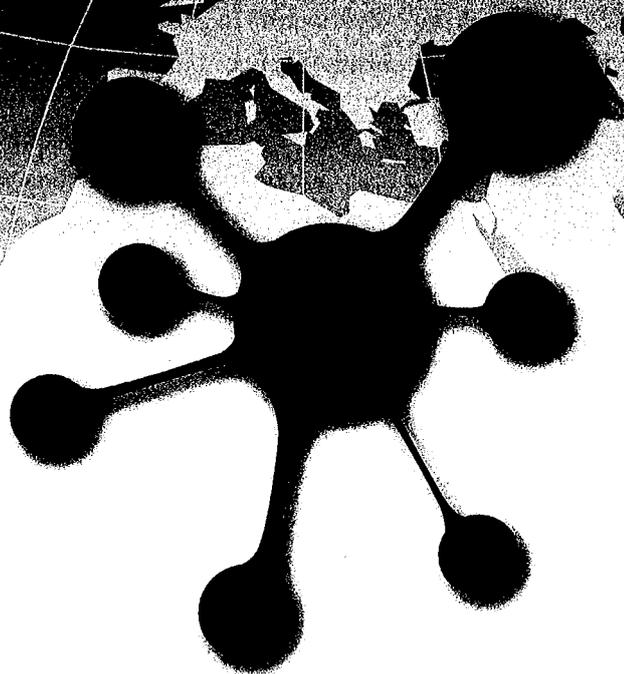


EUROPEAN SCIENCE AND TRAINING
FOR THE
PROMOTION OF HEALTH
IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

A B S T R A C T B O O K

NETWORKING
THE NETWORKS



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TROPMEDEUROP

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Background

Worldwide inequity in health and health care, caused by poverty, infectious diseases and lack of access to adequate health services, and dramatically aggravated by the AIDS-epidemic, is one of the greatest social, economic and political challenges of the 21st century. A thousand statistics can be summarised by the estimated daily loss of 35.000 young lives due to curable or preventable communicable diseases in the developing world. This humanitarian drama is also at the basis of worldwide social, economic and political problems such as uncontrolled migration, societal instability and the deterioration of grow markets, and is therefore also a major threat to the "Global Village", and Europe in particular. The improvement of the impact and efficiency of existing interventions, as well as the development and introduction of new tools and strategies, require intensified, well-co-ordinated research efforts and comprehensive expertise. Both the disease systems (biological, clinical, epidemiological, applied technology) and the health system (access, quality, efficiency and sustainability) must be addressed in a comprehensive strategic approach.

The role of Europe

In the industrialised world, Europe can provide unparalleled capacity, commitment and leadership. Combined, the European member states have by far the greatest capacity in the world for research and control of poverty-related, communicable and tropical diseases, and health development in general. However, due to historical and political reasons, much of the work in the past was done in a strictly national framework. Apart from the obvious under-exploitation of scientific synergy and efficiency, this fragmentation has also caused lack of co-ordination, and even counterproductive competition, in their collaboration with the developing countries and in the international arena. Moreover, due to the decline of the colonial and post-colonial interests, many states have reduced their investments in international health research, whereas in fact the needs have never been greater, be it in a very different framework. Consequently, Europe's position is not yet as strong as it could and should be in the field of international health research and development. In addition, the developing countries and international agencies are expecting a strong input from Europe, which has indeed its own exemplary social health care systems to show.

Over the past decade, national and EU-programmes have allowed to create small networks within Europe and with the South, and to considerably strengthen capacity in the developing countries. However, these networks were project-based, limited in time, scope, resources and collaborative power. Nevertheless, they have clearly shown the enormous potential, need and demand for a broader, more structured and long-term co-ordinated international health research, within Europe and with the South. The sixth Framework Programme provides new perspectives and instruments to shape a true European research space in international health, in particular regarding major poverty-related and communicable diseases; to unite forces to face the research needs of the health crisis in the South; to consolidate and strengthen the European profile and its leading role in this global challenge.

The role of TropMedEurop

TropMedEurop (TME) is the European Association of Institutes and Schools of Tropical Medicine and International Health. Over the past years, TME has evolved from a personal network of directors of "classical" Schools of Tropical Medicine to an

association uniting most European scientific institutes working on international health and tropical diseases. Main, independent offsprings are TropEd (European Master programme in International Health) and TropNet (surveillance of import diseases), which are described elsewhere. In the fields of research, capacity strengthening and international health policies TME still has to develop to its full potential. European and other international programmes have led to the creation of project-based and thematic networks, without an over-arching institutional coordination policy however. Thus, the networks are fragmented and limited in scope and time. On the other hand, they show the vast potential of a structured "European Research Area" for global health development, and for a coordinated collaboration with the developing countries. Capitalising on its scientific excellence, collaborative partnerships and societal values, Europe can and must indeed play a major role in global health development.

TropMedEurop intends to contribute to this ERA by coordinating the strategies, activities and standards of its members. It will, moreover, broaden this ERA to a European "Scientific Area" which includes also training and capacity strengthening and world-wide collaboration. It will build on the individual and common expertise of its members, which include virtually all players in this field in the EU, and on their collaborative networks within Europe and with third parties, particularly those in the South. It will also capitalise on the unique profile of Europe in this field, historically grown through its own social and political evolution, its relations with the South, its cultural diversity and its scientific excellence. This ERA should also strengthen the role and voice of Europe in global efforts to combat AIDS, malaria, TBC and other poverty-related and communicable diseases, to improve universal access to sustainable quality health care, and to ensure that globalisation contributes effectively to poverty reduction and equity. It should allow the partners in the developing countries to better coordinate and lead their collaboration with European researchers, institutes and countries.

Plan of action

The strategy to build up TropMedEurope's contribution to this European Scientific Area will be bottom-up, low-cost, gradual, voluntary and complementary to institutional, national, European and joint programmes and networks. In a first phase, the network will mainly focus on co-ordination and integration. However, once its co-coordinative capacity is strengthened, the consortium could also initiate and run network projects, and/or manage research programmes on behalf of the EU or other agencies.

1. Strengthening the legal, operational and scientific profile of TropMedEurop, and reinforce its co-ordinating capacity within Europe and with the southern networks.
2. Exchanging and enhancing access to information (common databases and websites), expertise (mutual and joint consultation and institutional peer-review), programmes and networks, staff (exchanges of junior and senior scientists), joint scientific training programmes (e.g. European post-graduate accreditation and joint PhD projects), clinical services (expertise, diagnostics, surveillance).
3. Promoting, supporting, bridging and, where useful, initiating relevant thematic networks, integrated projects and other national and transnational programmes on poverty-related and communicable diseases, including joint EU-programmes such as the European-Developing Countries Clinical Trial Partnership (EDCTP).
4. Bridging and integrating biomedical, clinical, epidemiological and intervention research in order to improve relevance, quality, efficiency and applicability.
5. Co-ordinated support to, and dialogue with national, European and global authorities and programmes, and joint advocacy in the international health fora.
6. Initiate and manage European research and capacity building programmes.

Expected outcome

Expected Results	Potential Users
Co-ordination of European research in international health	Institutes, networks and researchers; EU, national and joint programmes; training programmes; tropical and emerging disease surveillance in Europe
Better knowledge of pathogens and host interactions	Scientific and medical communities; industry; patients
Improved tools and strategies for case management, prevention and control of poverty-related and communicable diseases	Health ministries; international agencies; health services and systems; patients and populations; industry; world community
Strong leadership of Europe in international health and global disease control	European and national political and scientific authorities; international agencies; southern partner countries; target populations

Contribution to economic development in Europe and its partner countries

One of the main problems in the fight against poverty-related diseases is the lack of incentives to invest in product development and marketing. The deficiencies are situated not only downstream (lack of health services as a market, global market mechanisms), but also mid-stream (lack of capacity for clinical trials and intervention research) and upstream (insufficient critical mass in academia for basic research and industry partnerships). Yet, given the enormous number of patients, also in strong growth markets, and the rapidly increasing international support, a huge potential market could be exploited.

The mid-stream gap has already been identified and will be responded to by the European / Development Countries Clinical Trial Partnership (EDCTP), in the development of which many consortium members actively participate. TropMedEurop will stimulate and co-ordinate their further contributions to planning and implementation, and stimulate participation and co-ownership by its southern partners.

TropMedEurop can contribute considerably to filling the economic downstream gap. Through its intervention and health systems research, it can identify technical, socio-economic and institutional obstacles and solutions to the introduction and marketing of new or improved products (diagnostics, drugs, vaccines, commodities). It will call on the industry and development agencies to complement these efforts with their own expertise and resources.

TropMedEurop could also help filling the upstream gap, by pooling critical mass and resources, and possibly by acting as a joint forum and/or support secretariat (e.g. for legal and patent issues) to deal with the industry e.g. in private-public partnerships for basic research and technology development.

Current members and their expertise

TropMedEurop unites, since several decades, virtually all European schools and institutes involved in research, training and services in the fields of tropical medicine and international health development. Besides the EU member states, Switzerland, Norway and most states of Eastern Europe are represented in TropMedEurop. Most members have extensive collaborative networks in the South and participate actively, usually in collaboration with several members and southern institutions, in health, research and development programmes of the EU.

The members are active in virtually all relevant fields: AIDS, Malaria, TBC; other communicable and poverty-related diseases; health systems research; international health policies; national and international food safety and security, the impact of globalisation and climatic changes on health. Disciplines include fundamental and applied genomics proteonomics, biochemistry, immunology; clinical research and trials and product development; field and vector biology, epidemiology and modelling; sociology, anthropology and economics. The potential of crosscutting fertilisation and innovation, between institutes, themes and disciplines, is enormous and still far underexploited. Many of the infectious agents studied provide unique generic models for basic biology, human immunology and pathophysiology.