

REPORT OF THE 5th SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY BOARD (SAB) OF THE GLOBAL HEALTH AND TROPICAL MEDICINE RESEARCH CENTRE AT THE INSTITUTE OF HYGIENE AND TROPICAL MEDICINE – UNIVERSIDADE NOVA DE LISBOA (IHMT/NOVA)

Dates: 07-08 June 2024

Members of the SAB:

Present on site (OS) or online (OL):

Prof Sylvie Manguin (SM)-OS Institut de Recherche pour le Développement, Montpellier, France

Prof Afranio Kritski (AK)-OS Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Dr Mateus Webba da Silva (MWS)-OS Ulster University, United Kingdom

Apologies for absence:

Dr Maria do Rosário Bragança Sambo (OK) Ministério do Ensino Superior, Ciência, Tecnologia e Inovação - República de Angola

Prof Umberto D’Alessandro, Chair (UDA)-OS London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, United Kingdom

The meeting was held at the IHMT in Lisbon on Friday 07 and Saturday 08 June, 2024. The meeting was opened by Prof Filomeno Fortes, Director of the IHMT/NOVA, who welcomed the SAB members.

Miguel Viveiros (MV), the scientific coordinator of the Global Health and Tropical Medicine Research Centre (GHTM), provided an overview of the 2023 activities and outcomes, as well as the implementation of the SAB’s recommendations formulated last year. In addition, it was presented a summary of the Activity Plan for 2025-2029. For the next 2025-2029 period, GHTM aims to consolidate itself as a leading Biomedical RDCI Unit fostering collaboration among Portuguese-speaking institutions at a global level. The strategic objectives are: 1) to improve equitable health and well-being of populations, promoting Universal Health Coverage for all; 2) to investigate interactions of pathogens, vectors, hosts, and environment to strengthen local and global control capacities; 3) to assist control of infectious diseases minimizing emergence of antimicrobial resistance; 4) to generate high-quality evidence to improve the clinical care of tropical diseases in high disease-burden settings and to prevent travel-associated health conditions.

The current GHTM project with the “Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia” (FCT) started in January 2020, the contract was signed in September 2020, an interim evaluation was expected at the end of the 2022, and the project was finally extended until December 2024. GHTM has positioned itself as an interdisciplinary hub dedicated to research, postgraduate education, interventions aimed at integrated sustainable solutions for addressing complex health issues across borders and improving health for all.

GHTM’s highlights were the following: 1) contributing to all SDGs, with special emphasis on SDG3 - Good Health and Well-being; 2) hosting the WHO Collaborating Center (WHOCC) on Health Workforce Policy and Planning that supports the WHO's strategic goal of optimizing the impact of current and future health

workforce on achieving healthy lives, universal health coverage through research, training, and strategic advice; 3) integrating the new Associated Laboratory of Translation and Innovation for Global Health (REAL) at NOVA University, a fundamental pillar of the National System of Science and Technology; 4) combining population-level research with state-of-the-art laboratory investigation of pathogens and vectors and environmental research, supported by specialized infrastructures, being the Portuguese research institution with the highest success rate at EDCTP grants (European C Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership); 5) high quality science, working with migrants, focusing on social problems, using interdisciplinary and intersectorial approach; 6) a track record of 180 internationally research outputs/year (full list at <https://novaresearch.unl.pt/en/organisations/global-health-and-tropical-medicine-ghtm/publications/>) with an average weighted citation impact of 1.30, placing the GHTM 30% above the world average for the respective areas; 7) around 70 research projects were managed by GHTM, coordinating/participating in 6-8 EU-funded consortiums per year (full list at <https://ghmt.ihmt.unl.pt/projects/>); 8) strengthening the post-graduation offered at IHMT NOVA (IHMT), in a total of 3 PhD and 7 MSc programs awarding 12 PhD grants upon open calls, and the International advanced training that includes 2 accredited optional courses in the TropMED Network for Education in Global Health MSc program, the PhD Program on Biomedical Sciences (ANG), the MSc in Medical Parasitology (ANG) and the MSc in Public Health (CV) and the Advanced Course on Clinical Investigation to 30 junior researchers from PALOP; 9) promoting international collaboration, namely networks focused in CPLP, including capacity building at country level; 10) providing a good gender balance with women at key positions, 11) leading the Fair Research Partnership; and 12) providing specialized professional training in Travel Medicine (annual course for 35 medical doctors).

SAB discussion, feedback, and recommendations

The SAB's overall impression was extremely positive. The GHTM has continued to progress, with significant achievements by the different research groups. The expertise on management of human health resources at GHTM is being recognized by the Portuguese government and Portuguese speaking countries. GHTM improved the collaboration with industry, with 11 patents so far. Of notice, the large European project CLIMOS (Climate Monitoring and Decision Support Framework for Sand Fly-borne Diseases Detection and Mitigation), is the first to be led by GHTM.

The SAB was also pleased to see that the CTM (ex IHC) group has started the collaboration with the Clinical Research Unit (CRU) at the medical school of Nova University. Both VIASEF and Biotrop have progressed substantially; Biotrop has produced a website in Portuguese, with plans to have it in English. Moreover, Biotrop created a network of biobanks in Lusophone countries for capacity building. A common laboratory platform has started at GHTM, but not finalized yet.

The SAB recognises the unique position of GHTM in leading global health research in One Health vision.

After discussion, the SAB recommends the following:

1. Comparing to the past, the current structure of the GHTM with its four research groups and five CCI has shown their complementarity and partnership inter-groups is growing. The VBD and THOP (PRIME) is working with IHC (CTM) on clinical research, however a link with PPS should be made on health system research and implementation science.
2. Although progress has been made, it would be helpful to better reflect how these groups could refine and improve their interconnections and complementarity. Then, the experiences learned during the Covid-19 epidemic could provide preparedness research program for new epidemics.

3. Viasef – the SAB recognises the important progress done over the last year and suggests support should continue as required, while other national or international sources of funding are being secured.
4. In the current One Health Program, environmental research became an important area of research being part of the CCI “Genomic surveillance, population mobility and environment”. However, environmental research needs to be better defined by each group not only to increase the visibility of this scientific area, but also to allow bridges among the different research groups.
5. The SAB notices the current positive impact of the CCI “Fair research partnership”. Outputs should be disseminated more widely through scientific publications.
6. The SAB suggests considering establishing collaboration with PAHO, as improving the interaction with Afro WHO office and promoting closer interaction with Foreign Affairs Ministries from CPLP.
7. The SAB recognises the importance of being part of REAL and reinforces the necessity of the development of a framework for integration.
8. The IHC group has successfully established collaboration with the CRU of the medical school of Nova University, which has the capacities to run clinical trials, mainly on chronic diseases. The SAB considers this is a good opportunity to establish clinical care for tropical medicines through new cohorts among vulnerable populations that will enable Clinical Trials and Implementation Science activities in Portugal and in CPLPs, as the IHC group has expertise in infectious diseases.
9. The SAB suggests GHTM to create a resource mobilization Unit for the next 5 years, focusing on big stakeholders at global level, business plan and improvement of the interaction with industry and private sectors.
10. The SAB suggests the implementation of quality assurance on effectiveness of courses and indicators use that monitor the achievements made by different RGs.
11. The SAB recommends re-evaluating the teaching commitment of the staff, as non-research related activities are more fairly distributed among the scientific staff. The GHTM research portfolio is broad and should be supported by adequate tenured human resources, including junior scientists.
12. The SAB agrees with the 10 new positions proposed in the Activity Plan for 2025-2026: to work specifically in the following areas: a) in Molecular and Cellular Biology; b) in Computer Aided Drug Discovery (CADD), Chemogenomics, Cheminformatics, Experimental Drug screening in Tropical and Vector-borne Parasitic Diseases; c) in Statistics in Global Public Health; d) in Antimicrobial resistance, drug repurposing and sustainable infection models; e) in Clinical Tropical Medicine; f) Biobanking and Infectious Diseases; g) Experimental Models; h) Genomic surveillance and phylodynamics; i) Global Public Health and Digital Health; j) Clinical Epidemiology.