



Dr. Uche Veronica Amazigo is internationally recognized as a leading figure in the introduction and application of the innovative Community-Directed Treatment mechanism and control of neglected tropical diseases. Working with remote rural communities in her native Nigeria, who had been plagued for centuries by Onchocerciasis (River blindness), she discovered the previously unrecognized importance of onchocercal skin lesions, severe itching, depigmentation and resultant devastating social stigma. This landmark research led to the expansion of Onchocerciasis control efforts to 19 countries in Africa. She was instrumental in the development and scaling-up of a novel model that made it possible for community members to play a determining role in distributing medicine to affected villagers. Dr. Amazigo played a pivotal part in the success of Onchocerciasis control by strengthening community health systems and helping to engage and empower 500,000 communities across all countries covered by the African Programme on Onchocerciasis (APOC), especially while she was Director of the Programme from 2005-2011. This unique, approach, ideally suited to African conditions, is cost-effective and tremendously increases the coverage of eligible persons being treated by the safe and highly-effective drug donated specifically for the purpose. Furthermore, it proved that trained drug distributors selected by the community from among their peers, no matter their resources or skills, can adopt the role normally played by trained healthcare specialists - and will do so voluntarily if provided with the opportunity. The concept of community-directed treatment has, since 1997, been implemented in many African nations and around the world. In 2015, an estimated 90 million people will be regularly receiving treatment for Onchocerciasis and 40,000 people annually will be prevented from losing their sight. It is envisaged that Onchocerciasis may well be eliminated as a public health problem in many areas in Africa by 2025.

**UCHE VERONICA
AMAZIGO**

Prince Mahidol Award
Laureate 2012 and
Former Director

*African Program for
Onchocerciasis Control
World Health Organization,
Federal Republic of Nigeria*

The success of the community-directed approach results from linking research and management strategies and by empowering communities to fully participate in distributing medicines to the affected population.

Although community-directed treatment was introduced as a strategy to increase coverage and access to a drug for Onchocerciasis, it went on to have impact on the control of several other major diseases and essential healthcare services in Africa as it can easily be adapted to deliver a variety of cost-effective health interventions to the remotest of communities and difficult to access locations. It is estimated that, in addition to protecting 120 million Africans from Onchocerciasis, the community-directed treatment system benefited a further 40 million Africans in 2011 by delivering products and interventions to combat malaria and a variety of intestinal parasites, along with vaccines, nutritional supplements and health education. Dr. Amazigo received her Ph.D. in Biology and Medical Parasitology from the University of Vienna in Austria, a Diploma in Tropical Medicine and Parasitology from the Bernhard-Nocht Institute of Tropical Medicine in Hamburg, Germany and a Fellowship in International Health from Harvard School of Public Health, U.S.A. After retiring from WHO in 2011, she has launched an NGO to apply the community-directed approach in school health and feeding programmes in Nigeria.