

A KNOWLEDGEABLE PARTNERSHIP

Raising awareness of tropical disease research is crucially important. Robert Ridley from the TDR and David O'Connell comment on a TDR–NPG collaboration that aims to help address this issue.

Nature Reviews Microbiology has recently joined forces with the TDR (UNICEF/UNDP/World Bank/WHO Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases; <http://www.who.int/tdr>) to highlight the key scientific issues associated with tropical infectious diseases — diseases that often sit outside the academic mainstream of microbiology, despite their major impact on global health. Why is this so important and why now?

In a time of increasing global disparities in health and wealth, coupled with huge growth in the volume and complexity of scientific information being generated, knowledge management has become a highly valued and potentially life-saving commodity. The generation, dissemination and use of knowledge form the basis of remedies for all diseases. By linking together, the TDR and Nature Publishing Group (NPG) are demonstrating a synergy and partnership between roles that have previously been separate, namely that of 'producer' and 'distributor' of information.

Increasing collaborations between the producers and distributors of knowledge reflect a new era in which the question of access to knowledge is recognized to be of fundamental importance. Inequity of access to knowledge is a cause, as well as a result, of poverty. This is true within nations, but becomes increasingly acute for an organization like the TDR, which works through scientists operating in severely resource-constrained environments.

The recognition by publishers of the common goal that they share with scientists in making information widely accessible is perhaps best illustrated by the recent establishment of the Health InterNetwork Access to Research Initiative (HINARI). Through HINARI, >100 countries will benefit from free or low-cost access to the results of global health research published in >2000 journals. The TDR is proud to be associated with this WHO-led initiative, and the active engagement and support of high-profile publishers such as NPG has been crucial to its success.

For knowledge to have impact in the field of health, it must be used. For 28 years, the TDR has been active in the promotion and funding of 'use-inspired' research to fight a focused set of 10 tropical diseases and to help build and

strengthen research capacity in developing countries so that local scientists can contribute to finding solutions to their problems. In doing this, the TDR has developed new ways to work with a variety of partners, including industrial partners, for the development of new drugs. Examples include working with Merck & Co., Inc. to develop ivermectin as a therapeutic in the control of onchocerciasis (river blindness), which resulted in a significant reduction in the burden of this disease as a health problem in west Africa. Significant contributions have also been made for many other diseases, including malaria and leprosy.

None of these accomplishments could have been achieved without the time, commitment and effort over the years of many hundreds of TDR scientific advisors from both developed and developing countries. They have contributed to meetings and committees that have helped distil, interpret and contextualize existing knowledge and have then given direction to research so that it can deliver tools and methodologies that now have an impact on millions of lives. In developing the current partnership with *Nature Reviews Microbiology*, TDR will again draw on the expertise and commitment of scientists who work on tropical diseases, both out of a love of the science and a desire that their work can make a difference to peoples' lives.

Through the monthly 'Disease Watch' section, and through perspectives and reviews from leading researchers, we will be drawing collectively on scientific knowledge to make sense of the vast array of scientific information available on these diseases. For those that read these contributions as experts in the field, we hope that you will acquire new insights that are of help to your work. For those readers for whom the diseases are new from a research perspective, we hope that they will whet your appetite and generate a broader interest in, and perhaps even a few converts to, the field of tropical disease research. For all, we hope that our coverage of these issues show how research can make a difference in the fight against disease.

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