

# The World Bank Group and PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases launch APOC collection

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On May 14, 2015, the World Bank Group and *PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases* will launch a collection of peer-reviewed articles on the history and success of the control of river blindness (onchocerciasis) in Africa that started with the Onchocerciasis Control Program (OCP) in 1974 and transitioned into the African Program for Onchocerciasis Control (APOC) in 1995.

OCP and APOC have been so successful that, today, blindness caused by onchocerciasis is no longer a public health problem in most of the countries. The Partnership now reaches more than 100 million people annually across Africa to control the disease.

The publication of the *PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases* collection, titled "40 Years of the APOC Partnership," will coincide with the 41st anniversary of one of the most successful Private-Public-Partnership for health in Africa. This partnership is unique in the involvement of a broad range of financial, scientific and operational partners, with crucial roles played by a [private sector](#) drug donation and by a network of 15 NGOs.

River blindness is endemic in 31 African countries, 6 countries in Latin America and in Yemen. It is a debilitating disease that causes disfiguring skin disease, severe itching and eventual blindness among infected people. The flies that spread the disease breed in fast-flowing water, hence the name [river blindness](#). As a result, vast tracts of fertile land fed by rivers were abandoned for drier areas free of black flies.

In 1987, Merck (known as MSD outside the United States) initiated a program to donate a drug, ivermectin (Mectizan), which could be safely and effectively distributed annually on a massive scale to control the disease. OCP began distributing the drug in addition to larviciding, which controlled river blindness in 11 West African countries. After several decades of larviciding and treatment with ivermectin, today, at least 25 million hectares of land are free of river blindness, restoring livelihoods and boosting food security for almost 17 million people.

In 1995, a larger partnership was formed to fight river blindness in the remaining 20 endemic countries in Africa. APOC is implemented by the World Health Organization, with fiscal management by the World Bank Group along with support from African ministries of health, the private sector, the donor community, and NGOs.

Today the enormous success of OCP and APOC in reaching millions of people through innovative distribution strategies has paved the way for elimination of the disease worldwide.

The *PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases* collection describes all facets of the success leading to the effective control of river blindness that include partnerships, funding, distribution strategies, monitoring and evaluation, lessons learned, and advocacy. Over the past two decades, these factors have been replicated and other companies have initiated donation programs of drugs to support other control and elimination efforts for [neglected tropical diseases](#) (NTDs). Today, billions are treated worldwide for NTDs and even larger partnerships have formed to improve collaboration and to ensure that the world's poorest populations have access to medicines for NTDs and strengthened health systems to improve health and fight poverty.

**More information:** [dx.plos.org/10.1371/journal.pntd.0003562](https://dx.plos.org/10.1371/journal.pntd.0003562)

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