

Nuclear science to fight sleeping sickness

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The International Atomic Energy Agency on Friday announced an agreement to help African nations battle the tsetse fly, the main carrier of parasites that causes sleeping sickness with its bites.

The IAEA, which has been working on the problem with African countries for 30 years, can make available a Sterile Insect Technique (SIT), a nuclear-based pest control technology that is often described as "biological birth control for insects", according to the agency's website.

The IAEA signed a memorandum of understanding on Wednesday with the African Union, extending cooperation in a range of domains. Work on [sleeping sickness](#) follows an effective trial in Zanzibar in the late 1990s.

Sleeping sickness, or trypanosomosis in animals, is a deadly disease found in 35 African countries, where it kills 400,000 people a year, along with some three million head of cattle.

Apart from the cost in lives, the disease is seen as a major obstacle to development, causing an estimated loss in earnings of about four billion dollars (2.7 billion euros) a year.

"In SIT-supported pest suppression and prevention campaigns, millions of sterilized male insects are released into targeted areas. They mate with wild females in the field, but no offspring are produced. Eventually, the [pest](#) population is suppressed and steadily reduced over time," the IAEA explained.

Medical cooperation is part of the brief of the IAEA, which is based in Vienna and is responsible for promoting peaceful uses of atomic energy.

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