

MWANZA MEDICAL RESEARCH CENTRE WILL BE 20 YEARS OLD IN OCTOBER 2000

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As the National Institute for Medical Research (NIMR) will be celebrating its twentieth anniversary in October this year, Mwanza Medical Research Centre (MMRC) as one of its constituent centres (formerly known as the East African Institute for Medical Research - EAIMR) reflects on its achievements and future direction. At the time of NIMR establishment, MMRC inherited not only the physical infrastructure of the former EAIMR but also a paltry of human-ware in the form of three scientists and technicians each. Currently the Centre diagnosis and treatment of STDs on the transmission of HIV; and the District approach to the control of the HIV epidemic.

These achievements have been made possible through collaborations between MMRC and local and foreign Institutions. Local institutions, which have played tremendous a part in this collaboration include: The Ministries of Health and Education and Culture through their respective departments in Mwanza Region, Bugando Medical Centre (BMC), the African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF) and The National AIDS Control Programme (NACP). International collaborating Institutions include: Goterborg University, Sweden; Hanover Children's Hospital, Hanover, Germany; Danish Bilharziasis Laboratory (DBL), Denmark; University of Oxford, UK; London School of

Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), UK; The Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), The Netherlands; The Institute of Tropical Medicine, Berlin, Germany; and The Tropical Institute, Antwerp, Belgium. This collaboration might not have achieved much without a concerted financial support from the following institutions: The special Programme for Tropical Diseases Research of the World Health Organisation (WHO/TDR); The European Commission (EC); The Netherlands Government; The Swedish Agency for Research Co-operation (SAREC); Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA); and the Wellcome Trust. These Institutions have contributed significantly not only in terms of research funding but also in terms of research capability strengthening by funding training programmes.

As the Centre progressively expands its research activities into new areas, it also maintains its work on schistosomiasis. Among the notable activities on schistosomiasis research included: the hatching kit

(where intestinal schistosomiasis could be diagnosed by direct observation of miracidia), anti snail (molluscicidal) activity of plants e.g *Swartzia madagascariensis*, ultrasonographic assessment of schistosomiasis morbidity and schistosomiasis morbidity control. The Centre has also conducted studies on spatial distribution of intestinal helminths in primary school children in Magu district of Mwanza Region.

Currently the Centre has four ongoing projects on schistosomiasis. The first is assessing the impact of micronutrient supplementation on treatment of urinary schistosomiasis with Praziquantel, and is being carried out in collaboration with the Institute of Tropical Medicine, Berlin, Germany. The second project is assessing the impact of schistosomiasis control by a combination of chemotherapy and health education, and chemotherapy alone. This project is funded by WHO/TDR and is done in collaboration with the Hanover Children's Hospital, Hanover, Germany. The third project is evaluating the applicability of antigen assays for diagnosis of schistosomiasis in field conditions. This EC funded project is a multi-centre study involving Goterborg University, Sweden; DBL, Denmark; Leiden University, The Netherlands; The Institute of Parasitic Diseases, Shanghai, China; and Blair Research Institute, Zimbabwe. The fourth project is looking into the feasibility of undertaking action-oriented health education in primary schools. The project is funded by DANIDA and is carried out in collaboration with DBL and the Royal Danish School of Educational studies, Denmark.

Similarly the Centre has three on-going projects on Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) including STDs/HIV. The first is done by Tanzania Netherlands Support on AIDS (TANESA) in collaboration with MMRC, BMC, the Mwanza region's departments of health, education, planning and community development with funds from the Netherlands government. The second project is assessing the impact of a teacher led and peer assisted SRH education programme in primary schools on the transmission of HIV and other STDs, prevalence of unintended pregnancy and on sexual behaviour. The project is funded by EC and is done by MMRC in collaboration with LSHTM, AMREF, the ministries of Health and Education and Culture. The third project is assessing the impact of syphilis on the outcome of pregnancy and the evaluation of syphilis screening

strategies for the reduction of adverse pregnancy outcomes. The project is done in collaboration with LSHTM, AMREF, BMC and the Mwanza Regional Medical Office and is funded by the Wellcome Trust.

The Centre has also started studies on diarrhoeal diseases and malaria. The study on diarrhoea diseases is looking at the epidemiology of rotavirus infections in underfive years in different parts of lake zone and is being done in collaboration with the Medical University of South Africa (MEDUNSA). The studies on malaria are addressing issues regarding the impact of malaria on anaemia in underfives, quality of malaria management at the health centre level and susceptibility of mosquito vectors of malaria to insecticides. The Centre has also initiated a study assessing the quality of medical diagnostic services in health facilities in the lake zone to guide the ongoing Health Sector Reform (HSR) in Tanzania.

The centre aims at expanding further its activities, so that it is able to fulfil all of NIMR's mandated objectives.

To achieve this, the Centre will continue in its endeavour to strengthen its research capacity, expand and strengthen its collaboration with both local institutions especially at district level, and institutions out of the country. The Centre will also strive to develop into a resource centre for the Lake zone. In order to achieve this, the Centre has to continue improving its capability in the current research areas, but also expand into other areas such as traditional medicine, HSR, and others. The Centre also needs to develop a strong communication system in order to be able to communicate efficiently with different parts of the country and abroad. To achieve all these the Centre will require a strong financial input. Therefore, the Centre will have to strengthen its ability to solicit funds both from within and outside the country, and also have an elaborate and transparent financial mechanism.

The playing field is too wide to play individually, let us all work together in order to improve the health of Tanzanians and beyond.