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MEETING OF THE PANEL OF SCIENTISTS FOR
INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

SEARO, New Delhi, 10-11 March 1988

Report to the Regional Director

WHO Project: ICP RPD 001

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1. INTRODUCTION

A meeting of the Panel of Scientists for Institutional Strengthening was held in the WHO South-East Asia Regional Office, New Delhi, on 10 and 11 March 1988. The agenda, the list of participants and the list of documents are in annexes 1, 2 and 3 respectively.

2. OPENING SESSION

The meeting was opened by Dr U Ko Ko, Regional Director.

2.1 Opening Remarks by the Regional Director

The Regional Director, in his opening remarks, stated that this meeting was a sequel to the meeting of the Task Force on Institutional Strengthening held in the Regional Office on 30 and 31 October 1987, which had recommended that a panel of scientists be constituted to screen proposals and recommend institutions for strengthening. The Regional Office was sometimes confronted with apparently divergent tendencies which it endeavours to reconcile. Thus, while there is a demand for increasing emphasis on health systems research, at the same time, the pursuit of biomedical research relevant to national health programmes also needs encouragement. The Regional Committee for South-East Asia and the South-East Asia Advisory Committee on Health Research (SEA/ACHR) had called for increasing allocation of resources for institutional strengthening activities, while individual scientists continue to request support for research projects. Cost-effectiveness in research and in health programmes can be best assured by providing resources to countries which are better organized to absorb and utilize the funds, whereas it is the most needy countries which are least organized to effectively receive and utilize the support. It is not always easy to reconcile the various demands and strike a balance. While the regional funds for research promotion and development are little when compared to those available from other sources, the Regional Office has the largest research and development budget. He hoped the funds made available for institutional strengthening could be used in the manner accessible and acceptable to all the countries of the Region and that, with the help and advise of the Panel of Scientists, the scheme for institutional strengthening would take off well.

2.2 Nomination of Chairman

The Regional Director nominated Dr A.A. Loedin as Chairman of the meeting.

3. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY THE DIRECTOR, RESEARCH AND FAMILY HEALTH

Dr Jayaweera, Director, Research and Family Health, observed that institutional strengthening should be linked to research projects, which again depended upon the health problems which were being confronted - in other words the strengthening of institutions should be purposeful. The

limited funds available should be used in the most cost-effective manner, bearing in mind the absorptive capacity of the recipient, and in a catalytic manner so as to attract extrabudgetary funds from other sources.

He further said that the mechanism set up to operate the scheme for institutional strengthening should not duplicate other programmes with larger funds and the overhead expenses should be minimal.

4. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING AND INTRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

Dr Aung Than Batu, Acting Regional Advisor on Medical Research, then briefed the Scientists on the documents prepared for the meeting and of the aims and objectives of the meeting, which were to:

- (1) review and finalize the Guidelines and Information on the Institutional Strengthening Grants;
- (2) review and finalize the Institutional Profile to be obtained from institutions;
- (3) review and finalize the Application Form for Institutional Strengthening Grant, and
- (4) identify the criteria for the selection of institutions for strengthening and duration of grants (to be done on the basis of broad areas identified at the Meeting of the Task Force on Institutional Strengthening).

5. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

The provisional agenda prepared by the Secretariat was discussed and revised, with the addition of an item on "Management of the Institutional Strengthening Scheme". The agenda as approved is in Annex 1.

6. IDENTIFICATION OF CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF INSTITUTIONS FOR STRENGTHENING AND DURATION OF GRANTS

The participants were informed that the recommendations of the Meeting of the Task Force on Institutional Strengthening (SEA/POS/IS/Info.Doc.3) had been accepted by the Regional Office as guidelines for implementation of the scheme for institutional strengthening. With respect to the recommendation that a significant proportion of the regional resources for research be earmarked for directly strengthening the research capability of institutions, it was explained that separate budget was allocated out of the regional budget for research promotion and development (RPD) for 1988-1989 for institutional strengthening and furthermore that it would be possible to reprogramme these funds so that more money could be made available for this purpose depending upon the absorptive capacity and utilization. It was neither practical nor desirable that funds for research projects and programmes now being supported be abruptly reduced; they may, however, have to be gradually reduced. It was pointed out that the award of research grants, visiting scientists grants and research training grants which will continue under other components of the RPD budget also have a research strengthening effect.

A detailed explanation was provided of the quantum of funds now available under the inter-country programme for Research Promotion and Development for 1988-1989 and the amount potentially available by reprogramming if there was effective and timely utilization.

In view of the limited funds available, the Scientists felt that the funds should be used largely to support institutional strengthening in health systems research. This should generate activities that would attract more inputs from other sources. However, concentration of resources on only a few chosen institutions would also be undesirable and unacceptable to many countries.

The Panel considered as to how resources should be allocated to the institutions identified for strengthening in the countries of the Region. It was agreed that the level of resources allocated for institutional strengthening should be commensurate with the need of each country for strengthening its research capability. According to one of the several scenarios projected, three categories of countries in ascending order with respect to research capability may be visualized, the ability to mobilize external resources increasing pari passu with development in research capability. Countries which are least developed will need to be strengthened in infrastructure, provided support for research projects, as well as support for research management mechanisms, and for establishment of linkages between research institutions and national health systems. Whereas the most developed countries will need just enough support to catalyse the mobilization of external resources, countries in between will need support for research projects only. Technical cooperation among the lesser and better developed institutions could also be envisaged in the spirit of TCDC.

6.1 Criteria for Institutional Strengthening

The Panel considered various criteria that would be needed for the scheme for institutional strengthening to be operated by the Regional Office. The opinion emerged was that (a) one set of criteria would be needed to identify institutions eligible for research capability strengthening, and (b) another set of criteria for assessing and determining the type and magnitude of support that should be provided to the institutions identified.

(1) Eligibility

In order to be eligible for research capability strengthening, the institution:

- (a) should be one to which the government is committed to give viable support in a sustained manner;
- (b) should be one whose support from WHO funds will be eventually taken over and replaced by government funds;
- (c) should have a clear-cut plan of development for strengthening research, with particular reference to HSR;
- (d) should have linkages or potential to develop linkages with the national health system.

(2) Type and Magnitude of Support

The Panel considered the criteria to be used to assess the type of support that should be provided to the selected institution and the magnitude of such support. Adequate development of the following aspects are necessary for effective health systems research to be carried out by an institution within a country:

- management of research;
- awareness of the importance of HSR, as a management tool;
- communication between research and health care personnel,
- expertise in HSR, and
- infrastructure support for HSR.

The level of development of the institution and country with respect to the above conditions could be used to gauge the type and magnitude of support that is to be provided for institutional strengthening.

(3) Duration of Support

In considering the duration of the support to be extended to the selected institution, the Panel recalled the experience of UNDP/World Bank/WHO Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR) and other institutional strengthening programmes. In view of the wide disparity in development of research capability in the countries and the variation in the level of support that may be required, the Panel was of the opinion that the duration of the support to be recommended for a particular institution should also be decided individually by a meeting of the Panel of Scientists convened to consider the proposal from the institution.

7. MANAGEMENT OF THE SCHEME FOR INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

A dialogue should first be opened between the Regional Office and the health authorities of individual countries to explore the possibility of collaborating in institutional strengthening activities, especially in HSR.

This should be followed by site visits as required. Governments would be invited to propose institutions for strengthening and WHO will assist the national authorities in the initial stages of the Scheme to identify one such institution and to prepare the institutional profile and the proposal for institutional strengthening grant. Country support teams or other mechanisms may be made use of, as opportune, at any stage in the process.

The available information on the institution proposed for strengthening would be placed before the Panel of Scientists for consideration, according to the criteria already developed, and the Panel will then submit its recommendations to the Regional Director.

8. REVIEW AND FINALIZATION OF GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION ON THE INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING GRANTS, FORM FOR OBTAINING INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE, AND APPLICATION FORM FOR INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING GRANT

The Panel agreed that the content and format of the guidelines and information, the forms for obtaining institutional profile and the proposal forms for grants for institutional strengthening should be in accordance with the points discussed and agreed upon in the relevant sections of this report and the final conclusions, and that the WHO Secretariat would ensure compliance.

9. CONCLUSIONS

(1) The criteria that should be used to identify institutions suitable for strengthening HSR are:

- Government commitment to provide sustained support to the institution and to take over gradually the support being provided by WHO for institutional strengthening,
- Linkages or potential to develop linkages with national health systems, and
- Clear-cut plan of development for strengthening the institution in research, with particular reference to HSR.

(2) The basic minimum conditions/factors needed for effective HSR in a country and the level of development, which may be used as a basis for determining the type and magnitude of research strengthening inputs to be provided to the institution identified for strengthening, are:

- Management. Research management to plan, promote, coordinate, and financially support health systems research.
- Awareness. Awareness by administrators and scientists of the importance of and necessity for HSR as a management tool in national health programmes.
- Communication. Sustained and effective communication between research institutions, researchers and health care service and health service personnel.
- Expertise. Expertise and a critical mass of professionals capable of undertaking HSR.
- Infrastructure. Linkages and access to national health systems, and adequate support systems.

The duration of the support to be recommended would be decided at the meeting of the Panel of Scientists convened to consider the proposal for strengthening of the institution.

(3) The Regional Office should cooperate with the Member States in their assessment of the need for strengthening HSR in their countries, assist them in identifying the institution for strengthening and in developing proposals. Such cooperation should be extended, whenever necessary, through site visits and other suitable effective mechanisms.

10. CLOSING SESSION

Dr Jayaweera, on behalf of the Regional Director, thanked the participants for their important contribution to the meeting. He mentioned that the recommendations of the Task Force on Institutional Strengthening and the conclusions arising out of the current meeting would enable the Regional Office to commence soon the scheme for institutional strengthening. He was hopeful that the Scheme would start off smoothly and expeditiously. He then declared the meeting closed.

Annex 1

AGENDA

1. Opening remarks by the Regional Director and nomination of the Chairman.
2. Introductory remarks by the Director, Research and Family Health.
3. Aims and objectives of the meeting and Introduction of documents by Acting Regional Adviser on Medical Research.
4. Adoption of agenda.
5. Identification of criteria for the selection of an institution for strengthening and duration of grants.
6. Management of the Institutional Strengthening Scheme.
7. Review and finalization of Guidelines and Information on the Institutional Strengthening Grants, Form for Obtaining Institutional Profile, and Application Form for Institutional Strengthening Grant.
8. Finalization of recommendations and the report.
9. Closing.

Annex 2

LIST OF SCIENTISTS AND WHO SECRETARIAT

Temporary Advisers

1. Dr K. Jayasena
Professor & Head, Department of Pharmacology
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Peradeniya University
Peradeniya
Sri Lanka
2. Dr A.A. Loedin
Head
National Institute of Health Research and Development
Ministry of Health
Jakarta
Indonesia
3. Dr Prawase Wasi
Professor of Medicine, Faculty of Medicine
Mahidol University
c/o Sriraj Hospital, Department of Medicine,
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4. Dr J.S. Guleria
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5. Dr Lim Teong Wah
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Malaysia

WHO Secretariat

6. Dr B.A. Jayaweera, Director, Research and Family Health, SEARO
7. Mr N.P.H. Milner, Director, Support Programme
8. Dr N.K. Shah, Director, Prevention and Control of Diseases
9. Dr Uton M. Rafei, Director, Health Protection and Promotion
10. Dr D.B. Bisht, Director, Health Systems Infrastructure
11. Mr M.L. Gupta, Chief, Promotion of Environmental Health
12. Dr Zakir Husain, Director, Planning, Coordination & Information
13. Dr Aung Than Batu, Acting Regional Adviser on Medical Research
14. Dr S. Tejuja, WHO Short-Term Consultant
15. Mr Manmohan Singh, Administrative Assistant
16. Mr S.K. Madanpotra, Secretary
17. Mr Gursharan Singh, Secretary

Annex 3

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

	<u>Title of Document</u>	<u>Document No.</u>
1.	Agenda	SEA/ACHR/IS/POS/1/Agenda
2.	Suggested Working Schedule	SEA/ACHR/IS/POS/2/SWS
3.	Provisional List of Temporary Advisers and WHO Secretariat	SEA/ACHR/IS/POS/3/Participants
4.	Aims and Objectives of the Meeting	SEA/ACHR/IS/POS/4/Aims & Obj.
5.	Working Paper on Identification of Criteria for Selection of an Institution for Strengthening and Duration of such Grant	SEA/ACHR/IS/POS/5/Agenda Item 5
6.	Working Paper on Review and finalization of Guidelines and Information on the Institutional Strengthening Grants, Form for Obtaining Institutional Profile, and Application Form for Institutional Strengthening Grant	SEA/ACHR/IS/POS/6/Agenda Item 7
7.	Future Strategies for Strengthening National Research Capabilities Related to TDR Target Disease in Developing Endemic Countries	SEA/ACHR/IS/POS/Infn. Doc.1
8.	TDR - New Approaches to Research Capability Strengthening	SEA/ACHR/IS/POS/Infn. Doc.2
9.	Report of the Meeting of the Task Force on Institutional Strengthening SEARO, New Delhi, 30-31 October 1987	SEA/POS/IS/POS/Infn. Doc. 3