

## EDITORIAL

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## Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative

The **Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative** (DNDi) is a not-for-profit organisation with headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. Founded by six research institutions and an international humanitarian organisation\*, DNDi addresses the need for new field-adapted, effective, and affordable drugs for patients suffering from neglected diseases. DNDi harnesses knowledge and cutting-edge science and technology to research and develop critically needed drugs for neglected diseases such as leishmaniasis, trypanosomiasis, and Chagas disease, ensuring their suitability and accessibility to the poorer patients of the world. To achieve this, DNDi works predominantly with developing country organizations and governments.

Infectious, tropical diseases such as leishmaniasis, trypanosomiasis, Chagas disease, and malaria have a devastating impact on humanity, yet R&D for new drugs for these diseases has been progressively marginalised because they are not considered a lucrative investment. DNDi, a needs-driven initiative, keeps the needs of patients suffering from neglected diseases paramount in its search for new drugs to treat them.

DNDi is in the unique position of possessing first-hand knowledge of these needs due to the location and mission of its Founding Partners\* who work in disease-endemic countries throughout the developing world. Moreover, the founders of DNDi have participated in various studies that assessed both the need for new treatments for neglected diseases and the gaps in the R&D pipeline of drugs for these diseases. Using this knowledge, DNDi actively facilitates partnerships between the world's best researchers to provide a solid drug development focus. DNDi incorporates promising projects into its portfolio, matching patients' needs with existing opportunities, and then works with public research institutes and the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industry to ensure a pipeline of drugs for these neglected diseases. Over the last two years, DNDi has been very active in developing a robust portfolio. In 2005, DNDi will include into its portfolio five new projects recommended by its Scientific Advisory Committee, bringing the total number of projects to 18.

Regional collaboration and capacity strengthening for R&D in neglected diseases is one of DNDi's key goals. Liaison offices in Brazil, India, Malaysia, and Africa are now fully functional. In Kenya, DNDi has set up the Leishmaniasis East Africa Platform (LEAP) to address East Africa's needs for leishmaniasis, including capacity strengthening for drug evaluation and clinical studies in the region. The LEAP 0104 Paromomycin clinical trials are underway in Ethiopia, Kenya and Sudan.

Clinical trials for artesunate/mefloquine (AS/MQ) and artesunate/amodiaquine (AS/AQ) for chloroquine-resistant malaria are ongoing in Thailand and Burkina Faso respectively. DNDi has signed a non-exclusive agreement with sanofi-aventis to deliver AS/AQ for a target price of less than \$1 for an adult treatment. Both AS/AQ and AS/MQ will be submitted for registration at the end of the year and available to patients in 2006. For more details visit [www.dndi.org](http://www.dndi.org).

In addition to its scientific activities, DNDi is strongly advocating the need for more R&D for neglected diseases. Recently, together with its Founding Partners and other organizations, it launched an appeal to governments to take

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the lead in boosting innovation in R&D for neglected diseases by providing political leadership and commitment, significant and sustained financial support, and new rules to stimulate R&D for diseases of the poor. It will present this appeal and list of signatories to the member states at the World Health Assembly, 2006. You are encouraged to support this Appeal by signing up at [www.dndi.org](http://www.dndi.org).

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\* DNDi's founding partners include a humanitarian organization, Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF); a private research institute, the Pasteur Institute; four medical research entities from the southern hemisphere: the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation from Brazil, the Indian Council for Medical Research, the Kenya Medical Research Institute and the Ministry of Health Malaysia; and the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR) of the World Health Organization.