



Lions Clubs International
FOUNDATION

Rising to the Challenge: The Fight Against River Blindness



A Desperate Vision Crisis

In a world in which 40 percent of the population is affected by water scarcity, it's hard to fathom people abandoning their homes and fertile land near generously flowing rivers, and streams. Yet, sometimes they must. And for good reason.

Onchocerciasis.

Commonly known as river blindness, onchocerciasis is an agonizing disease caused by bites from infected blackflies who make their own home near rapidly coursing waters. Intense itching, rashes, skin discoloration, and eye disease that can lead to permanent blindness are the more overt manifestations of the disease. But the devastation goes far beyond the physical.

From Helpless to Hopeful

The World Health Organization provides these sobering estimates*:

- At least 25 million people are infected with river blindness, while 123 million people live in areas that put them at risk of infection.
- About 300,000 people are blind, and another 800,000 have visual impairment, because of the parasite.
- Nearly 99 percent of those infected live in Africa, the remainder in Yemen and six countries in the Americas.



*Source: https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/onchocerciasis/gen_info/faqs.html

The Fight Against River Blindness



Physiological effects of river blindness are readily identified. Go beyond skin deep and what the eye can – or cannot see – and the devastation becomes bleaker. With infected blackflies breeding swiftly and abundantly near water, where most fertile land is located, many people abandon their river valley homes, land, and livelihood simply to avoid disease. Onchocerciasis's negative impact now multiplies to include greatly damaged economic productivity for many villages in some of the world's poorest areas.

But there's hope. Today, transmission of onchocerciasis has been interrupted in the Nigerian states of Plateau and Nasarawa, ushering in a brighter future for the world's most river blindness-endemic country. In addition, with Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF) support, the World Health Organization verified Colombia to be free of onchocerciasis in 2013, followed by Ecuador, Mexico and Guatemala in 2014, 2015, and 2016 respectively.

So how has this hope unfolded?

One Step Closer to Ending River Blindness

To date, LCIF has provided nearly US\$45 million in grants to combat onchocerciasis worldwide. Nearly US\$28 million of those funds have financed onchocerciasis projects on which Lions and The Carter Center (TCC) have partnered.

TCC, founded by former US President (and Lion) Jimmy Carter, and former First Lady Rosalynn Carter, centers on waging peace, fighting disease, and building hope. Its mission strategically aligns with those of both Lions Clubs

International and LCIF, making TCC a powerful partner in Lions' efforts to serve humanity. This partnership has helped provide more than **17 million treatments, reaching approximately 9 million people** because of the success and accomplishments of the SightFirst program. LCIF has given out 275 million Mectizan® treatments with our grants (of which 218 million are through our partnership with The Carter Center).



Lions leaders meet with President Carter and Carter Center staff.

Leveraging Resources with a Major Partner



A valuable partner of Lions Clubs International Foundation (LCIF) since 1994, The Carter Center (TCC) has worked with the government of Nigeria to fight river blindness for more than 25 years. Because of these efforts, mass drug administration (MDA) of parasite-fighting medication ivermectin (Mectizan®, donated by U.S.-based Merck & Co.) can finally be halted in Plateau and Nasarawa. This represents the largest MDA cessation ever in the fight against river blindness.

THE
CARTER CENTER



LCIF has supported TCC with US\$63 million in funding for programs designed to wage war against river blindness and trachoma, a preventable bacterial infection, throughout Africa, and the Americas. Overall, Lions' partnership with TCC has led to distribution of more than 214 million Mectizan® treatments in 11 countries.

“Stopping the mass drug administration program in Plateau and Nasarawa states is a major achievement,” said Dr. Frank Richards, director of TCC’s River Blindness Elimination Program. “But we must be careful to monitor closely over the next few years to be assured that it does not come back. This will require continued effort and attention.”

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Celebrating Success and Renewing Commitments

Earlier this year, LCIF visited with TCC's Mary Ann Peters, chief executive officer and ambassador (retired), at TCC headquarters, in Atlanta, Ga., USA. As the two celebrated a near-quarter-century partnership, the discussion turned to a shared vision: eradication of river blindness transmission, as well as blinding trachoma, a preventable bacterial infection, in Ethiopia.

LCIF and Peters each offered remarks on the power of the TCC-LCIF partnership and all that has already been – and that will be in the future – accomplished because of it.

Capping the celebration was the signing of a new memorandum of agreement highlighting LCIF's pledge to provide an additional US\$16 million in support of TCC's river blindness and trachoma programs through 2020.

With continued support from LCIF, the Lions-Carter Center SightFirst River Blindness Elimination program in Ethiopia will continue to seek to reach interrupted transmission of onchocerciasis by the end of 2020.

Funds provided by LCIF will help The Carter Center, Lions, and the national government of Ethiopia press forward toward river blindness and blinding trachoma elimination. In addition, support will assist national programs in Mali and Niger to combat trachoma.

Making Progress

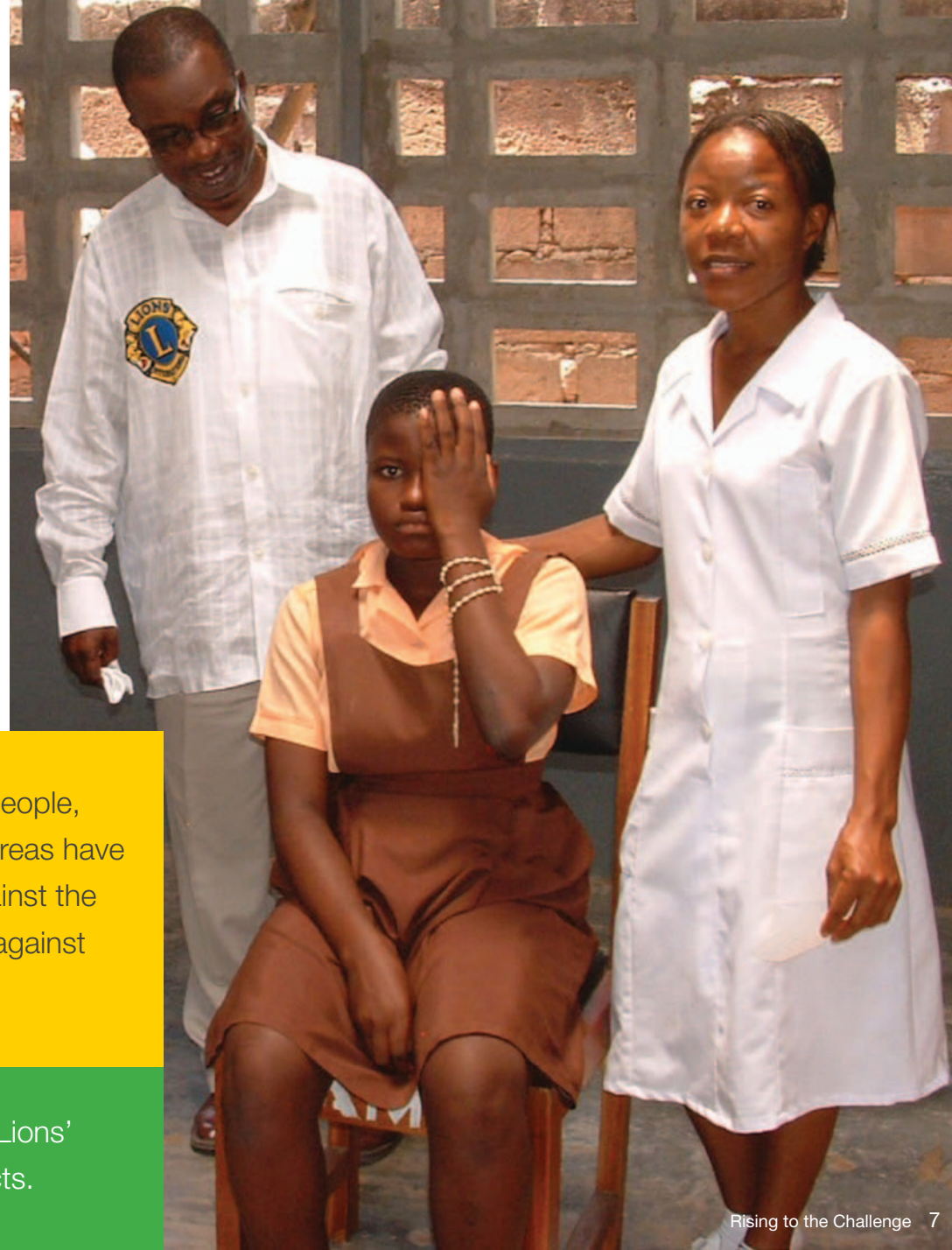
Nigeria's success in Plateau and Nasarawa indicates elimination of river blindness is achievable in Africa. The hard work must continue, as the disease still infects people living in many other Nigerian states and other parts of Africa.

Key activities anticipated to continue include but are not limited to:

- Training and capacity building activities for project staff, volunteers, community drug distributors, and health workers.
- Continued entomological and epidemiological surveys and laboratory analysis of results for program decision making.
- Continued implementation of semi-annual ivermectin treatment in all Lions-Carter Center-assisted areas and incorporation into treatment of the at-risk population in newly mapped endemic districts.
- Health education and awareness creation across the regions and in project areas.
- Impact assessments in districts which have completed eight to ten rounds of treatment.

Elimination of river blindness is now focused on the Yanomami people, who live on the border of Brazil and Venezuela. 11 of these 13 areas have had transmission interrupted as of 2017. In Africa, progress against the disease has resulted in the halting of mass drug administration against river blindness in parts of Sudan, Uganda, and Ethiopia.

Visit [lcif.org/Grants](https://www.lcif.org/Grants) to learn more about grant funding to help Lions' districts develop and implement large-scale humanitarian projects.



Supporting Lions. Serving Humanity. Giving Hope.

Pain, disfigurement, and vision loss caused by river blindness are preventable. Thanks to partnerships like that between TCC and LCIF, and generous donations by leading drug companies such as Merck, global elimination of river blindness may just be in sight.

Nearly 75 percent of vision impairments are preventable or curable, often for mere dollars. LCIF, through Campaign 100, will continue our foundation's more than a quarter-century commitment to eliminating avoidable blindness worldwide; so that efforts like these can continue:

- Helping 30 million people improve or restore their vision.
- Investing US\$415 million to extend services to even more people throughout the world.

A Commitment to Eliminate River Blindness



With your support, our foundation will:



- **Lead the world** in establishing and strengthening comprehensive eye care institutions and systems through capital expansions, equipment provisioning and human resource training.
- **Reaffirm Lions' global leadership** in child eye care service provision, in partnership with the World Health Organization.
- **Support national efforts** to eliminate blinding diseases like onchocerciasis ("river blindness") and trachoma, the world's leading causes of infectious blindness and visual impairment, through volunteer training and supervision, advocacy, surgical services, and distribution of appropriate medications.
- **Lead the global response** to the uncorrected refractive error challenge by supporting projects that provide high-quality, sustainable and high-impact refractive error services.
- **Establish SightFirst challenge grants** that empower and inspire Lions and their partners to develop innovative, ground-breaking approaches to service in underserved areas.
- **Enhance and expand** Lions-led comprehensive vision screening programs for adults and children.



Visit **lCIF.org/BE100** to learn how Campaign 100 will lead the charge to rid the world of infectious blindness, reduce avoidable blindness and visual impairment, and improve overall quality of life by providing services to those with blindness or visual impairment.

With your donation of US\$100, you can fund 2 cataract surgeries.

To support the compassionate work of Lions worldwide, please click on the donate button below to make a huge impact on LCIF's Empowering Service Fund today.

Together we can do it, because together, *We Serve*.

Donate today!



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Lions Clubs International Foundation
300 W. 22nd St. | Oak Brook, IL 60523-8842 USA
+1.630.571.5466 | **lCIF.org/BE100** | **#BE100**