



Verification of Interruption of Transmission in *Individual Foci*: Where Do We Go in the Americas?

Discussion panel: João Batista Vieira, Chair; Helen Freitas; José Luis Garcés; Eric Ottesen; Patrick Lammie; and Steven K. Ault, Secretariat

Dr. Eric Ottesen suggested that a small subgroup—a small working group of about three people—be created as a focal point to oversee all assessments in the Americas and that a standardized protocol be shared within and outside of the Americas prior to actual verification efforts. He said the protocol should be developed, standardized, and applied to each different area, and then circulated among the people in the small subgroup as well as others in the Americas and the Global Program to provide an opportunity for people to (1) critique it in advance and (2) provide suggestions for improvement based on other experiences (e.g., in other regions). This would create an opportunity for the Global Program to analyze in detail the verification steps, findings, tools, etc. being used in the Americas. The Chair supported the idea of entrusting a small group with preparing a protocol for circulation, as a preliminary document, and then distributing it to and accepting input from all stakeholders to create a more inclusive process.

Dr. Patrick Lammie said he wanted to summarize one or two points from the group discussion from the day before. He said there were two separate issues: using or developing a process along the lines of what was discussed in the group, which would be presented in a dossier (and which had already been discussed at the Technical Advisory Group [TAG]), and the issue of Belém. He said it had been agreed that Belém had satisfied (or more than satisfied) all of the possible criteria that could be developed for demonstrating the interruption for transmission. He added that in terms of the discussion, the issue of Belém was a separate category, and that any discussion of it in terms of the dossier would be an additional step beyond the research activities and the protocol being discussed.

The Chair stressed the importance of the proper definition of focal points in terms of geographic, ecological, and epidemiological aspects (e.g., the case of Haiti or Dominican Republic [DOR]) to make advances in control, and possible elimination, noting this could be done in one of the two countries separately. He said the basic definition was a practical problem and that the question of definition and selection of focal points should be emphasized in terms of appropriate conditions of integration and political articulation.

DISCUSSION

Question. Is it the decision of the lymphatic filariasis (LF) group that verification of elimination should be done by group, that is, by individual focal point? Is that why the group plans to develop this protocol, to be distributed among the Global Program, while it is still being validated?

Comment. The onchocerciasis program is dealing with a similar issue.

Comment. Yes, this is an issue for the Onchocerciasis Elimination Program for the Americas (OEPA) right now, which is why clarification is requested.

Question. Does the group need to complete this draft before initiating use of the dossier for verification?

Response. Yes, if the focal point was not shared with other countries.

Question. Who should compose the small group to carry out the work (preparing the protocol for examination, circulating it, and analyzing it later)? [Dr. Freitas is asked if she wants to participate in the group, and Dr. Lammie is suggested as a group member, as well as Abraham Rocha from the Aggeu Magalhães Research Center (*Centro de Pesquisas Aggeu Magalhães*; CPqAM), and Dr. Fontes of Maceió.] Does anyone else want to participate? This is an important issue that comprises verification of elimination, which is still a distant issue for some countries.

Comment. The process [of developing the document] was not meant to be a formal one, and the final version will be the technical component of the dossier. So it doesn't need to be sequential. There was a lot in the dossier that wasn't very technical (e.g., how many antibody assays should be done, how much ICT should be done, how areas should be chosen, how the focus should be defined, and how the sample sites should be chosen). And if most of the people [in the subgroup] come from Brazil, that would not be a problem. The point is that somebody has to do the work of thinking through a protocol and then sharing it with everybody. For example, the representatives from Trinidad & Tobago aren't here right now, but they should feel as much a part of the protocol development as anybody else, because the document will be circulated to them. But somebody has to do the initial work and get something down on paper before it can be shared. This doesn't require any other formal steps before the dossier; this is just a component of the dossier.

The Chair noted that Helen Freitas, Abraham Rocha, Gilbert Fontes, Patrick Lammie, and Luis Garcés had expressed interest in participating, and therefore the responsibility for completing the task would be passed on to them, under the coordination of the Secretariat.