

Regional workshop on Research priorities in communicable diseases

Conclusions and Recommendations

The participants of the Regional Workshop on Research Priorities in Communicable Diseases organized by the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia, New Delhi from 4-6 March, 2009 recognized that the South-East Asia (SEA) Region is at high risk for new and emerging infectious diseases and has become a hotspot for many zoonoses, drug-resistant pathogens and vector-borne diseases. Better understanding of the epidemiology of and the broader social, economic, cultural, environmental, ecological and political dimensions are some of the challenges for today's research in communicable diseases.

Research is essential for the development of new tools and interventions, and should be geared towards the development of evidence-based policies and interventions to increase efficiency and effectiveness of programme development and management of health promotion and diseases prevention and control.

The need for research as a part of strategic information and evidence base for developing effective and efficient disease interventions, that contribute to the scaling up and sustaining of interventions that work, cannot be underestimated. In the face of the financial crisis facing countries, priority setting becomes important, in order to carry out research for health problems that target groups or populations such as the poor, vulnerable, marginalized and underprivileged.

Undoubtedly, the environmental, ecological, social, economic and cultural aspects in disease control require partnerships and networking with social scientists, environmentalists, health economists, both in developing research proposals and conducting research.

Besides old challenges, research should address new challenges such as climate change and its impact on health. As a cross cutting issue, research agendas in this area would include study of host factors, environmental and socio-cultural factors, and also health systems leading to developing policies and strategies and ensuring optimal health service delivery systems.

In this context, the following recommendations were made:

Recommendations

Member States should

- Mandate the inclusion of an appropriate research agenda into national health policies and programmes.
- Allocate at least 5% of the budgets allocated to communicable disease programmes for research.
- Establish a national data base of all on-going research relevant to the programme, including drug trials, development of vaccines and diagnostic tools and share this information both within the country and with other countries of the Region.
- Establish a mechanism such as a National commission on research to policy to interface between researchers and the policy makers/programme managers to facilitate the translation of research into policy and strategy.
- Set up a network of institutes engaging in research, such as national centres of excellence, academic institutions, and WHO Collaborating Centres to support research relevant to national programmes, facilitate close collaboration between researchers and programme managers and promote actionable research
- Build/enhance institutional and individual capacity building for preparing quality research proposals and conducting research that can be applied for prevention and control of communicable diseases.
- Promote research that determines influence of environmental, ecological and social factors on epidemiology of communicable diseases
- Utilize available financial resources e.g. GFATM to support research in country-specific context.
- Consider organizing similar workshops in member countries bringing together policy-makers, researchers, programme staff and other stakeholders to identify gaps and priority areas for research in countries.

WHO should

- Discuss research as part of the agenda of the Regional Committee and Health Ministers' meeting.
- Collaborate with Member countries in building research capacity at the national, institutional and individual levels, specifically in training

researchers on research management, in engaging and applying research in disease control programmes and promoting actionable research

- Collaborate with TDR and other partners on research relevant to programmes in the Region, including on emerging global issues, such as climate change and the current financial crisis.
- Assist with the design of operational research protocols and coordinate multi-centre studies to address programme challenges, in an effective manner.
- Facilitate networking of researchers and laboratories as was very effectively done during the SARS containment in Asia in 2003.
- Establish regional mechanisms to set research agendas, and develop standard research protocols related to specific issues which can be used or adapted by Member countries when needed including research on environmental and ecological paradigms of communicable diseases
- Establish a specific programme on ARI/CDD research and control. This should be discussed at the Regional Committee Meeting.
- Facilitate sharing/ dissemination of research information among countries by various means including through a Public Health Journal of SEA Region.
- To review progress made on these recommendations after two years