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Test for sleeping sickness developed and manufactured by ITM

For decades, a sleeping sickness test has been used all over the world that was not only developed but is still being made today by ITM.

The cause of sleeping sickness is trypanosoma, a parasite that is transmitted by the tsetse fly. Without treatment, the parasite penetrates the brain, causing death. Animals can also contract sleeping sickness.

The key to combatting trypanosomiasis is early detection. This is made possible by the CATT, a test ITM developed at the end of the 1970s. It was at the incentive of parasitologist Nestor Van Meirvenne that the procedure came about and grew to become (the only usable) field test that is used on a large scale for detecting sleeping sickness in West and Central Africa. Because the production process is laborious and not commercially viable, the pharmaceutical sector has no or little interest in manufacturing the test, so ITM does it itself. The Institute has already supplied various organisations with many millions of test kits.

ITM epidemiologist Marleen Boelaert, expert in leishmaniasis and sleeping sickness

At the end of the 20th century, the number of new cases of human African trypanosomiasis took on epidemic proportions. Thanks to detection and treatment campaigns, this number has decreased to less than 10,000 per year, especially in Congo. ITM never abandoned sleeping sickness. ITM researchers such as Marleen Boelaert, Epcó Hasker and Philippe Büscher are working on eliminating trypanosomiasis in Congo together with local and international partners, supported by the Belgian government and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. In May 2014, ITM made an important contribution to a fast, new 15-minute test for detecting the illness in first-line care.

Header photo: [Tsetse fly from Burkina Faso](#) by International Atomic Energy Agency.