

German-African projects in the Biocenter

Sleeping sickness, Lassa fever and other infectious diseases: Some 100 scientists from Africa and Germany present their joint research projects in infectiology at the University of Würzburg's Biocenter during a conference from 10 to 13 June.

Since 2009, the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) has funded joint German-African research ventures dealing with infectious diseases in humans and animals. The organisation also supports associated socio-scientific research activities, because many infectious diseases in Africa are poverty-related.

The projects funded by the DFG focus, among others, on the sleeping sickness, Lassa fever or leishmaniasis. The partners come together during a networking conference in the University of Würzburg's Biocenter from Wednesday 10 to Saturday 13 June 2015. 40 scientists from Germany and 67 researchers from 18 African countries will present a total of 22 projects at the conference. The presentations are open to the interested public.



Previous networking meetings took place in Berlin in 2010, in Accra (Ghana) 2011, in Bad Honnef (Germany) in 2012 and in Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) in 2014 at the invitation of the DFG.

Focus on neglected tropical diseases

The conference is hosted by the DFG; Professor Markus Engstler, Head of the Department of Cell and Developmental Biology at the University of Würzburg, is the event's on-site coordinator. Mr Engstler is an expert in sleeping sickness research and co-founder of the German network against neglected tropical diseases (DNTD) established in 2014. The network brings together stakeholders from science, civil society, politics and economy; its general meeting is now held on the occasion of the DFG conference in Würzburg.

Neglected tropical diseases: This is the term used by scientists to refer to diseases such as the fatal sleeping sickness, which are widespread in the tropics. Even though about 1.9 billion mostly poor people are afflicted by these diseases, little or no effort is being made worldwide to combat them.

According to Engstler, the network has experienced a very dynamic development: "We have achieved that the issue of neglected tropical diseases is put on the agenda of the G7 summit in Elmau in early June." Additionally, an application of the governing coalition in Germany to the Bundestag is under way with the aim to boost research and development efforts to fight neglected tropical diseases.

DFG supports relevant research projects

Research of infectious diseases such as Aids, malaria and tuberculosis receives substantial international funding through grant programmes. Compared to this, research of other serious infectious diseases in humans and farm animals is disproportionately low. The DFG therefore encourages scientists to apply for medical project grants to research these neglected diseases.

Besides the scientific quality of the work, one of the DFG's major funding criteria is to help young African scientists to pursue sustained academic and professional careers in their home countries. Grants for both the German and the African project partners can be applied for; moreover the requirements for the basic project equipment are handled differently in the case of the African institutions.

Contact

Prof. Dr. Markus Engstler, Biocenter of the University of Würzburg, Phone +49 931 31-80060,
markus.engstler@biozentrum.uni-wuerzburg.de

Link to the German network against neglected tropical diseases (DNTDs)

<http://www.dntds.de>

Caption

Africa in Würzburg: The poster of the conference of German-African research groups in the University of Würzburg's Biocenter (picture: Markus Engstler)