

World NTD Day: Three million persons at risk in Ogun as COUNTDOWN lends support

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“Over three million persons are at risk of Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) in Ogun State, south western Nigeria, of which 1.4 million are school age children.” This was reported by the Honourable Commissioner of Health, Dr Tomi Coker at a press conference on the 31st January 2020 as part of the three-day activity to mark the world’s first NTD Day commemoration sponsored by [COUNTDOWN](#) in the state. The event was tagged #BeatNTDs: For Good, For All and aimed to draw attention to the morbidity and socio-economic burdens associated with the diseases and encourage individuals and organisations to partner with the state government in its effort to eliminate the diseases from its communities.

Above: Honourable Commissioner of Health Ogun State, Dr Tomi Coker during a press conference on World NTD Day
Photo credit: James Yashiya

Onchocerciasis locally known as “*inarun*”, lymphatic filariasis; “*iwuse*”, soil transmitted helminthiasis; “*ito eje*” and schistosomiasis; “*atosi aja*” are endemic in the state. So far, through collaborative efforts the programme has trained 8,500 volunteers to administer medicines in communities and have treated 780,657 school aged children in 6000 schools in the last round of school-based distribution in 2019. However, more is required to eliminate the NTDs by preventing new cases and improving the lives of those already affected, especially the vulnerable poor who are exposed to the vectors in their daily socio- economic activities and are unable to protect themselves from the consequences of such exposures.

Right: A sensitisation and awareness creation session during morning assembly with students of African Church Grammar School, Abeokuta on 28th January 2020
Photo credit: Anonymous



The first day of commemoration was marked by a state- wide radio programme on [Sweet FM station](#) to enlighten the public followed by awareness visit

to some primary and secondary schools in the state capital, Abeokuta. At the African Church Grammar School, Ita Eko, the NTD control programme coordinator, Dr Islamiat Soneye with staff of the public health unit of the ministry of health sensitised the pupils on the prevalence of the diseases in 18 of the 20 local government areas in the state. She described NTDs as;

“Diseases commonly associated with poverty but particularly poor environmental hygiene which exposes persons to the vectors. Though it is difficult to control the vectors due to the huge cost involved, however, students should consider themselves as NTD ambassadors in the state and lead campaigns for cleaner environment while educating people to limit contact with fast flowing rivers which breed black flies that cause onchocerciasis through bites.”

Lymphatic Filariasis, which is caused by black mosquito bites can be prevented by wearing protective clothing and sleeping under treated mosquito nets. Soil Transmitted Helminthiasis (STH) and schistosomiasis are caused by contact with contaminated water which hosts species of snails that breed it.

There was procession through major roads on the third day to sensitise and increase awareness among residents in the state capital with banners, posters and leaflets displaying key NTD messages in both English and the native Yoruba language.

Branded T- shirts provided by COUNTDOWN were worn by staff of the public health unit and volunteers who commenced the NTD walk from the arcade ground at the state secretariat at Oke Mosan, playing jingles and music on public address system. This was strategic in drawing attention of the general public to the message.

Right: An NTD Walk through major streets in the state capital, led by Dr Soneye (first left)

Photo credit: Odubiyi Adekunle



A multi-sectoral representation of academics from the Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta (FUNAAB); ministry of information and national orientation and representatives of Evidence Action, a non- governmental development organization which is funding school based deworming programme for schistosomiasis and STH in Ogun and other

south Western Nigerian states participated in the commemoration walk. Motorcycles adorned with posters rode through the streets with law enforcement agents providing traffic control for other road users and the procession. Strategic procession locations included the city centre Kuto and Omidia markets, major junctions and palace of a revered traditional leader, "The Olubara of Ibara" community, Oba Dr Jacob Olufemi Omolade.



From left: Director of public health; Dr Festus Soyinka, Dr Islamiat Soneye; State NTD Programme Coordinator, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Health; Dr Ayinde Ekundayo and Deputy State NTD coordinator, Maryam Kafil- Emiola)
Photo credit: Odubiyi Adekunle

Professor Uwem Ekpo of FUNAAB who joined the procession averred that it is a noble idea to have a day dedicated to raise NTD awareness globally just like we have for other public health issues like malaria, HIV, cancer, etc. Being a leading epidemiologist in the country, Ekpo gave insight to the epidemiology of some of these NTDs and lauded government efforts in the mass distribution of ivermectin, albendazole and praziquantel. He recognized the critical role played by UNICEF and other donor agencies in making these medicines available as preventive chemotherapy.



Right: A sensitisation session by staff of the NTD programme unit at Kuto market in the state capital
Photo credit: Odubiyi Adekunle



Dr Soneye expressed deep appreciation for the support the COUNTDOWN consortium has continued to provide through its ongoing implementation research in the state. She noted that the capacity of staff of the NTD control unit is being strengthened to plan and implement intervention programmes and laid premium to the participatory guide for planning mass administration of medicines, which is an evidence-based document produced by the research to support the programme. These and other forms of support are needed to reach the vulnerable members of the community towards elimination of the disease.

Above: A radio presenter with Dr Islamiat Soneye
Photo credit: Odubiyi Adekunle