Fact Sheet

The Global Alliance to Eliminate Lymphatic Filariasis

The Disease

- Lymphatic filariasis (LF), often known as "elephantiasis", is one of the most disabling diseases in the world, causing swelling of the limbs and genitals and debilitating fevers.
- Over 40 million people in 83 countries in Africa, Asia-Pacific, and the Americas are already incapacitated or disfigured, with another 120 million infected and over one-fifth of the world's population—1.3 billion people—at risk.
- Spread by mosquitoes and contracted in childhood, there is no cure for LF, but simple hygiene measures can prevent the worst symptoms from fully developing.

The Goal

- The goal is both to prevent the disease and to reduce the disability it causes.
- Elimination is possible if everyone in affected communities takes a few tablets once a year for four to six years, or uses table salt fortified with an anti-parasitic drug. Bed nets also are an effective prevention tool.
- Simple measures like hygiene and skin care can stop the swelling and fevers caused by LF from progressing, and surgery can correct male genital damage.

The Global Alliance

- The Global Alliance is a public-private partnership dedicated to eliminating LF by 2020 and decreasing its impact on those already afflicted. Key members include the World Health Organization, World Bank, GlaxoSmithKline, Merck & Co., Inc., the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, National Ministries of Health, the governments of the USA, UK and Japan, and numerous other donors and non-profit partners.

Unprecedented Gains

- GlaxoSmithKline and Merck & Co., Inc. have pledged unlimited quantities of two essential drugs needed for elimination—the largest drug donations in history, valued at more than $1 billion.
- Annual treatments have risen from 25 million in 12 countries in 2000 to over 250 million in 39 countries in 2004—the most rapid expansion in public health history, fueled by strong interest from affected countries plus catalytic grants from the Gates Foundation.

Additional Benefits

- Medicines used to treat LF eliminate intestinal worms, leading to improved growth and nutrition in children and prevention of anemia in pregnant women.
- LF treatment is increasingly combined with annual drug treatment for other parasitic diseases— river blindness, schistosomiasis, trachoma, etc.—, as well as with bed net distribution for malaria control, for greater impact and cost efficiency.
- Driving toward national iodization and fluoridation of salt in two countries.

Cost-Effectiveness

- Treatment is extremely cost-effective, averaging $0.25 per person treated per year, creating significant returns on investment given the enormous impact of LF on productivity and national economies in the world's poorest countries.
- Governments of affected countries and other local sources contribute a high portion of program costs—72.5% in Egypt, for example, and significant contributions elsewhere.

Outstanding Needs

- The greatest need is to raise awareness about LF and secure the additional partners and resources required for the program to reach its successful conclusion.