MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGO: 16 February 2011, 9:00 am GMT

Developing world medicines get more money ... but is it being misdirected?

London, 16 February, 2011 – The third annual G-FINDER survey reports both good and bad news on global investment into new neglected disease products for the developing world. Global funding for research and development (R&D) of new neglected disease products increased to US$3.2 billion in 2009 (up nearly a quarter of a billion dollars on 2008) and funding was spread more evenly across the 31 neglected diseases covered by G-FINDER. But funders moved their focus away from development of badly-needed new products to towards traditional basic research, often conducted by domestic institutions, with a $50 million drop in funding for Product Development Partnerships – not-for-profit organisations that drive neglected disease product development in conjunction with external partners around the world.

Report author Dr Mary Moran, Director of Policy Cures, said: “Funders need to be careful not to take their eye off the ball. More funding is vital, and encouraging to see, but it’s just as important that the funds are spent wisely and well. Increased public spending on domestic researchers is an understandable strategy in hard economic times, but only if it also achieves the aim of creating new medicines and vaccines for those in the developing world.” Basic research funding increased by 21% in 2009. By contrast, funding to PDPs dropped by US$50m in 2009 (down 8.6% to US$530m). Despite a relatively short history, PDPs occupy an integral place in neglected disease R&D, managing nearly a quarter (22.5%) of global grant funding, and with more than 140 neglected disease drug, vaccines and diagnostic projects now in the development pipeline, many already in clinical trials.

The G-FINDER report found that year-on-year neglected disease funding increased by $239 million in 2009, with most coming from public funders (up $259 million) and industry (up $43 million); while philanthropic funding dropped by $63 million (down 8.7%). Funding was also better distributed between diseases. HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis maintained or increased their funding, but their share of the global funding pie dropped from 77% in 2007 to 72% in 2009. Diarrhoeal diseases, dengue and kinetoplastid infections received more than a 5% share of global funding for the first time in 2009, but diseases like leprosy, trachoma, rheumatic fever and Buruli ulcer continued to linger at the bottom of the scale, each receiving less than 0.3% of global R&D investment.

The G-FINDER survey, now in its third year, is the most comprehensive report to date on public and private funding into R&D for neglected diseases like malaria, TB, HIV, pneumonia, sleeping sickness and helminth infections. It covers 31 diseases and 134 product areas for these diseases, including drugs, vaccines, diagnostics, microbicides and vector control products. In 2009, 218 organisations completed the survey, covering all major public, private and philanthropic funders. This year, the report has expanded to include, for the first time, data from private companies in Brazil and India as well as public funders in Ghana, Colombia and Thailand. The G-FINDER survey is conducted by the independent research group Policy Cures and funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The results and implications of the third annual G-FINDER survey will be discussed at a press briefing from 9:30 on the 16th of February at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Keppel St, London WC1.

For further information please contact: Sam Bolton +41 79 239 2366 and cell: +44 79 724 286 33.


1 Adjusted for inflation and reported in 2007 US dollars (the baseline year of the survey)
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Policy Cures is an independent group providing research, information, decision-making tools and strategic analysis for those involved in the creation of new pharmaceuticals for neglected diseases. Its focus is on providing governments, funders and civil society organisations with the information they need to make optimal R&D policy and funding decisions for diseases of the developing world.