

# River blindness still worries Kagadi

**KAGADI**

By Ismael Kasooha

Communities that were hit hard by river blindness in Kagadi are worried about a resurgence of the disease after the Government stopped the free distribution of drugs.

Steven Kalani, 76, of Sion village, said there is need for further treatment to eliminate the disease.

"When the Government stopped distributing drugs in 2012, some signs and symptoms similar to those of river blindness started emerging," Kalani said.

A person with river blindness usually has a rough and itchy skin, painless and spongy nodules on the skin. In advanced stages, there is usually white-patched skin on the legs, visual damage and sight loss.

The black fly is responsible for transmitting the parasites that cause river blindness in humans.

The people that *New Vision* talked to complained of similar signs and said they are not sure whether the disease has been eliminated as argued by the experts.

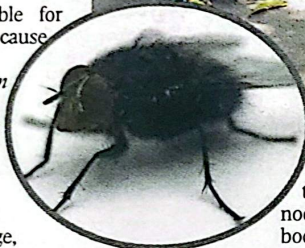
Generous Bakironda, 74, a resident of Kinyarwanda village, said she has all the signs and symptoms of river blindness that disappeared during the treatment period.

According to Bakironda, she started taking Ivermectin in 1992, until its distribution was stopped in 2012.

Victoro Rubare from Kyarusizi village, Ruteete sub-county undressed



Residents of Nyabwegereka village listening to a Ministry of Health official during a community sensitisation in Kagadi. Photo by Ismael Kasooha



**The Black fly, which causes river blindness**

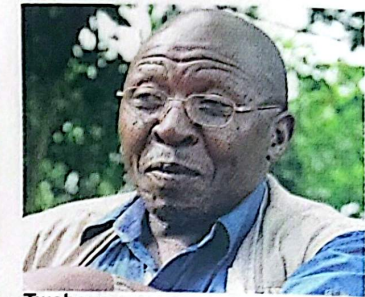
to show the nodules on his body and then explained that he is having sleepless nights due to the itching of the skin.

Charles Ziriyo, 77, said he would spend most of his time scratching his body, but that no longer happens.

"I was an outcast in the community,

but now I fit in well," Ziriyo narrated.

The existence of river blindness in Mpamba-Nkusi focus was affirmed after the assessment in 1992 in the then Kagadi sub-county, now Ruteete sub-county. That same year, the Ministry of Health with support from Sight Savers International who were later joined by African Programme for Ochocerciasis, started annual mass drug administration with Ivermectin in eight sub-counties.



Twebaze

post-treatment surveillance, several examinations are being carried out, to completely ascertain that the disease has been eliminated.

He added that they have taken skin samples of people complaining of similar signs such as those of river blindness, but they have all turned out to be negative.

"We have taken skin snaps from people presenting with similar conditions, but they have all turned negative," Twebaze said.

He said they have also made several examinations of crabs that host the larvae of the black fly that is responsible for spreading the disease, but they have also been found to be negative.

Twebaze said the transmission cycle was broken through by the pouring of a chemical called Abate into the rivers that acted as breeding grounds. The rivers are Rwabituju, Nyabwegereka, Mugyiguru, Nyabugando, Mbamba and Nkusi river system which flows downstream to Lake Albert.

