AFRICAN PROGRAMME FOR ONCHOCERCIASIS CONTROL (APOC)

Twelfth session of the Joint Action Forum
Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, 5-8 December 2006

FINAL COMMUNIQUÉ

Opening Ceremony:

1. The twelfth session of the Joint Action Forum (JAF) of the African Programme on Onchocerciasis Control (APOC) was held at the White Sands Hotel in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania from 5th to 8th December 2006. It was officially opened by his Excellency, Dr. Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, President of the United Republic of Tanzania. The meeting was attended by donor countries and institutions, participating countries of APOC, Merck & Co. Inc., Non-Governmental Development Organization (NGDOs), the Mectizan Donation Program, the West African Health Organization (WAHO), the World Health Organization (WHO), APOC management, the Technical Consultative Committee (TCC), the Working Group of APOC, academic institutions, former Onchocerciasis Control Program (OCP) countries, and the media. In addition, attending for the first time were representatives from Wyeth Pharmaceuticals and actors in the control of neglected tropical diseases.

2. Participants expressed sincere gratitude to the Government of Tanzania for hosting the meeting and for the hospitality that they had received since arriving in Tanzania. The JAF paid special tribute to the three medical doctors, Enyinnaya Uchechukwu from Nigeria, and Ruhiso Moshi and Kanyika Nakijwa from Tanzania, who died tragically in the ADC plane crash on October 29, 2006 in Abuja, Nigeria. A moment of silence was observed in their honour.

3. The Chair of the 11th session of JAF, Dr. Frederic Goyet, Dr. Uche Amazigo and other speakers, highlighted the impressive achievements of APOC, which were built upon the success of OCP. The Director stressed that the battle against onchocerciasis is yet to be won and that there is still the need to maintain the achievements of the former OCP.

4. His Excellency Dr. Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, the President of Tanzania addressed the forum. He commended the success of the APOC Partnership. He underscored the importance of the elimination of the disease to economic growth and development in Africa and expressed appreciation to Merck & Co. Inc., for making Mectizan® available for onchocerciasis control.

5. The Minister for Health and Social Welfare for Tanzania, Hon. Professor David Mwakjusa, and the Representative of Belgium, Dr. Jacques Laruelle, were respectively elected President and Vice-President of the 12th JAF Forum. The participants thanked the outgoing chair, Dr. Frédéric Goyet for his commitment and support to the programme.
Reflections of the Committee of Sponsoring Agencies (CSA):

6. Dr. Ousmane Bangoura, on behalf of members of the CSA, congratulated APOC on its achievements. He summarized the key activities of the CSA over the past year, which included the establishment of a Working Group on the Future of Onchocerciasis Control in Africa and a special meeting of Partners in Yaoundé, Cameroon in September 2006. The recommendations of the Working Group had been presented at the Yaoundé meeting and accepted by the Partners. The CSA endorsed the recommendations of the Working Group, the recommendations of the Yaoundé Partners Meeting, and the declaration made by the Ministers of Health in Yaoundé.

WHO Progress Report:

7. APOC management presented the WHO progress report which showed good progress in meeting Programme targets over the period 1996 -2005. The major reasons for low treatment coverage, where they occurred, were conflict and co-endemicity of onchocerciasis with loaisis. The key activities during the period included health impact assessment of ten years of APOC operations, high-level advocacy and the Yaoundé Declaration of African Ministers of Health. The Forum approved the Progress Report and congratulated the management of APOC.

Country Reports:

8. The country reports showed a steady progress towards achieving treatment goals and sustainability of CDTI. They provided evidence of the feasibility of co-implementation of multiple health interventions using CDTI as a vehicle. The Forum approved the country reports, however highlighted the need for improved methods of collecting and aggregating data across projects and countries.

A Mid-term Rapid Health Impact Assessment of APOC:

9. Preliminary results of an assessment of the health impact of 10 years of APOC activities were presented by a team from Erasmus University. This showed a positive health impact of APOC activities to date and forecasted a greater impact by 2015 and beyond. The Forum was very pleased with the results and looked forward to more detailed results from the research team.

When to Stop Treatment with Ivermectin Research:

10. Dr. Hans Remme presented preliminary results of a TDR investigation on the feasibility of cessation of ivermectin treatment in selected foci in West Africa. The results suggested that treatment with ivermectin alone may have reduced prevalence to a level that makes it safe to stop treatment. However, the results may only be applicable to the Northern Savanna region of Africa and would need to be validated in other areas with different epidemiological and entomological profiles. The Forum thanked Dr. Remme and the research team for the exciting preliminary findings and looked forward to final results of the study.
Integrated Community-Directed Interventions (CDI) Research:

11. Drs. Remme and Elhassan presented the findings from the second year of a TDR multi-country study which showed CDI is a more effective means of delivering additional health interventions as compared to existing approaches. The study also showed CDI is an appropriate vehicle for the co-administration of multiple health interventions at the community level. Factors critical to the effectiveness of this approach were empowering the communities, the adequate and timely supply of intervention materials from the health service, and the monitoring of implementation. The Forum was pleased with the findings and endorsed CDI as an effective vehicle for delivering suitable health interventions including the distribution of insecticide-treated nets and home management of malaria at the community level and for strengthening health systems.

The Future of APOC and Onchocerciasis Control in Africa:

12. The Forum endorsed the report of the Working Group on the future of APOC and the control of onchocerciasis in Africa. The JAF expressed its appreciation for the group’s hard work and excellent report. Building on the report, the advice of the Legal Counsel of the WHO as well as the recommendations of the APOC Partners Meeting which was held in Yaoundé, the Forum approved the following 6 recommendations:

12.1 APOC’s main objective of establishing sustainable national onchocerciasis control programmes in all countries where needed should be maintained and endorsed.

12.2 JAF recommends that amendments to the MOU should be drafted and circulated before the 13th JAF session to allow an extension of APOC to 2015 to enable it to fulfill its original objective and meet new challenges to ensure sustained onchocerciasis control.

12.3 APOC should take on the additional objective of developing the evidence base to determine when and where ivermectin treatment can be stopped, and provide guidance to countries on how to prepare for, effect, and evaluate the cessation of treatment.

12.4 APOC should promote integration and co-implementation of interventions with CDTI to effectively provide multiple health benefits to large populations.

12.5 In order to maintain the achievements of the OCP, APOC’s scope of activities should be expanded to establish appropriate regional support mechanisms including support for former OCP countries where the epidemiological situation requires urgent attention.
12.6 Financial planning and fundraising for onchocerciasis control should build on existing mechanisms and traditional donors but should also explore new funding opportunities at both country and international levels.

13. APOC management proposed to organize a meeting for policy and decision makers of the Ministries of Health, at the level of Director of Health Services or their equivalent, on integration of CDTI into the health system, co-implementation of multiple health interventions, and development of national policies on integrated control of neglected tropical diseases and malaria. This meeting would be organized in close collaboration with other – WHO departments. The JAF approved the proposed meeting.


14. APOC management presented a Plan of Action and Budget for 2007-2015 for consideration. The JAF congratulated APOC management for the document and approved in principle the plan and projected additional costs of $46.392 million. However, the forum requested more detailed estimates of the projected costs and additional information. Meeting participants were invited to provide written comments on the document to APOC management by the end of January. A final version of the document would be presented at the 13th JAF session for formal approval, conditional upon approval of the extension of duration to 2015.

Update on "Macrofil" Research:

15. Mr. Bob Power, Executive Vice-President of Global Business Operations at Wyeth Pharmaceuticals informed the JAF of the company’s commitment to the development of Moxidectin and announced financial support for Phase III clinical trials. The JAF expressed its appreciation to Wyeth Pharmaceuticals for this support.

16. Dr. Annette Kuesel of TDR provided a summary of research on the use of albendazole to reduce parasite loads of loa loa, a new formulation of a DEC patch test, discovery research for macrofilaricide, and moxidectin Phase II clinical trial developments.

17. The Forum welcomed these promising research findings and stressed the need for the development of other diagnostic tests as a matter of priority. Professor David Molyneux brought to the attention of the Forum ongoing research on alternative compounds as a potential macrofilaricide and against Wolbachia.

External Monetary Incentives Research:

18. Preliminary research findings on a multi-country study on external incentives were presented. The research has demonstrated that there is large variation in the kinds of external incentives observed across programmes and countries. The Forum noted that the lack of standardization in practices on incentives may affect the effectiveness and sustainability of programs. The Forum was pleased with the findings of this important study and looked forward to the final results.
19. Dr. Adrian Hopkins on behalf of the NGDO group reported continued progress at delivering support in most APOC countries. He noted that all NGDOs were already supporting the co-implementation of other health interventions with CDTI.

20. The Forum appreciated the immense contribution of Merck & Co. Inc., to onchocerciasis control, not just through their donation of ivermectin, but also through their financial support to the NGDOs.

21. The Forum acknowledged the important contribution that the NGDOs have made in APOC countries since the beginning of the program.

22. Professor Eka Braide, on behalf of the TCC, gave an overview of the activities of 2006, which included a summary the topics that were discussed at their meeting, and results from the countries. The Forum acknowledged the important role the TCC played in the evaluation of new scientific and technical knowledge and its alignment with the activities of APOC and congratulated the committee.

23. Dr. Robert Walgate, Editor of Real Health News made a presentation of a new online publication, www.realhealthnews.net, which has been launched to help translate research on the health of the poorest people in the world into policy. He also solicited input from participants on the types of research that might be helpful to their work.

24. Mr. Claude Vignes, Representative of the Legal Counsel of the WHO, submitted the report of the Auditor. The report was accepted by the Forum.

25. Mr. Koffi Agblewou of APOC management presented the PAB 2007 of APOC. The total amount requested by APOC to carry out its activities was $13,500,000. The Forum discussed the PAB 2007 and advised APOC management to improve the indicators, such as trust fund financing per treatment by country and a temporal analysis of APOC funding to countries. The JAF approved the PAB 2007.

26. Representatives of the Anglophone and Francophone countries presented summaries of a new data collection effort launched at the request of Donors at the Yaoundé meeting to provide the level of contributions made by participating countries as well as the disbursement of funds relative to budgeted amounts.

27. The Forum accepted the reports and congratulated participating countries on the high-level of support that they had demonstrated, but stressed a concern about the low
levels of disbursements seen in some countries and highlighted the need to account for government funding of core CDTI activities as well as the total contributions by government to the program.

**Status of the Trust Fund Report:**

28. Dr. Ousmane Bangoura of the World Bank provided the Forum an overview of the status of the Trust Fund, including the funding levels for the current phase of the program, the projected funding shortfall of $7 million for the phasing out period. In addition, potential options for supporting and channeling funds to the countries were outlined. The Forum accepted the report of the World Bank.

**Update of Donor Pledges:**

29. The Forum acknowledged with gratitude the financial pledges by donors and the NGDOs for their long-standing support for APOC and onchocerciasis control. The Forum applauded the contributions of the government of the Republic of Nigeria to the APOC Trust Fund. JAF encourage other African countries to make similar contributions to the Trust Fund. It was also very pleased with the significant contributions to vector control activities made in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

30. Merck & Co. Inc. repeated its pledge to provide Mectizan® for as long as is needed.

**Report of the Special Intervention Zones (SIZ) and Former-OCP Countries:**

31. Dr. Laurent Yaméogo of APOC/SIZ management reported the results of the SIZ activities during 2006. Half of the SIZ countries had reported satisfactory results, however, the situation in Ghana, and Sierra Leone require more attention in the coming years. A report was also provided by Dr. Mamadou Oumar Traoré, national Onchocerciasis coordinator of Mali on the entomological and epidemiological situations in the former-OCP countries outside the SIZ. While the situation appears to be under control in Sénégal, Mali, and Burkina Faso, findings show that the situation seems to be unsatisfactory in Côte d'Ivoire and in a small area in Guinea Bissau. The Forum accepted the reports.

**Report of the Multi-Disease Surveillance Center (MDSC):**

32. Professor Mandy Kondé of the MDSC provided the JAF with an overview of the activities of the Center in 2006. The presentation highlighted how the lack of funds has limited the MDSC's ability to fully carry out its mandate. Onchocerciasis surveillance needs to be strengthened in particular in the countries affected by conflict. The partial results for 2006 indicate the epidemiological situation in Ghana is deteriorating. The report also showed the important progress made on meningitis surveillance. The Forum accepted the report, thanked the Acting Director, and encouraged WHO AFRO to rapidly make available the strategic plan to the potential donors of the MDSC and establish the governance structure agreed upon at the meeting held in Ouagadougou in October 2004.
Presentations on Neglected Tropical Disease Control:

33. Dr. Alan Fenwick reported to the Forum about a newly approved USAID-sponsored initiative, worth $100 million over 5 years, to fund integrated control of neglected diseases. The first grants will go to five fast-track countries: Uganda, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Ghana. The Forum noted that the NTD control activities will build upon the extensive infrastructure, the strategy, and the grassroots network of APOC. He encouraged endemic countries to apply for funds from this grant.

34. Dr. Jacob Kumaresan provided an overview of the activities of the International Trachoma Initiative. He also emphasized the need to invest in mapping of NTDs and discussed evidence of the cost-effectiveness of co-implementation of multiple health interventions.

35. Dr. Dirk Engels, of the WHO, reported on work recently completed by the WHO on the guidance on the integration and co-implementation of preventive chemotherapy programs against helminthic infections with other public health interventions.

36. Dr. Likezo Mubila, of WHO AFRO, provided an update on the efforts of WHO AFRO to guide and build capacity in countries for integration and co-implementation of multiple NTD interventions.

Decision of Location of 13th JAF Session:

37. At the invitation of the Government of the Kingdom of Belgium, the next session of the Joint Action Forum will be held in Brussels, Belgium. JAF agreed to hold the meeting from December 4-7, 2007 and sincerely thanked the Kingdom of Belgium for the invitation that had been extended to it.

Closure of the session

38. On behalf of the Joint Action Forum, the Director of APOC, Dr Uche Amazigo and the Hon. Minister of Health and Sanitation of Sierra Leone, Mrs. Thomas Abator, thanked His Excellency, Dr. Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, President of the United Republic of Tanzania for opening the 12th session of the JAF. The JAF expressed its sincere gratitude to the people of Tanzania, in particular, the Minister for Health and Social Welfare, Hon. Professor David Mwakuya for the efficient and cordial manner he chaired the 12th session of the Forum. The JAF considered the organization of the JAF12 as a huge success.

39 The chair expressed his gratitude to members for their active participation, high quality of the deliberations and important decisions made by the Forum to accelerate the elimination of onchocerciasis in the African continent. He then closed the 12th session of the Joint Action Forum.
African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control (APOC)
Programme africain de lutte contre l'onchocercose

JOINT ACTION FORUM  JAF-FAC  FORUM D'ACTION COMMUNE
Office of the Chairman

JOINT ACTION FORUM
Twelfth session
Dar-es-Salaam (Tanzania), 5-8 December 2006

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AA/Mtg
13.12.06
AGENDA

Opening
1. Opening of the session
2. Election of Officers
3. Adoption of Agenda
4. Reflections of the Committee of Sponsoring Agencies

Progress
6. Country reports – Treatment data
7. Health Impact Assessment of APOC

Research
8. Operational research and MACROFIL
   (i) When to stop ivermectin treatment: Study in West Africa
   (ii) Study on Community-directed interventions
   (iii) Study on external monetary incentives
   (iv) Macrofil

Future of Onchocerciasis Control
9. The future of APOC and Onchocerciasis Control in Africa
   (i) Report of the Working Group
   (ii) Report of the NGDO Coordination Group for Onchocerciasis Control
   (iii) Report of the Technical Consultative Committee (TCC)

10. Report of Partners’ Meeting in Yaounde, Cameroon

Finance
12. Audit report
13. Plan of Action and Budget for 2007
15. Financing of APOC
16. Pledging of Donor contributions

Other matters
17. Special close-door session for African Ministers of Health
18. Information on activities in the Special Intervention Zones (SIZ) of the ex-OCP, non-SIZ
areas, and the Multi-Disease Surveillance Centre (MDSC) of Ouagadougou

19. Information on NTDs
20. Date and place of the thirteenth session
21. Final Communiqué
22. Closure of the twelfth session

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