



Community-Directed Treatment of Lymphatic filariasis in Africa

UNDP/World Bank/WHO Special Programme for Research & Training in Tropical Disease (TDR)



Community-Directed Treatment of Lymphatic Filariasis in Africa

REPORT
of a multi-centre study
in Ghana and Kenya



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(TDR)

TDR/IDE/RP/CDTI/00.2

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Cover photo: Community gathering - Ghana (WHO/TDR/Crump)
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Acknowledgements

The Ghana Team acknowledges the District Directors of Health Services and their respective Health Management Teams, the community leaders for their role in the study, and the research assistants for their input and dedication to the study.

The Kenya team acknowledges the generous support (in addition to that from TDR) provided by the British Government (DFID), GTZ-funded Kilifi District Development Programme (KDDP), KEMRI/Wellcome Trust Research Laboratories, Kilifi, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Livestock Development, the Kenya Government official administration (Kilifi and Malindi districts), the people of Malindi and Kilifi, Wilfred M. Kisingu, Pauline W. Muthigani, Karanja Kiiru and all other persons without whose support this study would not have been possible.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lymphatic filariasis is an important public health and socio-economic problem affecting over 120 million people worldwide. The recent introduction of new drugs and annual, single-dose treatment regimens has been a major breakthrough in the fight against the disease and, in 1997, the World Health Assembly passed a resolution calling for ‘.....the elimination of lymphatic filariasis as a public health problem...’.

The principal challenge for filariasis elimination is to ensure high and sustained treatment coverage of the populations of affected communities. However, in most endemic countries in Africa, sustained drug delivery to all affected communities is difficult to achieve by the health services alone. TDR has therefore developed the concept of Community-Directed Treatment (ComDT), in which the community itself has the responsibility for the organisation and execution of the treatment of its members. ComDT was effectively tested for onchocerciasis and it is now the principal drug delivery strategy of the onchocerciasis control programmes in Africa.

Because of important differences between onchocerciasis and lymphatic filariasis control, further operational research was required to determine the feasibility, effectiveness and potential sustainability of ComDT for lymphatic filariasis. A study was therefore undertaken in Ghana and Kenya to compare two delivery strategies:

- a delivery strategy of mass treatment by the regular health care system (**HST**)
- a strategy of Community-Directed Treatment of filariasis, which incorporates the health services at the level of implementation (**ComDT/HS**).

The study comprised two phases:

- Phase I consisted of a situation analysis during which basic information was collected.
- Phase II was the intervention phase, during which both HST and ComDT/HS were executed.

One round of treatment was undertaken, and the results evaluated and compared. The study was conducted between July 1997 and October 1999.

In each country, four study units (full health districts in Ghana and half health districts in Kenya) were selected. Two were randomly allocated to HST and two to ComDT/HS. Within each district, 10 communities were selected for the study, giving a total of 80 study communities for the two countries together. The evaluation consisted of a process evaluation and a final treatment coverage survey.

The results indicate that ComDT/HS achieved high levels of treatment coverage - between 75-88% of the population above 5 years of age - that appear adequate for filariasis elimination.

The study has shown that ComDT can be effectively implemented through the regular public health services. Communities and health staff appreciated the ComDT approach and are willing to take part in the future.

High treatment coverage is the main challenge for elimination of Lymphatic Filariasis

Two drug delivery systems studied in Ghana and Kenya

Treatment coverage by health systems was poor

ComDT achieved high coverage needed for elimination

**ComDT
effectively
implemented
by health
services**

The treatment coverage achieved with HST was poor, at around 45%, and insufficient for filariasis elimination. Distance from health centres was also a significant factor. HST coverage was particularly poor in villages located at more than 5km from a health facility, but distance did not affect treatment coverage in the ComDT/HS arm.

As a result of findings from this study, Community-Directed Treatment, implemented through the Health Services, is therefore recommended for drug delivery for filariasis elimination in Africa.

**ComDT/HS
recommended
for the elimi-
nation of
lymphatic
filariasis in
Africa**

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