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Editorial

The connections the Swiss Tropical Institute has with Tanzania, and in particular with Ifakara in the south-east, date back to 1949. Its Field Laboratory was inaugurated in 1957 and, in the course of time, went through some three different periods of activities – familiarization with the area, numerous research projects within the field of biomedical sciences, intense training commitments – before it took up goal-oriented applied research, linked with the Government's basic health services policy.

Whilst being scientific, the manifold investigations undertaken by Dr. M. Tanner and his associates simultaneously aimed at three practical goals: at assessing, in a longitudinal study, the changing health situation in a given rural area; at providing the local health authorities with the background information on parasitic and other diseases which they need to install appropriate preventive measures; and at integrating applied research in a primary health care programme, carried out by the authorities concerned.

For scientific purposes the work protocol was originally set up in a way that should help to elucidate somewhat the interrelation between nutrition, parasitic infections, immunity and environment. The results obtained showed that the factors involved were much too intricate to allow the establishment of simple causative relations. Instead, they revealed the limits scientists encounter when they deal with human communities. But they also showed the capability of scientists of contributing to development, provided they are prepared to act as a truly multidisciplinary team, they take an interdisciplinary approach and they keep the priorities of the communities in mind.

It is gratifying to find that the Village Health Workers, elected by the villagers and trained by the District Medical Officer's team, had quite an impact on the communities they served. Not only did they take upon themselves the task they were assigned to with much enthusiasm and skill; their activities in themselves brought about noticeable changes in the people's mind and attitude towards health and disease, raised the people's awareness of the problems existing and fostered their self-confidence with regard to what a community can do to improve the prevailing situation with the means available. This attempt to integrate applied research into a primary health care programme yielded positive as well as some negative aspects; there is no doubt, however, that a combination of research activities and primary health care system promotion can be successful and beneficial to all concerned.

The programme, or rather its first phase, for the project still continues, coincided with a period of marked development of national research capacities. This is reflected in the degree of collaboration with the National Institute of Medical Research, steadily gaining intensity; it is also seen in the unprecedented number of Tanzanian co-authors of the papers presented in this issue of *Acta Tropica*.

The undersigned, second and designated third Directors of the Swiss Tropical Institute, are happy to see its Field Laboratory gradually evolve from a field research outstation to a teaching centre and, onwards, to a nucleus of goal-oriented scientific activities geared at supporting local development endeavours. May the Field Laboratory eventually get fully integrated into the National structures and may its work become beneficial to the people of increasingly large areas.

Basel, January 1987

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