WHO-TDR, the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM) in Antwerp and the University of Gondar, Ethiopia, invites applications from Ethiopia for the first Structured Operational Research Training Initiative (SORT IT) Course on Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) in Ethiopia, to be held in Gondar (Ethiopia).

This is a “SORT IT” course and is conducted under the umbrella of the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases at the World Health Organization (WHO-TDR). The Ethiopian course series will be led by ITM Antwerp, the University of Gondar and WHO/TDR and will be organised in collaboration with SORT IT partners.

SORT IT supports organisations, projects and countries to undertake operational research in accordance with their own priorities, develop adequate and sustainable operational research capacity, and create an organisational culture of policy and practice being informed by operational research, leading to improved programme performance. The initiative provides the practical skills needed to conduct and publish operational research and to foster evidence-informed decision making in public health. The course duration is 10–12 months with 3 modules with clear milestones and measurable targets. Participants go through the whole research process and complete the course with a defined product which is a peer-reviewed manuscript to be submitted for publication in peer-reviewed scientific journals and which should go on to influence policy and practice.
Purpose: To develop the practical skills for conducting operational research on NTDs, publishing the findings and fostering policy and practice change.

Course curriculum: The course comprises three modules which will be held in Gondar as follows:

Module 1: Research Questions and Protocol Development – 24-30 September, 2018 (with 27 September free: public holiday in Ethiopia)

This six-day module aims to help participants develop a thorough understanding about what operational research is all about and to ensure that a draft research protocol is produced before the completion of the module. The teaching will be through lectures, discussions, exercises and use of completed and published operational research as examples. Participants will have the opportunity to present and discuss their written protocols with the facilitators. After a one-day break, this six-day module will be followed by Module 2.

Brief content overview

☐ Introduction to operational research ☐ Ethics

☐ Research terminology ☐ Developing a plan of analysis

☐ Asking the right research questions ☐ Drafting research protocols

☐ Aims and objectives

Key Deliverable Output: A draft scientific protocol

Module 2: Data Management and Data Analysis – 01-06 October, 2018

This six-day module aims to help participants understand data management and data analysis. The module will consist of:

- Data entry: ensure efficient quality assured data entry (2 days)
- Data analysis (2 days)
- Application of learning on specific projects (1 day)
- Plenary and feedback (1 day)

Brief content overview

☐ Designing an efficient data entry instrument ☐ Introduction to data analysis

☐ Making an efficient computer data entry questionnaire ☐ Producing relevant analysis results in tabular form
Entering and validating data entry

Key Deliverable Output: draft electronic data entry instrument

Module 3: Scientific paper writing – 15-22 March, 2019

This seven-day module aims to help participants write their scientific papers and deal with online submission and comments of editors and reviewers

Brief content overview

- Learn the principles of writing a scientific paper
- Learn how to deal with peer review

Key Deliverable Output: draft paper to be submitted to a scientific journal

1. Course faculty

The course will be conducted by the experienced and reputed faculty from the Global SORT IT partnership which includes ITM Antwerp, University of Gondar, NGOs, collaborating academic institutions and WHO-TDR. SORT IT alumni who have graduated to become faculty will also be involved.

2. What does the participant’s organisation gain?

- A person who is well-trained in operational research and can help their programme or institution undertake relevant operational research to identify challenges and improve programme performance in a sustainable manner.
- This will open better career opportunities including the possibility of pursuing a PhD in the field of operational research. The research studies should strongly complement “innovation” within routine operations and contribute to critical reflection on programme orientation and its impact over time.
- The initiative would also foster medical staff-retention in programme activities including operational research. It should consequently attract qualified staff and reduce turn-over which may hamper the continuity of research initiatives.

3. What does the participant gain?

- Practical skills for undertaking the entire operational research process from concept to publication and beyond.
- The experience of learning and sharing knowledge within a team of motivated participants and talented facilitators in operational research (who act as mentors) from different countries.
An opportunity to excel and gain visibility in operational research and to prepare for increased research responsibilities and research leadership in their country.

Possibilities of submitting published papers and eventually acquiring a PhD in operational research. Fellowships in operational research can be provided to promising and interested candidates, as a way of fostering longer term retention and career opportunities at the programme level. In particular, partnerships have been made with universities to link the fellowship programme with an eventual PhD in operational research.

Participants are strongly encouraged to help train and eventually lead others (as mentors) to maximise long term capacity development and impact. The philosophy used is “see one, do one, teach one and eventually many more”.

4. Course follow-up

In between the modules 2 and 3, candidates will return to their respective health programmes/projects to continue their routine work and in addition collect the data pertaining to their research projects.

Participants will be contacted intermittently after course completion to determine accomplishments and policy and practice impact of their studies. They will also become part of an operational research “alumni” organisation. A specific website forum has been developed to foster interaction.

Course facilitators will be available to provide advice upon request.

5. Criteria for successful applicants

Participant selection is guided by eligibility criteria. The applicant must:

1. Be actively involved in a disease control programme at national, state, NGO, or health institution level.

2. Outline a half page of text (see Application form) that: a) describes a relevant problem that the candidate has identified within a given programme and b) formulates a research question that is proposed to be developed into an operational research project. Please note that the research questions using already available routine programme data are preferred. Prospective studies are unlikely to fit into the timeline and the expected outputs of the course.

3. Provide a written statement from the programme manager or relevant authority confirming relevance of the research question and granting the applicant permission to have time and opportunity to carry out and publish his/her operational research.
4. Provide written commitment to attend all modules of SORT IT, return to their programme or institution after the course and implement course knowledge at programme level for a minimum of 18 months.

5. Provide a written statement from a mentor (if available) or referee, describing how the mentor knows the candidate and if he/she will be suitable for the course.

6. If applicable, be able to mobilise the funding required to carry out the operational research.

7. **Fill in the Application form.**

8. **Provide a curriculum vitae of maximum 3 pages.**

9. Hold a Master’s degree in Public Health (MPH) or an equivalent, or a strong recommendation.

10. Have fluent written and spoken English and/or the language of the course.

11. Be computer literate.

*Female candidates meeting the above criteria are strongly encouraged to apply!*

6. **Research questions – guidance**

In their application, candidates will be asked to formulate and submit a research question based on a perceived problem within the NTDs programme or health system in which they work. The research will have to be carried out within a 6 - 8 month time frame and therefore we strongly encourage simple research projects that are based on monitoring and evaluation data that are already collected and available in registers or treatment cards. Prospective studies and studies involving patient interventions and patient questionnaires are less likely to be accepted as suitable for this course because they usually cannot be completed within the time frame.

7. **Sponsorship**

The course organiser will provide a full scholarship to successful applicants (12 in all). The scholarship includes all tuition fees, travel expenses, meals and accommodation.

9. **Application deadline: 15 July 2018!**

To apply for this course, follow this link: [https://fs10.formsite.com/formulierenITG/form826/index.html](https://fs10.formsite.com/formulierenITG/form826/index.html) and ensure you complete the application form and provide the requested accompanying documents as stated in Section 5. **Only online application forms will be accepted.**
If clarifications are needed, please contact:
Jasmien Adams, Course Administration Assistant
Institute of Tropical Medicine, Antwerp, Belgium
Tel: +32 (0)3 345 58 32
E-mail: jadams@itg.be

Note:
1. Failure to provide all of the above requested information will result in the rejection of your application. Incomplete applications will be discarded.
2. The decision of the selections committee will be final in matters related to the selection to the course. You will not be able to pursue any dispute related to selection matters legally. Apply to the course only if you agree to this condition.
3. All supportive documents must be in Word or PDF format.