

# 'Dodgy dossier' partly to blame for failure of war against malaria in the tropics

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The war against malaria in tropical countries was fought and lost in the 20th Century on the basis of faulty intelligence, a 'dodgy dossier' which argued that the same methods used to tackle the disease in temperate countries would also work in the tropics.

Eradication failed in almost every tropical and sub-tropical country, because tactics that had been proven to work in countries such as the USA, Greece and Italy were also deployed in tropical countries, despite the existence of evidence that they would they not work, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

Dr. Colin Sutherland, a Senior Lecturer at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, who is contributing to a session entitled 'How science addresses developing world issues' at the BA Festival of Science in Liverpool today, explains: 'Previous efforts to eradicate malaria, if considered on a nation-by-nation basis, only succeeded in countries where the Plasmodium parasite was weak and its mosquito vector was vulnerable, particularly where populations were wealthy enough to afford the best tools available.

'The failure to eradicate malaria in tropical countries, where the parasite is now at its strongest, and the mosquitoes are doing very well, thank you very much is, in part, due to the miscalculation that a one-size-fits-all approach would be effective in every setting – a miscalculation that could have been avoided if we had heeded the evidence from Africa over half a century ago', he adds.

Dr. Sutherland cautions against the obsession among the western media with the 'scientific breakthrough', a concept which consequently dominates popular notions of science. Although breakthroughs do occur, and are undoubtedly newsworthy when they do, it is the careful synthesis of incremental advances in knowledge, and the dissemination of that knowledge to key decision-makers, health ministries and governments that will help us win the war against malaria. Today's session will look at ways of best achieving this, with a particular focus on open access publishing. It will also emphasise the importance of training and support for high calibre African scientists.

'In the war against malaria, knowledge is the most powerful weapon we have', concludes Dr. Sutherland.

Source: London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

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