

Health Research in Côte d'Ivoire – a summary

Côte d'Ivoire is located in West Africa on the Gulf of Guinea. It covers a territory of 322,463 km² and has a population of over 12 million, made up of several ethnic groups.

Before independence in 1960, health research dealt essentially with endemic diseases, such as malaria, leprosy, trypanosomiasis and onchocercosis. After independence, research experienced an upsurge with the establishment of a number of schools of health at the university, as well as both public and private research centres and institutes.

In the new framework, research activities involved biomedical research and epidemiology, as well as health services. Research, although financed essentially from abroad, enabled the formation of a critical mass of researchers. However, the economic crisis and deflation of a reliable technical assistance programme, put the brake on funding for the new thrust of research. The slow-down also discouraged researchers.

In the framework of the health reforms today, the importance of research has been clearly expressed in the National Plan for Health Development for 1996-2000. This became apparent, in institutional terms, by the creation of a Sub-Directorate of Applied Research in 1997, which was given responsibility for reorganizing research with a new legislative basis that included proposals for the funding of research. The adoption, in 1998, of the ENHR strategy and the appointment of a focal point, as well as the reactivation of missions of the INSP under the Ministry of Health all suggested a new lease of life for health research. To date two workshops and a promotion seminar have taken place, and a model for requesting the designation of priority areas has been drawn up. The mobilization of resources is under way with the help of COHRED and WHO for regional consultations leading to a national symposium on the identification of country research priorities.

The list of continuing constraints includes the need to strengthen research capacity and to set up mechanisms for the coordination of research. There is still no clear status for researchers outside the university and the lack of State funding means continuing uncertainty for research institutions. On the other hand, the research community benefits from a number of strengths, such as the existing National Health Development Plan, a critical mass of researchers - even if they are currently demotivated -, and a cluster of public and private research institutions. Against this background prospects for the future are encouraging in as much as a new structure for research is about to be introduced and the reform of health policy and of the university both augur well for the future of research. In addition, the country's political will has been reaffirmed in the promotion of ENHR by all stakeholders.