



Fact Sheet

“Knowledge belongs to all”

Malaria research: Investment in the health of the poorest

Background

Malaria is one of the four most prevalent diseases in the world: Almost two billion people live in areas where malaria is endemic. Between 300 million and 500 million people come down with the disease each year and around one million people die from the effects. The main victims are children. Malaria holds back development: The costs are a heavy burden on the economies of the African countries affected. Economic growth is considerably reduced, but the costs are particularly severe for the people who are suffering from malaria.

Because the malaria parasite has become increasingly resistant to the drugs Chloroquin and Mefloquin, prevention and the development of new medicaments is urgent. Development cooperation must rise to the challenge. The SDC is involved in the development of low-cost and effective methods such as mosquito nets impregnated with insecticide and of new affordable anti-malarial drugs. What is also required is efficient cooperation between industry and the public sector (e.g. university research). After the almost total withdrawal of the pharmaceutical industry from malaria research, the SDC stepped into the breach in 1999 together with other donors and set up the “Medicines for Malaria Venture” (MMV).

Impregnated mosquito nets for all

In Tanzania, the SDC co-financed a research program into the effectiveness of mosquito nets. In the Kilombero Valley between 1996 and 2000 the overall effectiveness of the net among the people was assessed. Subsequently the research partnership between the Ifakara Health Research and Development Centre and the Swiss Tropical Institute was continued. The Kilombero mosquito net project aimed to develop, in cooperation with the people, a sustainable distribution strategy to make the mosquito nets and the insecticide used in impregnating the nets accessible to the 450,000 inhabitants. The collaboration with families, local village chiefs and health workers led to the easy-to-remember slogan “Zuia Mbu” which is Kiswahili for “Prevent Mosquitos”. The marketing strategy included retail shopkeepers and wholesale dealers, kiosk owners, street merchants and hawkers. The awareness-raising campaign through posters, theater performances, mobile video shows and printed school books was mostly the work of the people, schools, health workers and local non-governmental organizations.

At the end of the project more than 50% of all children below five years was sleeping under a mosquito net. The death rate from malaria among children fell by one-quarter. Analyses showed that even the poorest households bought mosquito nets and used them. The knowledge and experience gained from this initiative is now being used in the national malaria prevention campaign of the Ministry of Health.

Therapy: new medicines for the future

The non-profit “Medicines for Malaria Venture“ (MMV) which was founded in 1999 and co-financed by the SDC aims to promote, in partnership with public and private institutions, research into and development of new anti-malarial medications affordable even to the poor. The private sector has almost completely withdrawn from malaria research because the returns promised on the investment required were too small. For research and development of a medicine, the pharmaceutical industry calculates that between USD 500 million and 800 million would be needed up to the time a product is put on the market. In this research partnership, the MMV takes over the management of the research portfolio of several promising anti-malarial candidates as well as the financing of the research costs, which means that the over-all costs can be kept lower. The pharmaceutical industry has made available the knowledge and the technology that had been amassed up to the time it stepped out of the picture. On this research basis, the pharmaceutical concern IMMTECH which specializes in the development of oral treatments for infectious diseases produces the active ingredients. The cooperation between the MMV, various universities, Bayer and recently with IMMTECH should ensure that a new anti-malarial medication is ready to go on the market within the next three years. Fair marketing practices and cooperation with the WHO should guarantee equitable access for all.

www.mmv.org

www.rbm.who.int

www.sdc-health.ch