

HEALTH RESEARCH FOR DISEASE CONTROL

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An abstract

Throughout the world realisation is dawning that health research can provide benefits for disease control and development, and thus global efforts to engage health research in social development have gathered pace over the past 20 years.

However of the US\$100 billion spent annually on health research worldwide, US\$30 billion is spent by the National Institutes of Health; and 90% is spent on diseases that afflict the populations of high income countries.

The World Health Assembly in May 2006, under pressure from low and middle income countries agreed to establish an intergovernmental group to develop a global plan on research and development for diseases predominantly affecting developing countries. The WHO Regions have also been active in placing health research firmly at the centre of the development agenda.

Several of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted by the UN General Assembly include health and against this background, it is widely accepted that Africa and some countries in Asia and Latin America have achieved limited success in reducing mortality, morbidity and life expectancy.

Numerous factors continue to provide an unfavourable environment for socio-economic development. More recent phenomena such as unbridled urbanization, brain drain, unfair trade policies have compounded the already fragile economies. Poverty, lack of human resources, low levels of education, and lack of technology, are the key constraints to good health and development in low and middle income countries.

Investment by African governments in the training of health care workers, particularly of nurses and doctors, is negatively impacted by both emigration as well as internal migration of the health care work force from the public to the private sector.

The gross under-funding of health research in developing countries and the low share of global investments in health-related research and development specifically directed to tackle the diseases of the poor, have been identified as major issues for action in international health.

There is increasing global recognition that science and technology-intensive solutions to improve the quality of life are not restricted to developed countries, but are necessary, and must also be undertaken as vigorously, by developing countries.

There are many examples of how health research can impact upon disease control and development.

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