NATIONAL ONCHOCERIASIS COMMITTEES
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1. **Introduction**

From the very outset training has always been a concern of the Onchocerciasis Control Programme; aware as it is that for a large part success can be achieved only through staff who have been trained for clearly defined tasks.

It is for that reason that fellowships have been awarded for conventional and/or field training.

Over the years the need to define a training policy has come to be felt both among the Programme's statutory bodies and among the various commissions.

Many recommendations have been made, but it seems important to recall the one contained in the final report (August 1981) of the Independent Commission (R 23):

"In order that training and career development are given adequate attention at OCP and in the countries, we recommend that a special unit should be established within OCP. It should be responsible for staff development in the Programme, and assist the participating governments in developing the careers of nationals trained under OCP auspices."

The "Proposal for a long term strategy" document (JPC5.7-0CP/84.4) states: "With the increasing emphasis on devolution and the important role which the Programme can be expected to play in enhancing and reinforcing health care systems in the Participating Countries as part of overall socioeconomic and rural development, a broadening of the scope of OCP training will be called for."

2. **Terms of Reference**

It was following these recommendations that the management of the Programme undertook to prepare a document on training policy closely related to devolution, since preparations for devolution are already in progress and will cover OCP's phase III and beyond.
If this policy is to be viable and acceptable, it must be based on information gathered from the beneficiaries and the users. Meetings were therefore held with:

- the OCP chiefs of unit;
- the administrative authorities and technicians of the Participating Countries and those of the countries of the Western Extension (Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Senegal and Sierra Leone).

3. Elements of the policy

It emerges clearly from the discussions that OCP's policy is and must be closely related to devolution and that its objective is to make available to the Participating Countries managerial and field staff capable, on the one hand, of taking over and, on the other hand, of working together with OCP in the execution of the exploratory and preparatory phases of its operations.

3.1. Priority disciplines

All the missions and surveys carried out in the Participating Countries bear witness to a manifest lack of qualified personnel. It is clear that the devolution process cannot be launched under these conditions unless emphasis is put on the sensitive disciplines directly related to the Programme's activities, i.e.:

- Entomology
- Hydrobiology
- Epidemiology
- Parasitology
- Ophthalmology
- Health economics

The objective of the Programme is to eliminate onchocerciasis as a disease of public-health and socioeconomic importance. OCP is, however, not losing sight of either the other communicable endemic and epidemic diseases raging in the area (trypanosomiasis, dracunculiasis, yellow fever, malaria, schistosomiasis, trachoma, leprosy, meningitis, etc.) or the other disciplines directly or indirectly related to health (sanitation, nutrition, health education, statistics, agriculture, water resource management and forestry, renewable energies, sociology, management, research, etc.), but prudence and wisdom demand that training in these
"Peripheral activities" be entrusted to and financed by the WHO Regional Office in Brazzaville (AFRO), the other specialized institutions of the United Nations system (FAO, UNDP, UNESCO) or bilateral aid.

3.2. Conditions for the award of fellowships

If the Participating Countries are to derive maximum benefit and guarantee from the training, certain conditions must be met:

- Candidates should be selected from among people with at least two years' service in the Civil Service of their country of origin;

- The Governments should undertake to make judicious use of their nationals once they have been trained (re-installation, guarantee of employment);

- The training should match the needs of the job;

- OCP/WHO should participate in the selection of candidates.

3.3. Types of training

It is worth recalling the three levels for which fellowships are awarded:

- Level I is for candidates who already have a university degree and are aiming at specialisation (AFRO is responsible for placement; duration: 12 to 36 months);

- Level II is for candidates who have already undergone specialized training and would like to study more particularly the aspects of their speciality as they appear in the Programme area (duration: 3 to 12 months);

- Level III is for medical officers and technicians who would like to familiarize themselves with the Programme's methodology (duration: 4 to 6 months).
3.3.1. **Conventional training**

This is already being offered to senior officers and technicians in the different faculties and training institutes with a view to establishing national teams. It should be supplemented by periods of practical training in OCP's sectors and sub-sectors. This will contribute not only to trainees' acquiring and improving their skills, but also to establishing close cooperation between the trainers (Institutes) and the users (Participating Countries and OCP).

3.3.2. **Continuous training and field training**

This type of training, which is so much desired by the Participating Countries, will be offered in the form of refresher courses, workshops, practical training, and briefing and consultative meetings.

OCP's units have a major role to play and must henceforth work together with the national teams in simple and detailed epidemiological evaluations.

3.4. **Places where training will be given**

To enable the fellowship holders to study under better conditions, it is advisable that the places where training is to be given should preferably be situated in the African Region and for that reason a list is given below containing a certain number of faculties and institutes:

- Faculty of Medicine, Abidjan
- Faculty of Medicine, Dakar
- National Medical School, Bamako
- University Centre for Training in Medical and Veterinary Entomology, Bouaké
- Trypanosomiasis and Onchocerciasis Research Institute, Bouaké
- Nura Centre, Bobo-Dioulasso
- African Tropical Ophthalmology Institute, Bamako
- CRSTOM Hydrobiology Laboratory, Bamako

Enquiries are being made among institutes in the English-speaking countries (Lagos, Ibadan, Jos, Institute of Aquatic Biology in Achimota) and Portuguese-speaking countries.
Institutes in Europe and America will continue to offer training in disciplines not catered for in Africa.

Practical training will be offered not only in the institutes, but also and above all in the Programme sectors and sub-sectors.

4. **Planning**

It goes without saying that a planning is essential. It will require continuous and sustained consultations throughout the devolution phase so that corrective measures needed can be taken.