

## Press Release

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### Initiative supports fight against invisible plagues – 850,000 Euros for medical research in Africa

**More than one billion people all over the world suffer from tropical diseases which are mostly unknown to the wider public and have also been neglected economically. In a joint effort with four other European foundations, the Volkswagen Foundation has opened a second round of funding for African scientists conducting research on these neglected diseases.**

They lurk in dirty water and in food, use mosquitoes as carriers, or bore themselves into the soles of the feet of their unsuspecting victims. We are talking about worms, bacteria, viruses, and parasites which are especially commonplace in Africa and cause painful as well as sometimes deadly diseases. However, whereas research on the three “big infections” – HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria – attracts generous funding, diseases like river blindness and buruli ulcer, a skin ulceration caused by the „mycobacterium ulcerans“ bacterium, are all too often completely overlooked.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that worldwide more than a billion people suffer from these and other neglected tropical diseases. Almost half the victims live in Africa. The provision of sustainable support for tropical medicine is the aim of the **European Foundation Initiative for African Research into Neglected Tropical Diseases (EFINTD)**, a joint program in which the Volkswagen Foundation is cooperating with the Portuguese Fundacao Calouste Gulbenkian, the French Fondation Mérieux, the British Nuffield Foundation and the Italian Fondazione Cariplo.

The five foundations first joined together in 2007 to provide support for the fight against diverse diseases. In the new second round of funding, now **seven young African researchers** from Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, Kenya and Mozambique have been selected to share the sum of **851,000 Euros** for a two to three-year period. The spectrum of topics covered by these postdoctoral researchers ranges from research on the diverse ways in which disease is transmitted, through the interrelations between tropical diseases and HIV/AIDS, up to proposals how communities, ministries and aid organizations can mutually assist in efforts to halt the spread of these diseases.

As the coordinator of the initiative, **Prof. Dr. Bernhard Fleischer** from the Bernhard-Nocht Institute (BNI) for Tropical Medicine in Hamburg, points out: “It is still difficult for African scientists to enter an academic career and to develop their own projects in their countries of origin. This initiative makes it possible for them to conduct independent research in their own countries on a topic which is so vital to the African continent.” Since the first joint call for proposals in 2008, **ten fellowships funded to the tune of 1.34 million Euros** have already been awarded to African researchers. The fellows will be attending a status symposium at BNI to be held from September 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup>.

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For further details about the European Initiative, please visit the Website  
<http://www.ntd-africa.net>.