

Editorial

Moving towards the end of the neglected in Ethiopia

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Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are a group of 20 diseases affecting more than one billion people globally [1]. NTDs have long been unnoticed in the health agenda. In November 2020, the World Health Assembly agreed on a new roadmap to prevent, control, and to eliminate NTDs worldwide [1]. It sets global targets and milestones aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 3.3, which calls for the end of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases epidemics by the end of 2030 [2].

Ethiopia has the third largest burden of NTDs in Africa [3], and it is going to launch its Third NTD Master Plan for the next five-years (2021–2025) targeting the prevention, control, elimination and eradication of 18 NTDs. In addition, the country’s national NTDs task force and the research advisory group have called for urgent operational research (OR) on NTDs [4].

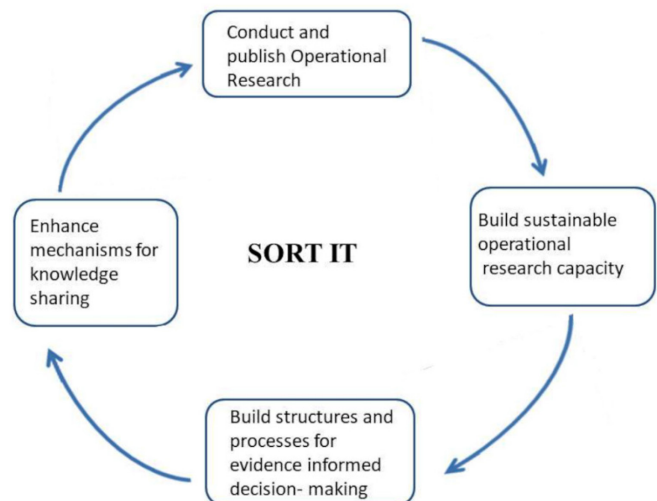
The Structured Operational Research and Training Initiative (SORT IT), a global partnership coordinated by the Special Program for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR) hosted at the World Health Organization (WHO), has supported several countries on OR [5]. Through a set of quality controlled trainings, SORT IT helps countries to conduct OR around their own priorities, building sustainable OR capacity, and making evidence-informed decisions. This novel initiative teaches the practical skills to conduct and publish research as a result of three training modules which includes protocol writing (Module 1), quality assured data capture and analysis (Module 2), manuscript writing for publication (Module 3), and subsequently forwards evidences to policy and practice (Figure 1). Since 2009, SORT IT has been scaled up to

93 countries and enrolled over thousands of participants from various domains of public health [6].

A first cycle of SORT IT focusing on NTDs in Ethiopia was successfully conducted between 2018 and 2019 in Gondar, as a joint initiative among TDR, the University of Gondar and the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) in Antwerp. Thirteen studies on various NTDs were completed during three SORT IT modules, covering eight prioritized NTDs [7]. Moreover SORT IT for Neglected Tropical Diseases control and elimination program in Ethiopia called for further action and planned a new cycle of trainings.

The second cycle of SORT IT on NTDs has taken place in Addis Ababa in March 2020 at the Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI) due to a collaborative initiative among EPHI, TDR, ITM and various national

Figure 1. Structured Operational Research and Training Initiative (SORT IT) life-cycle (partially modified from TDR 2019 [9]).



and international partners. This new cycle has focused as well on snake bite, which has recently been added to the list of NTDs [8].

Both Ethiopian SORT IT initiatives have successfully brought together more than twenty-five national and international institutions to strengthen a global partnerships and joint efforts to prevent, control and eliminate NTDs. It implies this initiative helps achieving the global target set for NTDs through a one health approach, since NTDs are directly or/and indirectly influenced by human and animal factors through a shared environment. As an institute comprising Public Health Research, Public Health Emergency Management and Response, Laboratory Systems, a National Data Management Centre and a National Public Health Training Centre, EPHI was an ideal host for SORT IT. We hope that SORT IT initiative will continue to bring more chances through mobilizing resources and capacities together to build, sustain, and expand this initiative to more NTDs affected countries.

Disclaimer

The views presented in this article are those of the author and may not necessarily reflect those of his affiliated institutions.

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