

The involvement of communitydirected distributors of ivermectin in other health and development activities



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# The involvement of community-directed distributors of ivermectin in other health and development activities



UNDP/World Bank/WHO
Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases
(TDR)

# **Acronyms**

#### **APOC**

African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control

#### CDD

Community-directed distributor

## CDTI

Community-directed treatment with ivermectin

#### **EPI**

Expanded Programme of Immunization

#### **FGD**

Focus group discussion

#### H&D

Health and development

#### **LGA**

Local government area

#### NPI

National programme of immunization

# NID

National immunization day

# PHC

Primary health care

# **TB-DOTS**

Tuberculosis-directly observed treatment short course, the internationally-recommended TB control strategy

# Team composition

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# **CONTENTS**

	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY					
1	INTRODUCTION					
2	STU	JDY OBJECTIVES				
3	METHODOLOGY 7					
	3.1 3.2	Study population, sampling and data collection				
4	STUDY AREAS AND STATUS OF CDTI 9					
	4.1 4.2 4.3 4.4	Cross River State, Nigeria9South-west Province, Cameroon10Kaduna State, Nigeria10Togo11				
5	RESULTS					
	<ul><li>5.1</li><li>5.2</li><li>5.3</li><li>5.4</li></ul>	Socio-demographic characteristics of CDDs 13  Additional health and development activities of CDDs 14  Relationship between the involvement of CDDs in other health and development activities and the performance of CDTI 20  Attitudes towards involvement of CDDs in other health and development activities 21				
6	CO	NCLUSIONS				
7	REC	COMMENDATIONS				
8	ACI	KNOWLEDGEMENTS				
9	BIB	LIOGRAPHY				
10	AN	NEXES: RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS 1-5				
	Research Research	arch instruments 1       32         arch instruments 2       39         arch instruments 3       40         arch instruments 4       43         arch instruments 5       45				

# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Community-directed treatment with ivermectin (CDTI), through which millions of people are treated, is currently the principal drug delivery strategy for onchocerciasis control. The success of CDTI in onchocerciasis control has caught the attention of other health and development programmes and there have been various attempts to use the CDTI structures and community-directed distributors (CDDs) for other health interventions.

However, the implications of this development for the effectiveness and sustainability of CDTI are not yet clear. Some expect that integration of other community-level health care activities with CDTI would enhance its sustainability. Others fear that sustainability may be jeopardized if CDDs are overloaded with tasks for other health and development activities. Hence there was a need for a detailed scientific evaluation of the current experiences and to identify what actions, if any, need to be taken to ensure that integration of other activities in CDTI strengthens rather than weakens its effectiveness and sustainability. Four research teams, from Calabar, Cross River and Kaduna in Nigeria; South-west Province, Cameroon; and Region Centrale and Region de la Kara, Togo, were commissioned to investigate this.

The study used a cross sectional design focusing on CDDs in the community as the unit of analysis. The study population consisted of all partners involved in the process of community-directed treatment of onchocerciasis with ivermectin at the community level. These included community members, their leaders and the CDDs they had selected, health facility staff and at the district level, and managers of other health and development programmes operating in the study communities.

The results showed that the majority of CDDs were involved in additional health and development activities. These were mainly Expanded Programme of Immunization (EPI), water and sanitation, and community development activities. The additional activities are not considered an important burden and do not seem to affect CDTI performance, as evidenced by the fact that ivermectin treatment coverage did not decline with increasing number of additional activities per CDD.

Most health programmes are interested in building on the experiences and structures of CDTI and in involving CDDs in their activities. Two-thirds of CDDs are already involved in EPI. Programmes such as EPI provide financial incentives to community volunteers, and this may explain why EPI is more popular with CDDs than CDTI. However, the results of the study suggest that provision of incentives by other programmes does not have a negative influence on CDTI and that communities often take advantage of such opportunities to reward the CDDs by selecting them for these other activities.

Nearly all CDDs were highly motivated to continue working as a CDD while being very much aware that they could not expect any financial reward for their CDTI work.

CDDs, communities and health workers were very much in favour of greater involvement of CDDs in additional health and development activities. The health workers wanted to build on the experience of the CDDs; the community wanted better services and had confidence in the CDDs; and, for the CDDs, this offered an opportunity for further capacity strengthening and they were particularly interested in doing more health-related work.



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