



Social, Economic and Behavioural Research (SEB)



UNDP/World Bank/WHO
Special Programme for Research & Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR)

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MISSION

The Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR) is a unique, independent global programme of scientific collaboration.

Established in 1975, TDR supports research impacting on global efforts to combat the major infectious diseases which predominantly affect the poor and disadvantaged. As part of TDR's Basic and Strategic Research Unit (STR), the Steering Committee for Social, Economic and Behavioural Research (SEB) fosters research and training that leads to better understanding of how social, behavioural, political, economic, and health system factors affect TDR disease patterns and disease control efforts.



RATIONALE FOR SEB RESEARCH

In general, social, political and economic factors are central to the spread and persistence of infectious diseases. In the majority of cases, the performance of health systems in protecting the most vulnerable populations from infectious diseases falls far short of optimal. Basic and strategic SEB research work is designed to generate new knowledge about the determinants of communicable disease emergence and persistence, as well as opportunities for improved disease control.

RESEARCH AREAS

SEB supports research and trains researchers addressing issues of trans-disease and global importance. It encourages research that contributes to identifying needs, opportunities and innovations for improved disease control and prevention of the following diseases: African trypanosomiasis, Chagas disease, Dengue, Leishmaniasis, Leprosy, Lymphatic Filariasis, Malaria, Onchocerciasis, Schistosomiasis and Tuberculosis.

Current SEB research areas:

1. Inequalities of access
2. Global change and infectious disease
3. Policy processes
4. Gender-sensitive interventions
5. Community dynamics
6. Conflict and infectious disease
7. Ethics of social research and biotechnology
8. Research methods

1. Inequalities of access

Inequality affects the health status of individuals as well as populations. Understanding and learning ways to alleviate inequality and poverty will reduce overall mortality, morbidity and disability caused by infectious diseases in poor and marginalized populations. SEB research in TDR is focused on understanding and remedying inequalities of access to proven therapies, prevention and health information.

2. Global change and infectious disease

Social, economic and political change and globalization may offer potential gain for certain population groups. For others it can mean more inequality, more marginalization and more poverty. SEB is committed to promoting research that sheds light on the impact of globalization and other forms of social change on disease persistence, emergence and resurgence. Such research can help define and illustrate health policy options in a rapidly globalizing world.

3. Policy processes

Solving public health problems caused by infectious diseases requires a sustained delivery of a complex array of public and private goods. Health systems have a key role to play in this process, and the development of health systems should be based on sound research. SEB-supported health policy and systems research is important to determine the impact of policies on health service delivery and utilization and on infectious disease epidemiology.



4. Gender-sensitive interventions

Gender roles and responsibilities impact on both disease patterns and the effectiveness of prevention and control. Men and women experience different exposure and susceptibility to disease. Gender inequality is related to differential access to prevention and control measures and to use of the health care system. The SEB Steering Committee's focus on gender seeks to identify and address gender-specific health needs, barriers to health care and possibilities for improved disease prevention and control.

5. Community dynamics

Community-level factors, and their social, economic and political context impacting on infectious diseases, are fundamental to understanding how communities manage their health and well-being. SEB promotes research elucidating how community dynamics impact on infectious disease control efforts.



6. Conflict and infectious disease

War, civil unrest and other forms of political conflict have negative effects on communities and health services. The breakdown in local infrastructure allows resurgence of previously controlled diseases and emergence of new ones. Insight into the effects of conflict and violence on tropical disease control creates possibilities for planning and management of these diseases in situations of instability and crisis. The Committee is particularly concerned to examine how vulnerabilities to conflict can be reduced and resilience by both communities and health systems can be bolstered.



7. Ethics of social research and biotechnology

Research ethics in resource-poor settings are relatively overlooked, yet should be a critically important part of contemporary ethical debate. Ethical issues relevant to social research in development extend beyond the rights of individuals into the impact of research at the level of society. For example, the possible future release of genetically modified vector mosquitoes into local communities will create important ethical issues at the population and community levels. Research that explores ethical integrity in these areas is encouraged.

8. Research methods

SEB research matters necessitate multi-level, cross-disciplinary approaches to health research. Theoretical and methodological approaches to infectious disease control, developed in disciplines such as medical anthropology, health economics, social medicine and medical sociology, medical geography and political economy of health are useful in this area. SEB supports the exploration of new ways of applying and integrating these methodologies in tropical disease control and health systems research.



WHO CAN APPLY FOR FUNDING?

Scientists from all countries, especially those where TDR diseases are endemic, are eligible for research grants. Collaborative research efforts are encouraged.

Full details of research proposal requirements and deadlines are available in the social research area of the TDR website:

www.who.int/tdr/topics/social-research/



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