Infectious diseases remain major causes of ill health among poor people. Almost 3 billion people live on less than US$ 2 a day, and they continue to be at the greatest risk for these diseases. How can this be possible when global health funding is increasing and new drugs and other health tools are being developed? How is research being prioritized to meet these needs, and can it be done better?

The Global Report is an important tool in raising these questions and providing some ideas. Its value is in its cross-disciplinary perspective, bringing together issues from environmental changes, lack of innovation support in low and middle income countries, poor health systems and inequitable funding patterns. While the report focuses on infectious diseases of poverty, many of the issues raised are also relevant for other communicable and non-communicable diseases. It is essential reading for policy-makers, funders and research leaders.

TDR, the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases, which initiated this independent report and brought together worldwide experts to author it, is one of two Special Programmes based at and executed by the World Health Organization (WHO). The Global Report provides valuable contributions to meet the goals of WHO’s Research for Health Strategy, which was adopted at the 63rd World Health Assembly in 2010.

National, regional and international stakeholders were invited by TDR to come together to identify research priorities so that they can own these priorities and take them forward. My hope is that the discussions generated from this report will help make important changes, so that we break the terrible cycle of poverty and disease and start to experience the real power of research to improve lives.

Dr Marie-Paule Kieny,
Assistant Director-General of Innovation, Information, Evidence and Research, World Health Organization (WHO)
How the report was developed

The world’s poor are still not reaping the full benefits of research outcomes, despite an increasing global commitment to health research. While research funding to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB has increased, other infectious diseases associated with poverty, such as Chagas disease, leishmaniasis, human African trypanosomiasis and Buruli ulcer, have not had the same attention. This key fact is at the heart of this report, which began after TDR initiated a concerted Stewardship effort to investigate and support more equitable approaches to funding and support for research.

Supported by the European Commission, TDR set up a global “Think Tank” of over 130 experts in 2008, and from the outset, the concept was to ensure disease endemic country input, with these countries playing active roles in developing the research agenda on infectious diseases of poverty.

Experts were convened from across the globe to work in ten disease-specific and thematic reference groups to carry out a review and consultation process and identify top research priorities. Each reference group was jointly led by a disease endemic country and international chair or co-chair, and each was hosted by a disease endemic country with WHO country or regional offices acting as the secretariat. The analysis and research priorities developed by these expert groups and followed by regional and national consultations with stakeholders and workshops underpins this Global Report.

Developed over three years and in three phases (see Box 1), The Global Report for Research on Infectious Diseases of Poverty identifies research-related actions that policy-makers, funders and researchers should focus on if the public health challenges of infectious diseases of poverty are to be met. The report details the drivers of infectious diseases in poor populations and highlights how advances in science and technology can be used to meet the challenges of controlling these diseases.

Themes selected for close attention in this report represent some of the most contemporary global discussions as they relate to infectious diseases of poverty, the aim being to draw particular attention to their implications for infectious
BOX 1. GLOBAL REPORT FOR RESEARCH ON INFECTIOUS DISEASES OF POVERTY: DEVELOPMENT PHASES

PHASE I: Expert discussions and literature reviews
Convened by the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR), a “Think Tank” of world experts reviewed and deliberated on infectious diseases of poverty – particularly social and economic drivers and the communities affected – to produce 10 disease and thematic reference group reports identifying top research priorities.

PHASE II: National, regional and global stakeholder consultations
A cross-section of national, regional and global stakeholders, including researchers, funders, decision-makers and representatives from public and private organizations, were convened in a forum hosted by ministers of health or regional health organization leaders for each reference group. Here, the findings and recommendations emerging from each Think Tank report were discussed and debated. The outcomes and input from this process were used to update and finalize the priorities outlined in the Think Tank reports.

PHASE III: Synthesis of ideas
International leaders were invited to be authors of the Global Report and included former ministers of health and of science and technology, policy-makers, research leaders and experts in public health. Supported by research fellows, these authors reviewed the 10 Think Tank reports, conducted additional literature research, and worked together to agree on core themes and develop options for actions.

The TDR secretariat and external consultants provided support for the development, writing and production phases of the Global Report.
diseases of poverty. They include “innovation and new technologies” in line with the call for an agreed set of research priorities in the Global Strategy and Plan of Action on Public Health, Innovation and Intellectual Property (GSPOA)\(^1\). The focus on “environment and climate change” highlights disease vulnerability of poor communities, while the “health delivery systems for universal coverage” theme was chosen following the call to action from the Bamako Global Ministerial Forum on Research for Health, November 2008\(^2\), (further addressed by deliberations at the Health Systems Research and Universal Coverage Symposium in 2010)\(^3\).

Presented in six chapters, this report is a distillation of the evidence, ideas and priorities that emerged from the stewardship initiative and provides an ambitious set of options for action. The report is essential reading for policy-makers, funders and research leaders.

Implementation of the actions proposed in this report should help improve current research prioritization processes, guide investment strategies and enhance commitment to using research to promote global health equity. If, like the MDGs, these options for action are focused on by policy-makers, funders and researchers, they should lead to well-planned, effective, and powerful health interventions. The task now is to develop and focus attention on key actions that are most likely to have a significant public health impact on poor populations.

Dr Ayoade MJ Oduola
Project coordinator
Former coordinator, Stewardship and Empowerment, TDR

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The Global Report was initiated and facilitated by TDR, the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases, based on wide contributions from stakeholders at various stages of the work. Under the leadership of the TDR Stewardship function, high level experts from around the globe were brought together for research, analysis and consultations. The result is an independent publication comprising different viewpoints written by expert authors in each chapter.

Much valuable advice and support was received from the TDR Think Tank members, chairs and co-chairs, who prepared the 10 disease and thematic reference group reports that provided the technical foundation for this report. Two major report development workshops were organized in Bellagio (July 2010) and Shanghai (January 2011).

Consultations on the report findings were held with national and regional experts and policy-makers at World Health Organization regional and country offices. The report was also peer reviewed by external consultants and reviewed by TDR’s Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) and TDR co-sponsoring bodies: UNICEF, UNDP, the World Bank and WHO.

Report editors were Dr Margaret Harris and Dr Julie N Reza, with further editing and proofreading provided by Jo Woodhead and Tony Murdoch. Graphic design and guidance on illustrations in the report was provided by Lisa Schwarb.

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Infectious diseases remain key agents of the debilitating poverty afflicting so much of the world today. Each year these diseases kill almost 9 million people, many of them children under five, and they also cause enormous burdens through life-long disability. Stepping up research into their causes and how to effectively treat them and prevent them from spreading could have an enormous impact on efforts to lift people out of poverty and to build a better world for future generations.

The *Global Report for Research for Infectious Diseases of Poverty* is an independent publication comprising different viewpoints written by expert authors in each chapter. It was initiated and facilitated by TDR, the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases, supported by the European Commission, and based on wide contributions from stakeholders at various stages of the work. It offers new ways of improving public health in low and middle income countries, with research as the compelling foundation and driver for policies.

The first chapter sets the context and outlines ten areas where research on infectious diseases of poverty can make major improvements; these form the framework for the rest of the report. The next three chapters take these ten areas forward by focusing on specific themes: the environment, health systems, and innovation and technology. A fifth chapter discusses the research funding landscape while the final sixth chapter considers the issues and evidence presented in the rest of the report to propose high level actions, including the best research strategies against infectious diseases of poverty.

Implementation of the actions proposed in this report should help improve current research prioritization processes, guide investment strategies and enhance commitment to using research to promote global health equity. If, like the Millennium Development Goals, these options for action are focused on by policy-makers, funders and researchers, they should lead to well-planned, effective, and powerful health interventions and have a real chance of saving millions of lives in years to come.