

Asia-Pacific Regional Directors' Meeting

15&16 December 2008, Vientiane, Laos

Monday, December 15th

Participants (see annex 1)

Session 1: Introduction to Institut Pasteur Regional Network – Chair: Paul Brey

The meeting objectives:

- improve collaboration capacities within the IP network by exchange of information on activities, future development according to the technical capabilities of each institute.
- interactions with regional partners to achieve novel and synergistic collaborations in the areas of scientific research and public health

Discussion after Session 1

Messages:

- Partners would like to have a clearer idea on the exchange of capacities, material and knowledge within the Institut Pasteur International Network and how they are sustained and further developed.
- The emphasis was placed on the importance of opening the IP network to external collaborations in the region. Some examples were provided: industrial production of Rapid Diagnostic Tests for leptospirosis (IPNC); students/lecturers exchange for teaching and training activities (Harvard, HKU IP).
- Stephane Rousseau (ADB) pointed out that a particular field of interest for his organization is the surveillance and tracking of counterfeit drugs. It was agreed that this subject is of major importance as it has critical public health consequences. However, it was mentioned that relatively little expertise in analysis/detection of counterfeit drugs lies in the IP Network.
- Chris Oxenford,(WHO), remarked that he regretted the absence of a real mechanism to get to know which group, institution is doing what and where in the region. This could possibly be addressed by the use or creation of a repository of information, and by a more systematic use of National Laboratory Plans of respective countries, which could be further used e.g. to communicate laboratory needs to funding institutions.

Session 2: Learning about other regional networks and activities (presentation of external partners)– Chair: Dr Ulf Nehrbass,

Discussion session: (animator, Roberto Bruzzone) Regional Networks and Activities and possible venues for interaction

REMARKS MADE DURING THE SESSION:

- Synergies between different programs are important: what should be improved is **communication and exchange** between these programs to be more effective and have a broader reach.

How to enhance communication? The following propositions were made:

- Create newsletter, communication forum, repository, website, information should be shared in a structured way.
 - Create a multinational scientific association, to bring together scientific actors and create a database of regional scientific actors and their functions, and to provide information underlining the interesting and importance of the various projects.
 - Create a forum on information sharing (per scientific topic?)
 - Conduct a survey of already existing mechanisms to improve communication and to evaluate how this could be implemented
- The presentations identified existing synergies but also some overlapping and difficulties shared **between 3 distinct entities**: governing bodies (i.e., MoH, WHO), technical assistance/research institutions and networks (IP, Oxford/Wellcome, US CDC, and funding/granting agencies (i.e., ADB, Wellcome Trust, World Bank, AFD...)).

The main difficulties identified were the existence of “different agendas” between these 3 entities, especially between technical assistance/research facilities and funding institutions, weak coordination of activities by national governments, and a paucity of information sharing, both on scientific activities and funding opportunities.

In this respect, private funding initiatives (Global Fund, GAVI, Gates Foundation, Rockefeller foundation...) could also be invited **to future meetings**, despite the fact that they too may have “different agendas”. Nevertheless, it was agreed upon that bringing the all “actors” of the various groups together already creates an environment conducive to improve communication and understanding. Various coordination settings could be set up, from loose association through

annual meetings (key for improving personal relationships seen as key elements for triggering collaboration) to more formalized coordination with WHO support (major undertaking). In addition, a common research topic could also serve as a starting point for dialogue/interaction.

The **animal sector** should be more included in the different projects. Animal Health Institutes/Centers should be included from the start. It should be made clear that both sectors (animal health and human health) fight the same battles and speak the same language. The international funding agencies should for example include animal and human sectors in their calls for projects. WHO is trying to address the integration of animal health through a FETP training programs for veterinarians. It was noted that some Network Institute's such as IP Cambodia, HKU-Centre Pasteur have already integrated the animal sector into their studies; furthermore, the future IP Laos will also address zoonotic disease in collaboration with the Lao National Centre for Animal Health.

Tuesday, December 16th

Session 3: Regional Programs and tech platforms – Chair: Dr Marc Jouan

Improvement of collaboration = need to plan for the coming 2 – 5 years and to apply for appropriate funding

Existing regional programs such as SISEA have already developed a modular approach and work packages that can be applied for either a new project or for the extension of an existing project. A modular financial approach concept should also be further developed. This would allow to fund the extension of specific activities once a project has come to an end.

Network projects must take into account the differences in lab capacities and training needs of each of the IPs.

Networking can and should be part of the goals of a regional project.

The regional dimension of support to decision/policy making is currently lacking in ongoing programs – even if they may exist to some extent at national level (MoH). Although it remains a challenge, we should explore how the results of future programs can influence policy not only at the national level, but also at the regional level.

Partnerships with external partners can be developed independently by each IP, even within a network program (ex SISEA-IPS – Chinese partners)

2 key points for improving regional cooperation in each country:

1) Find common objectives and defining which information is to be shared; 2) Harmonization between protocols, inclusion criteria, sample collection methodology etc., This has been difficult to implement, but it is truly an achievement of our regional programs because it provides quality assurance and long lasting capacity building.

For the selection of a new regional programs we need to identify the following challenges to addressed:

- common challenge in the region
- medical needs
- severe mortality / complications
- gap in understanding
- feasible in terms of resources
- sufficient concern

Research Program Topics mentioned: Dengue, Encephalitis, Foot and mouth disease (IP HCMC), flaviviruses as a group (IPS), molecular epidemiology of recent dengue strains (NIHE), syndrome approach (IPS), hemorrhagic syndrome (IPNC)

Dengue points made:

- on the increase in Vietnam
- most research is focusing on vaccine development – little else than vector control to control the disease. There are many challenges for sustainable vector control. So there is space for research.
- on the other hand, little advancement in the past 15 years – difficult to be innovative/new
- IP NC can contribute with good sentinel network, meteorological data, good entomological capacity, there is a specific type of transmission in NC.
- a more systematic approach to dengue can be taken with diagnosis/drug discovery/host-cell interaction – the ongoing work is mainly looking at vaccine/industrial approach
- interaction with other flaviviruses could be investigated (but there is a risk to lose focus)
- looking into the syndrome may give a wider perspective than only looking at dengue
- potential donors (PDVI for cohort studies, Wellcome Trust)
- exists a list with identified gaps in research on dengue established by WHO – may lead to funding facilitation

Decision: 3 working groups on 1 potential topic to identify Priorities, Interests and Capacities in the network

Important to make an inventory of existing activities in the region and within IP network inside or outside Asia, to identify added value of the network and funding opportunities

WG DENGUE: Leader Ulf Nehrbass (IPK) – together with Myrielle Dupont (IPNC), Juliet Bryant (NCLE-SISEA), Huong Vi Thi Hu Que (IP-HCMC) and Philippe Buchy (IPC) will send dengue research priorities established by WHO. Meeting in Korea within 6 months to discuss and decide

WG ENCEPHALITIS: Leader Vincent Deubel (IPS) – agenda should be sent within 1 month (deadline 16th January)

WG FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE: Leader Pr Huu (IP HCMC) – agenda should be sent within 1 month (deadline 16th January)

Questions remaining to be answered:

- frequency of regular meetings (annual ?) – frame for it (scientific conference, as a satellite meeting ? better in small group ?)

Meeting conclusions

The Asia Pacific regional directors' meeting is the third in a series of regional meetings in Africa, Europe conducted earlier this year. One of the most salient features of the Asia meeting was the invitation of numerous external partners. This was considered by all participants (RIIP and Partners), as an extremely positive feature of the meeting. Although there was some initial reluctance on the part of some regional IP institutes and partners as to what this “joint” meeting could achieve, it was clear from the ensuing discussions during the meeting that all participants considered this as an opportunity to collaborate together and share important information. Although the processes of setting up “inter-network” collaborations and efficient information sharing are not yet in place this can be further explored over time. The attending stakeholder/donor community (WHO, ADB, AFD, etc.) found this new “open-door” policy of the IP network a very encouraging “step forward” because it is the exact policy these institutions are trying to promote! Furthermore, it was noted how the regional IPs have progressed and pulled together over the past 4 years. This true “networking” spirit was attributed to a much more collegial environment due to the seminal regional directors' meeting in Hong Kong 5 Dec 2004 and to the subsequent regional research programs and meetings.

Finally, the meeting allowed the genesis of a new regional program on DENGUE fever, a public health scourge afflicting the Asia-Pacific region. Dr. Ulf Nehrbass has accepted to spearhead this new program and to sponsor an organizational meeting in Seoul in early 2009.