Dr Shin Young-soo, WHO Regional Director for the Western Pacific Region, congratulated the health ministers that have eliminated lymphatic filariasis as a public health problem.

After over a decade of efforts, Marshall Islands and Tonga have eliminated lymphatic filariasis as a public health problem. Dr Shin Young-soo, WHO Regional Director for the Western Pacific Region, congratulated health ministers from the two countries and also the health minister from Niue, who was unable to attend the last Regional Committee Meeting, for this historical achievement during the Pacific Health Ministers Meeting in Rarotonga, Cook Islands.
1 NEWS FROM MEMBER COUNTRIES

Cambodia

The National Helminth Control Programme in the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Rural Development jointly implemented the community-led initiative to eliminate schistosomiasis with water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) interventions in two pilot villages of Kratie province on February 2017, with technical support from WHO. Using community participatory approach, community members were facilitated by provincial and district officers to learn about the linkage between schistosomiasis and WASH and to develop their community risk management plan.

The National Helminth Control Programme assessed the Schistosoma mekongi infection status in 20 villages, including four sentinel site villages in Kratie province, in April-May 2017. Four out of 1 668 participants (0.2%) were found to be infected with *S. mekongi*, of which three were from Kratie province and one from Stung Treng province, all outside the sentinel site villages. Following the survey, mass drug administration (MDA) and health education was carried out in all the schistosomiasis endemic villages of Kratie and Stung Treng provinces.

The National Helminth Control Programme and the Population Service Khmer (PSK/PSI) continued to provide deworming against soil-transmitted helminthiasis (STH) to plantation workers and their families in the north-eastern provinces of Cambodia. In May-June 2017, for the third consecutive year, eight provinces (Ratanakiri, Mondulkiri, Stung Treng, Kratie, Kampong Thom, Kampong Cham, Tboung Khmum and Preah Vihear) were targeted by the deworming campaign.

China

The National Institute of Parasitic Disease (NIPD), Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (China CDC), and the WHO Collaborating Centre for Tropical Diseases hosted the WHO Expert Consultation Workshop to Accelerate Elimination of Asian schistosomiasis on 22-23 May 2017. See Section 2 for more details.

Representatives of the NIPD participated in the WHO South East Asia Regional NTD Conference on 25-27 April 2017 in Jakarta, Indonesia, to share China’s experiences towards the elimination of schistosomiasis and discuss the role that China can play to support neglected tropical disease (NTD) elimination in the Southeast Asia Region.

Fiji

Although the large geographic area where most of the population lives in Fiji has been under post-MDA surveillance since 2014, lymphatic filariasis (LF) transmission is still ongoing in Taveuni Island in the Northern division and Malolo Island in the Western division, as well as in the Eastern division. Following the failure of pre-transmission assessment survey (TAS) in 2016, two additional and intensified rounds of MDA were conducted in February-April 2017, using the directly observed treatment (DOTs) strategy in house-to-house visits.
Due to concerns about lack of progress in deworming coverage, the Fiji Ministry of Health organized a national workshop in March 2017 to develop an action plan for the control of STH. Education, nutrition, health promotion and WASH sectors participated in the workshop. The draft plan is currently under discussion among the national stakeholders. Once finalized, it will be reviewed by the National Task Force on NTDs for endorsement.

A national review of the nutrition supplementation programme found that although the packaging of deworming products with nutrition supplements such as iron is a sound idea, it has not worked well at the grass roots level. This was due to frequent delays in arrival of nutrition supplies. The national review recommended that deworming should go ahead whether or not other nutritional supplies were available.

The Fiji Ministry of Health and Medical Service also took part in the Pacific Regional Workshop on Facial Cleanliness and Environmental Improvements (F&E) for Trachoma Elimination held in Nadi on 22-24 May, organized by the Fred Hollows Foundation Australia in collaboration with WHO-DPS. The national program manager and representatives from the WASH sector attended. A draft national action plan on F&E was developed at the workshop and is currently being discussed among stakeholders. The meeting was also attended by two representatives from Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu each, who also developed the draft national action plan on F&E.

**Kiribati**

Kiribati continued to deworm preschool and school-aged children. By March 2017 the first round of the year was completed. Coverage data indicated that 59% of preschool and 67% of school-aged children were dewormed during that round. Women of childbearing age (WCBA) were also given deworming tablets through community outreach activities. Coverage among WCBA was 81%.

The Ministry of Health of Kiribati began the first round of countrywide trachoma MDA at the end of March 2017. The WHO-recommended Coverage Supervision Tool (CST) was implemented in one island – Tabiteuea South – that has completed MDA. The CST results suggest that the coverage in this island was above the threshold level of 80%.

**The Lao People’s Democratic Republic**

The 6th round of MDA for LF elimination was conducted in February 2017. The 1st LF TAS is planned to be conducted in September 2017. In preparation for TAS 1, a TAS training workshop was held in February for 15 government staff members from various departments in the Ministry of Health. Three staff members from the Research Triangle Institute (RTI) International’s ENVISION Indonesia team traveled to Laos to facilitate the TAS training workshop with the Ministry of Health and Family Health International 360.

Government staff from different sectors responsible for NTDs and WASH from the central level and also from schistosomiasis-endemic districts in Champasak province, Lao PDR, visited Cambodia to exchange lessons on implementation of the community-led elimination of schistosomiasis by improving water sanitation and hygiene interventions in Kratie province, Cambodia in February 2017.

The Ministry of Health organised a national consultation on 27-28 June 2017 to agree on the national goals, targets, indicators and a detailed action plan, with budget estimates, for the elimination of schistosomiasis in Lao PDR. The national consultation involved all multi-sectoral players and partners in the areas of water supply and environment health, animal health, education, and nutrition from all levels in Lao PDR.

The Ministry of Health organised a national multi-sectoral consultation in Lao PDR on 29 June 2017 to initiate development of an action plan to accelerate control of foodborne trematode infections, taeniasis and cysticercosis. Following the outcome of the WHO Expert Consultation to Accelerate Control of Foodborne Trematode Infections, Taeniasis and Cysticercosis held in Seoul, Republic of Korea on 17-19 May 2017, the participants agreed on concerted goals, targets, pilot areas and inter-sectorial actions to test out the comprehensive One Health approach in the next three years.
Malaysia

The 8th round of enhanced MDA was conducted in 3 IUs in Sabah and Sarawak from March till June 2017. Enhanced MDA was carried out by ensuring the administration of drugs using directly observed therapy. A total of 21,544 eligible people received MDA. MDA coverage was 94.06% in Lawas, 99.96% in Sundar and 99.08% in Bangkalalak.

Marshall Islands

On 24 February 2017, Marshall Islands received official acknowledgement by the Director General of WHO for having achieved elimination of LF as a public health problem. An event will be organized to celebrate this achievement at the Pacific Health Ministers’ Meeting in August 2017 in Rarotonga, Cook Islands.

Marshall Islands continued to deworm preschool and school-aged children. In March 2017, the first round of deworming was completed for the year. Preliminary coverage data indicated that 58% of preschool and 32% of the school-aged children were dewormed in that round. There have been difficulties in collecting accurate and timely coverage data from the remote islands.

The Federated States of Micronesia

The second round of MDA against LF was implemented in Chuuk State. The round was completed in the Mortlocks region in May 2016, in Northwest Region in June 2016, and in Faichuuk Region in September 2016. The Southern Namonia region completed the round by May 2017. The last remaining region of the Chuuk state, Northern Namonia, is expected to complete MDA by August 2017. Scattered oceanic terrain, very limited manpower, and local administrative constraints help to explain why MDA has been staggered over a number of months.

Micronesia developed a protocol for TAS 1 and a micro-plan for conducting pre-TAS in the Chuuk state. These sentinel and spot check surveys are expected to commence in November 2017, starting with the Northwest region. Draft protocols for TAS 2 in the other three states were also developed recently and will be submitted for ethics approval in the near future. The plan is to conduct TAS in all 4 states by early 2018, including Chuuk.

Palau

In May 2017, blood testing to assess the prevalence of LF among the migrant worker population was conducted using filariasis test strips. The survey was intended to provide information on the risk of LF transmission to the local community posed by those coming from endemic countries. The report is awaited.

Papua New Guinea

The National Department of Health (NDOH), in collaboration with the Provincial government, implemented its third round of MDA from January to June 2017 in New Ireland Province. Slow verification of data has delayed submission of the treatment report, but the preliminary findings suggest treatment coverage of around 80%.

NDOH and WHO are assisting three more provinces - East New Britain, Sundaun and West New Britain provinces - to initiate the first round of MDA for LF elimination. Sundaun and East New Britain Provinces have allocated some funds and completed their micro-plans. However, a serious cash flow problem in the country is obstructing further progress.

The PNG Institute of Medical Research (IMR) and NDOH has continued to implement a randomized control trial (RCT) on the use of a triple drug regime (IDA- Ivermectin, DEC, ALB). The Government of PNG is willing to adopt the IDA strategy if it is developed into the WHO strategy for accelerating elimination of LF.

The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine completed the azithromycin treatment dosage study on Karkar Island, Madang Province, in April 2017. All work on the study has been completed, including the production of the final report, which found that a 20mg/kg dosage for the treatment of yaws was as effective as 30mg/kg.

At the request of NDOH, the Denominator Population Survey was conducted on Karkar Island in May-June 2017, to document the actual prevalence of yaws on Karkar Island. The results of the survey are to be used to plan for possible MDA for elimination of yaws using the 20mg/kg azithromycin dose.

Philippines

The Department of Health (DOH) successfully conducted the fifth stakeholder’s forum for the control and elimination of NTDs in February 2017 with the theme “Evidence Based Technologies to Accelerate the Gains of NTD Elimination, A New Hope”. This is an annual event where government stewardship and innovative tools are emphasized as the key to reaching the goals of elimination by 2030.
Samoa

The Ministry of Health in Samoa implemented the tenth round of MDA for LF elimination in the North West Upolu (NWU) Region in April. The NWU Region continues to report persistent transmission and thus additional two rounds of MDA were recommended by the RPRG in 2013, while the other Evaluation Units (Apia Urban area, the rest of Upolu and Savaii) are undertaking post-MDA surveillance since 2013.

Solomon Islands

School-based deworming was conducted in Honiara for the third consecutive year in August 2016. Targeting 3,231 Honiara pre-school children and 17,855 school-aged children, the programme has achieved coverage of 69% and 78% respectively. Scaling up of deworming in other provinces is being planned for 2018.

The trachoma post-MDA impact assessment survey is ongoing and expected to be completed by July 2017, with only a few clusters remaining in Temotu province. The completed six-month post-MDA impact assessment in Temotu shows a trachomatous inflammation-follicular (TF) reduction to 13.1% from the pre-MDA level of 26%.

Solomon Islands plans to hold a national workshop in October 2017 to update the national action plans on elimination and control of NTDs.

Tonga

Tonga is expected to receive official acknowledgement by the Director General of WHO as having eliminated LF as a public health problem by July 2017. An event will be organized to celebrate this achievement at the Meeting of the Pacific Health Ministers in August 2017 in Cook Islands.

Tuvalu

Having completed the two additional rounds of LF MDA and achieving coverage of over 70% in each round, with the second completed in January 2017, Tuvalu has now planned to commence combined Pre-TAS & TAS in August 2017. Funding, technical assistance, and logistic supplies have all been secured.

The LF MDA round in 2017 also served as the second round of the twice-yearly deworming against soil-transmitted helminthiasis. The first deworming round was completed by June 2016, with 76.2% treatment coverage among children aged 2-14 years old and the second with coverage of 72.5%.

Vanuatu

A trachoma impact assessment survey was completed in June 2017, which tested 930 children aged 1-9 years and found a TF prevalence of 11% and a trachoma trichiasis (TT) prevalence of 0%. The final results of the laboratory confirmation are awaited.

With financial and technical support from WHO, the DOH continued to implement phase 2 of the project to enhance the Neglected Tropical Disease Management Information System. A broad range of data is now collected by the mobile app, including data on MDA, drug inventory, adverse events, and prevalence surveys. The dashboard also has new functions that allow users to generate reports and visualize data. This allows NTD programme focal points at all levels to monitor activities and take immediate actions to improve implementation.

In an effort to continue the partnership between the health and agricultural sectors for the elimination of schistosomiasis in the Philippines, technical staff from the Bureau of Animal Industry of the Department of Agriculture visited NIPD in China for an observation tour and training on diagnosis and treatment of schistosomiasis in animals. The next step for the partnership will be to develop policies and guidelines to control animal schistosomiasis by the third quarter of 2017.

The DOH’s deworming campaign was conducted again in January 2017. The DOH mobilized partners from the education sector, local government units and private sectors to jointly implement the campaign. The preliminary report showed 75.2% coverage among pre-school children aged 1-4 years old and 66% coverage among school-age children aged 5-18 years old. In order to address difficulties reaching children enrolled in private schools and out-of-school youth, the DoH will be conducting rounds of consultations among private schools and other community partners.
School deworming was conducted from January to June 2017 and reports have been received from the four provinces of Tafea, Sanma, Shefa and Malampa so far. The final report is being compiled.

The yaws surveillance report was received only from the three provinces of Sanma, Malampa and Shefa. The reports showed 137 suspected yaws cases and 34 confirmed positives with the Dual Path Platform Syphilis Screen and Confirm (DPP) test. Case investigation and focal treatment reports showed that 5 638 people were treated from the confirmed endemic areas. Health education remains necessary in Lamap and Tanna due to continuous reporting of confirmed yaws cases.

**Viet Nam**

In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, the National Institute of Malarialogy, Parasitology and Entomology (NIMPE) organized a deworming campaign and 2 680 992 out of 2 704 106 (99%) school-aged children in 29 provinces received the first round of deworming tablets in April and May, 2017. NIMPE also collaborated with the National Institute of Nutrition and 1 705 445 out of 1 739 026 preschool-aged children in 22 provinces received deworming tablets in the first week of June 2017.

MDA for control of liver fluke infection was conducted for the high-risk group of people who eat raw fish dishes in five communes of Ninh Binh province where a high prevalence (31.71% in 2012) of Clonorchis sinensis infection was reported. Approximately 30 000 PZQ tablets were distributed to 9 993 high-risk people in Kim Son district in Ninh Binh province.

During April and May 2017, a survey on STH infection in school-age children was carried out in the five provinces of Ha Giang, Lao Cai, Dien Bien, Thai Nguyen and Quang Nam province and infection rates were determined to be 58%, 21%, 43%, 4.3% and 21% respectively. A separate survey on STH infection was conducted during the same months among WCBA in the same provinces excluding Quang Nam province and the infection rates were found to be 48.7%, 49%, 34% and 10% respectively. The final report is awaited.

A mini-TAS survey was conducted on school-aged children (grades 4 and 5) in Duy Tien District of Ha Nam province, Quang Ninh district, and Le Thuy district of Quang Bin province from April to June 2017, with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) ENVISION through RTI and WHO. RTI ENVISION facilitated training in mobile data collection for the national level team in March. Survey results showed that none of the children sampled were positive for LF infection. Viet Nam is now finalizing its LF elimination dossier for official submission to WHO.

Ten training courses on LF morbidity management and disability prevention were organized in the five provinces of Ha Nam, Thai Binh, Bac Ninh, Hai Duong and Hung Yen province between October 2016 and March 2017. There were 397 participants and support was provided by USAID ENVISION through RTI. Health staff, community members, and some patients participated in the training courses.

In late March, USAID ENVISION, through RTI, the Fred Hollows Foundation and the International Trachoma Initiative, trained staff from the Vietnam National Institute of Ophthalmology and Ha Giang provincial and district health staff on trachoma survey data collection. Ten recorders, 12 graders, and two supervisors were trained and certified in Lung Ho commune in Ha Giang province, which was known to have children with TF. Two districts were found to need one round of MDA, while seven others were below the threshold requiring MDA.

**Wallis and Futuna**

The results of the final TAS completed in 2016 suggested that Wallis and Futuna (WAF) has reached a <1% level in eliminating LF as a public health problem. The TAS report was shared with the LF experts in the regional programme review group (RPRG) which suggested that the country was ready to submit the dossier to claim elimination of LF as a public health problem. WAF is currently developing the dossier for validation in early 2017 with technical support from WHO.
The Expert Consultation to Accelerate Control of Foodborne Trematode Infections, Taeniasis and Cysticercosis was held on 17-19 May 2017 in Seoul, Republic of Korea. During the consultation, it was determined that poor sanitation and food hygiene, presence of animal reservoirs, and culturally specific food habits contributed to high reinfection rates immediately following preventive chemotherapy. The Consultation recommended that community empowerment through the One Health approach should be the core strategy to accelerate and sustain control of FBT infections. A stronger focus must be placed on monitoring and evaluation of epidemiological and treatment data, preferably integrated with reporting of other NTDs targeted by preventive chemotherapy.

The Expert Consultation to Accelerate Elimination of Asian Schistosomiasis was held at the National Institute of Parasitic Diseases in Shanghai, China from 22 to 23 May 2017. The consultation aimed to determine regional goals and targets for countries shifting from disease control to the elimination phase. Noting the limitations of preventive chemotherapy alone, the consultation recommended community empowerment through the One Health approach that includes focal snail control (for *S. japonicum*). Any approach must be mindful that schistosomiasis is a complex disease, and elimination will rely heavily on the continued and increased support of governments.

The Seventeenth Meeting of the Western Pacific Regional Programme Review Group on Neglected Tropical Diseases was held on 15–16 June 2017 in Siem Reap, Cambodia. The RPRG congratulated Marshall Islands and Tonga on the validation of elimination of lymphatic filariasis as a public health problem, and Cambodia and Lao PDR on the validation of elimination of trachoma as a public health problem. The group encouraged countries that are nearing the elimination stage for each NTD to improve the quality of diagnosis through standardizing NTD diagnostics and establishing a system for quality assurance. Specific recommendations on elimination and control of NTDs were issued individually to countries based on endemicity, progress, and challenges faced by each individual country.