

PRESS RELEASE 2021

MINISTRY OF HEALTH UGANDA CONTINUES TO LEAD IN AFRICA TOWARDS ELIMINATION OF RIVER BLINDNESS/ONCHOCERCIASIS

The Ministry of Health declares the Wadelai (Pakwach District), and Nyamugasani (Kasese) foci as River Blindness Free

Uganda has successfully freed 38,450 people from river blindness (onchocerciasis), based on the current World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines. This success brings the country close to achieving its elimination goal of the disease nationwide by 2025. River blindness is a known public health problem affecting a significant population of Uganda since the early 1950s. The government of Uganda launched the National Onchocerciasis elimination policy in 2007.

River blindness is a vector-borne disease transmitted by black flies, which breed in fast-flowing rivers. It causes severe eye and skin diseases that may result in blindness. The disease is endemic in 40 districts of Uganda with about 4.7 million people at risk, excluding districts in the Victoria Nile focus that achieved elimination in the early 1970s.

The strategy used to eliminate river blindness from Uganda is the mass treatment of affected communities with ivermectin twice a year, and vector control/elimination where feasible. The fourteenth meeting of the Uganda Onchocerciasis Elimination Expert Advisory Committee (UOEEAC) of the Ministry of Health, held virtually from 3rd to 5th August 2021, concluded that two more river blindness foci met the WHO criteria for eliminating river blindness by completing a minimum of three years surveillance after halting ivermectin mass drug administration. The two foci/and total populations include the Wadelai (Pakwach District), 25,232 people, and Nyamugasani (Kasese District), 13,218 people.

Since the beginning of the elimination of onchocerciasis, these two foci have joined the other eight foci, which have eliminated the disease. They are: Itwara (Kyenjojo and Kabarole districts); Elgon (Mbale, Sironko, Manafwa and Bududa districts); Mpamba-Nkusi (Kagadi district); Wambabya Rwamarongo (Hoima, and Kikuube districts); Kashoya-Kitomi (Kamwenge, Rubirizi, Buhweju, and Ibanda districts); Imaramagambo (Bushenyi and Mitooma districts); Obongi (Obongi district); and the Victoria Nile focus (Jinja, Mukono, Kamuli, Mayuge and Kayunga districts).

It is estimated that 4,230,524 people are no longer at risk of onchocerciasis, including 2,878,706 living in the Victoria Nile focus.

In total, river blindness transmission interruption and elimination have been attained in fifteen (Victoria included) of the seventeen foci, and 5,952,585 Ugandans living in these districts are no longer at risk of acquiring the disease. In addition to the ten foci where elimination has been confirmed, five other foci: Budongo (Hoima, Buliisa, Masindi), Bwindi (Kisoro, Rubanda, Kanungu), Maracha-Terego (Maracha), Nyagak-Bondo (Nebbi, Arua, Zombo, Madi-Okollo), and West Nile (Koboko and Yumbe), have achieved interruption of the disease transmission, stopped interventions, and are undergoing three years of Post Treatment Surveillance as per the WHO guidelines. The Madi-Mid North focus currently classified under "suspected interruption of transmission" includes Pader, Lamwo, Kitgum, Gulu, Omoro, Amuru, Nwoya, Oyam, Lira, Adjumani, and Moyo districts with a total population of about 1,517,667 people. The Lhubiriha focus (Kasese district), with a population of 144,879, remains classified as transmission ongoing because of the potential for cross-border transmission from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

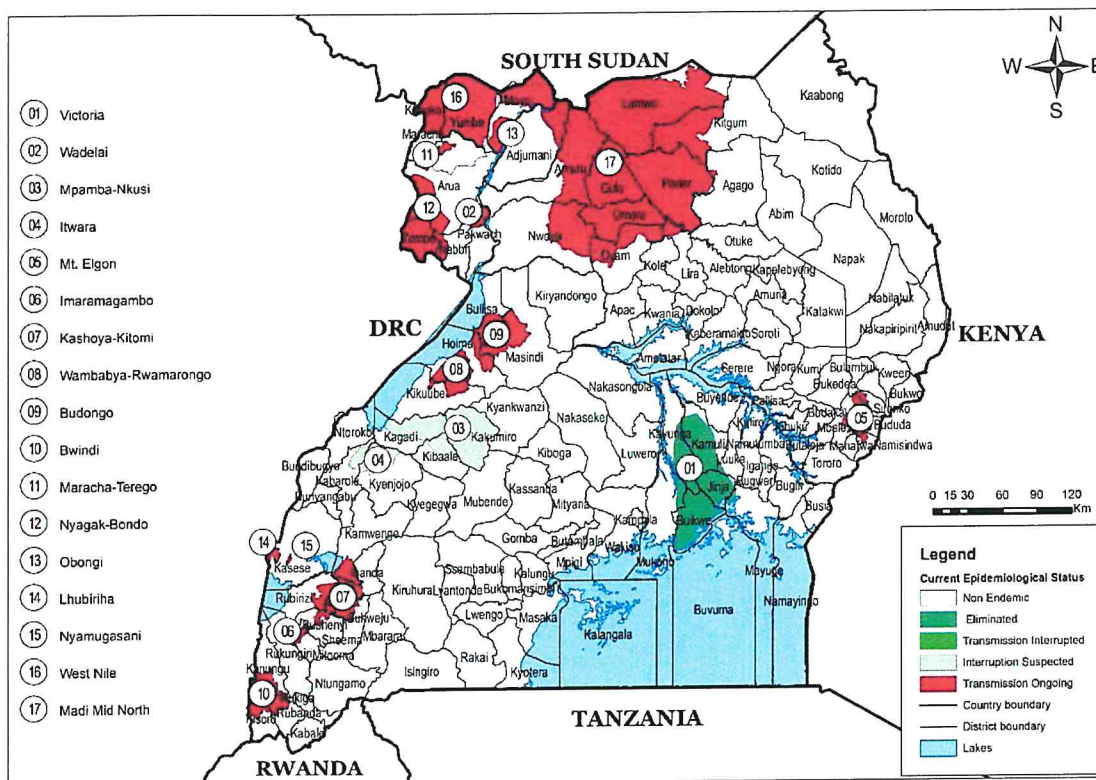
The government of Uganda, in cooperation with neighboring countries, DRC and the Republic of South Sudan (RSS), continues to promote cross-border river blindness activities. With the support of the United Nations



High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Health will begin mass treatment of refugees from river blindness endemic areas in October 2021. Uganda continues to register success in the fight against river blindness through the effort of the Ministry of Health's National Onchocerciasis Elimination Program and with the support of partners, including The Carter Center; Sightsavers; UKAid; USAID's Act to End NTDs | East project led by RTI International; The ELMA Foundation; Lions Clubs International Foundation; Lions of Uganda; MSD, also known as Merck & Co., Inc., Kenilworth, N.J. USA; the Mectizan Donation Program; BASF; the World Health Organization; and the governments of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of South Sudan.

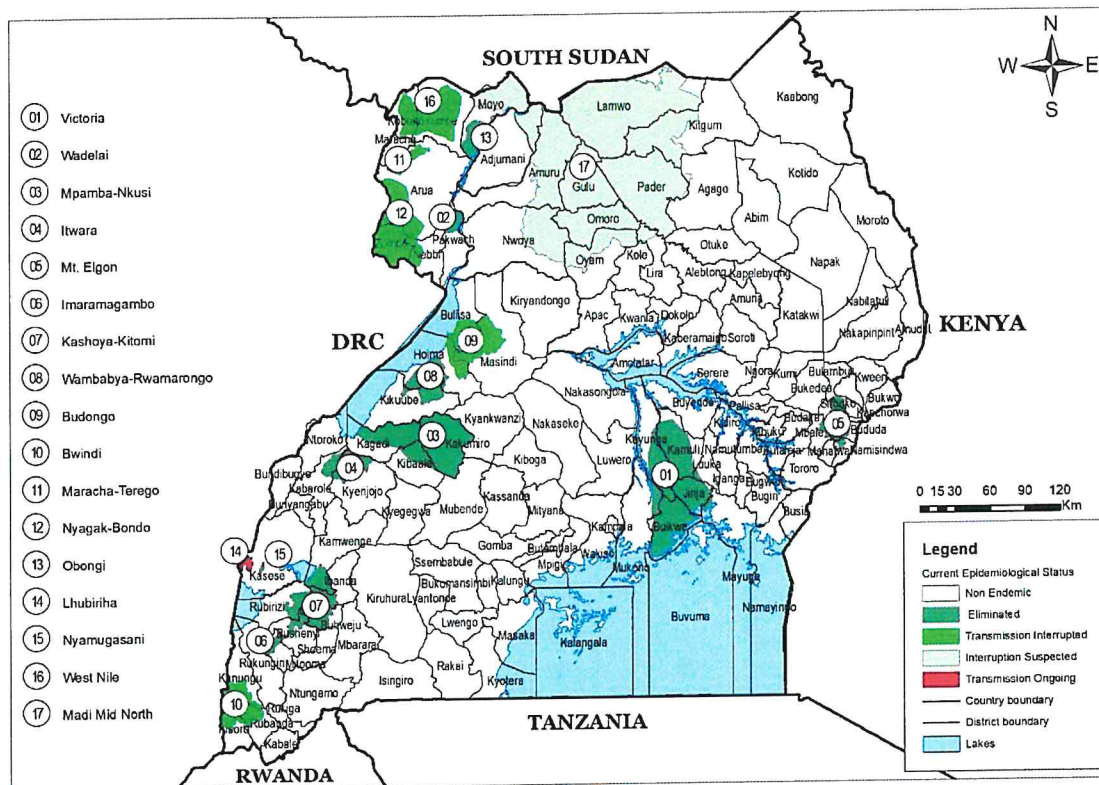
The maps below indicate the Onchocerciasis status in Uganda in 2007, and 14 years later in 2021

Onchocerciasis status 2007



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Onchocerciasis Status 2021



FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY

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