

FIND JOINS EFFORTS LED BY CROWN AGENTS TO IMPROVE TESTING FOR ELIMINATION OF VISCERAL LEISHMANIASIS IN KENYA

- **FIND is partnering with Crown Agents as part of ASCEND (Accelerating Sustainable Control and Elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases), a UK government initiative to drive progress towards global targets for the control and elimination of NTDs**
- **FIND will collaborate with the Kenyan Ministry of Health to strengthen testing for visceral leishmaniasis (VL) and address current VL outbreaks in the country by increasing access to rapid tests**

Geneva, Switzerland & London, UK – 4 August 2020 – The Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND) and Crown Agents announced today a new partnership to strengthen visceral leishmaniasis (VL) testing and address current VL outbreaks in Kenya, as part of ASCEND, a UK government initiative to defeat neglected tropical diseases (NTDs).

ASCEND (Accelerating the Sustainable Control and Elimination of NTDs) is designed to advance the impact and sustainability of national programmes tackling NTDs. Crown Agents leads a consortium of technical partners to implement ASCEND across South Asia, and East and Southern Africa. FIND is working on essential training of health workers for the diagnosis and management of VL, supply of rapid diagnostic tests, and community sensitization in Isiolo, Marsabit, Turkana and Wajir counties. Activities are set to expand into Baringo, Garissa, Kitui and West Pokot counties.

VL, also known as kala azar, is an NTD caused by protozoan parasites and transmitted through the bites of sand flies. It is almost always fatal if not diagnosed and treated. Poor rural communities in eastern Africa and the Indian sub-continent carry the highest burden of the disease. In Kenya, which is among the top 10 high-burden countries for VL across the world, more than 5 million people live at constant risk of infection,¹ with approximately 1,200 cases reported each year – figures that are certainly underestimated due to the lack of access to diagnosis.²

ASCEND is advancing the Kenyan national goal of prevention and control of VL in all endemic areas of the country. FIND recently registered an office in Kenya and has been working closely with the Kenyan government on VL control and elimination since 2016. Work on the ASCEND VL project will build on the organization's previous work to strengthen diagnostics and testing services across the country and address the current VL outbreaks in Garissa and Kitui counties.

¹ BMC Public Health. Characterization of visceral leishmaniasis outbreak, Marsabit County, Kenya, 2014. <https://bmcpublihealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-020-08532-9> accessed 29 July 2020

² BMJ Open. Exploring global and country-level barriers to an effective supply of leishmaniasis medicines and diagnostics in eastern Africa: a qualitative study. <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/9/5/e029141.info> accessed 29 July 2020

“We are honoured to bring our experience in VL to ASCEND, and to continue to help support Kenya’s Ministry of Health to build the testing capacity needed to underpin elimination efforts in all the counties where the disease is being reported today,” said Prof. Joseph Ndung’u, Head of the FIND NTD programme and Executive Director of FIND Kenya.

“The new partnership with FIND will support the Kenya government to have a sustainable control of VL in all endemic counties, improve diagnosis and treatment, strengthen supply chain, increase awareness of the disease and most importantly integrate VL control and into the health system,” said Dr Duncan Ochol, ASCEND Country Lead, Kenya.

This project is funded by UK Aid from the British people, as part of ASCEND (Accelerating the Sustainable Control and Elimination of NTDs).

#

About FIND

FIND is a global non-profit organization that drives innovation in the development and delivery of diagnostics to combat major diseases affecting the world's poorest populations. Our work bridges R&D to access, overcoming scientific barriers to technology development; generating evidence for regulators and policymakers; addressing market failures; and enabling accelerated uptake and access to diagnostics in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Since 2003, we have been instrumental in the development of 24 new diagnostic tools used in 150 LMICs. Over 50 million FIND-supported products have been provided to our target markets since the start of 2015. A WHO Collaborating Centre, we work with more than 200 academic, industry, governmental, and civil society partners worldwide, on over 70 active projects that cross six priority disease areas. FIND is committed to a future in which diagnostics underpin treatment decisions and provide the foundation for disease surveillance, control and prevention. For more information, please visit www.finddx.org

About Crown Agents

Crown Agents is a not-for-profit international development company which specialises in empowering leaders to accelerate self-sufficiency and prosperity for their communities, businesses, institutions and countries. We supply health services for the most vulnerable, support government systems reform, deliver humanitarian projects in conflict affected countries and provide last mile logistics that ensure supplies and services get to citizens in hard-to-reach locations.

Media contacts

FIND: Sarah-Jane Loveday, Head of Communications
+41 (0) 79 431 62 44
media@finddx.org

Crown Agents: Anna Schuesterl, Senior Communications and Marketing Manager
±44 (0) 78 72 48 45 12
comms.team@crowนางents.co.uk