



From the Office of the Executive Director

23 March 2020

Dear valued donors,

As most countries around the world are struggling with the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) pandemic, I wanted to personally reach out and update you about icddr,b. Over the last 60 years, icddr,b has acquired technical expertise, earned an international reputation and gained the community's trust as a recognized global health research institute. The SARS-CoV-2 related events in Bangladesh have been changing swiftly and this will have significant implications for our capacity to maintain operations.

We are committing the expertise and services of the institute to the government of Bangladesh to help this very vulnerable country weather a potentially devastating epidemic. At the same time I am currently focused on icddr,b maintaining as much capacity as possible. The clinical services provided at the Dhaka and Matlab hospitals continue, with additional safety protocols. The icddr,b Senior Leadership Team is reviewing the research portfolio of current protocols to triage them into four categories.

1. Research that for safety reasons must be halted;
2. Research that can be postponed or put on hold;
3. Research that cannot continue in the same modality, and needs to be amended; for instance, research that relies on face-to-face interviews but can move to telephone or online interviews;
4. Research that is so critical that it must continue, with additional safety protocols in place; for instance, some of the vaccine trials.

We have reached out to colleagues around the world, and our triage is consistent with global practice.

Of significant concern, is icddr,b's ability to maintain its scientific capacity going forward, and remain a viable research organization, supporting health and development research in the Global South. For icddr,b this is dependent on activity-based, donor research funding, which accounts for the overwhelming majority of our total annual budget and is also critical for sustaining research support services. We are not alone in this. The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic will seriously degrade research capacity throughout the Global South unless we can find ways to reconfigure ourselves to preserve it. Institutions that have to lay-off staff or put them on leave without pay will be slower to recover when things return to (some level of) normal. Researchers without pay will drift away. Institutional memory, relationships and skills will fade.

In light of this, I hope that during the pandemic you will consider approaches to sustained funding that will enable icddr,b to remain a viable global research institution, while at the same time protecting the safety of our staff.

As the global pandemic evolves, we are committed to keeping our development partners informed of the local situation and its implications. We value your partnership and support through these challenging times as we plan the next steps in tackling this global pandemic.

With much appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John D. Clemens'.

John D Clemens, MD
Executive Director

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