

5. Research and Development

The establishment of Research and Development and Operational Research within the scope of the *Roll Back Malaria* Initiative was presented and discussed in plenary session. The following is a summary of the main points discussed:

- The research agenda at the country level should be based on the requirements of disease control; the operations should be evidence-based and the interventions targeted to at-risk populations. The research sector should support and give answers to the needs of the control sector.
- Antimalarial drugs, insecticide resistance and the health sector reform are issues that will need attention.
- Basic research is not considered to have a high priority, operational research and intervention methods are areas that need more attention.
- The connection between operational research and intervention could give information to orient day to day activities.
- It is important to keep in mind the problems of sustainability and the ability to be replicated when selecting interventions to be the subjects of research.
- The apparent lack of a career development plan to benefit the personnel involved in malaria control.
- It is important to support the research and control networks. Some examples were mentioned regarding research and operational groups working together in the areas of resistance to antimalarial drugs, control of malaria transmission and surveillance. This approach enhances the capacity building for the personnel involved.

In summary, the *objectives* of the RBM proposal in Research and Development are:

- To strengthen the link between Malaria Control Program and the research sector
- To strengthen the Malaria Control Program personnel capacity
- To support operational research that would help to define the more adequate interventions for the identified problems.

Discussion

- The participants mentioned that personnel working in malaria control are too busy to dedicate time to research and that research personnel that give support to malaria control programs normally cannot find qualified people at local levels to work with.
- It is necessary to identify financial sources for the support of young researchers to carry out operational research.
- In **Bolivia**, during the last two years, 10 research projects were carried out financed by French Institutions, however, it is difficult to monitor the research at

the local level. In the last 50 years only 20 papers were published. Currently the research activities have been reactivated but much remains to be done in this area.

- In **Brazil**, there are four reference centers in the Amazonian Region where an epidemiologist could be trained in relation to malaria control. The country has a technical group that, in addition to other functions, gives support and orientation to the Ministry of Health on the use of antimalarial drugs and on vector control activities. This technical group and the Malaria Control Program define the priorities in research. There are training courses in epidemiology in order to strengthen the program. Currently there is not enough personnel, time and money for all the proposed activities.
- In **Colombia**, university students are being incorporated in the development of an information system that should function in 1000 malaria endemic communities in the southern area of the country.
The Colombian representative noted that the country is implementing the RBM, while the Ministry of Health is involved in the process of health sector reform. Although the country is in a difficult social situation, the health authorities recognize the importance of strengthening the research capacity.
- In **Peru** during the last seven years, the Ministry of Health made 12 million dollars available for research and the Malaria Program had the opportunity to identify and select research areas. The areas selected included the economic impact of malaria and the development of human resources in collaboration with a network of participating universities.
- In **Suriname**, a Malaria Council had previously provided orientation to the strategic approaches and research priorities. With changes in the government the council was dissolved and a Malaria Institute was organized. However, because of a lack of specialized human resources in the country, the Institute was not successful. Recently, with new changes in the government, the Malaria Council is being re-established.
- In **Venezuela**, the Ministry of Health has a technical-scientific consultant group that has collaborated in program evaluation and the improvement of the inter-sectoral approach to malaria control. The priority areas defined for research are: resistance to anti-malarial drugs, insecticide resistance, health information and aspects related with the vector. However the links and integration between the research and operations sectors are still weak and the majority of research projects are not based in the needs of the Malaria Control Program.

Dr. Kamini Mendis, RBM, concluded that there is a need to strengthen the activities at regional and national levels in order to promote the collaboration among basic and operational researchers. The possibility of forming a group that could develop a list of priority researchers at the national level was also suggested. At a regional level a network of various national groups could be organized as well in order to determine the priorities for the region. Dr. Mendis also said that WHO is able to finance projects whose goal is the development of technical capacity. She has proposed that in the America Region, PAHO could give support to the creation of national groups that will promote operational research. She requested that the countries establish national committees within the next six months.