bringing the Programme to a successful conclusion

1. Main features of the strategy and operations planned for the fourth Financial Phase conducive to bringing the Programme to a successful end

1.1 The Programme Director's proposal for the Plan of Operations for the fourth Financial Phase (document JPC12.9) sets forth a number of operational principles and expected achievements, the impact of which will lead OCP to its final stage: phasing out the Programme with the assurance that its accomplishments will be maintained.

1.2 From the overall strategic point of view, operations will adhere to the lines laid down in the Long-Term-Strategy, thus consolidating the results obtained during the third Financial Phase. This applies in particular to vector control which, for all intents and purposes, will have ceased early in the Phase throughout the Original OCP area, thereby completing ahead of time the twenty year programme agreed upon in 1974. The subsequently approved control operations in the Extension areas, implemented during the third Financial Phase, will continue unaltered throughout the fourth Phase.

1.3 Therefore, at the end of the 1992-1997 period, vector control will be confined to parts of the Extension areas where larviciding will already have reduced considerably the human reservoir of the parasite. In other words, the epidemiological situation in 1997 will be such as to allow for a definite phasing-out of vector control.

1.4 Maintaining the achievements of the Programme will depend on the extent to which the Participating Countries will be able to identify and control recrudescence. Consequently, preparing for, or implementing, the process of devolution will be a critical issue and a major preoccupation of all parties of the Programme throughout the 1992-1997 period. The role of OCP will be to provide technical support to the Participating Countries in respect to onchocerciasis surveillance and control, and together with WHO and the other Sponsoring Agencies, to ensure that such activities are firmly anchored in the national health systems of the countries concerned.
2. Phasing-out the Programme

2.1 In the preceding section a brief account has been given of the salient features of the Plan of Operations for the fourth Financial Phase which, taken together, set the scene for winding down the Programme during the post 1997 period.

2.2 The preparation of timeframes for OCP operations and their cessation has, over the past years, been guided by the duration of vector-control believed to be required to ensure virtual elimination of the human parasite reservoir. This period has recently been estimated to be no longer than 14 years - the maximum lifespan of the onchocercal adult worm - according to predictions made by the OCP mathematical model.

2.3 However the experience of Programme operations to date indicates that the duration of larviciding necessary to eliminate the human reservoir of *O. volvulus* is in general two to three years less than the maximum of 14 years predicted by the model. As a matter of fact, it has been necessary to continue larviciding for 14 years only in the periphery of the reinvaded zones of the Original OCP area. It is worth noting in this regard, that the far western Extension area in question has never been exposed to reinvasion.

2.4 Furthermore, the probability exists that the added effect of larviciding and community-wide ivermectin distribution when carried out simultaneously could shorten the required duration of larviciding. Recent observations made in the Western Extension area suggest that this could be the case.

2.5 During the phasing out period (beginning 1998) vector control will be rapidly discontinued and it is expected that OCP operations would cease by the end of the current decade. This is the most likely scenario and costs for the phasing out period would not exceed US $72 million and would decline from US $26 million in 1998 (as compared to US $26.9 million for 1997), to US $24 in 1999 and to US $22 million in the year 2000. Under the most pessimistic scenario, which is highly unlikely, and which would require larviciding for a full 14 years, Programme operations would continue in limited areas until 2002.

2.6 The search for a macrofilaricide applicable on a large scale under field conditions will continue unabated during the fourth Financial Phase and even into the phasing-out period, if necessary. Should such a macrofilaricide become available before the cessation of Programme operations, the entire strategy would need to be reconsidered and the implementation of a revised strategy, including the use of a macrofilaricide, would probably lower the costs even more.
3. **Impact and results of OCP operations when the Programme comes to an end**

3.1 By conducting OCP operations until the end of the phasing-out period, the Programme will have attained its objective: "to eliminate onchocerciasis as a disease of public health importance and as an obstacle to socioeconomic development throughout the Programme area and for the Participating Countries to be able to maintain this achievement".

3.2 This means in more specific terms, that by that time probably 40-50 million people in West Africa will no longer live under the threat of onchocercal infection and its serious ocular manifestations.

3.3 On the development side, more than 25 million hectares of fertile, riverain land, previously deserted due to fear of onchocercal infection, will have become available for cultivation, enough to feed ca 17 million people. This land has the potential of contributing importantly to poverty-alleviation.

3.4 It is worth stressing that these results will be obtained without any ecological damage in spite of continuing aerial larviciding over extended periods.

3.5 When the Programme ceases operations, it will have made a substantial contribution to manpower development in West Africa. Close to 1000 Africans will have worked with OCP and thereby acquired considerable experience in technical disciplines as well as in the field of management. To this should be added the 400 to 500 fellows who have received OCP grants for graduate and post-graduate studies in disciplines connected with onchocerciasis control.

3.6 Eventually, also, it can be expected that the devolution process by its very nature will contribute to and catalyse the development of public health systems in the Participating Countries with the support of all parties involved.

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