

Special Presidential Award

Bruce Benton



Today the Bank salutes Bruce Benton, Manager of the Onchocerciasis Coordinating Unit, for his 15 year commitment to the eradication of onchocerciasis in Africa. Mr. Benton's unwavering focus and commitment to the Bank's long-term vision to eradicate this ancient scourge—commonly known as river blindness—resulted in exemplary collaborations among donor countries, agencies and foundations, non-governmental organizations and countless local communities.

River blindness in Africa is endemic in the broad swath that runs from Senegal in the east to Ethiopia in the west, and then south to Angola and Malawi. To date, 2 million people have severely impaired vision and 350,000 have been blinded by the disease. A further 18 million are infected and 80 million are at risk without the intervention of the programs that Mr. Benton has spearheaded.

Reversing the downward spiral of the disease required long term and sustained commitment in a climate of change and competing development priorities. During Mr. Benton's tenure, the Bank's expanded role and focus moved beyond a health priority focus, to a broader approach incorporating agricultural, institutional, and social and political development. In the words of Katherine Marshall (Director on Faiths and WFDD), "He advanced a broad and complex development program with inputs from many disciplines, attention to the social complexities and consummate skill in navigating political obstacles of bureaucracies and countries."

Mr. Benton has also been recognized by colleagues and his team for his remarkable ability to mobilize others behind a shared vision; and to keep the program going as managers, ministers and presidents come and go. The results of this dogged determination are impressive:

- ❖ Full funding (USD 400 million) for the West African Onchocerciasis Control Program (OCP) through its conclusion in 2002 secured from 24 donor countries, agencies and foundations.
- ❖ Eight new donor partners enlisted in the OCP
- ❖ Program coverage has been expanded from seven to 11 West African countries.
- ❖ The formation of the African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control (APOC), comprised of 27 donor countries, international agencies and foundations, funded with USD 60 million to prepare, launch and implement 64 prevention and eradication projects covering 14 countries.
- ❖ Formation of a coalition of development partners including 19 African countries, 27 donors, 40 non-governmental organizations and Merck and Co., in the largest Bank supported global partnership in health.

Congratulations, Mr. Benton!

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