03. Strengthening Existing Capacities

DEVELOPING RESEARCH CAPACITY WITH REGIONAL PLATFORMS IN DISEASE ENDEMIC COUNTRIES.
DNDi works with partners in neglected disease-endemic countries and ensures their involvement in the R&D process through technology transfer and through a global network of collaborations, such as access to chemical diversity, establishment of discovery platforms, pharmaceutical and clinical development, and connections to control programmes through the Leishmaniasis in East Africa Platform (LEAP) and HAT platforms in Africa, Founding Partners, and other existing networks in disease-endemic countries.

In addition, physical upgrading of facilities directly related to clinical trials is taking place within disease-endemic regions. Such capacity building may include the building and renovation of hospital wards, clinics, and health posts; renovation and re-equipping of clinical laboratories; and training of health service personnel with particular emphasis in building expertise in clinical trial methodology, Good Clinical Practice and Ethics, patient treatment and evaluation, and accurate diagnosis and follow-up by parasitology.

**LEISHMANIASIS EAST AFRICA PLATFORM (LEAP)**

LEAP, the Leishmaniasis East Africa Platform, is a regional clinical research network that brings together experts from leishmaniasis-endemic East African countries including Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, and Uganda. The platform incorporates partners from across the spectrum of clinical research and disease control organisations/institutions working in leishmaniasis in these countries.

LEAP serves to strengthen clinical research capacity, which is lacking in part due to the remoteness and geographic spread of the patients (most of whom are in the most impoverished regions of Africa). This platform also serves as a base for ongoing educational efforts.
Strengthening Existing Capacities

The HAT Platform - which was inaugurated in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo in 2005 - is a clinical research capacity strengthening network that brings together experts, clinicians, and researchers from trypanosomiasis-endemic countries or from neighbouring countries, as well as international clinical trial and HAT specialists.

The overall aim of the HAT Platform is to build and strengthen treatment methodologies and clinical trial capacity in HAT-endemic countries, so that new and promising interventions for this fatal disease can be rapidly and effectively evaluated, registered, and made available to the patients. The primary goals of the HAT Platform are to develop appropriate clinical trial methodologies for HAT, to overcome system challenges related to administrative and regulatory requirements, to strengthen clinical trial capacity (human resources, infrastructure, and equipment), and to share information and strengthen communications between endemic countries. Activities include an annual meeting, training workshops, and a quarterly newsletter.

The core partners of the HAT Platform consist of the national control programmes of the major endemic countries (Angola, DRC, Republic of Congo, North Sudan, South Sudan, and Uganda), DNDi, in collaboration with STI, facilitates the platform both financially and through general administrative and logistical support provided by the STI-DNDi Africa office in Kinshasa. Other partners of the platform include national and international research organisations, NGOs (such as MSF, Epicentre), and representatives of health ministries and regulatory authorities of other African countries.

THE HAT PLATFORM

Over 30 attendees from 9 countries were present at the 2nd annual HAT Platform meeting of in Nairobi, Kenya – September 2006.

A 'concrete' achievement: LEAP members and DNDi officials attend the inaugural ceremony of Africa’s first research and treatment centre for visceral leishmaniasis in Arba Minch, Ethiopia (February 2007).
PAN ASIAN NETWORK FOR NEGLECTED DISEASES (PAN4ND)

The objective of PAN4ND, which officially convened its first network meeting in Tokyo in May 2006, is to create a climate suitable for collaborative research on the identification of novel molecules that could be used as for neglected diseases. In its inaugural year, PAN4ND convened two network meetings to discuss current R&D to identify new bioactive molecules from natural substances and how best use standardized methodologies to generate and manage data that could be employed to prepare an investigational new drug. With members including research institutions from seven countries, PAN4ND also held a network training session in collaboration with the Central Drug Research Institute (CDRI).

By encouraging research collaboration between member institutes, PAN4ND seeks to maximize the potential for discovery of hits and leads from natural products for development as drugs for neglected diseases and will do so by:

- Linking natural products’ researchers and institutes as a collaborative network;
- Incorporating neglected diseases as part of our drug candidate screening programs;
- Standardizing screening methodologies against parasitic targets and other pathogens within the network.

Activities include an annual meeting, training workshops, development of a training manual, website, and a network newsletter.

For patients suffering from neglected diseases, the world has been asleep to their needs. These platforms are key elements in bridging gaps in the R&D pipeline so that they are better needs-adapted treatments in the future.