



## IMPROVING OPERATIONAL RESEARCH CAPACITY TO FIGHT DISEASES



Low and middle-income countries remain overburdened with infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria with high levels of maternal and child mortality. Unfortunately such countries also often lack the expertise to research therapies and policy measures to fight these diseases for themselves. Operational Research (OR) into strategies and interventions that improve health service delivery, provides evidence to influence policies to promote better public health.

In response, **DFID is providing £1m over three years (2011 to 2014) to the International Union Against TB and Lung Disease ([The Union](#))** to support the expansion of a capacity building programme in OR. The programme provides targeted training and mentoring support to improve the capacity of front line health practitioners in low income countries across Africa and Asia to carry out OR.

Capacity-building has long been recognised as important, but successes can be difficult. The Union took a particularly rigorous approach, putting applicants, who had to have a Masters' degree or equivalent, through a tough selection process. Ambitious milestones were set and participants could only pass if they produced a peer-reviewed paper. This design has resulted in high-quality research, which will have a lasting impact.

**DFID is supporting the International Union Against TB to develop skills in conducting and publishing OR into interventions and tools to improve health service delivery.** Key features of the course are a modular approach, strong mentor support and the opportunity for participants to become future course mentors. The project is currently in the third and final year of receiving DFID support.

### Outputs

Since DFID support began in 2011 there have been **107 participants enrolled for training**. The 76 participants who have currently completed the training have collectively submitted 77 research articles to peer reviewed journals (of which 61 have currently been published). Course participants have also written a

range of policy relevant research briefs, opinion and view point articles on a range of diseases such as TB, HIV and Diabetes. Over the last 3 years course participants have also gone on to deliver 25 OR courses to their fellow health professionals in their home organisation or country.

### Growing Capacity

Through the research outputs and increased OR capacity of course participants the project has been able to improve health programme performance and health service delivery that has directly improved the health of people in lower and middle income countries.

**There are many examples where participants have used their skills to bring about institutional change**, such as a research officer from a medical college in Fiji who secured his own funding and persuaded the management to start his own OR training programmes. Similarly two course participants in India set up the Centre for OR in Delhi which has published over 100 papers and is a major influence on the national TB Control Programme in India.

**OR carried out by participants has also directly impacted health policy.** For example, in Malawi research conducted by a course participant into medical records, led to the Health Ministry replacing a paper based system to monitor patients on antiretroviral treatment (ART) with an electronic system that now monitors 250,000 patients on ARTs

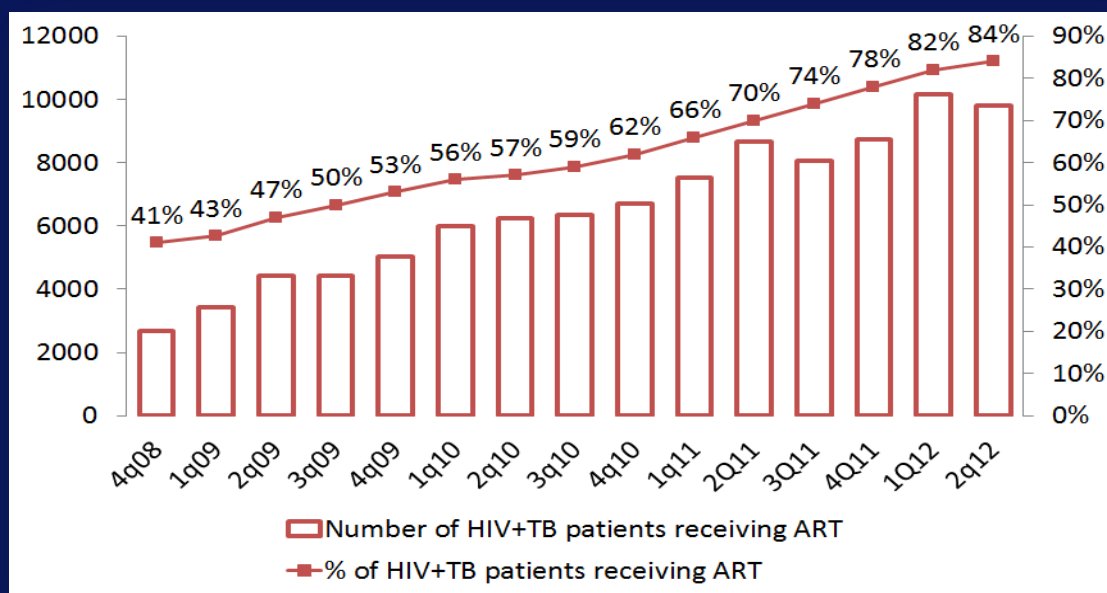
**The diagram below highlights a good example of improvements in monitoring and health**

**systems.** A course participant in India carried out research in 2010 that revealed all HIV-TB patients should receive ART irrespective of their CD4 blood count. The national health ministry introduced policy to this affect in 2011. Alongside a number of other interventions, such as intensified supervision, monitoring, regular review and patient support this has contributed to increased provision of treatments.

**Three years in, the programme has directly achieved some of the following outputs:**

- 107 Trained Researchers
- 77 Published Papers
- 25 OR Courses

**Number (%) of HIV- infected TB patients receiving ART during TB treatment in India 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2008 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2012**



Source: Indian National Quarterly TB Reports

## Next steps

Following a positive annual review by DFID in 2013, an independent evaluation has been commissioned to:

- Evaluate and quantify programme effectiveness, impacts and value for money
- Assess the possibility of scaling up the model or applying the course model in different sectors

## Further Information:

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The programme has submitted a concept note outlining potential options for future funding beyond the end of the current agreement in 2014. DFID is keen to continue its support and is reviewing the potential funding options.