



SUCCESS STORY

The Neglected Tropical Disease Control Program Treats War-torn Northern Uganda



Children wait in line to be treated with medications for NTDs in a school based distribution campaign.

**Photo: Scott Torres,
RTI International**

USAID support for NTD control in Uganda is through the NTD Control Program led by RTI International under Cooperative Agreement No. GHS-A-00-00006-00. The Program currently supports national NTD control programs in 12 countries—Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Haiti, Mali, Nepal, Niger, Sierra Leone, Southern Sudan, Togo, and Uganda. For more information, go to our website at <http://ntd.rti.org>.

Until recently, many districts in northern Uganda were left untreated for neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) as a result of political unrest and war. Social instability and the dangers of working in the northern region prevented many international donors from reaching these districts. With support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Neglected Tropical Disease Control Program, in 2009, the Uganda Ministry of Health (MOH) conducted a large-scale treatment distribution for NTDs to residents in the north for the first time.

Prior to the NTD Control Program's arrival, many of the targeted diseases had never been mapped to determine their impact on northern district populations. Disease mapping in 2008 revealed highly endemic areas in the north for all five NTDs targeted by the Program: schistosomiasis, onchocerciasis, lymphatic filariasis, trachoma, and soil-transmitted helminthes.

With support from the NTD Control Program, the Uganda MOH worked hard to prepare and train thousands of volunteers to help with the distribution of medicines. Advocacy campaigns were initiated to help raise awareness about the diseases among local populations and community leaders. The mass drug administration (MDA) was successful. The medicines were well received by the communities and hundreds of thousands of people were treated during this MDA.

Districts in northern Uganda continue to face many challenges in the fight against NTDs. Community sensitization and raising public awareness about the diseases will be ongoing campaigns for these districts as they implement this new public health program. In addition, recently disbanded camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in northern Uganda have created a large transient population between the camps and war-torn communities. These unstable populations sometimes make it difficult to organize trainings, sensitization, and MDA campaigns.

Despite the challenges in logistics and communication that can accompany a new program, William Oyet, the NTD focal person for Pader District in northern Uganda, is optimistic: "There is high support and willingness by the district leadership to mobilize and sensitize the communities about the NTD Control Program." Mr. Oyet adds that communities have also shown increased interest in disease control, witnessed most clearly through a high rate of compliance with drug distributions.