



### Press Release

## **River Blindness Transmission Interrupted in cross border Metema Focus, Amhara Regional State, Ethiopia**

Onchocerciasis is one of the neglected tropical diseases targeted for elimination in 2020. It is caused by a parasitic worm that causes skin disease and visual loss and transmitted from person to person through the bites of infected black flies. In Ethiopia, Onchocerciasis is endemic in five regions which include Amhara, South nations and nationalities and peoples, Gambella, Oromia and Benishangul Gumuz. The total districts known to be endemic for Onchocerciasis were 197 and more than 19 million people at risk for the infection. Of these districts Metema focus was known to be endemic in 2000/2001 based on rapid epidemiological mapping of Onchocerciasis (REMO). These includes entire parts of West Armachiho, Tegede, Chilga and GendaWuha and larger parts of Qu2f( )10a7nas2D6.e19b6.6 (u)..9b6.aupe1.315 Td (f)-6.6 e2Tc in oT.(hi)10 Fo.2 (i)2.w2 (i)2(l) due to shift in policy from control to elimination, twice a year treatment and the introduction of the health development army(HDA).

Five years after the policy change from river blindness control to elimination, the Ministry of Health would like to announce the interruption of transmission in the Metema river blindness focus in Amhara Regional State. The Metema focus includes Alefa, Quarra, Chilga, Takusa, Tach Armachiho, and West Armachiho districts. Beginning in 2018 over 1.1 million people in these districts will no longer need to take MDA.

The six districts in Metema focus will be first of Ethiopia's 197 river blindness endemic districts to interrupt transmission of the disease and one of the largest river blindness successes ever announced.

The Ministry of Health notes that there is one small area along the Wudi Gemzu River in Metema where black flies may still be transmitting the parasite among a population of about 15,255 people. MDA with Mectizan will continue in this 'hot spot' until transmission is interrupted.

The Metema focus crosses the international border into Sudan's Galabat focus, where transmission has also been recently interrupted. Sudan's Galabat focus will also stop MDA in 2018 and move to the PTS, in a coordinated fashion with the Ethiopian Metema focus. This is the first time two countries have coordinated their stop MDA decisions together and it exemplifies the importance of partnership between neighboring countries when disease elimination is the shared goal.

Post treatment surveillance and health education activities will continue for 3-5 years in the areas