Call for applications for a regional training centre for research on infectious diseases of poverty with a focus on intervention and implementation research in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region

Deadline for submission: 15 November 2014

This offer is provided by TDR, the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases, a co-sponsored programme of UNICEF/UNDP/World Bank/WHO, based at the World Health Organization in Geneva, Switzerland.

Purpose of the call

In line with health research needs identified by both the World Health Organization (WHO) Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office (EMRO) and TDR, this call is to select a regional training centre in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region (list of countries is available at http://www.emro.who.int/countries.html). The Regional Training Centre is expected to offer training courses aimed at building health research skills, mainly but not exclusively on intervention and implementation research. Over a two-year period, this centre should progressively integrate a package of skill-building courses into its training programmes. The skills include a practical understanding of research ethics; good practices in human health research; writing a strong proposal and sound protocol; effective project planning, management and evaluation in health research; effective research results dissemination and utilization. Training on implementation research will be based on the TDR’s implementation research toolkit. The inclusion of train-the-trainer programmes will enhance dissemination of these courses among other institutions in the region.

Background

In accordance with its 2012-2017 strategy, TDR aims to foster an effective global research effort on infectious diseases of poverty and promote the translation of innovation to health impact in disease endemic countries. This is implemented through two main complementary and interacting lines of activity: (i) intervention and implementation research; and (ii) research capacity strengthening and knowledge management.

Intervention and implementation research focuses specifically on systematic approaches to understanding and addressing barriers to effective delivery of health interventions for
the control and disease elimination. The need to address implementation bottlenecks is often greatest in settings in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where health systems are the weakest. Building capacities to overcome such bottlenecks is increasingly important to achieve universal health coverage and to ensure a sustainable post-2015 development agenda. LMICs need to play a major role in research and priority-setting to ensure relevance of interventions, sustainability and optimal health impact for the poor.

Although health research capacity in LMICs has grown over the past two decades, there is still a need for further capacity building in good practices and project management skills so that research priorities are efficiently and effectively identified, planned, implemented, monitored and evaluated. These skills are not readily taught in academic scientific curricula.

Through its short training courses, TDR has been promoting integration of ethics and good research practices in research on infectious diseases of poverty and has developed an implementation research toolkit to facilitate training in the design and conduct of research, aimed at improving access to, and delivery of, public health tools, strategies and interventions.

TDR is also actively promoting research capacity in the different WHO regions by establishing Regional Training Centres. Four centres have already been created:

- **WHO Regional Office for the Americas (WHO-AMRO)** - Centro Internacional de Entrenamiento e Investigaciones Médicas (CIDEIM), Cali, Colombia, with primary expertise in research project management.
- **WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia (WHO-SEARO)** - Gadjah Mada University (GMU), Jogyakarta, Indonesia, with primary expertise in social science and implementation research.
- **WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO- EURO)** - Astana Medical University (AMU), Astana, Kazakhstan, with primary expertise in bioethics.
- **WHO Regional Office for Western Pacific (WHO-WPRO)** - Research Institute of Tropical Medicine (RITM), Manila, Philippines, with primary expertise in Good Clinical Practice, Good Clinical Laboratory Practice and in scientific writing.

A Regional Training Centre in the WHO Region for Africa will be selected later in 2014.

**A Regional Training Centre for WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region**

The objective is to build research skills of health researchers from countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region, and enhance the contribution of research to disease control, elimination, poverty alleviation and development.

Responsibilities of the training centre also include:

- Acting as a resource centre for TDR research training activities and supporting the organization of inter-country meetings or workshops related to TDR activities, as necessary.
- Leading the quality assurance of training programmes through an inter-regional network.
Specific long-term goals are to:

- Increase the ability of health researchers (including public health researchers) in disease endemic countries to access grants and improve research quality and competitiveness, through building relevant skills in organizing, managing and conducting health research.
- Establish a global network of training centres that: (a) collaborate with other health research institutions (including public health research institutions) and stakeholders; (b) exchange experiences and innovative approaches to good practices in health research to ensure sustainable capacity development; (c) leverage additional activities for preventing and controlling infectious diseases of poverty; and (d) promote the translation of innovation to health impact.

The collaboration with TDR

In 2014, TDR will provide a contract covering two years of technical and financial support for the development of a Regional Training Centre selected among academic and research institutions in countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region. The proposed activities should be in line with research priorities on infectious diseases of poverty identified by both TDR and the WHO Regional Office. TDR’s initial support should help the institution to become more effective and sustainable through enhanced collaboration and partnerships.

The expected deliverables within the initial two years will be:

- At least one new short course on bioethics or good practices or project planning and evaluation (running at least twice a year) integrated into the institution’s existing teaching/training programmes.
- At least three workshops on implementation research using the TDR implementation research toolkit.
- Training programmes disseminated to at least two satellite institutions within the region.
- Participation in and contribution to the organization of the annual meeting of the global network of Regional Training Centres.
- Initiating networking activities with other Regional Training Centres supported by TDR.

Eligibility criteria

The selection will be made in collaboration with WHO EMRO and will be based on the recommendations made by a committee of external experts.

Candidate institutions must be located in a country of the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region (http://www.emro.who.int/countries.html) and have to fulfil the following essential criteria:

- Be a national public institution with activities on health research relevant to the TDR strategy;
- Be affiliated with a recognized university;
- Demonstrate interest and show potential in leading capacity strengthening for good practices in health research, including implementation research;
• Have explicit commitment from the head of the institution, as well as the relevant ministry of health, research or education;
• Have the adequate infrastructure and facilities (e.g. training and conference facilities, technologies including access to high speed internet, computers, IT support, video conferencing if possible);
• Have qualified personnel that can support the initiative in undertaking training activities;
• Be able to work in English, and collaborate and manage the relationship with the other Regional Training Centres;
• Have experience in health research with national and international partnerships;
• Have well-established accounting and administrative systems.

The following criteria are not essential but are an asset that will be valued in the selection:
• Be a member of an existing functional network to disseminate the various courses.
• Have the capacity to generate written materials, provide technical support and training (orally or in written format) in another WHO official language (Arabic or French).

Application procedure

Interested candidate institutions are invited to complete this application form (http://www.who.int/tdr/grants/pi_grant_app_form.pdf) and send a complete proposal in an electronic format (word or pdf) including all the required documentation in one file, by e-mail to RCS@who.int, by 15 November 2014. The e-mail subject line must include “RTC [institution name]”.

The proposal should include:
1. Full name of the institution and the main contact person for this project, i.e. the project coordinator, with full contact details.
2. A description of the institution’s mandate, structure, missions, collaboration and infrastructure (see the earlier section on selection criteria) (maximum 2 pages).
3. An outline of the institution’s experience in running training programmes at national/regional and international levels.
4. A list of the major training programmes carried out during the last 5 years, the curriculum for these courses, partners involved, the number of participants and the evaluation system, as well as the timetable for training activities held in 2012-13 (maximum 3 pages).
5. A project plan (maximum 3 pages), including a description of how:
   a. the training programmes would fit in with the mandate of the institution, either face-to-face or blended training programmes proposed;
   b. the RTC would develop and disseminate the training programmes to other institutions in the region;
   c. the RTC would become self-sustained;
   d. how the RTC will be engaged in networking activities with the other RTC supported by TDR.
6. The details of staff involved in training activities and who are interested in the initiative (including the project coordinator). The curriculum vitae of the key
personnel with a clear indication of their potential role in the initiative, should be made clear.

7. The budget in US dollars (maximum of US$ 100 000) for an initial 12 month period.
8. Letters of support from the head of the institution and the relevant ministry of health, education research or technology.

**Selection criteria**

Applications will be evaluated on institutional profile, staff experience, feasibility and sustainability of the proposal.

TDR will acknowledge receipt of applications within two weeks of the submission deadline by e-mail. An acknowledgement of receipt does not imply that the application is eligible for review.

**The results will be announced in January 2015**

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