

# Research and education in the spotlight during President Tshisekedi's visit to ITM

The visit was part of a state visit to consolidate ties between DRC and Belgium.

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Dit is de omschrijving

**Today, the Congolese President Félix Tshisekedi visited the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) in Antwerp. During his visit, the longstanding collaboration of ITM and its Congolese partners in the fields of research and education was highlighted. The presidential delegation was welcomed by the Minister for Development Cooperation Alexander De Croo, the Antwerp governor Cathy Berx and the director of ITM, Dr Marc-Alain Widdowson. The visit of the Congolese president to ITM is part of a state visit to consolidate ties between the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Belgium.**

For years, ITM has been working with Congolese research and educational institutions aimed at making scientific progress in order to achieve better health for all. "Today, ITM is working intensively with Congolese partner institutions in the areas of research, education and capacity building. These long-term partnerships are crucial to help address important health problems in DRC and the world," says Dr Marc-Alain Widdowson, brand new director of ITM. The cooperation with Congolese partner institutions is structurally financed by the Belgian Ministry for Development Cooperation.

The sleeping sickness project was extensively discussed during the president's visit to ITM. Two years ago, the Belgian and Congolese governments and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation decided to join forces to eliminate sleeping sickness by 2030. At the start of the project, around 90% of the sleeping sickness cases reported worldwide occurred in DRC. ITM and the Congolese Programme National de Lutte contre la Trypanosomiasis Humaine jointly coordinate efforts to control its transmission and ultimately eradicate this disease by 2030. During his visit, the president was shown the tsetse fly, the insect transmitting sleeping sickness, and took part in a scientific show & tell about the diagnostics used for detecting the illness. Every year, ITM produces and distributes more than two million rapid detection test kits all over the world to detect sleeping sickness.

ITM's support to research during outbreaks of Ebola, chikungunya, etc. in DRC was also an important topic during the visit. Scientific research can lead to life-saving insights when an outbreak occurs, and ITM scientists are currently tackling important questions on Ebola care in North-East DRC. In a highly interconnected world, ITM must continue to innovate and develop its outbreak investigation capacity and stands by to conduct timely research anywhere in the world in case an outbreak occurs.

Lastly, two students and an alumnus talked to the Congolese president about their reasons for choosing ITM. No fewer than 300 Congolese studied at ITM over the last decade. Fourteen Congolese students completed their PhD at ITM during the same period. Every year, more than 600 students from all over the world come to the Institute to specialise in tropical medicine and international health.