

# REGIONAL CONSULTATION FOR THE AMERICAS ON HEALTH RESEARCH FOR ATTAINMENT OF THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGs)

## The Regional Context

The Region of the Americas is characterized by the coexistence of high-, middle-, and low-income countries with conspicuous differences in development levels and a long history of scientific output and health technology innovations, with significant contributions to regional and global public health. Compared with other regions, the Latin America and Caribbean region represents an intermediate level of development in terms of the production and transfer of knowledge although it is marked by gaps of the deepest social and economic inequities. Addressing the research and policy-making problems will engage these two asymmetries. Correcting them will require, on the one hand, a regional consensus on the goals shared by all the countries of the Region as a whole, which should be built around the Millennium Development Goals, and on the other, agreements within the framework of integration blocs to promote sustainable development as a factor in equity.

## *Session 1. World Report on Research for Better Health*

Strategies to generate knowledge access, dissemination, and transference for management in health.

### 1. Principles

- Scientific research and the transfer of knowledge to society are built on the premise that health is a basic human right. The underlying ethic of this construct is the promotion of equity.
- In concordance with the equity principle, expenditure in health, research, and knowledge transfer is an investment for the promotion of human development
- Knowledge in health is considered a public good.
- Scientific research and knowledge application should be part of a universal ethic that recognizes diversity and respects cultural, ethnic, religious, and gender differences.

### 2. Relevance of Knowledge Production

- The relevance of research in promoting equity and human development at country and regional levels should be evaluated.
- The scientific knowledge available globally should be analyzed and condensed through a regional process involving input from producers and decisionmakers to determine the degree of regional application and its implications for countries and specific population groups.
- Groups of experts should examine the health problems for which global evidence is lacking which should clearly define the lines of action in knowledge generation negotiated with the different social actors and decisionmakers for attaining the MDGs and reducing the gaps in equity.

### 3. The Production of Knowledge and its Application in Complex Social Contexts

- Research is needed for a better understanding of the social contexts in which knowledge is generated, transferred, and applied since these processes may conflict with the interests of different sectors of society thus limiting their potential.
- Reducing the gap between generated knowledge and its application to improve health conditions and attain the MDGs calls for the construction of informed public opinion that will make it feasible to carry out health interventions derived from the generated knowledge.
- Reducing the gap between knowledge and its application requires strengthening the capacity for innovation and development of technological processes within the framework both of health services and the industry that manufactures goods used for public health interventions.
- Reducing the gap demands appropriate, expeditious systems to improve the dissemination of and access to scientific and technical information both to health services and the population at large. Bridging the digital divide is thus an inherent part of reducing the gap between the production and application of knowledge.
- Finally, reduction of the gaps cannot elude the enormous gap in scientific and technological capability between the most developed and the developing countries of the Hemisphere. The most developed countries must accept responsibility for strengthening and expanding the capability in science and technology of the less-developed countries.

#### 4. Key Issues for Health System Research Agendas

- The impact of the health sector reforms on potential attainment of the Millennium Development Goals should be explored.
- Implementation of the reforms is an opportunity to add research as a means to generate and develop health interventions, and for mutual appreciation between researchers and decisionmakers.
- It is important to channel more resources toward the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals and in investigating the existing obstacles, and the strengths to attain them.
- The individual nature of the responses of each country's health system will demand the development of national research agendas to address local priorities, the involvement of different actors in setting those priorities and promoting participatory processes.

#### 5. Key Actions for Improving Dissemination of and Access to Health Information

- The gradual adoption of digital technology as a tool for managing local health services has become a high-priority strategy for attaining the Millennium Development Goals. Creating and developing portals and interfaces to access health data, management information, and scientific publications should be considered a State policy for attaining the MDGs
- Both government and civil society should make a commitment to include and expand the scope of health information to the general public through digital technology, thus empowering citizens to exercise their right to health.
- The promotion of regional political agreements and required negotiations to lower the cost of services and technology will boost connectivity and capacity building.

## ***Session 2: Desirable Proposals to be presented at the Mexico Summit***

The list suggested to the Advisory Group of the Americas is more compatible with the GFHR list than with the projected Ministers' Summit. However the Advisory Group decided to analyze the proposals and make recommendations.

### **1. Brokerage of knowledge in health/Network of Observatories to promote the use of research findings through analysis and dissemination**

- There is a conceptual and practical difference between brokerage and observatory activities. Brokerage implies technical mediation entities, i.e. experts' groups or panels that analyze and summarize scientific evidence for different publics. An observatory is a social entity comprised of different actors who, based on the available evidence, monitor processes and suggest actions to mobilize financial, technical, and political resources for the implementation of proposed activities.
- Therefore, the Advisory Group recommends forming groups of regional experts and reinforcing the existing groups, in different areas of knowledge and health issues to analyze the available scientific evidence, the gaps in knowledge, and the recommendations for lines of research as well as for potential applications.
- Concerning the observatories, the Advisory Group endorses the proposal to create them, or to strengthen the existing ones, facilitating networking among them. In this regard, they should be understood as entities comprised of diverse actors who, based on information input, monitor the social relevance of knowledge production and its application in solving public health problems.

### **2. Clinical Trials Global Registry**

- Considered a good proposal, which requires taking into account certain aspects, such as organization, based on improvement of national and regional registries of clinical trials brought forward by the agencies that regulate drugs, biologicals, and medical equipment.
- The national and regional Clinical Trials Registry must adopt the standards of good clinical practice and monitor their compliance.
- The national Clinical Trials Registry must follow the codes of ethics for research on human subjects in effect in each of the countries.
- The national Clinical Trials Registry must boost country capability to oversee and monitor clinical trials conducted in the country.
- The Clinical Trials Global Registry must promote consensus among countries to adopt shared ethics criteria.
- The Clinical Trials Global Registry must promote dialogue between the different sponsors and countries involved in the trials to ensure that the results and benefits of the trials are used to the advantage of the countries that served as subjects of the study.
- The Global Registry must set up dissemination and information mechanisms about the trials conducted in individual countries and groups of countries for the various stakeholders.

### 3. Promotion of a List of Priorities in Health Research

- The Group endorses this idea and suggests that the construction of the list is started, or what has already been done in each country to identify the Region's common priorities and promote projects for collaborative research among countries is resumed.
- The list should be developed starting from health services, with intersectoral approaches and submitted for debate among the different social actors and stakeholders in order to reach a consensus.
- The priorities must be the Agencies' and donors' tools for mobilizing financial resources to improve health and equity.
- The research priorities must consider the study of social determinants of health conditions and the measures to influence them.
- The research priorities must identify feasible and sustainable interventions on specific populations or groups (ethnic groups, groups living in extreme poverty).

### 4. Improving Access to Health Information in the Developing World

- The Region has initiatives to this end such as, the Virtual Health Library, the Health Information Networks, and the Information Networks on Researchers, Institutions, and Projects among others.
- Broader and better coordination is needed between national and regional efforts and between the Region and other regions of the world.

### 5. In regard to the Renewed Commitment to Evaluate and Procure Financial Resources for Health Research and Capacity Building:

- The Region contributes in this regard with the creation of Sectoral Research Funds set up with different sources of financing. The Advisory Group recommends that these initiatives be studied and shared with the countries as a strategy for mobilizing and allocating financial resources.
- The Group endorses the proposal to allocate 2% of the national health expenditure and 5% of the international financial and technical cooperation in health to promote research and to strengthen national and regional capability. The figures proposed should be considered resources for advocacy and serve to augment the resources and allotments established for health research in the countries.
- The Group suggests that negotiations on the foreign and domestic debts focus on the possibility of converting the debt into health research and development.

### 6. Additional Desirable Proposals

- To create and/or strengthen health technology assessment systems within the framework of regional and subregional integration mechanisms.
- To create systems for innovation and technology development within the health services framework.
- To consolidate the Information Network for the Management of Science, Technology, and Innovation in Health.

### ***Session 3: Cross-cutting Issues***

#### The Role of Civil Society and the Public and Private Sectors

- The main function of the public sector is considered to be the steering and management of scientific activity and innovation in health for the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. It should provide the legal instruments and the medium- and long-term policies and development strategies for research, innovation, and technological development.
- The public sector must identify and mobilize scientific, technical, and financial resources to support health research, and the processes of innovation, and technological development in health for the solution of health problems.
- The public sector must exercise leadership and coordinate the establishment of health research priorities with input from social actors, civil society, and the various stakeholders
- The public sector must take the lead in developing consortia, which include the private sector, for the execution, monitoring, and evaluation of research projects, innovations, and technological developments.
- The private sector must fulfill a role not only as a source of financing for research but also as an independent sector that monitors and evaluates projects and progress toward the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.
- Civil society should play its role in oversight and social audit of government and private sector progress in research, innovation, and technological development for the attainment of the MDGs.

How to evaluate progress toward the attainment of the MDGs with impact in bridging the equity gaps?

The Advisory Group felt that the question should be rephrased, since as proposed, it suggests that evaluating the progress toward the attainment of the MDGs is in itself a factor that fosters inequity.

- Develop instruments for assessing the social impact of research, innovation, and applied technology on the basic indicators of social conditions, such as poverty, employment, coverage, and access to education and health services.
- The impact assessment should be performed by an assortment of independent actors in order to compare results and promote a constructive debate on actions geared to the attainment of the MDGs.
- Particular attention should be paid to inequalities and imbalances that generate inequity within the countries, with a view to eliminating the bias created by the averaged regional indicators.

What are the priority areas for health research in your region?

- Building and strengthening capability in research, innovation, and technological development in health, promoting cooperation among countries.
- Improving the structure of both the health systems and the human and financial resource management systems.

- Investing in connectivity and expanding the networks for accessing health information.
- Boosting the efficiency of research and technological development spending, identifying better quality procedures and practices.
- Strengthening the capacity to evaluate critical technology transfers: food, drugs, biologicals, new diagnostic technologies.

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