

## **Francophone Inter-country Meeting in Bamako in preparation for the International Conference in Bangkok 2000 -summary**

The development of the Subregional Francophone African Network began in 1998 at the 5th African ENHR Networking Meeting in Accra. The francophone countries present decided to create their own network in response to the growing awareness of health research for development and the special needs of francophone countries. They elaborated a number of proposals for periodic meetings, a standing committee and setting up a headquarters. UNDP lent its support to the initiative and the group established links with WHO. At the 6th African ENHR Networking Meeting in Harare in 1999 cooperation with WHO and other international organizations was formalized, as well as initial contacts with COHRED.

The meeting was held on 28-30 June 2000 in Bamako, Mali and was attended by Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Mali and Senegal. Participants recalled that during the colonial period health research in francophone African countries had focused on epidemic diseases and was carried out entirely by foreign researchers. This situation had persisted for a time after independence and it was the creation of universities that brought about gradual change. The lack of dissemination of information about research and its findings had also marginalized francophone African countries and it was not until the Commission for Health Research for Development began its work that these countries became more actively involved.

The meeting focussed on the formulation of the francophone countries' contribution to the Bangkok Conference. A number of issues were discussed through an exchange of views and experience and in the light of responses to the questionnaires used in the consultative process for the Bangkok Conference.

Participants reviewed the workshops held on the promotion and advocacy of health research for development and found the results inadequate. They expressed the hope that there would be greater government support, notably support for training and research institutions. They also called for greater involvement of other stakeholders, including technical and financial partners.

The meeting noted that some countries had set up a national mechanism and programmes for health research. National priorities had also been set in some countries, while others had experienced difficulty doing so because of the political situation or the lack of funding. Yet others had insisted upon the need to pay special attention to such issues as the eradication of poverty, equity and gender.

Most countries agreed there were insufficient efforts to strengthen national research capacity, especially in the training of young researchers. In addition to the lack of funding, there were inadequate research structures and obsolete facilities. Researchers were presented with insufficient incentives and inadequate technology. These conditions had encouraged the brain drain.

There was inadequate networking at all levels and a poor dissemination of information about research and its findings in most countries with few outlets for the flow of information. The lack of funds to organize international meetings or to travel abroad to them aggravated the situation.

Most countries had not been able to translate research findings into action or policy, since there were weak links between researchers and policy makers. Co-operation between researchers and decision-makers and communities non-existent. Even S/S cooperation has been little developed, as has interdisciplinary and multi-sectoral collaboration.

All countries suffered the lack of resources and in most cases governments contributed no funds to health research. When they did, there were complex administrative procedures that served as an impediment. The private sector has shown no interest in local research and the predominance of external funding tends to distort priorities. There is, in general, no policy or strategy to mobilise national resources for research. At the same time the absence of effective structures for co-ordination of research and the absence of criteria and mechanisms make it hard to evaluate research results and gauge progress.

The meeting summarized its discussions in a number of recommendations. They focussed on the need for access to new technology of information and communications; for capacity building to enhance available human, material and financial resources; co-ordination mechanisms and partnerships at national and regional levels; a mechanism to mobilize resources with government and private sector and development partners; and a determination to implement and follow-up recommendations of the forthcoming Bangkok conference

The meeting closed with the adoption of a series of conclusions relating to key challenges for the coming decade. They concerned the strengthening of promotion and advocacy of HRD; the development of research capacity at all levels; the mobilisation of necessary financing; the development of better communications between researchers and decision makers, communities and development partners; the need to ensure the sustainability of the francophone Network.