

PRESS RELEASE

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The Swiss Transdisciplinarity Award goes to the Swiss Tropical Institute

This year's Swiss Transdisciplinarity Award for an outstanding transdisciplinary research project goes to a team from the Swiss Tropical Institute in Basel which is studying the health of nomads and their livestock in Chad. One of the outstanding features of this excellent project is its research approach which focusses on the utility of the research findings and stakeholder involvement. The prize money of CHF 50,000 is funded by the Gebert Rüf Foundation and the award is made by the Swiss Academy of Sciences' Transdisciplinarity-Net (td-net). The 2004 award will be presented on 12 November at the "Medicine as Culture" conference in Zurich.

The nomadic cattle breeders of the Sahel often travel several hundred kilometres with their herds each year in search of the water provided by the seasonal rains. As a result they have very little access to health services. This fact provided the starting point for a project carried out jointly by the Swiss Tropical Institute and its Centre de Support en Santé Internationale in Chad and the national veterinary laboratory in N'Djaména (Chad). The project involves the joint study of human and animal health in the region. The local population, the authorities (health and agriculture ministries), private actors and other Swiss institutes were fully integrated into the transdisciplinary research process from the outset. Thanks to the project, health services have been developed that are based on the local population's own perception of its needs and are tailored to their specific circumstances. This outcome would not have been possible without the involvement of all of the relevant actors and the combined application of scientific and social-scientific perspectives. The success of this project clearly demonstrates the importance of a transdisciplinary approach to research, and not only in research on development. The project "Health of nomadic people and their animals" is an excellent example of how research can make an effective contribution to the resolution of serious problems in a way that contributes to the common good.

Transdisciplinary research needs to be promoted. To this end, the Swiss Academy of Sciences has established td-net (network for transdisciplinarity in sciences and humanities, www.transdisciplinarity.ch) in cooperation with other scientific academies. The Swiss Transdisciplinarity Award highlights outstanding contributions by transdisciplinary research to the resolution of problems in the areas of society, technological development, the economy, the environment and health. The award was made possible by the generous support of the Gebert Rüf Foundation. The 2004 Swiss Transdisciplinarity Award will be presented to the recipients on 12 November at the conference "Medicine as Culture – Cultural Studies of Medicine" in the Kongresshaus Zurich (www.sagw.ch, www.samw.ch).

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Project website: http://www.sti.ch/animalh_nomads.htm

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* "Medicine as Culture/science – The Cultural Sciences of Medicine"