NEARLY ALL OF the world’s poorest people are affected by at least one ‘neglected tropical disease’ – infections which are especially endemic in low-income populations worldwide. It has been suggested that these diseases are primary drivers in the perpetuation of poverty among the 1.4 billion people living below the World Bank’s poverty level of US $1.25 per day, also known as ‘the bottom billion’. These wide-ranging infectious diseases are often relatively easy to treat, but have traditionally been somewhat overlooked when it comes to international research and funding efforts.

At the other end of the scale, malaria is a tropical infection which has long received a large share of global attention. This is due in part to the sheer extent of its geographical distribution; the complexity of the parasite’s life cycle; and the disproportionate impact it has on young children. Initiatives aimed at eradicating this disease date back to the 1950s, but with its specific inclusion as part of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, renewed vigour in the research community to battle malaria has led to the development of new drugs, more efficient prevention measures, improved diagnostic tests and the promise of an ever-elusive vaccine.

This edition of International Innovation presents an array of research that is leading the way in the fight against tropical diseases. The breadth and originality of the work featured is testament to the expertise of the scientists working to overcome these debilitating conditions. Dr John Reeder, Director of the World Health Organization Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases, describes how they are working to put the power to fight infectious tropical diseases into the hands of the populations that feel their effects most severely. This global approach to tropical disease prevention is echoed in the ethos of the European & Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership, and our interview with its Executive Director, Professor Charles Mgone, outlines their goal to decrease Africa’s disease burden through clinical trials. We also feature Medicines for Malaria Venture, whose pioneering work developing novel antimalarial drugs serves as an example of what large-scale, collaborative projects can achieve when they are united under a common goal.

The issue is rounded off with a word from Dr Peter J Hotez, whose career has been defined by his dedication, not only to his research, but also to the people who stand to benefit from it. This is an area in which discoveries can provide marked and tangible benefits for many of the most vulnerable populations on Earth, and this is what drives these scientists to investigate these devastating infections and create novel therapeutics.

As ever, please do not hesitate to get in touch with feedback, enquire about a subscription or offer proposals for our next edition.

Enjoy the issue.

JOSH GABBATISS
FRANCES CARTWRIGHT
March 2014