NATIONAL ONCHOCERCIASIS COMMITTEES

Eighth meeting

Ougadougou, 5-7 June, 1984

PROGRESS REPORT

Of the

PROGRAMME DIRECTOR
Mr Chairman,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I propose to present to you the latest developments in the activities of the Programme from last October to the end of March 1984.

Our very extensive reflections on the long term strategy of the Programme will be presented in a separate document, as well as the progress made in preparations for devolution.

The Programme will celebrate its tenth anniversary next year and we shall be able to adopt a detached attitude towards the evaluation of its results.

The vector control had spectacular consequences and almost immediate effects on the blackfly, discernible by the peasants of the infested valleys and by the entomologists as well.

The parasitological and ophthalmological results have been longer to show, because of the long life of the parasites and it is only recently that one could perceive the extremely encouraging tendencies of the epidemiological evolution. It is on the level of the socio-economic development that we must adopt an adequate detached attitude to evaluate the impact of the Programme. With the support of the Participating countries and the NOCs, the Programme undertook the analysis of the impact to reinforce its action in the field of the socio-economic promotion which has been one of its justifications.

VECTOR CONTROL

The first nine months of 1983 had been characterized by an acute hydrological deficit which lasted until the end of the year and the first quarter of 1984. Moreover the early coming of the dry season worsened the situation; usually permanent rivers like the Mono or the Bagoe stopped to flow. Never have flows been so weak during the past forty years. However, the exceptional weather conditions of 1983 were not the only factor responsible for the excellent entomological situation obtained. The rational implementation of larviciding operations was also an important contributory factor.
Entomological monitoring

The very good entomological situation which prevailed in September has continued to improve since then, the blackfly population decreasing naturally with the coming of the dry season. In October, the transmission of onchocerciasis was limited to some outlying foci along the Guinea border. Since November there has been no more transmission. Since January no blackfly has been found in the treated area, except for a few specimens on the Upper Sassandra.

The lack of transmission and the drying of the watercourses allowed the gradual suspensions of the treatment of many basins. Since February the eastern area of the Programme has not been treated.

Moreover, the monitoring teams have besides carried out treatments on the ground on the Niger river at Tienfala, Mali and in the breeding sites of low discharge which are far away from the aerial spraying areas and from the rice growing area of Selingue, Mali.

Aerial operations

The total amount of kilometres of weekly treatments remains below the average of the previous years: 4,800 kilometres in October, 1,300 in March. The number of flight hours of the helicopters has been also reduced: 490 hours in October and 130 hours in March. The fixed-wing aircraft were no more used after December.

The Abate treatments in all the areas where the blackflies show no resistance consumed 8,400 litres of product in December and 215 in March. The watercourses of Ivory Coast were treated with Tekmar, 36,000 litres of which were used in December and 7,900 in March. Chlorphoxim was used only during the last quarter of 1983 on the Black Volta river and the Upper basin of the Sassandara river.

Environmental monitoring

The drought led to a considerable decrease of the biomass of the fishes in the non treated areas as well as in the areas being treated. This phenomenon hides any effect of the insecticides on the ichthyological fauna if there is any.

At the request of the Ecological group information started to be collected on the global consumption and the use of pesticides in the Participating countries.
Research

In the field of the priority research of the development of new insecticides, effort was devoted to specific tests, in river of azametiphos, an organophosphorus and permethrin, a pyrethrinoid. The evaluation of performance of this latter insecticide being good at the proportion of 0.015 mg/litre/10 mm, and its short term impact on the environment being bearable, tests on an operational scale will be done in Ivory Coast.

The systematical screening in gutter of new formulas provided by the industry continues in Lome and Bouaké. Tests of adulticiding with Permethrin, by helicopter, are in preparation in the valley of the No river, Togo.

EPIDEMIOLOGICAL EVALUATION

During the past semester 27 villages were visited for parasitological studies and for the control of the ocular condition.

Epidemiological situation

The very good results which were announced at the JPC of last December are confirmed in the whole Programme. The prevalence and the average of microfilaria load are decreasing everywhere and the lack of new infections in the age group below the age of 10 remains in more than 80% of the Programme area. A certain persistence of the transmission is noticed only in certain marginal areas (basin of the Kara river) and in the villages of reinvasion. The results of the parasitological evaluation confirm those of the entomological evaluation.

Ocular condition

The improvement in the ocular condition is outstanding. The minor lesions are getting scarce and only some patients who were heavily affected before the beginning of the Programme have had their conditions worsened. However the improvement though remarkable is less visible in the reinvasion villages.

Research

In the treated areas the population of adult worms has decreased and has become old, the lack of young worms reducing the fecundity.

The attempts to differentiate forest and savanna species of onchocerca by the analysis of isoenzymes are giving positive results. An attempt is also being made to differentiate infecting larvae L3 of onchocerca volvulus and O. ochengi, parasite of the cattle which is active also in the blackfly.
The Programme supports the evaluation of formulae of Ivermectin a promising microfilaricide.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Participating countries have devoted a considerable effort to integrate the development of the onchocerciasis freed areas in their national development plans. Their approaches of the problem reflect their priorities and their economic and social options. The excellent reports they submitted to the JPC of 1982 and 1983 show the importance and the variety of their actions.

The Programme started to make an evaluation of the increase of the cultivated areas in the valleys liberated from oncho in Upper Volta, in the east of Mali and the north of Ivory Coast. The results are positive. The valley of the Fazeko river is entirely cultivated. In the valleys of the Black and the Red Volta rivers, the increase of the cultivated areas used by the settlers of AVV and the spontaneous migrants often more numerous than the former has been outstanding. In certain areas of the White Volta river (Yeriba), almost all cultivable surfaces have been occupied. On the Black Volta river, at Samandeni, the population has more than doubled between 1977 and 1982 in an area which was the very example of desolation because of onchocerciasis. Although the development of the valleys is less evident on the Comoé and the Leraba rivers, the trend of settlements of the riverside “no man’s land” has started. The extension of animal husbandry, around the new settlements areas is outstanding.

The Programme intends to extend its evaluation work of the “recovered land” to the whole area of the OCP.

The Ecological group during its latest meeting expressed concern about the management of the valleys' environment especially during the settlement of spontaneous migrants. They put the emphasis on the necessity to preserve the soils more particularly by maintaining the forest areas and possibly by carrying out reforestation works. They also expressed the wish that special attention be paid to the protection of land and aquatic fauna and to the excessive use of pesticides by the peasants and the fishermen. The Programme Director has transmitted these wishes to the national authorities. Besides, many countries have already taken decisions and have appropriate legislation on this.

The improvement of the incomes and the way of life of the populations settled in the oncho freed areas were one of the expected effects of the Programme. The progress towards this objective is also satisfactory. Recent studies conducted by the FAO and the Programme have proved that the settlers of AVV have an income 1.5 times higher than the peasants of the interfluve. Moreover they have an easier access to medical care services and the percentage of children attending school is higher. Spontaneous migrants benefit also from this rural development promotion.
The Programme Director is at the disposal of the Countries to receive their wishes concerning the action of the Programme in socio-economic development. He is already in a position to inform them about the epidemiological situation in the new lands, but intends to give them his support in the preparation of their projects and their dealings with the financing agencies.

EXTENSIONS

The principle of the Southern extension has already been accepted many years ago and the only reason for delaying the start of operations is the lack of two efficient and easy to operate larvicides to fight the resistant blackfly.

The JPC of December 1983 has authorized the starting of exploratory studies in the western extension area. These studies deal with the treatment of the Sankarani river basin. It will be a test for the possibilities of treatment in the area and will allow to appreciate its impact on the re-invasion of the western borders of the Programme area. Besides, the collecting of information is going on about the distribution of the different species of the S. damnosum complex and about the epidemiological condition and the expected impacts of the extension on socio-economic development. The national authorities of all the countries concerned by the Programme are fully cooperating with the Programme.

TRAINING

The interest shown by the Programme in the socio-economic development is proved by the extension of the award of scholarships to the fields of management, rural economy, environment management, animal husbandry, forest techniques, sociology, statistics.

Of course the Programme will continue to support the training of epidemiologists, ophthalmologists, health economists, entomologists and hydrobiologists. All the states have been called upon to present their candidates.

The development of the devolution process in line with the long term strategy will require an increase in the training of specialized personnel. The needs for the period 1984-1994 are being evaluated.
LIAISON ACTIVITIES

A press conference had been organized during the session of the Joint Programme Committee in Paris last December. Furthermore OCP participated in two exhibitions, the first for United Nations Day on 24 October 1983 and the second for the World Health Day on 7 April 1984.

An illustrated brochure entitled "Onchocerciasis or River Blindness" giving information on the disease and the role of the Programme is being prepared.

From January to March, the Assistant Director-General, technical and economic services of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Fund for International Development, Vienna, one of the Assistant Director-Generals and two other senior staff from WHO Headquarters, Genova, as well as a delegation of seven Italian senators visited the Programme. Field visits and/or briefing sessions had been organized for their benefit.

The WHO Regional Director for Africa stopped over in Ouagadougou on 23 April 1984 on his way to Brazzaville. He was interviewed by the Radio TV and received by the Head of State of Upper Volta.

ADMINISTRATION

The third phase of financing will start in 1985. To carry out the activities of the Programme and realize the extensions, an increase in the budget will be absolutely necessary. An extra effort will be required of all the present contributors and new countries and bodies will be solicited.

In this regard, it is wished that the Participating countries which have not yet paid their contribution do so.