

Input to the Global Ministerial Forum on Research for Health

Bamako, November 2008

A Call for Civil Society Engagement in Research for Health

Toward a Post-Bamako action plan

- Recommendations from civil society organisations to all stakeholders in research for health
- Blueprint for strengthening the role of civil society organisations in research for health

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A Call for Civil Society Engagement in Research for Health

We - the authors of this Call to Action - are a group of civil society organisations that, through our work, demonstrate how research leads to action for change. We play key roles in all aspects of the research process and conduct ground-breaking research involving multiple sectors and disciplines focusing on neglected research areas. We believe that research needs to move from health research to research for health. Our experience is proof that civil society organisations are indispensable to achieve this change.

This document is the result of a consultative meeting held in Denmark (23-24 October, 2008), organised by CIAM, COHRED and DBL, and co-funded by the Wellcome Trust and the organisers.

Preamble

The goal of research for health is *better health for all*. Reaching this goal is possible with the involvement of the stakeholders in health that represent the rich spectrum of sectors and disciplines, including civil society organisations¹ (CSOs). Civil society organisations are a missing voice in the successful move from health research to research for health.

Civil society organisations:

- Drive, participate in and conduct research that embraces health in its broadest sense, including the determinants of health and health-related inequities;
- Can hold all stakeholders accountable for the commitments they make towards research for health;
- Can increase the skills and capacity of local actors, enabling them to respond effectively to national and international priorities and demands;
- Provide missing viewpoints and cultural perspectives to research for health;
- Translate research for health into action for health; and
- Disseminate research findings to a wide audience of stakeholders in health using more accessible and most appropriate formats such as stories and narratives.

This document – or blueprint – presents key strategies and recommendations to strengthen the role of CSOs in research for health. It was developed by a group of CSOs to:

- Emphasise the value and importance of CSOs in research for health;
- Define appropriate strategies to increase CSO engagement in research for health;
- Inform the discussions at the Bamako Ministerial Forum on Research for Health, and participate in developing a post-Bamako action plan that will include greater civil society engagement in research for health.

The strategies, based on the perspective of CSOs, outline the steps necessary to involve CSOs in helping achieve better health for all through research. The recommendations focus on all stakeholders in research for health – that is, government, academia, funding institutions, development partners and CSOs committed to research for health.

¹ We define **civil society organisations** as organisations that are not for profit, operate between the state and the public, represent or serve population groups, and are guided by the principle of social justice. Our focus is on those organisations with an interest in research for health, and in using research to assess health determinants, influence health policies and improve health outcomes. While acknowledging the diversity of CSOs and the challenges of representativeness, we believe that CSOs represent and build alliances with community based organisations and community groupings, and that their contribution to research for health has a positive impact on the population at large.

Recommendations from civil society organisations to all stakeholders in research for health

We call on all stakeholders to:

1. Acknowledge the importance of research for improving health for all, and to **recognise the contribution** CSOs can make to support the broad scope of research for health, with a focus on health development and equity.
2. Build and nurture **partnerships** with CSOs around common concerns on national and global priorities in research for health, and to base these partnerships on the principles of mutual respect, fairness, inclusiveness, transparency and trust and with a multi-discipline approach.
3. Create environments at national and global levels in which CSOs can exercise their **legitimate roles in research for health**, through providing financial, infrastructural development and institutional capacity building support to CSOs.
4. Provide **funding** which is long-term and flexible, based on fair-contracting principles, thus strengthening CSOs to engage in participatory processes, build their institutional capacity, and becoming a strong partner in developing and implementing research strategies at local, regional and global levels.
5. Value additional and creative means of **communicating** research, using a variety of channels and languages, and to acknowledge the role CSOs can play in raising awareness of research, in increasing engagement in research, in transforming research findings into action, and in communicating this to the public, thus helping build public trust in research.
6. **Jointly identify indicators** and methodologies for evaluating the impact and contribution of all stakeholders, including CSOs, in research for health.

Blueprint for strengthening the role of civil society organisations in research for health

1. Advocate for greater involvement of civil society organisations in research for health:

• Civil Society Organisations

CSOs can advocate based on: (a) rational arguments based on sound evidence and knowledge; (b) deeper awareness of the values, objectives and motivation of government, academia, funding institutions and development agencies; (c) respectful dialogue and communication on the practical and accurate needs and concerns of the public in how these match up with the policies and agendas of government, academia, funding institutions and development agencies.

2. Establish and strengthen partnerships and networks for civil society engagement in research for health, with:

• Government and Academia

Establish and strengthen partnerships between government institutions, academia and CSOs based on mutual respect, democratic principles, transparency and inclusiveness.

• Funding Institutions and Development Agencies

Strengthen interactions between funding bodies and development agencies to increase involvement of CSOs in research for health.

• Civil Society Organisations

Establish and strengthen networks between CSOs based on common themes, supported by international and global CSOs, to: (a) amplify the voice of the public to influence policies, strategies and agendas of government, academia, funding institutions and development agencies as they relate to research for health; and (b) promote collaboration between CSOs on all aspects of research for health.

3. Strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations to participate as full partners in research for health:

• Government, Academia, Funding Institutions and Development Agencies

Support the development of independent institutional and human capacity to enable CSOs represent an independent voice in research for health.

• Civil Society Organisations

Define areas of interest in the research process, identify capacity building needs based on areas of interest, and develop and implement capacity building plans based on the identified needs.

4. Increase the credibility of civil society organisations in local, national and international environments:

• Civil Society Organisations

strive towards a) excelling in integrity and political independence, b) exercising social relevance and inclusiveness, c) demonstrating transparency, accountability and professionalism in administrative and financial management, and d) delivering quality services and products.

5. Increase civil society organisations' access to research funds

• Government and Academia

Incorporate CSOs in research projects, where appropriate.

• Funding Bodies and Development Agencies

Increase availability of research funds to CSOs by harmonising and aligning funding principles and practices.

6. Create a national and international demand for research for health

• Government and Academia

Include a research component in all health-related development projects, and establish systematic mechanisms that will make research findings available in a language and format accessible to the general public on a timely basis.

• Funding Institutions and Development Agencies

Encourage the inclusion of a research component in health-related development projects, and provide funds to promote dissemination of research findings in a language and format that is accessible to the general public on a timely basis.

• Civil Society Organisations

Include a research component in all health-related development projects, and promote translation of research knowledge to actionable knowledge thereby highlighting relevance to day-today living situations.