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FRANCE

Implementation of article X of the 1972 Convention

France's policy on scientific cooperation in biology and medicine and in the field of health

The purpose of the present document is to illustrate how France is meeting its commitments under article X of the 1972 Convention. It gives an outline of France's cooperation policy in the field of health, in particular in combating communicable diseases and in the area of scientific cooperation in biology and medicine.

I. FRANCE'S COOPERATION POLICY IN THE FIELD OF HEALTH

1. Access to basic health services for as many as possible

Development cooperation, in particular in the field of health, is a long-standing commitment of France. Coverage of the essential needs of populations and access to health services for as many people as possible are seen as both an impetus for development and the goal of such development. Access for all to health care is one of the priority goals in the fight against poverty and inequality.

In the field of health, France advocates a comprehensive and integrated approach to the organization of health care. This approach comprises three elements:

AIDS and communicable diseases: For almost 20 years the fight against AIDS has been a key element of France's activities in this area. More than a quarter of bilateral funding in the field of health has been focused on this sector, representing an average annual contribution of 100 million francs (excluding multilateral assistance). This mobilization against AIDS is part of a broader programme to combat communicable diseases, focusing on AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria (which three pathologies account for 5 million deaths per year), as well as on blindness-causing diseases and trypanosomiasis;

Strengthening health systems: The fight against communicable diseases is integrated into a broader framework of health care systems. This approach involves the strengthening of national public health policies, the development of human resources (management and training for different health professions) and a drugs policy designed to improve access to drugs and develop the use of generic and essential drugs;

Health funding: The third element of this approach is to support the funding of health systems. Accordingly, the French cooperation programme endeavours, while taking due account of local contribution capacities, to ensure the reliability of these health systems.

2. Development assistance resources in the field of health

France is one of the leading contributors of development assistance. French official development assistance amounts to 29.7 billion francs. Official assistance measures 0.33 per cent of the country's gross national product (GNP), and in this regard France leads the seven most industrialized countries.

(a) French Ministry of Foreign Affairs resources in the field of health

In 2000, activities conducted by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the field of health amounted to a total of almost 500 million francs, excluding multilateral cooperation.

This sum is divided among activities conducted under the Priority Solidarity Fund, with 166.2 million francs, to support projects or programmes conducted over several years in the "zone de solidarité prioritaire" (priority solidarity area), comprising 61 countries; specialized technical assistance abroad, with 202 million francs; and training, research and support for non-governmental organizations and local authorities, with 119.2 million francs.

Specialized technical assistance

This type of assistance is something peculiar to French development assistance. Local health systems currently benefit from the expertise of more than 350 "coopérants", or technical assistants. In most cases, these are public health experts posted to the Ministry of Health to support local teams. Various professions are represented: 45 per cent are medical officers; 24 per cent hospital doctors; 9 per cent pharmacists and biologists; 6 per cent nurses; 5 per cent directors of institutions; and 3 per cent engineers. With this major undertaking, France helps ensure the rigorous implementation of projects and participates in local capacity building. Multilateral institutions also benefit from these efforts in the form of support or advice at the local level.

Strengthened cooperation with multilateral institutions

France contributes to the funding of multilateral development agencies conducting major programmes in the field of health, in particular, the World Bank and the European Development Fund. It also makes contributions to United Nations specialized agencies, including the World

Health Organization (WHO), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), to a total amount of more than 300 million francs per year.

Over the last few years, France has also developed cooperation with multilateral agencies on specific programmes. Thus, in the effort to combat communicable diseases, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs is providing funding of 7 million francs for the establishment of a WHO office in Lyon, complementing support provided by WHO, the City of Lyon and the private sector (Mérieux Foundation) (see box below).

(b) French Development Agency (AFD), an additional asset

AFD is a specialized financial institution that offers a full range of financial assistance, from donations to loans. In the field of health, AFD is responsible for providing assistance to fund infrastructure. Its commitments amounted to a total of 35.4 million francs in 1999 and 30 million francs in 2000. New projects are currently being studied in addition to those put forward by the Priority Solidarity Fund.

WHO Office in Lyon

The main mission of the new WHO Office in Lyon is to strengthen the capacities of developing countries, so that they are better equipped to address epidemics and emerging infections, and, in this way, to contribute to global health security. The Lyon Office is engaged in the technical training of experts from across the world involved in combating epidemics. On their return to their respective countries, these experts are able to contribute more effectively to the rapid screening of the main epidemic and emerging diseases.

WHO is contributing to the strengthening of international security by facilitating the rapid screening of epidemics and by helping disseminate information available at the national level. The WHO Office in Lyon will play an essential role in setting up a network of national laboratories of developing countries, with the use of modern means of communication. The choice of the regional capital Lyon as the location for this office is justified by the city's excellent reputation in the fields of medicine and biotechnology and by the close collaboration that already exists between WHO and the scientific community of Lyon, evidenced by the existence of several WHO collaborating centres in the city. The presence of the Marcel Mérieux Foundation, a long-standing WHO partner in public health activities in developing countries, and the proximity of Lyon to Geneva are also important factors underlying the decision to locate the office in Lyon. Finally, WHO is already present in the city through its International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC).

II. COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF BIOLOGICAL AND MEDICAL RESEARCH

1. Hosting foreign researchers

France attaches great importance to international cooperation in the field of the life sciences. French biological and medical research laboratories host an increasing number of foreign researchers involved in cooperation programmes set up by ministries, research agencies or universities and other bodies. Every year some 6,500 foreign researchers undergo training at doctorate and post-doctorate level in the life sciences. The so-called “laboratoires à régimes restrictifs” (restricted laboratories)¹ in the fields of biology, biomedicine and microbiology receive a certain number of these trainees.

More than 3,000 post-doctoral researchers from other countries are received each year in non-academic biological and medical research laboratories, such as the French Institute of Health and Medical Research (INSERM), the life sciences department of the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), the National Institute for Agricultural Research (INRA) and the Pasteur Institute in Paris. The cost to the laboratories themselves of hosting these researchers is estimated at over 300 million francs.

2. Research institutes devoted to development

The French Development Research Institute (IRD) is specifically devoted to development issues, with an extensive range of activities in the fields of environment, agriculture, health and society. IRD is represented in a large number of countries and has 1,600 permanent staff members, 200 of whom work in the health sector. Its programmes in this area are concerned with such issues as nutrition, vector-borne diseases and AIDS in tropical areas.

The role of the International Cooperation Centre of Agricultural Research for Development (CIRAD) is to contribute to the rural development of tropical and sub-tropical countries through research, experimentation, activities related to training in France and abroad and the dissemination of scientific and technical information. It has a staff of 1,800.

3. Pasteur Institute and international cooperation: a model framework

The Pasteur Institute is a private foundation serving the public interest that was created in 1887 by Louis Pasteur. Its role is to contribute to the prevention and treatment of diseases through scientific research, teaching and public health activities.

Since its creation, the Pasteur Institute has occupied a central position in international relations. In 2000, it hosted more than 400 foreign students and trainees, representing 65 different nationalities and hailing, for the most part, from developing countries. The most striking feature of the Institute’s relations with other countries is the role it plays as the centre of an international network of Pasteur institutes, linking 20 different institutes situated in five continents, in such cities as Bangui, Phnom-Penh, St. Petersburg, Tehran and others. The scientific committee of the Pasteur Institute network is responsible for strengthening scientific cooperation. The network is involved in the transfer of knowledge. It encourages and

promotes the broadest possible exchanges on such topics as pathogenic agents and biotechnological expertise and equipment, by employing its scientific potential in particular for the benefit of developing countries. French State funding for the Pasteur Institute amounted to 335 million francs in 2000, representing 31.4 per cent of its current resources.

The information contained in this document does not claim to be exhaustive. The activities and areas of involvement of public authorities - at both national and regional levels - and of civil society are so diverse that it is not possible to make a full list of all the players and, still less, of all the activities that fall within the scope of article X of the 1972 Convention.

Note

¹ “Laboratoires à régimes restrictifs” are those for which prior authorization must be obtained before foreign researchers may be admitted, owing to the sensitive nature of the material studied, in accordance with current national legislation and pursuant to article III of the 1972 Convention.
