

Diarrhea - prevention and control  
- research

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WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION  
ORGANISATION MONDIALE DE LA SANTE  
DIARRHOEAL DISEASES CONTROL PROGRAMME



CDD/EDP/86.1  
ENGLISH ONLY

Report of the First Meeting of the  
SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP ON EPIDEMIOLOGY AND DISEASE PREVENTION

(Geneva, 5-7 February 1986)

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The first meeting of the Scientific Working Group (SWG) on Epidemiology and Disease Prevention of the Diarrhoeal Diseases Control (CDD) Programme was held in Geneva from 5 to 7 February 1986. The participants are listed at the end of the report.

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## 1. OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH PRIORITIES

1.1 Objectives

The proposed objectives of the SWG were considered and approved. These are to stimulate and support research, much of which will be epidemiological, that will lead to the development and application of interventions (other than case management and specific immunization) for the control of morbidity and mortality due to diarrhoeal diseases. The topics of interest have emerged from an ongoing analysis, conducted by the Programme, of the cost-effectiveness of potential non-clinical interventions to reduce diarrhoea morbidity and mortality.

1.2 Research priorities

The SWG reviewed a draft document describing the priority research areas of the global SWGs, prepared for the guidance of potential researchers. It noted that some research topics are of interest to more than one SWG. For example, research on persistent diarrhoea may be supported by the SWG on Case Management or by the SWG on Epidemiology and Disease Prevention, or by both. The SWG considered the distinction between research that it funds and operational research which is managed by the Regional Offices. It agreed that it should support research that seeks to explain in global terms how to formulate and implement the most effective control measures, while regional research should deal with country-specific problems in the implementation of adopted interventions.

## 2. RELATED ACTIVITIES OF OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

The SWG briefly reviewed the activities of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada, in support of epidemiological research on diarrhoeal diseases and the activities of the Applied Diarrheal Disease Research Project (ADDR), a new initiative of the United States Agency for International Development. It considered areas for possible coordination and cooperation with these organizations, including (a) active exchange of information about programme activities, (b) co-funding of selected projects, and (c) cooperation in institution strengthening activities.

## 3. BUDGET

The SWG reviewed and approved the proposed budget for its activities in 1986, as follows:

	<u>US\$</u>
Consultants	15 000
Duty travel	12 000
Contracts	580 000
Collaborating Centres	8 000
Meetings	50 000
Fellowships	20 000
Miscellaneous supplies	4 000
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Total	689 000
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## 4. APPLICATIONS FOR RENEWAL OF SUPPORT

The SWG reviewed 4 applications for a renewal of support and agreed to provide additional funds for 3 of them. The 3 approved projects are:

- (a) 84114 - Epidemiology of prolonged diarrhoea in Lima, Peru - R.E. Black, Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health, Baltimore, USA, and C. Lanata, Instituto de Investigacion Nutricional, Lima, Peru.

- (b) 84012 - Giardia lamblia and Cryptosporidium - are they significant pathogens? A prospective study in a Peruvian village - R.H. Gilman, Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health, Baltimore, USA, and C. Lanata, Instituto de Investigacion Nutricional, Lima, Peru.
- (c) 85016 - The inter-relationships between feeding-mode, malnutrition and diarrhoea morbidity in early infancy among the urban poor in Southern Brazil - J.C. Martines, University of Pelotas, Pelotas, Brazil.

#### 5. NEW AND REVISED PROPOSALS

The SWG reviewed 10 new or revised proposals, of which:

- 2 were approved for support either as originally submitted or pending minor technical or budgetary modifications;
- 6 were kept in abeyance, pending revision of the proposal;
- 2 were not considered worthy of support.

The 2 proposals approved for funding are:

- (a) 85158 - Promotion of breast-feeding and improved weaning practices through health education: interventions for reducing diarrhoeal morbidity - M. Saniel, Research Institute for Tropical Medicine, and C. Verzosa, Kabalikat, Manila, Philippines (\$37 000)

The study will assess the impact of education about breast-feeding and improved weaning practices on diarrhoeal morbidity among infants in periurban Manila. The proposed duration of the study is 4 years; in the first 18 months it is intended to formulate a health education programme for the promotion of breast-feeding and improved weaning practices, and to implement surveillance activities to collect pre-intervention data on feeding practices, levels of bacterial contamination of weaning foods, and diarrhoea incidence rates. IDRC has already agreed to provide partial support for the first 3 years of the project.

- (b) 85051 - A case-control study of the effect of improved water supplies on diarrhoeal morbidity in young children - P. Sandiford, Instituto Nicaraguense de Acueductos y Alcantarillados, Managua, Nicaragua (\$9832)

This is a case-control study of the impact of improved water supplies on diarrhoeal morbidity among young children in rural Nicaragua. The use of case-control techniques represents a novel approach to the evaluation of interventions to control diarrhoeal diseases. The expected duration of the project is one year.

#### 6. PROJECT STIMULATION AND SUPPORT

The SWG considered possible mechanisms to stimulate research activities on priority topics. The following were discussed:

##### 6.1 Publicizing the SWG's research priorities

The SWG agreed that there was a need to promote awareness in the scientific community of the modified research priorities of the Programme. A possible approach to encourage potential research groups to submit proposals in priority areas would be for the Programme to distribute widely the document describing its research priorities.

##### 6.2 Methodology development

The SWG considered the need to develop standard guidelines on study design and analysis in certain priority research areas. It noted that guidelines on the use of case-control studies to examine the impact of water and sanitation interventions on diarrhoea morbidity had been prepared with support from WHO. The SWG recommended that the scope of this work be expanded to include other types of interventions. It noted that the Secretariat was working

on the design of case-control studies to measure the impact of early home therapy on the incidence of dehydration and to identify and quantify risk factors for severe and life-threatening diarrhoeas. It also noted that a meeting would be held at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine from 30 June to 2 July 1986 to review progress in developing case-control methods for the study of diarrhoea risk factors and the impact of specific interventions on the incidence or severity of diarrhoea. The SWG recommended that the Secretariat explore ways of encouraging research workers interested in the application of these methodologies to develop proposals on priority topics.

The SWG considered that there was also a need to examine the use of social science research techniques in studies that attempt to identify specific behaviours which increase (or decrease) the risk of diarrhoeal diseases or to assess the acceptability and feasibility of potential control interventions.

### 6.3 Commissioned research

The SWG agreed that it would be necessary to commission research in priority areas, in a selective way. It suggested that consideration be given at the present stage to research on risk factors for severe, life-threatening diarrhoeas, as proposals on that topic are unlikely to be developed spontaneously. The topic might best be addressed by a multicentre study using standard guidelines to be developed by the Secretariat. The Group considered that commissioned research would also be required to examine the impact of vitamin A supplementation on diarrhoea morbidity and mortality.

### 6.4 Workshops on the development of protocols

The SWG noted that a workshop on the development of protocols, organized jointly by the CDD Programme and the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases, would be held in February 1986 in Calcutta. The aim of the workshop would be to reinforce skills that are applicable to epidemiological or intervention-related research on diarrhoeal or tropical diseases, and to assist researchers in developing protocols, especially on intervention-related research, that may ultimately be submitted to the SWG for possible support.

### 6.5 Consultant roster

The SWG discussed the need for a roster of consultants for project and institution site visits, training activities, the development of protocols, and other activities needed to stimulate and support priority research. It was agreed that a list of suitable persons would be prepared, encompassing other disciplines than epidemiology (particularly the social sciences).

## 7. INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

The SWG agreed that there was a need to provide institutional support to developing country institutes to help them to carry out high priority research projects. It supported the view that institutional support should be awarded only to institutes undertaking or planning to undertake research projects with SWG support, and when it is deemed essential for the satisfactory performance of the work and can be met from the Programme's financial resources. The SWG considered that approaches to institutional support should be flexible and should seek to respond to identified needs. Possible types of institutional support include the provision of training fellowships (short-term or up to one year), facilities, and equipment. The appropriate mix of these elements would depend on the nature of the research and the areas most urgently requiring strengthening. It was agreed that, as a general rule, support should be awarded for a maximum of 5 years and on a year-by-year basis, conditional on adequate performance and the availability of funds. It was recognized that funds for the purpose are limited and that institution strengthening grants would probably be in the region of US\$25 000 a year (in addition to project grants).

A list of possible institutes for research strengthening by the SWG was reviewed and a short-list of 6 candidate institutes to be considered for early site visits was prepared.

8. PROJECT AND INSTITUTION SITE VISITS

The SWG drew up an initial list of site visits (including those identified above) to be conducted before its next meeting for the purposes of stimulating new project proposals, reviewing ongoing projects, and identifying requirements for institutional strengthening.

9. SECOND MEETING OF THE SCIENTIFIC WORKING GROUP

The SWG agreed to hold its second meeting in Geneva from 17 to 19 September 1986.

10. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Members:

Dr R.E. Black, Department of International Health, School of Hygiene and Public Health, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, USA

Dr R. Feachem, Department of Tropical Hygiene, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London, UK (Chairperson)

\*Dr J.-P. Habicht, Division of Nutritional Sciences, Cornell University, Ithaca, USA

Dr Thavitong Hongvivatana, Director, Center for Health Policy Studies, c/o Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Mahidol University, Nakorn Chaisri, Thailand

Dr S.C. Pal, Director, National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Diseases, Calcutta, India

Dr G. Ruiz-Palacios, Infectious Diseases Department, National Institute of Nutrition, Mexico City, Mexico

Dr Lye Munn Sann, Institute of Medical Research, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Dr E. van Praag, Department of Tropical Hygiene, Royal Tropical Institute, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Observer:

Dr S. Moses, International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada

Secretariat:

Dr M.H. Merson, Director, CDD Programme

Dr N.F. Pierce, Research Coordinator, CDD Programme

Dr I. de Zoysa, Medical Officer, CDD Programme (Secretary)

\*Unable to attend.

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