Addiss, Children Without Worms, The Task Force for Global Health, 325 Swanton Way, Decatur GA 30030, USA. Email: dgaddiss@yahoo.com

Eisai Inc
Fabian Gusovsky, Executive Director, CINO Group, Eisai Inc, USA. Email: fabian_gusovsky@eisai.com

BT Slingsby, Director, Global Access Strategies, Eisai Inc, Japan. Email: b-slingsby@hhc.eisai.co.jp

EMD Serono
Frederique Santerre, Head of Global Government Affairs on Health Policy, EMD Serono. Email: Frederique.Santerre@merckgroup.com

GlaxoSmithKline
Mark Bradley, Director Scientific Support, GlaxoSmithKline, 980 Great West Road, Brentford, Middlesex TW8 9GS, UK. Email: Mark.h.bradley@gsk.com; Tel: +44 20804 75521

Jorge Carrion, Director Government Affairs Latina, GlaxoSmithKline, USA. Email: jorge.e.carrion@gsk.com

Joy Cole, Director, GlaxoSmithKline, UK. Email: joy.2.cole@gsk.com

Tijana Duric, Director, Supply Planning and Finances, GlaxoSmithKline, UK. Email: tijana.x.duric@gsk.com
REPORT FROM THE 7th GAELF MEETING, NOVEMBER 2012

Minne Iwamoto, Director, Africa Malaria Partnership, GlaxoSmithKline, 200 N. 16th Street PA 19102 USA. Email: minne.h.iwamoto@gsk.com; Tel: +1 2157517096

Ellen Strahlman, Global Head Neglected Tropical Diseases, GlaxoSmithKline, UK. Email: ellen.r.strahlman@gsk.com

Dennis Romerick Tuazon, Project Officer, GlaxoSmithKline, Philippines. Email: dennis.g.tuazon@gsk.com

Andrew Wright, Director Disease Programmes, GlaxoSmithKline, 980 Great West Road, Brentford, Middlesex, TW8 9GS Email: andy.l.wright@gsk.com; Tel: +44 208 047 5515; Fax: +44 208 047 0684

ITI
Teshome Gebre, ITI Regional Representative, Africa, Task Force for Global Health, Ethiopia. Email: tgebre@taskforce.org; Tel: +251 911 203 524

PJ Hooper, Sr. Associate Director, External Relations, Task Force for Global Health, USA. Email: phooper@taskforce.org; Tel: +1 4043711460

Johnson & Johnson
Patricia Molina, Vice President, Public Affairs, Johnson & Johnson, USA. Email: pmolina@its.jnj.com

Steven Silber, Head, Flubendazole Development Program, Janssen Research and Development, Johnson & Johnson. Email: ssilber@its.jnj.com

Mectizan Donation Program
Adrian Hopkins, Director, Mectizan Donation Programme, The Task Force for Global Health, 325 Swanton Way, Decatur, Atlanta, Georgia 30030, USA. Email: ahopkins@taskforce.org; Tel: +1 404 371 1460

Joni Lawrence, Associate Director, Mectizan Donation Programme, The Task Force for Global Health, 325 Swanton Way, Decatur, Atlanta, Georgia 30030, USA. Email: jlawrence@taskforce.org; Tel: +1 404 371 1460

Yao Sodahlon
Senior Associate Director, Mectizan Donation Programme, The Task Force for Global Health, 325 Swanton Way, Decatur, Atlanta, Georgia 30030, USA. Email: ysodahlon@taskforce.org; Tel: +1 404 371 1460

Merck & Co Inc
Janet Vessotski, Director, Corporate Responsibility, Merck & Co Inc, One Merck Drive, Mailstop WS2A – 56, Whitehouse Station, NJ 08889 USA. Email: janet.vessotskie@merck.com; Tel: +1 732 594 2550

Sanofi Access to Medicines
Benedict Blayney, Director of Neglected Tropical Disease Programmes, Sanofi Access to Medicines, France. Email: benedict.blayney@sanofi.com

International Development Agencies and Donors

Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
Jan Agosti, Senior Programme Officer, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, PO Box 23350, Seattle, WA 98102 USA. Email: jan.agosti@gatesfoundation.org; Tel: +1 206 7093 331

Alexandra Farnum, Program Officer, Malaria, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, PO Box 23350, Seattle, WA 98102 USA. Email: danijela.korac@gatesfoundation.org

Lance Gordon, Director, Neglected Infectious Diseases, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, PO Box 23350, Seattle, WA 98102 USA. Email: lance.gordon@gatesfoundation.org

Julie Jacobson, Senior Project Officer, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, PO Box 23350, Seattle, WA 98102 USA. Email: julie.jacobson@gatesfoundtaion.org

For more information on the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis please visit www.filariasis.org
REPORT FROM THE 7th GAELF MEETING, NOVEMBER 2012

Thomas Kanyok, Senior Program Officer, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, PO Box 23350, Seattle, WA 98102 USA. Email: thomas.kanyok@gatesfoundation.org

Hannah Kettler, Senior Program Manager, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, PO Box 23350, Seattle, WA 98102 USA. Email: hannah.kettler@gatesfoundation.com

Caila Nickerson, Program Assistant, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, PO Box 23350, Seattle, WA 98102 USA. Email: caila.nickerson@gatesfoundation.org

END Fund
Ellen Agler, CEO, The END Fund, 115 Bloomingdale Avenue, Wayne, PA 19087 USA. Email: eagler@endfund.org

FHI360
Nosheen Ahmad, Program Officer, END in Africa, FHI360. Email: nahmad@fhi360.org

Pou Bolivar, Project Director, FHI360, USA. Email: bpou@fhi360.org

Geneva Global Inc
Warren Lancaster, International Director, Geneva Global Inc, UK. Email: wiancaster@genevaglobal.com; Tel: +44 780 976 7986

Anna Rohwer, Associate Program Director, Geneva Global Inc, USA. Email: arohwer@genevaglobal.com

Scott Morey, Senior Program Director, Geneva Global Inc, Switzerland. Email: smorey@genevaglobal.com

Global Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases
Michelle Brookes, Policy Director, Global Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases. Email: michelle.brooks@sabin.org

Neeraj Mistry, Managing Director of Global Network for NTDs, Sabin Vaccine Institute, Global Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases, USA. Email: neeraj.mistry@sabin.org

Greg Simon, Senior Technical Officer, Sabin Vaccine Institute, Global Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases, USA. Email: gregory.simon@sabin.org

Wangechi Thuo, Program Officer, Sabin Vaccine Institute, Global Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases, USA. Email: wangechi.thuo@sabin.org; Tel: +1 2028425025

Marcia de Souza Lima, Director, Programs and Operations, Sabin Vaccine Institute, Global Network for Neglected Tropical Diseases, USA. Email: marcia.desouzalima@sabin.org

Inter-American Developmental Bank
Agustin Caceres. Communications Specialist, IABD, USA. Email: agustinc@iadb.org

Izumi Foundation
Gretchen Stoddard, Program Officer, Izumi Foundation, USA. Email: stoddard@izumi.org

RTI International
Kalpana Bhandari, ENVISION, RTI International, 701 13th St. NW, Suite 750, Washington, DC 20005, USA Email: kbhandari@rti.org

Molly Brady, NTD Technical Advisor, ENVISION, RTI International, 701 13th St. NW, Suite 750, Washington, DC 20005, USA. Email: mbrady@rti.org; Tel: +1 202 728 1967

Katie Crowley, ENVISION, RTI International, 701 13th St. NW, Suite 750, Washington, DC 20005, USA Email: kcrowley@rti.org

For more information on the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis please visit www.filariasis.org
Achille Kabore, Senior Technical Advisor, ENVISION, RTI International, 701 13th St. NW, Suite 750, Washington, DC 20005, USA. Email: akabore@rti.org; Tel: +1 202 340 8888

Scott McPherson, ENVISION, RTI International, 701 13th St. NW, Suite 750, Washington, DC 20005, USA
Email: smcpherson@rti.org

Eric Ottesen, Director, ENVISION Program / LF Support Center, RTI International, Task Force for Global Health, 325 Swanton Way, Decatur, GA 30030, USA. Email: eottesen@taskforce.org; Tel: +1 404 687 5604

Lisa Rotondo, Deputy Director Technical, RTI International Envision, USA. Email: lrotondo@rti.org; Tel: +1 202 974 7890

The World Bank
Donald Bundy, Lead Health and Education Specialist, Human Development Network, The World Bank, 1818 H Street, NW, Washington DC 20433, USA. Email: dbundy@worldbank.org; Tel: +1 202 473 3636

Patricio Marquez, Lead Health Specialist Eastern and Southern Africa Region, The World Bank, 1818 H Street, NW, Washington DC 20433, USA. Email: pmarquez@worldbank.org

Ok Pannenborg, Special Advisor, The World Bank, African Region Human Development, 1818 H Street, NW, Washington DC 20433, USA. Email: opannenborg@worldbank.org; Tel: +1 202 473 4415

Abdo Yazbeck, Lead Economist, Health, The World Bank, USA. Email: ayazbeck@worldbank.org

UK Department for International Development
Delna Ghandi, Senior Health Advisor, DFID, UK. Email: D-Ghandhi@dfid.gov.uk

Iain Jones, Economic Advisor, DFID, UK. Email: i-jones@dfid.gov.uk

UNICEF
Jennifer Fenley-Duffy, US Fund for UNICEF, Director, Integrated Partnerships, USA. Email: jduffy@unicefusa.org

USAID
Ploi Swatdisuk, Program Analyst, USAID, USA. Email: pswatdisuk@usaid.gov

Marci Van Dyke, Technical Advisor, USAID, USA. Email: mvandyke@usaid.gov

Emily Wainwright, Senior Operations Advisor NTDs, USAID, USA. Email: ewainwright@usaid.gov

Angela Weaver, Senior Advisor for Neglected Tropical Diseases, USAID, 307-27, Third Floor, Ronald Reagan building, 1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington DC, 20523 USA. Email: aweaver@usaid.gov; Tel: +1 202 712 56 03

International Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

American Leprosy Missions
Mary Jo Geyer, Program Officer / Consultant, American Leprosy Missions, USA. Email: maryjogeyer@mac.com; Tel: +1 412 024 60 02

Linda Faye Lehman, Technical Consultant, American Leprosy Missions, Disease and Disability Prevention, USA. Email: llehman@leprosy.org

Carter Center
Frank Richards, Director, Malaria, River Blindness, Lymphatic Filariasis & Schistosomiasis Programs, The Carter Center, Atlanta, GA30307, USA. Email: frich01@emory.edu; Tel: +1 770 488 4511

Christian Blind Mission
Martin Kollmann, Programme Director NTDs, Christian Blind Mission, Central Africa Regional Office
PO Box 58004-00200 City Square, Ring Road Parklands, Nairobi, Kenya. Email: mkollmann@cbmi-nbo.org; Tel: +2 542 037 51798 or +2 647 335 24436

For more information on the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis please visit www.filariasis.org
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Ijeoma Obidegwu, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, CBM-US, USA. Email: iobidegwu@cbmus.org

**Good Neighbours International**
Yunsuk Ko, Managing Director, Good Neighbours International, Tanzania. Email: atuan.ko@gmail.com

**Handicap International**
Pierre Brantus, NTD medical consultant, Federation Handicap International, 6 Residence Rousseau 67 Chemin des Bergeronnettes, Prevesin-Moens 01280 France. Email: brantus.pierre@orange.fr

**HDI Inc**
Stephanie Richard, Program Manager, HDI Inc, USA. Email: stephanie@hdi-us.org

Anders Seim, Executive Director and Funder, HDI (Health & Development International), USA
Email: anders@hdi.no

**Helen Keller International**
Mary Hodges, Country Director, HKI, Sierra Leone. Email: mhodges@hki.org; Tel: +232 76845 9625

Charles MacArthur, Director of NTD Control, HKI, 1840 Harpswell Neck Road, Harpswell, ME 04079
Email: cmacarthur@hki.org; Tel: +1 207 833 73 44

Victoria Quinn, SVP Programs, HKI, USA. Email: vquinn@hki.org

Mustapha Sonnie, Program Manager, Neglected Tropical Disease, HKI, Sierra Leone. Email: msonnie@hki.org

Emily Toubali, Program Manager of NTD Control, HKI, USA. Email: etoubali@hki.org

Yaobi Zhang, Doctor, HKI, USA. Email: yzhang@hki.org; Tel: +1 447 8888 01010

**IMA World Health**
Sarla Chand, Vice President: Programs, IMA World Health, PO Box 429, 500 Main Street, New Windsor, MD 21776 USA. Email: sarlachand@imaworldhealth.org; Tel: +1 410 635 8720 or +1 443 244 0540

Ann Varghese, Senior Program Manager, IMA World Health, 500 Main Street, New Windsor, MD 21776, USA. Email: annvarghese@imaworldhealth.org; Tel: +1 410 635 8716

**LEPRA**
Venkata Ranganadha Rao Pemmaraju, Chief Executive, LEPRA Society, India. Email: ranganadh@leprahealthinaction.in

**Leprosy Mission, Canada**
Peter Derrick, Executive Director, The Leprosy Mission Canada, Canada. Email: pderrick@leprosy.ca

Grace Folts, Program Officer, The Leprosy Mission Canada, Canada. Email: gfolts@leprosy.ca

Deborah Mensah Awere, Program Officer, The Leprosy Mission Canada, Canada. Email: dmensah-awere@leprosy.ca

Dorothy Nyambi, Team Leader, International Programs, The Leprosy Mission Canada, Canada
Email: dnyambi@leprosy.ca; Tel: +1 416 566 63 34

Anna Wickendon, Leprosy Mission Canada, Canada. Email: awickendon@leprosy.ca

**Malaria Consortium**
Ruth Ashton, Technical Officer, Malaria Consortium Africa, Uganda. Email: r.ashton@malariaconsortium.org

**MAP International**
Ravi Jayakaran, Vice President – Global Programs, MAP International, USA. Email: Globalprogramsupport@map.org

For more information on the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis please visit [www.filariasis.org](http://www.filariasis.org)
Mission to Save the Helpless
Francisca Olamiju, Executive Director, MITOSATH, 605 Hospital Place (opp. Green Valley Suites, GRA), 93001 Plateau State, Nigeria. Email: mitosath@hotmail.com; Tel: +234 734 64792 or +234 803 331 8085

PATH
Tala De Los Santos, Diagnostics Group Leader, PATH, USA. Email: tdelossantos@path.org

Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust
Astrid Bonfield. Chief Executive, Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust, UK. Email: astrid.bonfield@qejubileetrust.org

Sightsavers International
Agatha Aboe, Global Trachoma Programme Coordinator, Sightsavers, Ghana. Email: aabo@sightsavers.org; Tel: +233 244 311 588

Simon Bush, Director Neglected Tropical Diseases, African Alliances and Advocacy, Sight Savers International, 21 Nii Nortel Ababio Street, PO Box KIA 18190 Airport Residential Area, Accra, Ghana Email: sbush@sightsavers.org; Tel: +233 2177 4210 or +233 244 322 885

Caroline Harper, CEO, Sightsavers, UK. Email: charper@sightsavers.org

Tom Millar, Operations Director, Trachoma Mapping, Sightsavers, UK. Email: tmillar@sightsavers.org

United Front Against Riverblindness
Daniel Shungu, Executive Director, United Front Against Riverblindness, DRC. Email: dlshungu@riverblindness.org; Tel: +1 609 771 3674 or +1 609 954 3398

World Vision
Azadeh Baghaki, Senior Partnerships and Policy Advisor: Health, Nutrition and WASH, World Vision, Australia. Email: azadeh.baghaki@worldvision.com au

Dennis Cherian, Deputy Director, Health and HIV, World Vision Inc, USA. Email: dcherian@worldvision.org

Happy Kumah, Program Manager, World Vision, USA. Email: hkumah@worldvision.org

Global Regional Programme Review Group Chairs

African Regional Office
Ricardo Thompson, Senior Researcher, National Institute of Health, Av Eduardo Mondlane, 1008 Maputo 264, P.O Box 264, Maputo, Mozambique. Email: rthompsonmz@gmail.com; Tel: +258 823 060 036

Americas Regional Office
Manuel Gonzales, National Manager of DR PELF, CENCET, Dominican Republic. Email: manuelgonpe@gmail.com

Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office
Reda Ramzy
Professor, National Nutrition Institute, General Organization for Teaching Hospitals & 16 Kasr El Aini St, Cairo 71556, Egypt
Email: reda_em@masrawy.com

PACELF
C.P. Ramachandran, Chairperson, WHO-WPRO-RPRG, 1/63, Off Jalan Tunku, Kuala Lumpur 50480
Email: ramacp@hotmail.com; Tel.: +603 948 610 12531

South-East Asia Regional Office
Nirmal Kumar Ganguly, President & Distinguished Biotechnology Research Professor, Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research, India. Email: nkganguly@nii.ac.in
(NB – will not be in attendance)
Academic and Research Institutes

All India Institute of Medical Sciences
Sarman Singh, Head, Division of Clinical Microbiology, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, India. Email: sarman_singh@yahoo.com

American University, USA
Larry Sawers, Professor, American University, USA. Email: lsawers@american.edu

Bonn University
Achim Hoerauf, Chair and Head, Department of Medical Microbiology, University of Bonn Medical Center, Germany. Email: hoerauf@microbiology-bonn.de

Bonn University Hospital
Ute Klarmann-Schulz, Medical Doctor, IMMIP, University Hospital Bonn, Germany. Email: ute.klarmann@ukb.uni-bonn.de

CDC
Stephen Cochi, Senior Advisor, Global Immunization Division, CDC, USA. Email: scochi@cdc.gov
Christine Dubray, Medical Epidemiologist, CDC, USA. Email: ffg5@cdc.gov
Karla Feeseer, EID Fellow, CDC / APHL, USA. Email: wsc7@cdc.gov
LeAnn Fox, Medical Doctor, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC, Division of Parasitic Diseases, National Center for Infectious Diseases, Atlanta, GA 30341 USA. Email: lfox@cdc.gov; Tel: +1 770 488 7560
Patrick Lammie, Senior Scientist, CDC, USA, Email: pjl1@cdc.gov
Monica Parise, Branch Chief, CDC, USA.Email: mparise@cdc.gov
Larry Slutsker, Director, Division of Parasitic Diseases and Malaria, CDC, USA. Email: lms5@cdc.gov
Kimberly Won, Health Scientist, CDC, USA. Email: kfw7@cdc.gov

Columbia University
Martin Chalfie, Professor, Columbia University, USA. Email: mc21@columbia.edu

Erasmus MC, University Medical Center Rotterdam
Wilma Stolk, Epidemiologist, Erasmus MC, University Medical Center Rotterdam, Netherlands. Email: w.stolk@erasmusmc.nl

Georgetown University
Margaret Baker, Assistant Professor, Department of International Health, School of Nursing and Health Sciences, 3700 Reservoir Road NW, Washington DC 20057-1107, USA. Email: mcb93@georgetown.edu; Tel: +1 202 687 4497
Bernhard Liese, Chair, International Health, Georgetown University, 3700 Reservoir Road, Washington DC, DC 20057, USA. Email: Bhl6@georgetown.edu; Tel: +1 202 687 3254

Gettysburg College, USA
Eileen Stillwaggon, Professor of Economics, Gettysbury College, USA. Email: stillwaggon@gettysburg.edu

Jazan University
Maged El-Setouhy, Scientific Director of SARC. Jazan University, Saudi Arabia. Email: maged.elsetouhy@gmail.com; Tel: +966 56 806 9515

James Cook University
Patricia Graves, Assoc Prof/Director WHO LF/STH/NTD collaborating centre, James Cook University, Australia. Email: patricia.graves@jcu.edu.au; Tel: +1 404 420 3897

For more information on the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis please visit www.filariasis.org
Imperial College London
Roy Anderson, Professor of Infectious Disease Epidemiology, Imperial College, College Headquarters, London, SW7 2AZ, UK.
Email: roy.anderson@imperial.ac.uk; Tel: +44 20 72176588

Lynsey Blair, Senior Project Manager, Schistosomiasis Control Initiative, Division of Epidemiology, Public Health and Primary Care, Imperial College, London, UK. Email: l.blair@imperial.ac.uk

Lesley Drake, Executive Director, Partnership for Child Development, Imperial College London, UK
Email: lesley.drake@imperial.ac.uk

Jane Lillywhite, Managing Director, Partnership for Child Development, Imperial College London, UK
Email: j.lillywhite@imperial.ac.uk

Brie McMahon, Partnerships Manager, Partnership for Child Development, Imperial College London, UK. Email: b.mcmahon@imperial.ac.uk

Kabatereine Narcis, African Capacity Building Advisor, Schistosomiasis Control Initiative (SCI) Imperial College, UK. Email: vcdmoh@gmail.com

Alexis Palfreyman, Programme Manager, Partnership for Child Development, Imperial College London, UK. Email: a.palfreyman@imperial.ac.uk

Anna Phillips, Programme Manager, Schistosomiasis Control Initiative, Imperial College London, UK
Email: a.phillips05@imperial.ac.uk

Infectious Disease Research Institute (IDRI), USA
Steven Reed, President, Founder, and Chief Scientific Officer, Infectious Disease Research Institute (IDRI), USA. Email: steven.reed@idri.org

Kenya Medical Research Institute
Pauline Mwinzi, Principal Scientist, Kenya Medical Research Institute, Kenya. Email: pmwinzi@kemricdc.org

Doris Njomo, Research Social Scientist, Kenya Medical Research Institute, P.O.Box 54840-00200, KEMRI, Kenya. Email: dnjomo@kemri.org; Tel: +202 722 541 Ext 3420

Maurice Odiere, Senior Research Scientist, Kenya Medical Research Institute, Nairobi, Kenya
Email: modiere@kemricdc.org

Njeri Wamae, Chief Research Officer, Centre for Microbiology Research, Kenya Medical Research Institute, Nairobi, Kenya.
Email: nwamae@kemri.org; Tel: +254 202 730409

Lindsley F. Kimball Research Institute
Sara Lustigman, Head, Laboratory of Molecular Parasitology, Lindsley F. Kimball Research Institute, USA. Email: slustigman@nybloodcenter.org

Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine
Moses Bockarie, Director of CNTD, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Centre for Neglected Tropical Diseases, Pembroke Place, Liverpool, L3 5QA, UK. Email: mjbb1@liverpool.ac.uk; Tel: +44 151 705 3343

Alison Blacklock, Programme Administrator, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Centre for Neglected Tropical Diseases, Pembroke Place, Liverpool, L3 5QA, UK. Email: sara.holmes@liv.ac.uk; Tel: +44 151 705 2592

Rinki Deb, Research Assistant, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Centre for Neglected Tropical Diseases, Pembroke Place, Liverpool, L3 5QA, UK. Email: rinkideb@liverpool.ac.uk; Tel: +44 151 705 3131

Joan Fahy, Programme Manager, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Centre for Neglected Tropical Diseases, Pembroke Place, Liverpool, L3 5QA, UK. Email: fahy@liv.ac.uk; Tel: +44 151 705 3145
REPORT FROM THE 7th GAELF MEETING, NOVEMBER 2012

Benjamin Koudou, Programme Manager, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Centre for Neglected Tropical Diseases, Pembroke Place, Liverpool, L3 5QA, UK. Email: gkoudou@liv.ac.uk; Tel: +44 151 705 2594

Louise Kelly-Hope, Programme Manager, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Centre for Neglected Tropical Diseases, Pembroke Place, Liverpool, L3 5QA, UK. Email: lkhope@liv.ac.uk; Tel: +44 151 705 3336

David Molyneux, Senior Professorial Fellow, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Centre for Neglected Tropical Disease, Pembroke Place, Liverpool, L3 5QA, UK. Email: david.molyneux@liv.ac.uk; Tel: +44 151 705 3291

Steven Perry, Vice President, LATH / USA, 3527 6th Street (South), Arlington, VA 22204, USA Email: Sperry@lath.com; Tel: +1 571 312 4728

Maria Rebollo, Programme Manager, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Centre for Neglected Tropical Disease, Pembroke Place, Liverpool, L3 5QA, UK. Email: mrebollo@liverpool.ac.uk; Tel: +44 151 705 3335

Michelle Stanton, Post Doctoral research Assistant, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Centre for Neglected Tropical Disease, Pembroke Place, Liverpool, L3 5QA, UK. Email: mstanton@liv.ac.uk; Tel: +44 151 705 2593

Mark Taylor, Professor of Parasitology, Director of AWOL, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Centre for Neglected Tropical Disease, Pembroke Place, Liverpool, L3 5QA, UK. Email: mtaylor@liv.ac.uk, Tel: +44 151 705 3112

Brent Thomas, Research Scientist, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Centre for Neglected Tropical Disease, Pembroke Place, Liverpool, L3 5QA, UK. Email: bthomas@liv.ac.uk, Tel: +44 151 705 3180

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
Anthony Soloman, Senior Lecturer, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, UK. Email: anthony.solomon@lshtm.ac.uk

Lymphatic Filariasis Support Center, Atlanta
Brian Chu, Research Project Manager, Task Force for Global Health, 325 Swanton Way, Decatur, Atlanta, Georgia 30030, USA. Email: bchu@taskforce.org; Tel: +1 404 592 1427

Rebecca Mann, Information Analyst, LF Support Center, USA. Email: rmann@taskforce.org

Dominique Kyelem, Program Director, Task Force for Global Health, Lymphatic Filariasis Support Center, 325 Swanton Way, Decatur, Georgia 30030 USA. Email: Dkyelem@taskforce.org; Tel: +1 404 687 5621

Alex Pavluck, Senior Manager of Information Technology, Task Force for Global Health, 325 Swanton Way, Decatur, Atlanta, Georgia 30030, USA. Email: apavluck@taskforce.org; Tel: +1 4045 921421

Vasanthapuram Kumaraswami, Associate Director, International Programs, Task Force for Global Health, USA. Email: Kumaraswami@gmail.com

McGill University, Canada
Roger Pritchard, James McGill Professor, McGill University, Canada. Email: roger.pritchard@mcgill.ca

Michigan State University
Charles Mackenzie, Professor, Michigan State University, USA. Email: mackenz8@msu.edu

National Institute of Health, Mozambique
Ricardo Thompson, Senior Researcher, National Institute of Health, Av Eduardo Mondlane, 1008 Maputo 264, P.O Box 264, Maputo, Mozambique. Email: rthompsonmz@gmail.com; Tel: +258 823 0600 36

National Institute for Research in Public Health, Mali
Mamadou Traoré, Director, National Institute for Research in Public Health, Mali. Email: traorem@afribonemali.net

National Nutrition Institute, Egypt
REPORT FROM THE 7th GAELF MEETING, NOVEMBER 2012

Reda Ramzy, Professor, National Nutrition Institute, General Organization for Teaching Hospitals & 16 Kasr El Aini St, Cairo 71556, Egypt. Email: reda_mi@masrawy.com

Notre Dame University, USA
James Reimer, Salt Project Director, Haiti Program, University of Notre Dame, 351 Galvin Life Science IN 46628, USA. Email: Reimerjn@gmail.com

Thomas Streit, Associate Professor, University of Notre Dame, 351 Galvin Life Science IN 46628, USA Email: tstreit@nd.edu; Tel: +1 150 987 0746

Quest International University Perak, Malaysia
Subhada Prasad Pani, Research Professor & Head of Microbiology & Deputy Dean (Pre-clinical), Faculty of Medicine, Quest International University Perak, Malaysia. Email: pani.sp@gmail.com

Research!America
Jennifer Chow, Director, Global Health, Research!America, USA. Email: jchow@researchamerica.org

Eleanor De Honey, Vice President of Policy and Programs, Research!America, USA. Email: Edehoney@researchamerica.org

Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute
Randee Kastner, PhD Candidate, Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute, Switzerland. Email: randee.kastner@unibas.ch

Peter Steinmann, Research Associate, Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute, Switzerland Email: peter.steinmann@unibas.ch

Chris Stone, Scientific collaborator, Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute, Switzerland Email: c.stone@unibas.ch

Task Force for Global Health
Mark Rosenberg, President and CEO, The Task Force for Global Health, 325 Swanton Way, Decatur, Atlanta, Georgia 30030, USA. Email: mrosenberg@taskforce.org; Tel: +1 404 373 4440

University of Edinburgh
David Taylor, Professor of Tropical Health, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom. Email: David.W.Taylor@ed.ac.uk

University of Sydney
Peter McMinn, Bosch Professor of Infectious Diseases, Infectious Diseases & Immunology, Sydney Medical School University of Sydney, NSW 2006, Australia. Email: peter.mcminn@sydney.edu.au; Tel: +61 2 9351 2900 or +61 2 9351 5319

Washington University
Alison Krentel, Consultant, Washington University - DOLF project, Washington DC, USA. Email: amkrentel@yahoo.co.uk

Andrew Majewski, Scientific Project Manager, Washington University School of Medicine, Washington DC, USA. Email: amajewsk@dom.wustl.edu

Ramakrishna Rao, Associate Professor of Medical Research, Washington University School of Medicine, Washington DC, USA. Email: rao@dom.wustl.edu

Gary Weil, Professor, Division of Infectious Diseases, Washington University School of Medicine, 660 S. Euclid Avenue, Campus Box 8051, St Louis, MO63110-1093, Washington DC, USA Email: gweil@dom.wustl.edu; Tel: +1 314 747 5198

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO)

WHO Headquarters
Dirk Engels, Coordinator, HTM/NTD/PCT, Department of Control of Neglected Tropical Diseases 20 Avenue Appia, CH 1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland. Email: engelsd@who.int; Tel: +41 22 791 3824 or +41 22 791 4777

For more information on the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis please visit www.filariasis.org
Kazuyo Ichimori, Scientist, WHO, 20 Avenue Appia, CH 1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland. Email: ichimori@who.int, Tel: +41 22 791 2767

Lorenzo Savioli, Director, Department of Control of Neglected Tropical Diseases, WHO, 20 Avenue Appia, CH 1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland. Email: savioli@who.int, Tel: +41 22 791 2664

Tony Oka Ukety, Technical officer, WHO, 20 Avenue Appia, CH 1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland
Email: uketyt@who.int

WHO AFRO
Amadou Garba, Medical officer/PCT NTD Focal Person, IST/WA, WHO AFRO, Burkina Faso
Email: garbaa@bf.afro.who.int

Adiele Onyeze, Regional Advisor, WHO AFRO, PO Box 06, Dioue, Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of Congo. Email: onyezea@afro.who.int, Tel: +242 0534 35272

Louis-Albert Tchuem Tchuente, PCT NY Focal Person, WHO AFRO Intercountry Support Team / ESA, Zimbabwe. Email: tchuemtchuente@zw.afro.who.int; Tel: +237 777 07436

Michelle Thulkanam, Partnership, Advocacy & Resource Mobilization Officer, WHO AFRO, Republic of Congo. Email: thulkanamm@afro.who.int

WHO APOC
Paul-Samson Lusamba-Dikassa, Director, African Onchocerciasis Control Programme (APOC), Burkina Faso. Email: lusambap@oncho.afro.who.int

WHO EMRO
Riadh Ben-Ismail, Regional Advisor, Control of Tropical Diseases, WHO EMRO, Egypt. Email: ismailr@emro.who.int

WHO PAHO
Yoaska Acevedo, Intern, Pan American Health Organization, USA. Email: yaoska.acevedo@gmail.com

Steven Ault, Senior Advisor Neglected Diseases, PAHO WHO, 525 23rd Street NW, Washington DC 20037. Email: aultstev@paho.org; Tel: +1 202 974 3896

Luis Gerardo Castellanos, Coordinator and Senior Advisor, PAHO WHO, USA. Email: castellanosl@paho.org

Laura Catala Pascual, Project Support Specialist, PAHO WHO, USA. Email: catalal@paho.org

Marcos Espinal, Area Manager HSD, WHO PAHO, USA. Email: espinalm@paho.org

Martha Saboya, Specialist NTD, WHO PAHO, USA. Email: saboyama2@paho.org

Gabriel Schmunis, Consultant, WHO PAHO, USA. Email: gabriel.schmunis@gmail.com

WHO SEARO
Aditya Prasad Dash, Regional Advisor (Vector Borne & Neglected Tropical Diseases), South East Asia Regional Office of World Health Organisation, India. Email: dasha@searo.who.int

WHO WPRO
Sung Hye Kim, Scientist, WHO/WPRO, Fiji. Email: kimsu@wpro.who.int

Rapporteur
Molly Brady
NTD Technical Advisor, ENVISION, RTI International, 701 13th St. NW, Suite 750, Washington, DC 20005
Email: mbrady@rti.org; Tel: +1 202 728 1967

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