

Local power - global change

A Message To Our Partners During COVID-19 Pandemic



Dear Partners,

To comply with recommendations issued by the WHO, CDC, and Emory University regarding the prevention of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mectizan Donation Program (MDP) team and all staff at The Task for Force for Global Health will be working from home through the end of April 2020. Such social-distancing protocols slow the spread of the virus and mitigate its potential to overwhelm our hospital systems.

MDP will maintain normal business hours during this time. We will let you know as soon as our physical offices re-open.

We wish health and safety to you and your loved ones during these challenging times. In the meantime, please join us in our effort to “flatten the curve” and keep yourselves and your families and friends well and healthy.

Best regards,

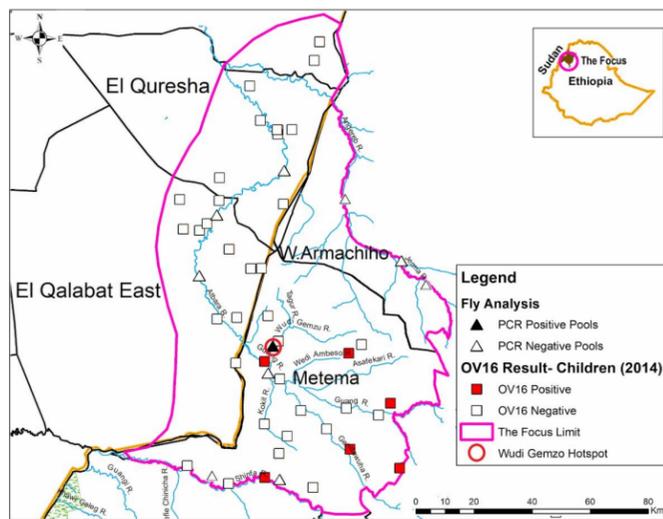
The MDP team

The First Coordinated Cross-Border Interruption of Onchocerciasis Transmission in Africa

A [recent publication](#) by Moses N. Katarbwa, et. al. in *PLOS NTDs* documents the first joint decision between two countries—Ethiopia and Sudan—to stop Mass Drug Administration (MDA) for onchocerciasis (river blindness) elimination in a cross-border area.

MDA with Mectizan® (ivermectin) is implemented by national onchocerciasis elimination programs to interrupt transmission and eliminate the disease. Mectizan® targets the

microfilariae (juvenile worms of *Onchocerca volvulus*, the causal pathogen) in the body that cause severe itching, visual impairment, and blindness. With sustained high treatment coverage with Mectizan® in mass distribution at least once annually, the disease can decrease in the population, and eventually transmission can be



interrupted.

An important reason for the success in this Galabat-Matena cross-border focus was the commitment of both Sudan and Ethiopia and their national onchocerciasis elimination programs to collaborate in their efforts to eliminate onchocerciasis in the focus. In addition, the implementation of annual and semiannual treatments with high coverage worked towards interrupting transmission.

Before stopping the treatment with Mectizan[®] in this focus in 2017, the two programs carefully conducted the required serological (antibody testing in children) and entomological (parasite larvae counts in flies) assessments, and the results met WHO's criteria for stopping treatment with ivermectin (Mectizan[®]). A buffer zone of at least 20 km around the Metema sub-focus was also investigated to ensure there is no transmission in subjacent communities with risk of reinvasion. Though the data shows that transmission was already interrupted in the Galabat sub-focus in 2015, Sudanese program officials agreed to continue annual MDA until the Metema sub-focus completed their stop MDA assessments in 2016. The only exception to the stop MDA decision in the focus was Wudi Gemzu, a hotspot in the Metema sub-focus where a strategy to accelerate elimination using four annual treatments was recommended.

The article cites some key takeaways from the Galabat-Metema cross-border case study: i) a sustained high ivermectin treatment coverage is key to reach the interruption of the transmission of onchocerciasis; ii) cross-border collaboration and communication are critical to safely stop interventions in a focus shared between two or more nations considered as "special intervention zone"; and iii) WHO-recommended evaluations to stopping treatment can help detect persistence of transmission of infection in part of a focus considered as "hotspot" where intervention must continue.

The success shared by Ethiopia and Sudan serves as an encouraging case study in the value of strong cross-border collaboration.

You can find the full length article [here](#).

Call For Nominations For The Mectizan Award!



The Mectizan Award is given by Merck & Co., Inc. to recognize individual contributions to the elimination of onchocerciasis or lymphatic filariasis.

We welcome you to submit nominations based on the criteria listed on [this form](#). All nominations received by the Mectizan Donation Program will be screened to ensure that they meet the established criteria and will then be reviewed by Merck & Co., Inc., the Mectizan Donation Program, and the Mectizan Expert Committee Chair for selection of the recipient.

The deadline for all nominations is August 1st, 2020.

If you would like to submit a nomination, please visit our [award nomination page](#).

New Staff Announcement



Introducing our new Communications Specialist Caleb Peng

Caleb Peng is the new Communications Specialist for the Mectizan Donation Program (MDP) a program at [The Task Force for Global Health](#). In this role, Caleb is

responsible for the creation and dissemination of communications materials and managing social media platforms for MDP.

Prior to joining MDP, Caleb worked for Emory University in various roles, including marketing, health promotion, residence life, and crisis management.

Caleb received his bachelor's degree in psychology from Emory University and his master's in public health from Emory University Rollins School of Public Health.

Please join us in welcoming Caleb to MDP! Please feel free to contact him at cpeng@taskforce.org with any river blindness or lymphatic filariasis elimination news you'd like for MDP to share.

Inaugural World Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD) Day!



January 30th, 2020 was the Inaugural World NTD Day, celebrated around the world!

The Task Force for Global Health (TFGH), which has worked towards the elimination of NTDs for over 30 years, hosted a symposium to commemorate the inaugural World NTD Day. TFGH President and CEO, Dr. David Ross noted that the Mectizan Donation Program was the first NTD program, which served as a catalyst for the launch of other drug donation programs for NTDs.

The panelists discussed the importance of raising awareness for NTDs, like onchocerciasis and lymphatic filariasis, and shared their experiences from the field. There was even a story of when panelist Kelly Callahan met a baby named “Mectizan,” named after the drug that impacted the baby’s family.

The event featured Kelly Callahan, Upendo John Mwingira, and Najwa Sampson, who have all done incredible work in the NTD field and continue to make a difference. Kelly, as Director of The Carter Center’s Trachoma Control Program, works in partnership with the ministries of health in 6 African countries to treat more than 37 million people annually. Upendo is a leading expert in the control and elimination of neglected tropical diseases, serving as a Senior NTD Advisor for Onchocerciasis and Schistosomiasis at RTI International. Najwa serves as the Logistics Coordinator of TFGH’s International Trachoma Initiative, providing supply chain support to countries receiving the Zithromax[®] donation. The medication is used to prevent and treat trachoma, an eye disease that can lead to loss of vision, if left untreated.

To watch the symposium, you can see it the recorded footage [here](#). And to see more chatter on World NTD Day, look for the #WorldNTDDay and #BeatNTDs hashtags on Twitter and other social media platforms.





(*Merck & Co., Inc., Kenilworth, New Jersey USA, is known as MSD outside the United States and Canada)

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