

Update on the Onchocerciasis Elimination Mapping (OEM) Project:



Introduction and project overview

In close coordination with WHO, AFRO-ESPEN, the Task Force for Global Health (TFGH), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) and many other partners, Sightsavers has started to bring together the essential building blocks to create stronger standardised systems for the scale-up of mapping in ivermectin-naïve areas, where transmission of onchocerciasis is likely or suspected.

This body of work, known as the Onchocerciasis Elimination Mapping (OEM) Project, aims to build the foundations for developing, operationalising and scaling up new and standardised World Health Organization (WHO)-endorsed OEM protocols, including:

- Operationalising a methodology and process for collecting data where disease is uncertain or where transmission is considered likely but not yet known.
- Helping to strengthen local technical capacity and provide standardised data capture systems.
- Creating a data flow system that facilitates evidence-based decision-making for countries.

After consultation with partners, districts in Ghana, Nigeria and Mozambique have been selected to be a part of the OEM pilot to help operationalise protocols. Through these protocols, the OEM Project aims to pave the way for a consistent approach, endorsed by the WHO Onchocerciasis Technical Advisory Subgroup (OTS) and key stakeholders, to accomplish OEM in the remaining hypo-endemic, non-ivermectin-treated, areas, hopefully by 2020.

This update details further information about the thinking behind the programme and some of the key areas of progress since the programme started. We look forward to updating you as the initiative develops!

With warm wishes,

Becks Hill, Programme Director
Phil Downs, NTDs Technical Director



Further information

If you have any questions or comments about the programme, please contact Becks Hill, Programme Director at Sightsavers, Rhill@sightsavers.org



The role of Onchocerciasis Technical Advisory Subgroup (OTS) and the OEM Project

During the first OTS meeting (October 2017), an initial framework for the OEM Project was developed. This framework seeks to facilitate the evidence required for the development of new OEM guidelines. As part of this framework, OTS made a number of recommendations that can be found in the OTS meeting report.



Further information

For a copy of the first OTS report, please contact ESPEN or your country WHO office. An overview of the OTS and OEM recommendations can be found in the 10 November 2017 Weekly Epidemiological record:

<http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/259414/WER9245.pdf?sequence=1>



Pilot phase summary

In the first months of the project, we have focused on developing the following:

- Coordination with national programmes
- Coalition building
- Project planning
- Data flow development
- Convening a Project Advisory Group (PAG)
- Development of training curriculum
- Procurement processing
- Institutional Review Board (IRB) development
- Refining priority operational research questions

How has this been achieved?

A data flow coordination meeting, hosted by BMGF, was a critical part of building relationships among key OEM stakeholders. Partners at the meeting included ESPEN, BMGF, WHO HQ, LSHTM, OEM Consultants, Taskforce, Standard Code and Manta Ray Consulting. Key outputs of the meeting were a data flow chart, an activity timeline, and defining the roles and responsibilities of data-related activities.

In addition, an external Programme Advisory Group (PAG) comprised of onchocerciasis experts was convened in March 2018 to discuss OEM data collection forms, management and communication strategies, facilitation of exclusion mapping, and the methodological approaches for the pilots bearing in mind OTS recommendations.

It is hoped that groups like the PAG and the Oncho NGDO Working Group will continue to provide insights and expert comments throughout the project lifecycle. This will be invaluable in assuring approaches and activities of the pilot project advance OTS objectives on OEM.

What's next?

The next six months will focus on implementing the project in select districts in Ghana, Nigeria and Mozambique. This will lead to an operationalised template for OEM that establishes initial best practices for field-level data collection, and data visualisation and decision-making at national level, with a view to leverage the needed support for wider scale-up in other countries. The project will also continue coordinating with partners focused on strengthening national laboratory capacity for diagnostic processing.



What can existing onchocerciasis programmes do to support OEM now?

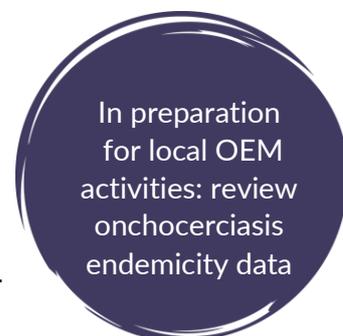
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districts are provisionally categorised as needing **onchocerciasis exclusion or elimination** mapping, according to available epidemiological data.

In preparation for local OEM activities, national programmes and implementing partners are encouraged to review their own onchocerciasis endemicity data.

Wherever possible, these reviews should include:

- Identifying districts that are proximal to meso- and hyper-endemic foci that have not yet been treated or mapped.
- Identifying districts that are already receiving treatment for lymphatic filariasis.
- Reviewing available reports and peer review literature on districts categorised as needing OEM, including historical APOC/OCP data.
- Prepare maps for the areas they will need mapping. Ideally, obtain topographical maps of areas targeted for OEM (1:200,000, or 1:100,000 if available).



- Developing GIS maps with up-to-date shape files showing forests, national parks, swamps/flood areas, contour lines, rivers etc.
- Using satellite images from Google Earth or other available geological information to identify possible onchocerciasis-endemic areas.
- Providing evidence of the presence or absence of clinical onchocerciasis in areas of interest.

These reviews will help determine the geographic areas that can be reasonably represented by first-line villages selected along a specific river basin; these preparatory activities should remain simple and inexpensive. Programmes that have not already done so, should establish regular monitoring and evaluation of first-line villages in areas where transmission has been verified.



Further information

Onchocerciasis endemicity data may be available in-country, and via the ESPEN NTD portal at <http://espen.afro.who.int/>

Where data can show that a particular district can be excluded from elimination mapping, submit information to WHO through the EPIRF and JAP process. All forms should be submitted to the WHO representative of the concerned WHO country office with electronic copies to PC_JointForms@who.int and the concerned regional focal point.



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