

African tuberculosis analyses move from Antwerp to Cotonou

ITM partner in Benin to provide TB support to other African countries

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Dit is de omschrijving

The National TB Reference Laboratory in Cotonou, Benin, is the newest member of the World Health Organization (WHO) TB Supranational Reference Laboratory (SRL) Network. As the third SRL in the WHO African Region it will support other TB laboratories in the continent where most of the 10 million yearly TB cases occur.

The Institute of Tropical Medicine Antwerp (ITM), itself a coordinating centre in the WHO TB SRL network, is proud of the achievements of its longstanding partner *Laboratoire de Référence de Mycobactéries* (LRM) in Cotonou. Over the past 10 years, with support of the Belgian Development Cooperation, ITM has contributed to scientific capacity building at LRM.

TB and Buruli ulcer samples from Benin used to be sent to Antwerp for analysis. With support from ITM, LRM gradually took over activities, including molecular diagnostics. The latter are important for a precise diagnosis and should happen as close as possible to where the cases occur. In recent years, ITM increasingly focused on the preparation of regional laboratories like LRM, centres of excellence which could help develop the services all over their region.

Dr. Armand Van Deun of ITM's Unit of Mycobacteriology in particular has mentored Dr. Dissou Affolabi and his team in Cotonou over the past five years in preparation for its supranational reference tasks.

Dr. Armand Van Deun said: "ITM is thrilled to be part of LRM's journey towards scientific excellence. Our partners in Benin are an example of how developing countries can take charge of scientific and medical capacity." Southern partners taking scientific and medical capacity in their own hands and helping surrounding countries to achieve a satisfactory level of performance is at the heart of ITM's [Switching the Poles capacity-building programme](#).

The WHO said LRM's contemporary containment infrastructure, well-trained and committed staff, strong links with the TB laboratory network in Benin and the ability to provide support to reference laboratories in other countries earned it full SRL status, also serving as a model to other countries in Africa.

Dr. Dissou Affolabi said: "Over the years many scientists have contributed to the solid foundations of LRM. Now it is up to us to show what we can do for Benin and other countries in the region. ITM has been a special partner along the way, with a keen eye for talent and for training people. We run several research projects together and more and more we also take the lead in those projects."

At the end of 2013, ITM [filmed at the reference laboratory in Cotonou](#) for a documentary about the Switching the Poles programme. The film shows the skills and expertise at hand at the laboratory, as well as the preparations in progress to acquire SRL-status.

