Strategies for improving sexual and reproductive health through research and technical capacity strengthening

Modalities for collaboration with centres or institutions to promote reproductive health
1 Background

The Department of Reproductive Health and Research (RHR) includes the UNDP/UNFPA/WHO/World Bank Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction (HRP). RHR’s mission is to help people to lead healthy sexual and reproductive lives. In pursuit of this mission, RHR has established strategies and mechanisms that endeavour to strengthen the capacity of countries to promote and protect the sexual and reproductive health of individuals and that of their partners.

One of these strategies is RHR’s ongoing commitment, through HRP, to strengthen capacity for reproductive health research in developing countries through the awarding of various grants. This strategy is based on the recognition of the crucial role of research in the identification of reproductive health needs within communities and in testing priority interventions for addressing these needs, as well as in the generation of new knowledge for advocacy, policy formulation and the development and strengthening of programmes. RHR promotes and supports the utilization and application of evidence-based recommendations to strengthen reproductive health programmes and services. Underlying RHR’s effort in research, research capacity strengthening and programme development is the conviction that greater capacity for research in countries will contribute to the health status of the population and to accelerated socioeconomic development.

One of the important mechanisms for implementing RHR’s mission in research and technical capacity strengthening is the establishment of Collaborating Centres that will play a strong leadership role in policy formulation towards achieving a holistic vision of reproductive health.
2  Goal

To promote the well-being of communities by improving reproductive health through collaboration with centres in the conduct and application of relevant research, the dissemination and application of updated practice guides and the testing and adoption of relevant interventions for programme development and strengthening.

3  Objectives

3.1  To establish collaboration with centres which are designated in accordance with WHO rules and procedures (WHO Collaborating Centres). The following criteria, among others, are considered:

i)  involvement in priority reproductive health research and programme development areas at subnational/national or regional levels;
ii) involvement in priority reproductive health research and programme development areas at the global level;
iii) potential for serving, at the national level, as a resource for the dissemination, adaptation and adoption of tools through Service Guidance Centre grants.

3.2  To establish collaboration with centres which are non-designated, but play an active role in priority reproductive health areas. Such centres fall into one of the following categories:
3.2.1 RHR research, research training and programme development partnership centres, including Service Guidance Centres.

3.2.2 Developing country ‘emerging centres’ which are current or past recipients of research capacity strengthening grants.

3.2.3 Developing and least developed country centres eligible for research capacity strengthening grants.

4 Areas, modality and criteria

4.1 Designated WHO Collaborating Centre in Reproductive Health

*Modality and criteria*

Centres of excellence are designated by WHO for four-year terms, based on active collaboration in reproductive health research or programme development activities. As a rule, WHO Collaborating Centres must be selected in fields that are relevant and contribute to the implementation of WHO programme activities. They must fulfil one or several essential functions in support of WHO programmes and key priorities. During the biennium 2002-2003, there were 55 such designated centres globally. Regional Directors propose institutions for designation as WHO Collaborating Centres by the Director-General and there is collaboration between the relevant WHO regional office and the Department of Reproductive Health and
Research in identifying centres for such designation. Details on the process and criteria for designation can be found on WHO’s web-site: http://whocc.who.int/ (general information). Areas for designation vary according to global or regional needs. The current reproductive health thematic areas for collaboration at global level include:

- development, testing, introduction and application of new methods of family planning, including their promotion within service programmes, through guidance tools to expand choice;
- development and testing of methods for dual protection against unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs);
- development and testing of STI and HIV prevention interventions, including microbicides and protocols for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV;
- generating and synthesizing evidence for development and testing of interventions for the promotion of best practices for improving maternal and newborn health;
- generating evidence and new knowledge for action, policy, programme support and advocacy for best practices for addressing the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents;
- developing action plans for the prevention of unsafe abortion and provision of post-abortion care;
• generating evidence and testing standards for the prevention and management of STIs, infertility and cancer of the cervix;

• learning users’ and potential users’ perspectives with regard to reproductive health technologies and services;

• developing and testing of prevention interventions for unintended pregnancies;

• promotion, through research and programme development, of models of best practices for male involvement in reproductive health;

• promotion of gender equity and rights in reproductive health, including research and research-linked service and advocacy programmes for the elimination of traditional harmful practices and gender-based violence;

• participation in the development and implementation of programmes to support global initiatives for promoting sexual and reproductive health, including relevant research training activities;

• facilitation of the dissemination and promotion of utilization of normative guidelines and tools, including advocacy for best practices.
RHR non-designated research and programme development partnership centres, including Service Guidance Centres.

*Modality and criteria*

Centres which are not designated as “Collaborating Centres” can collaborate with RHR in undertaking research that is of global relevance or is within sub-national, national or regional priority areas of reproductive health. Centres can also collaborate in RHR’s programme development activities such as the dissemination, adaptation and adoption of tools developed to promote implementation of best reproductive health practices. Collaboration could be achieved through the award of various contracts and grants including Service Guidance Centre (SGC) grants.

Centres wishing to be considered in this category will need to complete an institutional profile form which outlines the centre’s scientific track record and its sub-national, national, regional or global standing. Collaborating centres are expected to operate at a demonstrably high technical standard and to give due account to gender and ethical considerations.

Institutions which are participating as Service Guidance Centres will be expected to indicate in their letter of intent, their strategy for adaptation, introduction and adoption of guidelines. RHR can be approached to advise on this. For details refer to the brochure on SGC grants or the RHR website.
4.3 Emerging centres and Long-term Institutional Development (LID) grant recipient centres.

Modality and criteria

A key mechanism for research capacity strengthening is the award of a LID grant. This is a technical support package covering the development of human resources essential for conducting research in reproductive health, and the development, strengthening and supply of movable non-human research resources and infrastructure. Centres supported through a LID grant are expected to implement well-defined research and research training activities. A LID grant is normally awarded for up to a maximum of five years, renewable once for another five years, subject to satisfactory annual performance by the recipient centre (for details please refer to: http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/capacity_strengthening/LID.htm or write to request a full brochure).

The centre should be a research unit focused on reproductive health and be part of a university, government structure or a non-governmental organization (NGO).

The centre should demonstrate the potential for becoming a viable research entity, which is responsive to national reproductive health needs.

LID grant applications should have the support of national and immediate authorities and an institutional profile form should be completed.
Applications should preferably be from centres in least developed countries (LDC), although consideration will also be given to strong or well justified applications from other developing countries.

The centre should provide evidence that it has the necessary financial support structures and essential administrative leadership to implement the grant proposal.

The centre should have the potential to apply the research findings in reproductive health care and prevention by having established or by establishing firm links with appropriate policy-makers and stakeholders as well as with reproductive health programmes and services.

Prospective centres should have, or be willing to establish, acceptable scientific and ethical review mechanisms for research.

Centres which have successfully completed their first five-year or second five-year term, and are thus classified ‘emerging centres’, are eligible for other grant support, such as a Resource Maintenance and Capital (RMC) grant, Small Supplies Grant (SSG) or Service Guidance Centre (SGC) grants. RMC grants include support to centres to serve as Service Guidance Centres (for details please refer to: http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/capacity_strengthening/rmc.htm or write to request the full set of brochures).

Selection of centres for grant support will be done in consultation with national authorities and the WHO regional and country office.