



## **Opening Remarks**

to the

### **WORKSHOP ON RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT**

**Cairo, Egypt, 28 October–2 November 2007**

It has long been suggested that success in combating communicable diseases depends upon each country having the ability to conduct appropriate operational research. Operational research, which has as a prime aim the provision of interventions, tools and strategies that enhance programme effectiveness, increases the likelihood that research-derived recommendations will successfully influence policy and practice of local control programmes. Public health interventions studied in the setting in which they will be applied are more likely to take account of the different aspects of local disease epidemiology and available material and human resources. Local studies are also ideally suited to considerations of context (biological, political, socioeconomic and technological), a key determinant of the success of communicable disease control and eradication strategies. Moreover, analysis of local problems should generate locally appropriate solutions consistent with available resources.

The relevance of operational research is assured by forging a close link between researchers and local control programme management, or by equipping the control programme to conduct its own research. Therefore, capacity building is an integral part of any operational research programme. For this reason, research and knowledge management is one of the core functions of the World Health Organization, and this workshop has been planned to address this core function.

Since 1992 the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (EMRO), together with the UNICEF/UNDP/WHO/World Bank Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR), has supported operational research that provides solutions to problems in the control of communicable disease, through the Small Grants Scheme. Up to end 2007, this scheme has supported 315 research studies out of a total 1670 research proposals (19%). Until 2001 only 10 tropical diseases were covered under the scheme, but in

2002 it was expanded to cover all communicable diseases and the number of proposals submitted and accepted has increased tremendously.

As you are aware, the target participants for this workshop are the surveillance officers working in the field of communicable diseases and the health system in general. The aim is to provide them with the necessary tools and skills to enable them to address the relevant challenges through operational research. Surveillance officers in Ministries of Health already have a wealth of data that are not being interpreted or made full use of. Considerable improvement in programme performance can be achieved if surveillance staff are equipped with the necessary skills to identify important research questions and to design appropriate ways of answering these questions. This workshop is the first to target this group of potential researchers and will be repeated in the future to cover all surveillance officers in the Region.

The workshop comprises several modules. Each consists of a plenary session on a specific section of a research proposal, followed by group work and practical application. Particular focus will be on selecting the appropriate research methodology. The expected product of this workshop is draft proposals that will be submitted in response to the forthcoming call for applications of the EMRO/TDR small grants scheme. These proposals will be independently evaluated by the selection committee of the small grants scheme.

I wish you all success in your endeavour to address the challenges facing your programmes through operational research.