

THE GLOBAL ALLIANCE TO ELIMINATE LYMPHATIC FILARIASIS
WEBSITE: <http://www.filariasis.org>

The Global Elimination of Lymphatic Filariasis

The Story of Egypt



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Introduction

This is the story of Egypt's efforts to rid itself finally of lymphatic filariasis (LF), an ancient and disfiguring disease.

Above all it is the story of a bold national effort combined with unprecedented public–private international cooperation. The LF elimination programme in Egypt faced the daunting challenge of mass drug administration (MDA) – using a combination of drugs – to 2.5 million people over a two–week period every year for five years. Egypt's programme is a pioneer in this field – and the world is waiting to see whether such a large–scale undertaking can succeed in eliminating the disease in a relatively short period of time.

Historically, control of LF in Egypt has been fairly successful in some areas and less so in others. The Egyptian government has now resolved to try to rid the country of this debilitating disease once and for all. The national campaign is supported by all the available resources of the Ministry of Health and Population and of the primary health care infrastructure and by unique public–private partnerships developed with WHO within the framework of the Global Alliance to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis.

Egypt's story is particularly interesting because the country's LF elimination programme is the first to treat a large population from the outset, rather than scaling up over a number of years. Subsequently, few countries have adopted this method: the logistic difficulties of such large–scale implementation are formidable and, once a programme of this type has started, the momentum must be maintained – stopping halfway is not an option.

This story charts both the progress made during the period 2000–2002 and the challenges that lie ahead. Although it is aimed primarily at the non–specialist, the story will also interest the specialist, since Egypt's experiences may hold lessons for other endemic countries hoping to plan and implement successful programmes.

Much can be learned from every country and campaign. As well as the common concerns, there are likely to be unique aspects – for example the geography of the country and the culture of its peoples. It is hoped that by analysing and distilling the experiences of countries such as Egypt, it will be possible to identify those features of elimination programmes that have been most successful and to apply them in areas where campaigns have yet to begin.





(a) A mosquito taking a blood meal;

(b) *Microfilariae* circulating in the blood

What is lymphatic filariasis?

Lymphatic filariasis is one of humanity's oldest and most debilitating diseases, but few people have heard of it, let alone know anything about it. It doesn't make the headlines and it doesn't kill outright – but it causes permanent disability, silently destroying people's lives. The facts are intimidating:

- LF currently affects more than 120 million people worldwide

Lymphatic filariasis is a parasitic disease that is spread by mosquitoes. A thread-like worm causes the disease, which depends on two hosts: humans and several species of mosquitoes that plague tropical countries. The mosquito ingests microfilariae when it bites a person. These microfilariae undergo a process of transformation in the mosquito to become infective larvae, which enter the blood stream of another person through

The worms lodge in the lymphatic system — a network of nodes and vessels that regulate the delicate fluid balance between the tissues and blood and are essential for fighting infection — causing stagnation of the lymph and swelling. The resultant damage manifests itself as the grossly enlarged lower limbs or external genitalia of elephantiasis and hydrocele.

Although the majority of people infected

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