

# MINISTRY OF HEALTH

## UGANDA REGISTERS SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS TOWARDS ELIMINATION OF RIVER BLINDNESS /ONCHOCERCIASIS

**Ministry of Health is close to declaring Wadelai (Pakwach District) and West Nile (Koboko and Yumbe) foci as River Blindness Free**

Uganda has stopped interventions in 2019 among 608,219 people in Nyagak Bondo focus previously treated for river blindness (Onchocerciasis), based on the current World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, bringing the country closer to achieving its goal of eliminating river blindness nationwide. River blindness has been known as a public health problem affecting a significant population of Uganda since early 1950's. The Government of Uganda declared a nationwide elimination policy in 2007.

River blindness is a vector borne disease that is transmitted by the black flies which breed in fast flowing rivers. It causes serious eye and skin disease that may result in blindness. The disease was originally endemic in 40 districts in Uganda with about 4.6 million people at risk, excluding districts in the Victoria Nile focus that eliminated the disease in the early 1970's.

Since the launch of the elimination program in 2007, Uganda has achieved elimination in 7 foci: Obongi in Obongi District; Itwara (Kyenjojo and Kabarole districts); Elgon (Mbale, Sironko, Manafwa and Bududa districts); Mpamba-Nkusi (Kagadi district); Wambabya-Rwamarongo (Hoima, and Kikuube districts); Kashoya-Kitomi (Kamwenge, Rubirizi, Buhweju, and Ibanda districts); Immaramagambo (Bushenyi and Mitooma districts), excluding Victoria Nile (Jinja, Mukono, Kamuli, Mayuge and Kayunga districts), which was eliminated in the early 1970's.

The strategy for elimination of river blindness from Uganda is mass treatment of affected communities with ivermectin and vector control/elimination. The 13<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Uganda Onchocerciasis Elimination Expert Advisory Committee (UOEEAC) of the Ministry of Health held from 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> August 2020 concluded that final serological surveys should be conducted this year in Wadelai and West Nile foci which have completed three years of post-treatment surveillance (PTS) per current WHO





guidelines. There has been no evidence of river blindness vectors (*Simulium flies*) for the last 10 years in these foci.

If serology confirms successful completion of PTS period in Wadelai and West Nile foci, an additional population of 566,888 will no longer be at risk of contracting river blindness disease. Including the Victoria focus, at least 4.676 million people in Uganda will no longer be at risk of being infected with onchocerciasis.

There are 5 foci (Budongo, Bwindi, Maracha-Terego, Nyamugasani, and Nyagak-Bondo) where interruption of transmission was confirmed but which have not yet completed the required PTS period as per WHO guidelines. In these foci, the population has been protected from onchocerciasis, and the foci are awaiting final confirmation of elimination. The Madi-Mid North focus comprising of Pader, Lamwo, Kitgum, Gulu, Omoro, Amuru, Nwoya, Oyam, Lira, Adjumani, and Moyo districts, with a population of approximately 1,471,583 million people is still classified as "Interruption Suspected". Only Lhubiriha focus (Kasese district), with a population of 140,659 remains classified as "Transmission Ongoing". So far, approximately 4.3 million treatments for Onchocerciasis have been stopped.

The Government of Uganda, in collaboration with neighboring countries, Democratic Republic of Congo and Republic of South Sudan continues to promote cross-border river blindness elimination activities.

Uganda continues to register success in the fight against river blindness, through the effort of the Ministry of Health's River Blindness Elimination Program, with the support of partners including; The Carter Center, Sightsavers, USAID's Act to End NTD | East Program led by RTI International, the Lions Clubs International Foundation, Lions of Uganda, Merck, Mectizan Donation Program, BASF, World Health Organization, and the Governments of Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of South Sudan. This accomplishment is evidence that total elimination of River Blindness is possible in Africa.

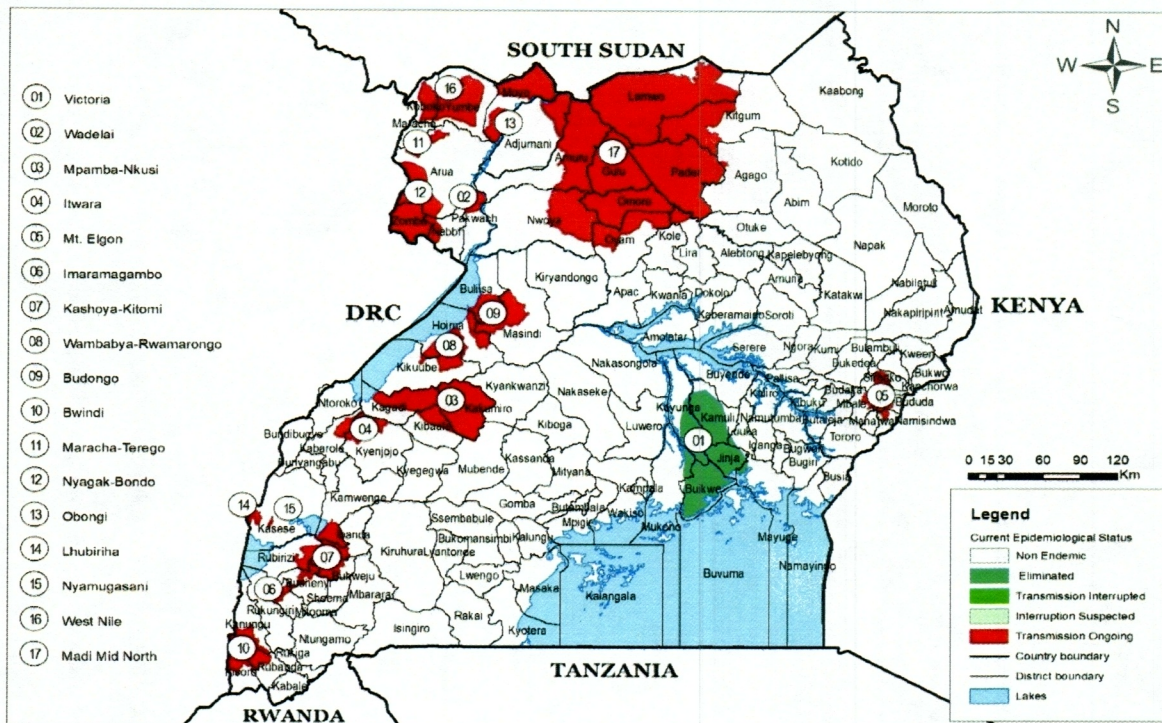
**FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY**



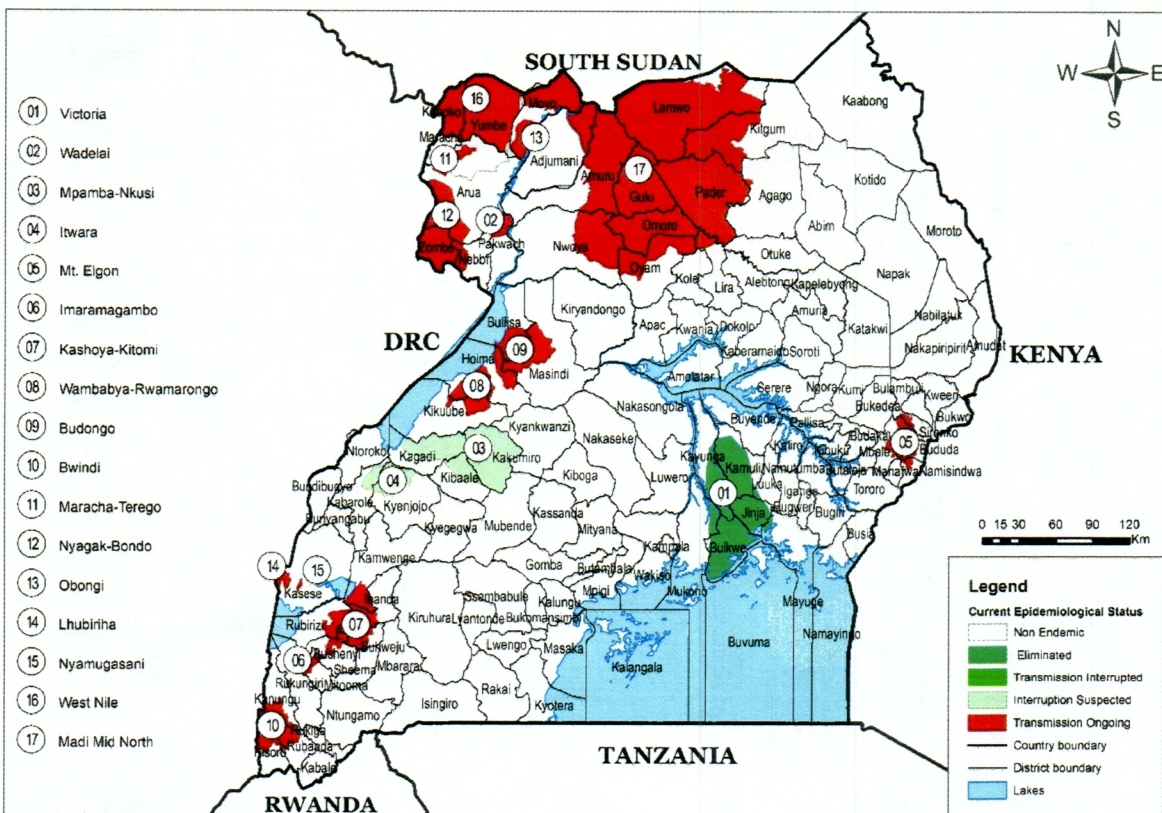
**Dr. Aceng Jane Ruth Ocero**  
**Minister for Health**



## Onchocerciasis Status 1992



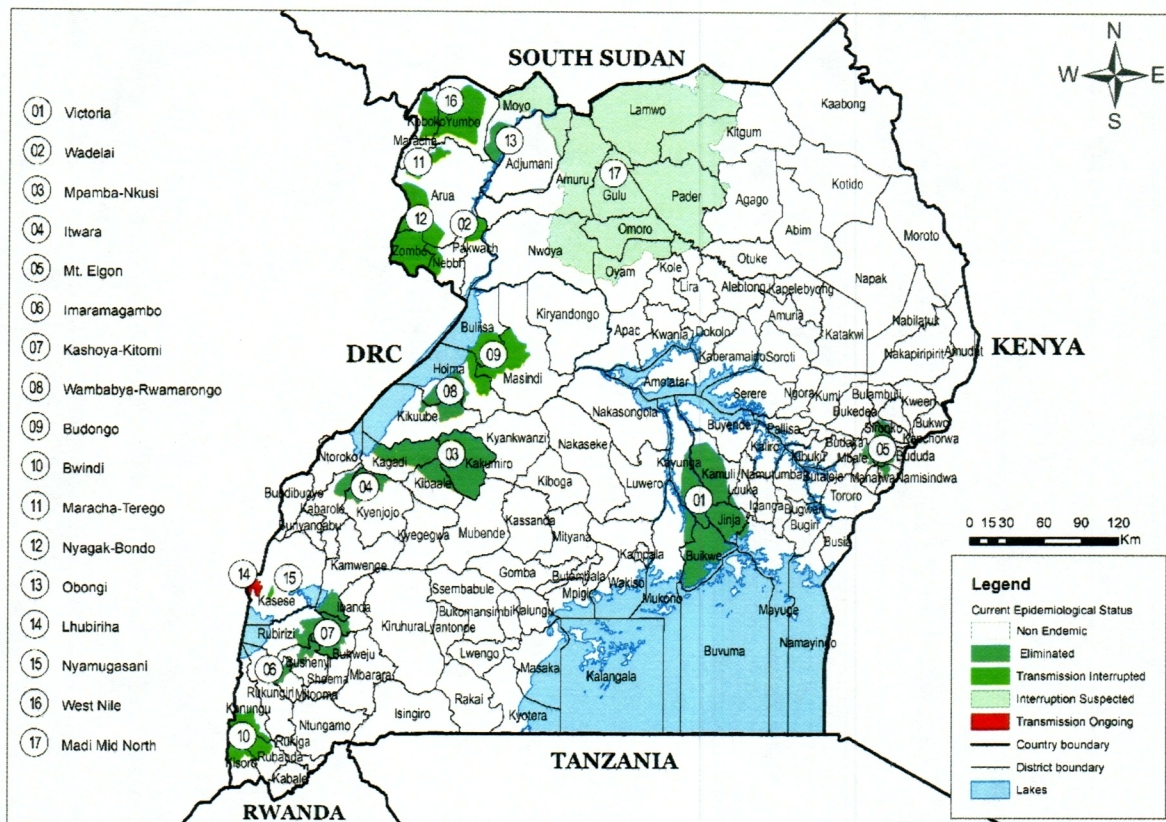
## Onchocerciasis status 2007



*Handwritten signature*



# Onchocerciasis status in 2019/2020 Pending Wadelai/West Nile foci reclassification



*Signature*