

**ROLE OF THE YAKUBU GOWON CENTRE (YGC)
IN THE NIGERIA GUINEA WORM ERADICATION
PROGRAMME (NIGEP)**

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HEALTH PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA**

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A. INTRODUCTION:

The Yakubu Gowon Centre (YGC) began to be involved in the fight against Guinea worm in Nigeria in March 1999. This fight was necessitated by President and Mrs. Carter's request for the involvement of General Dr. Yakubu Gowon GCFR and the Yakubu Gowon Centre to join hands with them and the Carter Center in the last phase of war to eradicate guinea worm in Nigeria by December year 2000.

Since then, the Yakubu Gowon Centre has continued to be deeply involved in Advocacy, Mobilisation and Health Education activities aimed at:

- a. Rekindle the interest and support for guinea worm eradication activities throughout Nigeria, especially in the affected areas with a view to meeting our set target of zero case by year 2005.
- b. Whipping up sufficient political support for guinea worm eradication programmes at all levels of government particularly in ensuring that safe drinking water to guinea worm endemic communities are actually provided on ground and not just on paper.
- c. Creating sufficient awareness about guinea worm mode of transmission and prevention in the affected guinea worm areas of the country, with a view to ensuring that the communities change their attitudes for the better and also sustain any progress made in reduction of guinea worm.

- d. Contributing ideas and resources in the implementation of NIGEP activities, both at the National, State, Local Government and community level.
- e. Participation of General Gowon and the Centre in National and International Guinea Worm Programme Meetings/Conferences such as the one held in Accra, Ghana.

B. ACTIVITIES OF THE YAKUBU GOWON CENTRE:

Guinea worm eradication programme activities of the Yakubu Gowon Centre are nation wide and include:

- 1. Advocacy meetings with State Governors, Commissioners, LGA Chairmen, Traditional Rulers, Community Leaders and members of the communities. These meetings are usually attended by Water agencies and other collaborating partners such as UNICEF, UNDP, WHO and The Carter Center (Global 2000).
- 2. Community Health Education for guinea worm eradication.
- 3. Follow up of activities to ensure that promises and pledges made by the State, LGA, and communities are kept. New safe water sources are sometimes commissioned by General Dr. Yakubu Gowon *GCFR* during these follow up visits.
- 4. Meetings and interviews with media to ensure that messages concerning the guinea worm eradication activities are passed on to a wider audience.

Details of activities carried out and areas visited are shown in Table 1 (Summary page)

C. **IMPACT OF ACTIVITIES:**

The advocacy and mobilisation campaign of his Excellency General Dr. Yakubu Gowon *GCFR* and his team has continued to make significant impact in the guinea worm eradication programme activities. The country has witnessed a drastic reduction in guinea worm cases from 13,419 cases in 1999 to 1,460 cases in year 2003. In addition, as a result of increased mobilisation and advocacy to government at all levels, there has been an increase in the provision of safe water sources to guinea worm endemic communities. This has resulted to a noticeable reduction in the number of guinea worm cases to less than 500 cases between January to December 2004.

The joy and appreciation of the affected rural people speak for itself. It says it all. Other areas where impact have been created area:

- a. Rehabilitation of old and broken down water sources by the communities, State Governments and the Local Government authorities, to meet the need of the endemic communities.
- b. Adherence to Health Education messages as evident by the prompt reporting of cases for necessary action and the use of filter.
- c. Improved logistic support for guinea worm programme activities by the State, and the Local Government authorities in the areas of vehicle and maintenance, monthly allowances for States and Local Government Coordinators, Village Based Health Workers and case management materials.

D. **PROGRAMMES FOR THE REST OF THE YEAR: OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2005**

- i. Visits will be made to all the endemic zones whose peak transmission falls within October to December.
- ii. Production of Health Education posters and pamphlets in 9 Nigerian languages will be completed as soon as funds are made available.
- iii. Intensive follow up activities in all previously endemic and endemic communities to ensure that surveillance is sustained.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen while we justifiably have reasons to pat each other on the back for the tremendous strides made so far, appreciating the technical and financial support we receive from The Carter Center/Global 2000, and other collaborating agencies such as UNICEF, WHO, The Japanese Embassy and UNDP, permit me to say that it is certainly not yet celebration time. Nigeria is still endemic of guinea worm disease, and for us Nigerians, this poses a formidable challenge, which we must collectively rise up to. For as long as there is one case hiding somewhere, all rural communities without adequate safe water supply still remain prone to guinea worm infection.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, in order to eliminate guinea worm in Nigeria all hands must be on deck. It is based on this that The Yakubu Gowon Centre will wish to advocate for the following:

- i. Total dedication by all staff of guinea worm at the State, Local Government and community level.
- ii. There is a need for increase in political and financial commitment by all tiers of Government.

- iii. There is a need for increase funding and support by all our other stakeholders.
- iv. The need for provision of safe water source to all rural communities by the relevant agencies.
- v. Pressmen owe it a duty to mobilize the support of all and create awareness using the appropriate medium of communication peculiar to endemic communities.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, the target to eliminate guinea worm in Nigeria and set our people free from its shackle by year 2005 ending is a task that must be done by all.

Thank you.