

European Commission: The EU role in global health

Response by the Wellcome Trust

November 2009

1. The Wellcome Trust is the largest charity in the UK. It funds innovative biomedical research, in the UK and internationally, spending over £600 million each year to support the brightest scientists with the best ideas. The Wellcome Trust supports public debate about biomedical research and its impact on health and wellbeing.
2. A significant proportion of our funding is spent on research in low and middle income countries (LMICs) to find solutions for local and global health priorities. As well as a range of grant schemes to fund researchers in LMIC countries, we have a diverse range of specific global health activities: ranging from initiatives for institutional and national capacity building, to support for biomedical ethics and international public engagement programmes¹. We fund several major overseas programmes in Africa and South-East Asia², which are long term partnerships focused on research on malaria and other diseases that cause high levels of mortality in the tropics. We also recently launched the Hilleman Laboratories³, a joint venture with Merck & Co based in India with a not-for-profit mission to focus on developing affordable vaccines for diseases that commonly affect low-income countries. At the core of all our international activities is a drive to build research capacity – an essential part of developing a vibrant and sustainable research community within LMICs. We would be happy to provide more information on these activities, and any of those listed below, if that would be helpful.
3. The Trust is pleased that the EU is considering how it can ‘add value’ in the global health arena, and we support the publication of an EU global health strategy. We are grateful for the opportunity to respond to this consultation, and have answered a subset of questions which relate to our interests as a funder of global health research. We would appreciate being kept informed as the EU global health strategy is developed.

Question 4: *In your opinion, which are the main strengths and weaknesses of the current EU policy on health and development cooperation, and which dimensions should be given greater attention in order to face the challenges ahead?*

4. We are pleased that the important role of research in addressing global health challenges is acknowledged throughout the issues paper, and agree that EU-funded research can make a major contribution to development and universal access to basic health services. The inclusion of funding for health research in the EU Framework Programmes, including an emphasis on poverty-related diseases and collaborative research partnerships under the European and

¹ Summary of Wellcome Trust global health activities: <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/Funding/Biomedical-science/International-funding/Global-health-research/index.htm>

² Major Overseas Programmes: <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/Achievements-and-Impact/Initiatives/International-biomedical-science/Major-Overseas-Programmes/index.htm>

³ The Hilleman Laboratories press release <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/News/Media-office/Press-releases/2009/WTX056551.htm>

Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP), is positive in this regard. We would like to see this kind of research maintained as the strategy develops. In particular, we would emphasise the importance of developing *research* capacity as part of improving the health care capacity of countries. The Trust and the EDCTP shared information during the development of our African Institutions Initiative⁴, and we would like to continue this engagement around our common capacity building activities.

5. We agree that a comprehensive EU global health strategy would be useful to bring together the EU's various activities and to communicate clearly the region's role in global health. As elaborated in the issues paper, current EU global health activities are somewhat fragmented. The UK cross-government global health strategy 'Health is Global'⁵ was an effective initial step towards consolidating the ideas and initiatives of major UK government departments working in global health. Similarly, coherence and consistency, along with clarity on the roles of various European institutions and Directorates-General, could be a major benefit realised through the development of an EU global health strategy.

Question 5: *Could you identify health problems that have been neglected by the EU and international health research agenda and propose the best means to support innovation to address them, especially in low- and middle-income countries?*

6. The Trust has increasingly used translational funding as a way to encourage innovation to address healthcare problems and unmet need. Through our Technology Transfer Division, we recently launched the five year, £30 million R&D for Affordable Healthcare in India initiative⁶, which will fund translational research projects that will deliver safe and effective healthcare products for India, and potentially other markets, at affordable costs. A key aim of the scheme is to encourage innovations that extend access to care to the greatest numbers of beneficiaries, without compromising on quality.

Question 12: *What impact will the global crisis (climate change, food prices and economic downturn) have on global health and what could be done to help mitigate their ill effects?*

7. Climate change threatens the health of millions of people worldwide, and has been described as "the biggest global health threat of the 21st century". Threats include heat waves and flooding, changing patterns of infectious diseases such as malaria and dengue, and water scarcity and rising sea levels, which could displace hundreds of thousands of people. The impacts will be greatest in developing countries.
8. However, a major international study – partly funded by the Trust – has demonstrated that many measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will have positive impacts for health⁷. The study, published in the Lancet, examines the health impacts of different climate change mitigation policies in four key sectors: electricity generation, urban transport, household energy, and food and agriculture. The researchers concluded that co-benefits will offset at least some of the costs of climate change mitigation, and should be taken into account in international negotiations.

⁴ African Institutions Initiative <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/Funding/Biomedical-science/International-funding/Global-health-research/WTX055734.htm>

⁵ Health is global: a UK Government strategy 2008-13:

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_088702

⁶ R&D for Affordable Healthcare in India initiative: <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/Funding/Technology-transfer/Awards/R-and-D-for-Affordable-Healthcare-in-India/index.htm>

⁷ Public health benefits of reducing greenhouse gas emissions: <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/About-us/Policy/Spotlight-issues/Health-impacts-of-climate-change/Public-health-benefits-of-reducing-emissions/index.htm>

Question 14: *What action do you think the EU should take to stem the brain drain of health workers, while respecting their freedom of movement?*

9. Health research is a global activity which benefits from unhindered collaboration and exchange of people between countries. There are important benefits for both Europe and LMICs when European health professionals spend time in LMICs; and likewise, for health workers from around the world training and working in Europe. As noted in the issues paper, Europe offers a broad spectrum of centres of excellence in training and research, and researchers from LMICs benefit from experiencing such facilities. We agree that there should be coherence between EU policies regarding mobility both for health workers within Europe and outside; an EU strategy would provide a good opportunity to develop a clear EU position in this important area.

Question 15: *What role do you see for new technologies (including telemedicine) in enabling developing countries to provide access to care even in remote areas and to allow better sharing of knowledge and expertise between health professionals, and how can the EU support this?*

10. New technologies have a significant role in addressing health care issues in LMICs. Through the Trust's Technology Transfer Division, we have funded a wide array of translational projects across a spectrum of technologies and therapeutic areas⁸, with the aim of providing better diagnosis, treatment, surveillance for diseases, including in LMICs. We would be happy to share more information on individual projects if required.
11. Developing better technologies to improve data sharing globally will also offer significant benefits. We were interested to recently learn about the EU GÉANT data network for the research and education community: an example of how technology could be adapted to have positive application in facilitating sharing of information between researchers in LMICs and Europe. The global health strategy should recognise the important role of cross-Directorate projects such as this to help them achieve their goals.

Question 19: *How do you think national capacity and local scientists in low-income countries could be empowered to conduct research relevant to their countries' priorities?*

12. Local scientists can be empowered by building capacity for research in LMICs and allowing researchers to set their own priorities. The Trust has invested significantly in this area and has a range of capacity building initiatives, through which we aim to provide long-term, sustainable funding to allow the research community in LMICs to address local health issues. An important theme common to all our capacity strengthening initiatives and our network of major overseas programmes⁹ is that their agendas are set in the regions where they are based, rather than imposed by the Trust.
13. The issues paper acknowledges the importance of North-South research partnerships and collaborations; we also view South-South partnerships as important in empowering scientists and policy makers in low-income countries to 'set the agenda'. The Trust's African Institutions Initiative¹⁰ provides examples of successful South-South partnerships: the £30 million initiative involves more than fifty institutions from eighteen African countries, and aims to build a critical

⁸ Technology Transfer at the Trust: <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/Funding/Technology-transfer/index.htm>

⁹ Major Overseas Programmes: <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/Achievements-and-Impact/Initiatives/International-biomedical-science/Major-Overseas-Programmes/index.htm>

¹⁰ African Institutions Initiative <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/Funding/Biomedical-science/International-funding/Global-health-research/WTX055734.htm>

mass of sustainable local research capacity across Africa through strengthening African universities and research institutions. We would encourage the EU global health strategy to explore the benefits of South-South collaboration.

Question 27: *What, in your view, is the main added value offered by the EU in the field of global health?*

14. We agree that global health governance is currently a very crowded area and are pleased that through this consultation, the EU is reflecting on how it can usefully 'add value'. The crowded 'global health architecture' was highlighted in a recent report of the House of Lords Select Committee on Intergovernmental Organisations¹¹.
15. We are pleased to see that 'evidence-based policies for health' are included in the proposed policy objectives underpinning EU action. We agree that the development of a global health strategy would enable the EU to champion and raise the prominence of the world-class global health research conducted in Europe, and to facilitate its application for development. We therefore welcome the proposals for a new partnership for international S&T cooperation to coordinate the many separate research and development activities undertaken by the EC and Member States.

¹¹ *Diseases Know No Frontiers: How effective are Intergovernmental Organisations in controlling their spread* <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200708/ldselect/ldintergov/143/143.pdf>