



## Blinding Trachoma in Ghana

The International Trachoma Initiative (ITI) is dedicated to eliminating blinding trachoma, the world's leading cause of preventable blindness.

Trachoma can be prevented and cured with inexpensive, time-limited treatment. ITI's work is grounded in the WHO-endorsed strategy called SAFE: **S**urgery for trachomatous trichiasis (TT), **A**ntibiotics (Pfizer-donated Zithromax) to treat active infection, **F**ace-washing to reduce transmission, and **E**nvironmental improvement through access to clean water and better sanitation.

Blinding trachoma is a disease of poverty that affects 41 million people, mostly women and children, in 56 countries. Building on trachoma elimination success in Morocco, ITI currently works in 15 of the countries most affected by trachoma, including Ghana, where it has supported the trachoma program since 2000 and has had a country office since 2002.

In 2007, Ghana's National Trachoma Control Program was integrated with four other Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) programs. ITI served as the lead agency for the integrated program in Ghana.

### TRACHOMA IN GHANA



*Ghana Population:* 23,382,848<sup>i</sup>

*Ghana Rank on Human Development Index:* No.135 of 177 countries<sup>ii</sup>

#### Infection:

- More than 11,600 Ghanaians are estimated to be blinded by trachoma.<sup>iii</sup>
- 5,200 Ghanaians have trichiasis<sup>iv</sup>, the advanced stage of trachoma, and need immediate surgery.
- An estimated 2.8 million Ghanaians are at risk of trachoma infection. Trachomatous trichiasis (TT) prevalence rates in some districts are as high as 8.4%.<sup>v</sup>
- Active trachoma prevalence rates among children aged 1-9 are as high as 16.1% in some districts.<sup>vi</sup>
- Trachoma is endemic in 26 of Ghana's 138 Districts.<sup>vii</sup>

#### ITI Activities:

- ITI supported the administration of 899,065 Zithromax treatments, achieving a coverage rate of 94%.<sup>viii</sup> All 26 trachoma endemic districts received mass drug administrations in 2007.<sup>ix</sup>
- 4,542 (TT) surgeries have been performed since ITI's program inception in 2000.<sup>x</sup>

- The Ghana Trachoma Control Program organized a TT surgical camp for five districts in the Northern region. A total of 35,174 people were screened, and only 214 were found to have trichiasis. 197 of these individuals accepted to have surgery and were operated on.<sup>xi</sup>
- Currently, ITI together with the Ghana Health Service and other partners are conducting an impact assessment survey in all 26 trachoma endemic districts. The results are scheduled to be released in mid-June 2008 and will determine if continued administration of Zithromax is necessary.<sup>xii</sup>
- National Trachoma Control Goals for the end of 2008 include<sup>xiii</sup>:
  - Complete impact assessment surveys to determine new backlog of surgeries and needed Zithromax treatments.
  - Administer 950,000 doses of Zithromax. (This number dependent on results of impact assessment survey.)
  - Perform 1,000 TT surgeries.
  - Train 10 TT surgeons to carry out surgeries in districts that do not currently have operators.
  - Have 85% of children 1-9 years with clean faces.
  - Develop and implement a surveillance plan for all the districts that will be graduating from antibiotic treatment.

#### **Opportunities:**

- With continued assistance of ITI, SAFE interventions have been performed in all 26 trachoma endemic districts.<sup>xiv</sup>
- Some activities for the control of five Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs)—trachoma, lymphatic filariasis, onchocerciasis, schistosomiasis and soil-transmitted helminthes—have been integrated, due to these facts:<sup>xv</sup>
  - Many of these diseases overlap geographically.
  - Some NTD programs use the same drugs for treatment.
  - All use the same health workers and community based volunteers for drug delivery.
  - Personnel, drugs, logistics and funding for these diseases being integrated maximizes resources and impact.
- 37,236 children (84.2%) in Ghana were found to have clean faces.<sup>xvi</sup>
- 3,438 household latrines have been completed by the Carter Center and WaterAid Ghana. This figure will increase once the data is updated with outputs of other organizations such as WorldVision Ghana.<sup>xvii</sup>

#### **Challenges:**

- Most trachoma endemic districts are also endemic for other diseases.<sup>xviii</sup>
- 2-3 times as many women suffer from trichiasis and ensuing blindness than men.
- The remaining national TT surgery backlog is 5,200 of 13,234.<sup>xix</sup>
- There are only 52 ophthalmologists in Ghana.<sup>xx</sup>

To speak to ITI's country representative in Ghana or for more information on trachoma control in Ghana, please contact Geoffrey Knox at +212-229-0540 and [gknox@geoffreyknox.com](mailto:gknox@geoffreyknox.com) or [communications@trachoma.org](mailto:communications@trachoma.org).

The International Trachoma Initiative (ITI) is a non-governmental organization working to prevent, treat and ultimately eliminate blinding trachoma. With programs currently in 15 countries in Africa and Asia, ITI is a major proponent and facilitator of the SAFE strategy to prevent and eliminate trachoma through **Surgery, Antibiotics, Facial cleanliness and Environmental improvement**. ITI, created through a public-private partnership of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and Pfizer Inc, collaborates with international agencies, governmental, and non-governmental organizations to build targeted support—including Zithromax<sup>®</sup> donated by Pfizer—for expanded implementation of the SAFE strategy, operational research and program evaluation, education and advocacy. <http://www.trachoma.org>

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<sup>i</sup> "CIA World Factbook." United States Central Intelligence Agency. <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gh.html>> accessed 21 April 2008.

<sup>ii</sup> "Trachoma Expert Committee Fact Sheet 2008." International Trachoma Initiative

<sup>iii</sup> "Imagine Ghana free of avoidable Blindness Framework for Action 2004-2008." National Eye Health Programme.

<sup>iv</sup> Global Health Atlas, 2003. World Health Organization. <<http://www.who.int/globalatlas/dataQuery/default.asp>> accessed 20 April 2008.

<sup>v</sup> "Trachoma Expert Committee Fact Sheet 2008" International Trachoma Initiative

<sup>vi</sup> "Ghana Trachoma Data Form (2008)." World Health Organization Alliance for the Global Elimination of Blinding Trachoma, Twelfth Meeting. Geneva, Switzerland: 28-30 April 2008.

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>ix</sup> "Trachoma Expert Committee Fact Sheet 2008" International Trachoma Initiative

<sup>x</sup> "Trachoma Expert Committee Fact Sheet 2008" International Trachoma Initiative

<sup>xi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xiii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xiv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xvi</sup> "Ghana Trachoma Data Form (2008)." World Health Organization Alliance for the Global Elimination of Blinding Trachoma, Twelfth Meeting. Geneva, Switzerland: 28-30 April 2008.

<sup>xvii</sup> "Trachoma Expert Committee Fact Sheet 2008" International Trachoma Initiative

<sup>xviii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xix</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xx</sup> 2007 National Eye Care Unit Report.

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