

## Health research for development in Guinea - a summary

Guinea is located in West Africa, 10 degrees north of the equator, with a 300km coastline on the Atlantic Ocean. It covers a territory of 245,857 km<sup>2</sup>, with a population of 7.2 million. One third of the population lives in an urban environment, with half of that number in the capital, Conakry. The population growth rate is 2.6%, with a fertility rate of 5.6.

During the colonial period, scientific and technical research in the country was part of that conducted in French West Africa. The Committee for Historical and Scientific Studies, set up in 1915, was the first to coordinate research and publish the results. This was succeeded in 1936 by IFAN, which undertook research considered uncoordinated and too liberal. Despite growing opinion in favour of research, colonial administrative inertia and the absence of African researchers were constraints on further development.

Prior to independence the network of research in the country consisted of 16 institutes, two of which did health research, namely the Research Station on Cinchona and the Pasteur Institute. The latter is today known as the Guinea Research and Applied Biology Institute. Most of the work done at that time was related to veterinary medicine and agriculture.

Since independence in 1958, the Government has grasped the importance of research in socio-economic development. Thus, a Higher Council for Scientific and Technical Research was set up in 1961, and made responsible for elaborating proposals on all questions relating to the development of scientific research and its coordination. But the almost total lack of a conceptual framework and the many structural and staff changes did not help the development of research in general, and health research in particular, which was limited to a number of chemical trials.

It was only in 1984 that the National Conference on Health put the accent on the use of research as an instrument for decision making. A Research and Training Unit was created in 1988 in the Office for Planning and Research of the Ministry of Public Health and Social Affairs. Its task was to stimulate health research. Cooperation between the Ministry and the WHO led to the adoption of the ENHR strategy in 1992. The implementation of this strategy has made it possible to carry out certain activities despite existing constraints.

Today Guinea has a structure for health research that includes five institutions. However, the discrepancy between the regulations determining the role of each institution and practice has resulted in poor coordination between them and with researchers. Other continuing constraints include inadequate human, material and financial resources, insufficient promotion and advocacy of health research and poor dissemination of research findings and their translation into action and policy. Future prospects, which pose major challenges for the country, relate to greater awareness among development partners, a merger of the National Health Research Plan with that for hygiene development, the declaration of an annual national health day, and a mechanism for fund raising.