

Adetokunbo O. Lucas, MD

RECIPIENT OF THE 2013 JIMMY AND ROSALYNN CARTER HUMANITARIAN AWARD

Dr. Adetokunbo “Ade” Lucas, recipient of the 2013 NFID Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Humanitarian Award, was nominated by none other than President and Mrs. Carter.

Seconding the choice, Dr. Mark L. Rosenberg, President and CEO of the Task Force for Global Health Inc., says that Dr. Lucas has made “extraordinary humanitarian contributions to improving the health of people in his own country of Nigeria, throughout Africa, and indeed, throughout the world. His early career was marked by outstanding scientific productivity and this was followed by many years of extraordinary generosity and tireless advocacy for the formation and application of public health policy.”

Over the past 50 years, Dr. Lucas has been involved with nearly every public health issue in Nigeria. “From medical research to health policy,” Rosenberg says, “he has made important contributions at the local, national and global levels in the area of infectious diseases, chronic diseases, maternal mortality and safe motherhood.”

By focusing on a wide range of infectious diseases during his early career, he helped pave the way to the current resurgence of attention being paid to the neglected tropical diseases. “His work led to the development of new strategies for the control of schistosomiasis and onchocerciasis, involving mass drug administration that has benefitted hundreds of millions of people,” Dr. Rosenberg says.

For 10 years Dr. Lucas directed the Tropical Diseases Programme of the World Health Organization, and was instrumental in combating six major tropical diseases—malaria, schistosomiasis, the trypanosomiasis, the leishmaniasis, the filariases and leprosy. He coordinated net-

works of cooperating scientists, institutions and industry representatives and, Dr. Rosenberg says, he “brought about many scientific advances as well as the development of new and improved technologies such as multiple drug therapy for the control of leprosy.”

For his part, Dr. Lucas wrote in his autobiography that those ten years were the best of his life with the most challenging professional assignment in his career.

Eradicating Diseases

Over the decades, Dr. Lucas has served on many boards and panels, including the Governing Board of the Global Fund for Fighting AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. He has also been on the International Task Force for Disease Eradication, which was formed at The Carter Center in the late 1980s to evaluate the prevention and control of some diseases and the eradication of others.

The Task Force, “composed of scientists and notable international health organizations from around the world,” Dr. Rosenberg says, “has identified seven diseases that could be eradicated—dracunculiasis, poliomyelitis, mumps, rubella, lymphatic filariasis, cysticercosis and measles, as well as several others that can be eliminated—and regularly reviews and comments on progress toward eradication.”

It is fitting, Dr. Rosenberg continues, “that Dr. Lucas has served on this Task Force since its inception, because he has contributed many of the advances that have made the elimination of these diseases possible.”

When The Carter Center called for a cease fire among the disputing parties in Sudan’s civil war in 1995 to allow health workers to attack guinea worm and other diseases plaguing people of the region, President Carter says, Dr. Lucas “eval-

uated their public health needs and made recommendations to the ministry of health as requested by their government.”

Elevating Public Health

Ade Lucas was born in Lagos, Nigeria, in 1931. According to a *Lancet* review of his 2010 autobiography, *It Was the Best of Times*, Dr. Lucas writes that he was born into a learned family. His father was named vicar of St. Paul’s Church, Breadfruit and received the Order of the British Empire; his mother insisted that he not only learn to read and write at a young age, but also master the organ—an instrument he still plays.

As a young man, he attended school in Lagos and traveled to England for his higher education. He received his degrees at the University of Durham in the United Kingdom. He also won the Debating Plate there, in open competition.

For firsthand experience in internal medicine, tropical medicine and public health, Dr. Lucas did his postgraduate training—from 1957 to 1964—in Belfast, London and at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

For two years, Dr. Lucas was a senior registrar in internal medicine at University College Hospital in Ibadan, Nigeria. While there, leaders at the University persuaded him to turn his attentions and energies to preventive and social medicine. “The impact of this transition did not go unnoticed,” Dr. Lincoln Chen wrote in the April 2011 edition of *The Lancet*. “Bernie Guyer, former chair of maternal and child health at Johns Hopkins and student trainee in Ibadan, told me that he was widely respected as a formidable clinician whose decision elevated overnight the low academic status of public health at that time.”

From 1965 to 1976, Dr. Lucas was a professor and head

of the Department of Preventive and Social Medicine at the University of Ibadan. He was the first chairman of the Medical Research Council of Nigeria, from 1973–75. The Council established medical research goals and proposed methods for funding and implementation. One project focused on developing a national program for the control of goiter and iodine deficiency, which eventually resulted in a national policy for the iodization of salt.

Between 1976 and 1986, Dr. Lucas directed the Special Program for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases at the World Health Organization in Geneva. The program resulted in the development of new and improved tools for the control of the targeted diseases; for example multiple drug therapy to control leprosy. According to *The Lancet*, the program “launched global networking in R&D, integrated social with the medical sciences, pioneered ‘sandwich training’, and partnered with the pharmaceutical industry—spawning the ivermectin donation program for river blindness.”

The ivermectin story and the sharp decline in leprosy, following the introduction of the multiple drug therapy, “thrill me,” Dr. Lucas says. “In 1985, 122 countries had significant amounts of leprosy. Now only four countries have a prevalence of active cases of leprosy above one per 10,000 people.”

About his work, President Carter says, the world “is still benefitting from the fruits of his effective and pioneering leadership in that position.”

Improving Worldwide Health

In 1984, Dr. Lucas chaired a committee that created Nigeria’s National Health Policy. Aside from minor revisions, the policy is still in place today. He was instrumental in the founding of the Commission for Health Research for Development and the Global Forum for Health Research.



From 1986 he oversaw the Carnegie Corporation's grant program that promoted maternal health and developed strategies for reducing maternal mortality in West Africa and other countries. And in 1987 he helped plan a conference on "Safe Motherhood" in Nairobi—the event that kick-started the global programs aimed at preventing maternal mortality.

He is co-author with H.M. Gilles of the textbook, *Public Health Medicine for the Tropics*. He has published numerous papers and contributed to many other textbooks and medical journals.

Dr. Lucas has served on the advisory boards of national and international organizations, including the Rockefeller Foundation, the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, the Wellcome Trust Scientific Group on Tropical Medicine, and Bill and Melinda Gates' Children's Vaccine Program. He is also a Fellow of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists—awarded by the College in recognition of Ade Lucas' contributions to research and training in maternal health.

Along the way, Dr. Lucas has received honorary degrees from many universities. Tulane University awarded him a Doctor of Science degree in 1986 "publicly acknowledging your enormous contributions toward improving the health and well-being of people worldwide." And Emory University bestowed a Doctor of Science degree on him in 1987 "for his remarkable effectiveness in marshalling scientific and human resources in the war to conquer diseases in developing nations."

He has also won a long shelf full of awards, including the Order of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 1983, Harvard's 350th anniversary Medal in 1986, and the Prince Mahidol Award in 1989. In 1988 he was elected as a foreign associate of the Institute of Medicine of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences.

From 1990 to 1995, Dr. Lucas was a professor of International Health at Harvard University. He continues his affiliation with the university's School of Public Health as an ad-

unct professor. He was profiled with 12 other distinguished scientists in the 1996 book, *Disease Fighters Since 1950*.

And he continues his battle against neglected tropical diseases to this day. In early 2012, Dr. Lucas wrote in African newspapers that there is "reason to hope that we may soon see a future free of these diseases."

The solutions may be closer than ever because of the combined efforts of global health groups, bilateral donors, pharmaceutical firms, private foundations and representatives from NTD-endemic countries. "Working together," Dr. Lucas observed, "these organizations have created a real opportunity to help hundreds of millions of people affected by these terrible diseases build self-sufficiency. Their innovative partnership is changing how we approach global health problems and will increase the impact of previous NTD programs, building on tremendous progress so far."

He added, "I have spent decades fighting against neglected tropical diseases. In my 80 years, I have hoped to see a day when these neglected diseases will no longer blight the lives of the poor communities in Africa and worldwide. With this new innovative partnership, I see a light at the end of the tunnel."

In September, 2012, Dr. Lucas received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the USAID's Neglected Tropical Diseases Program.

In his memoir, Dr. Lucas tells of courting his wife, Kofo, for 20 years before marrying her 54 years ago. They eventually had four children and six grandchildren. He continues to enjoy a lifelong love of playing classical music on the organ.

"What is the most striking about Dr. Lucas' contributions has been his ability to help translate research into practice, and the incredible energy he has invested in making sure that science serves the health and development of those people in the greatest need," says Dr. Rosenberg.

Ade Lucas, President Carter adds, "is certainly one of the most deserving individuals we know of for the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Humanitarian Award."