

## TDR's Portfolio Prioritization Model

### Introduction and scope

This document explains how TDR, the UNICEF / UNDP / World Bank / WHO Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases, conducts the review, prioritization and selection of proposed projects in line with its strategy and core values.<sup>1</sup> This helps us to achieve the highest impact and value-for-money.

The prioritization model is part of a broader framework of portfolio development, budget planning and monitoring and scientific review processes as described in the Performance Framework<sup>2</sup> and as illustrated in Figure 1. It is also coherent with the TDR Memorandum of Understanding.<sup>3</sup> Other complementary aspects are described in standard operating procedures or terms of reference for the Programme's governing and advisory bodies.

The Performance Framework is used not only by our staff but also by a broad range of stakeholders to assess the Programme's strategic and technical relevance and contribution towards its vision and mission. It includes reference to various inputs into the prioritization and selection process.

### Objectives

The main objectives of TDR's prioritization and selection model and standard operating procedures are to:

1. Facilitate the development of a competitive, innovative, strategically oriented and balanced portfolio;
2. Foster accountability in the prioritization of projects;
3. Ensure coherence and collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including WHO regional offices and disease control programmes; and
4. Support a consistent, credible and transparent process of prioritization.

### Principles for portfolio prioritization

As a matter of principle, members of our advisory groups and all external reviewers must not have any conflict of interest in conducting their review and providing recommendations for prioritization and selection of projects and their related expected results. The principles of each strategic plan guide the way TDR builds its portfolio and decides on which expected results to pursue.

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<sup>1</sup> TDR's core values referred to are: gender and socioeconomic equity, quality, sustainability of outcomes, value-for-money, and effective partnerships

<sup>2</sup> Performance Framework 2024–2029

<sup>3</sup> TDR Memorandum of Understanding. <https://tdr.who.int/governance>

TDR contributed to the development of WHO's guidance for WHO staff on research priority setting<sup>4</sup> and therefore our approach to managing this is reflected therein.

## Prioritization criteria

When reviewing the various proposed expected results to make recommendations on prioritization (ranking) and selection, the set of criteria below is considered by internal (to TDR) and external reviewers and decision-makers (individuals or committees).

### Relevance

- A positive impact can be made in the prevention, control and treatment of infectious diseases of poverty.
- Responds to regional and country needs and is coherent with global efforts.
- TDR has specific advantages in implementing this expected result.
- Level of value for money is acceptable.
- Promotes geographic, socioeconomic and gender equity, reaches the most disadvantaged and respects the environment.

### Scientific/technical merit

- Fills a critical knowledge gap.
- Responds to a need for capacity strengthening.
- Brings novelty and innovation.
- Encourages a transdisciplinary, multisectoral approach.
- Methodology is scientifically sound.
- Maximizes the link between research and capacity building.

### Feasibility

- Has a strategic, long-term benefit and demonstrates good potential for sustainability.
- Engages with control programmes and communities.
- Level of resources required is within TDR's limits.
- Timeframe is realistic.

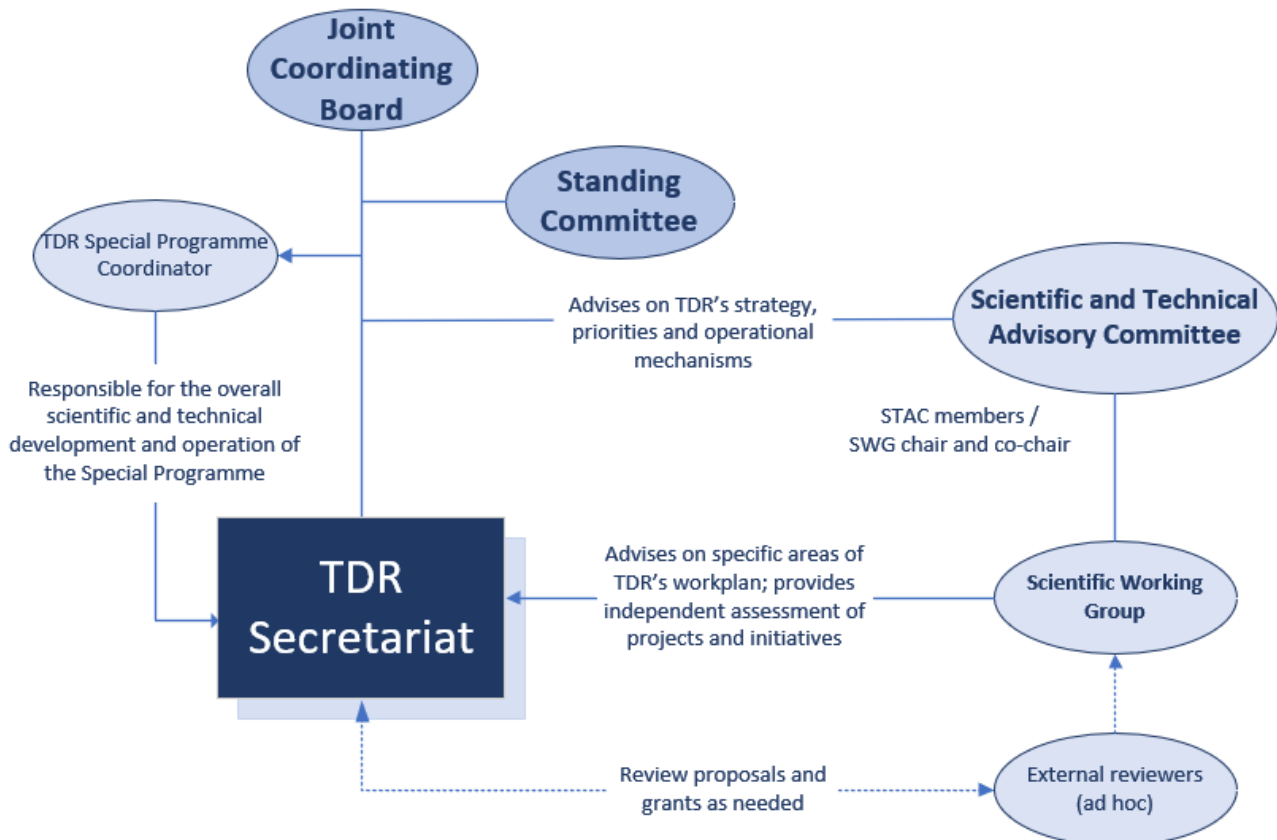
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<sup>4</sup> A systematic approach for undertaking a research priority-setting exercise: guidance for WHO staff <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/334408>

## Structures supporting the Programme's portfolio prioritization

As TDR's governing bodies, the Joint Coordinating Board, Standing Committee<sup>5</sup> and Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee<sup>6</sup> function according to the Memorandum of Understanding, as well as in line with their own established procedures and terms of reference.

Figure 1 – Structures supporting portfolio prioritization in TDR



<sup>5</sup> Standing Committee Operating Procedures. [https://tdr.who.int/docs/governance/sc\\_sops](https://tdr.who.int/docs/governance/sc_sops)

<sup>6</sup> STAC and SWG terms of reference. [https://tdr.who.int/docs/governance/stac\\_swg\\_tor](https://tdr.who.int/docs/governance/stac_swg_tor)

## Processes and mechanisms

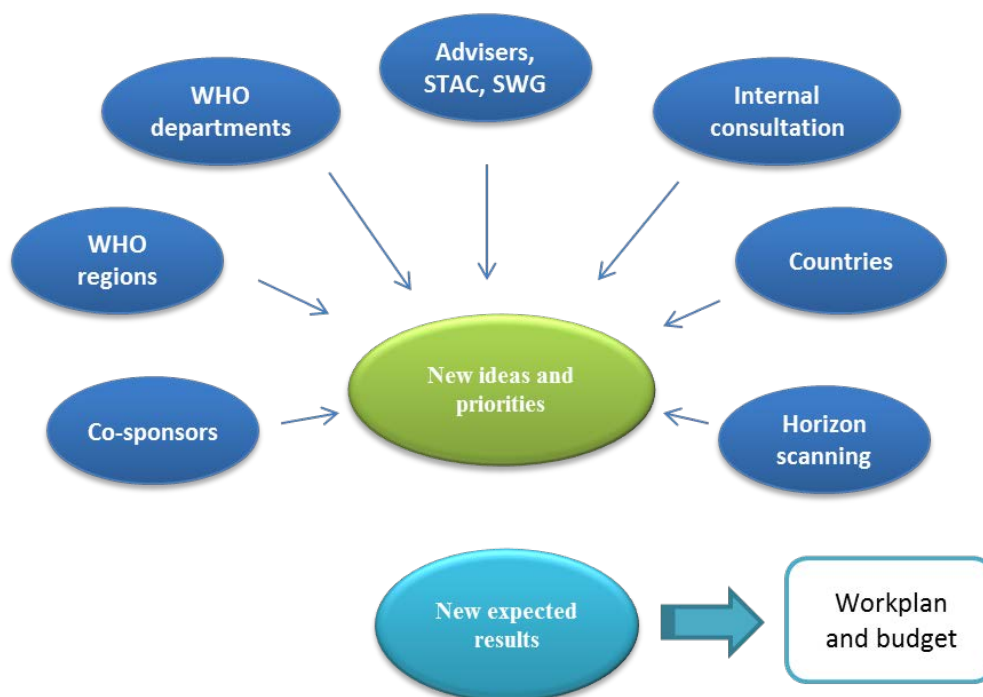
Portfolio development and prioritization processes are carried out in line with the current strategic plan and within an approved budget ceiling (or planned cost).

### Identifying health research needs

Regular consultations and scanning the horizon of health research needs at global level are the basis of the development and renewal of our portfolio, to keep it relevant and innovative. Valuable input that feeds new and innovative ideas comes from consultations that take place at various levels, both internally and externally (see Figure 2), with:

- Staff: Programme-level portfolio reviews, science forums, lunchtime seminars (twice a month), informal brainstorming sessions, learning platform;
- External advisers: Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) meetings, Scientific Working Group (SWG) meetings, other ad hoc committee meetings, discussions, TDR alumni network;
- Co-sponsors;
- The Standing Committee and Joint Coordinating Board;
- WHO disease control programmes: joint meetings, presentations, workshops, lunchtime seminars;
- Other WHO departments: attending meetings, informal discussions, workshops, review synthesis reports / WHO research priorities;
- WHO regional offices: regular teleconferences, an annual meeting, sharing draft workplans, joint projects (e.g. impact grants);
- Countries: input from grant applications analysed, feedback from projects, collaboration with regional training centres, interns, stakeholder surveys, attending meetings on priorities; and
- Crowdsourcing ideas from communities.

Figure 2 - Consultations leading to the establishment of new initiatives



Once initiated, the life-cycle of an expected result is described in the next section, while the process of review as part of the workplan and budget is illustrated in Figure 3.

## Establishing priorities

Ideas gathered through consultations and other means are reviewed and prioritized internally and externally to gather input on their relevance, value and feasibility, to enable selection of those that are most desirable and to decide on their suitability and implementation priority.

### *Internally:*

- Ideas resulting from consultations and discussions are captured in databases. They are then screened based on the set of criteria above and expected results are developed by unit heads and project managers.

### *Externally:*

- The Scientific Working Group reviews and prioritizes proposed expected results, making recommendations to STAC and to the Secretariat.
- STAC reviews the proposed workplan and provides direction and recommendations to Director TDR for presentation to the Joint Coordinating Board (JCB).
- Further review and prioritization by the Scientific Working Group, STAC and ad hoc committees of internationally renowned experts may take place as the expected results are being implemented.

## Integrating expected results into the workplan and budget

Proposed expected results are part of our workplan and budget and follow the cycle in Figure 3. TDR's budget cycle covers periods of two years, with the process being aligned with the governing bodies' cycle of review, ensuring their full engagement in the development, approval and review/revision process. The process is iterative, each biennium representing an opportunity to review and make improvements to the expected results and workplan and to integrate new expected results.

STAC reviews the operations workplan (containing all expected results) and budget and makes recommendations on strategic directions for portfolio development and budget allocation by strategic priority area. The revised version is reviewed and endorsed by the Standing Committee, before being reviewed and approved by the JCB. The Scientific Working Group and ad hoc committees of experts provide further input and recommendations for prioritization at strategic priority area and project level.

To account for potential changes in the income level due to various factors, two budget and workplan scenarios are developed (one for base income and one for higher income). Having the projects and their expected results prioritized according to the two scenarios allows implementation at the actual level of income.

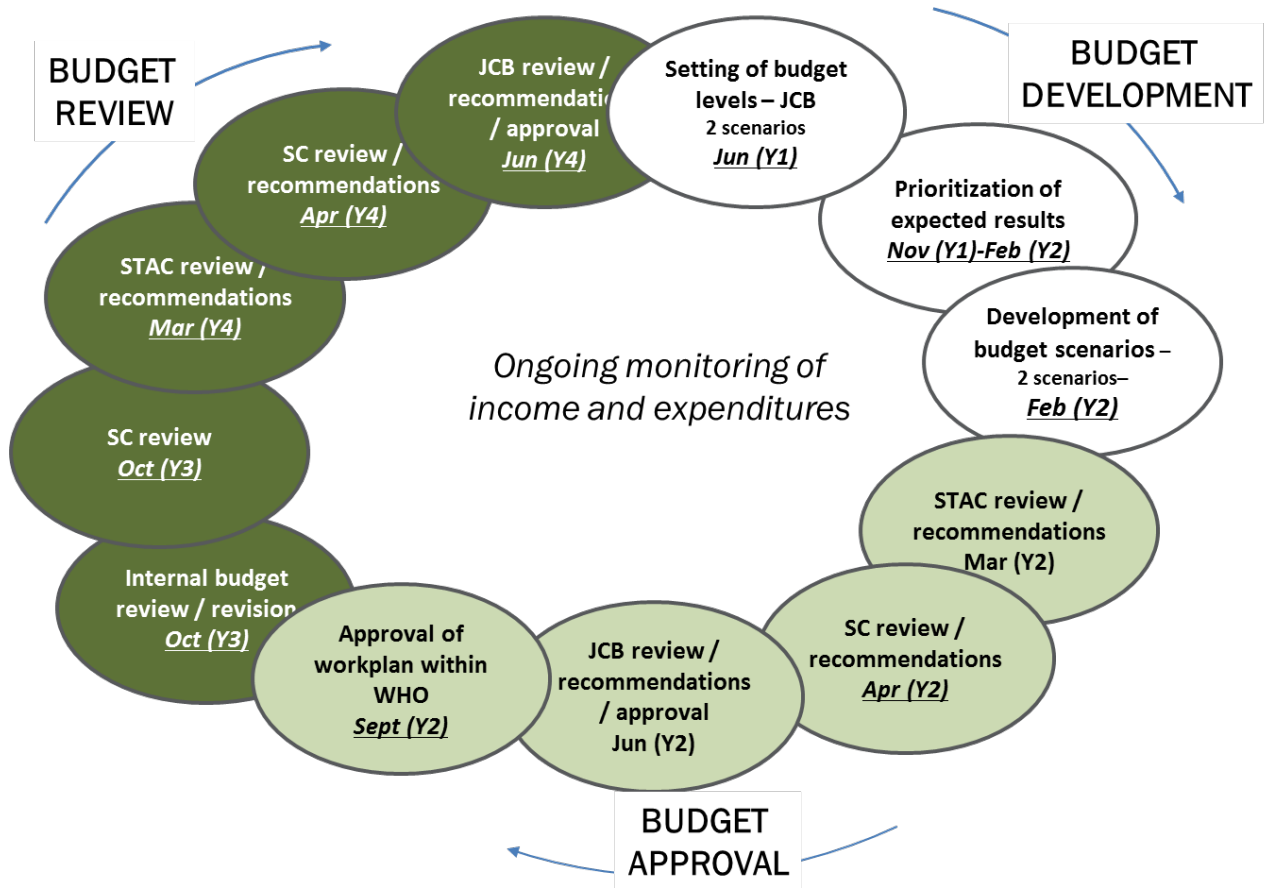
Any new designated funding needs to support implementation of the approved budget and workplan. Rising opportunities going beyond the approved budget/workplan are discussed with STAC and the Standing Committee, both of which need to endorse them before a formal agreement can be signed.

Activities funded through the Strategic Development Fund<sup>7</sup> are prioritized by the Director, according to TDR's strategic priorities. These activities take advantage of opportunities to develop the Programme's strategic plan, raise the profile of the Programme and explore new priority areas. They are reviewed in light of the prioritization criteria mentioned above and against specific selection criteria. The Director reports to STAC annually on development and implementation of the Fund and requests Chair STAC's assent before approving activities above US\$ 100 000.

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<sup>7</sup> Extract from the JCB36 report, June 2013: "Within the agreed budget, a Strategic Development Fund is proposed to be established to respond to new and arising needs and opportunities during the course of the biennium. This idea has been strongly supported by the Standing Committee and recommended by STAC."

Figure 3 - Overview of prioritization steps as part of TDR's budget and workplan cycle



## Standard operating procedures for proposed projects and expected results review and prioritization

Figure 4 provides step-by-step guidance on the prioritization of a new project and its expected results in chronological order. Steps are listed in sequential order.

Figure 4 - Portfolio prioritization steps

