

REVIEW OF THE MULTILATERAL INITIATIVE ON MALARIA (MIM)



FINAL REPORT

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MIM is seen by many interviewees as having been an important force over the last five years in directing resources toward malaria research. Interviewees credited MIM for having actually mobilized additional resources to develop capacity for scientific research in Africa, and for bringing broader public attention to the malaria research agenda. With experience now on its side, MIM can make concrete plans for how to proceed over its next half-decade.



I. Executive Summary

The Multilateral Initiative on Malaria (MIM), an international effort against African malaria, was conceived in 1996 and launched in 1997 at the First MIM Pan-African Conference in Dakar, Senegal. In September 2002, a Review Panel of seven scientists from around the world gathered to review the Initiative's progress after its first five years, with an eye toward planning for the next five.

Individual voices were crucial to the review. The Panel heard from African researchers; administrators of large malaria activities worldwide; workers from development agencies; staff from major funders; and the personnel who managed the first MIM Secretariat at the Wellcome Trust. The Panel talked to researchers supported by MIM and researchers whose applications for support the program has turned down. They talked to energetic supporters and thoughtful critics of the Initiative, as well.

In these interviews MIM's central focus—improving the malaria research capacity of African scientists so that Africa can itself address this crushing disease—was resoundingly described as critical. As the world's major effort in service of this goal, MIM is seen as important, valued, and timely. One interviewee put it well: MIM is an effort that “cannot be allowed to falter.”

At the review, MIM was found to be a healthy, growing group of four component organizations—an administrative arm (the Secretariat), a funding arm (MIM/TDR), an electronic-communications arm (MIMCom), and a research-materials arm (M4), all described in detail in the report. The component organizations' work has already been impressive, especially in bringing African scientists together through improving communication and building science-focused institutional networks.

The 1997 operational and strategic plans, which were based in hope and theory, have grounded MIM's early success. But if MIM's first five years can be de-

scribed as its infancy, its next five years will mark its coming of age. Among the challenges facing the maturing Initiative is that of revisiting the operational and scientific strategic plans set in 1997 to see what changes may be needed for the years ahead. With experience now on its side, MIM can make concrete plans for how to proceed over its next half-decade.

In the MIM Review Panel's view, there are two stars to follow. The first is: developing MIM's operational systems and organizational capacity so they are solidly built and smoothly functioning. Achieving this will help the Secretariat eventually achieve its ultimate aim: to rotate permanently among African institutions. The second is: furthering the development of African research capacity over the same time, so that African science can become a full partner, and collaborator in research and control efforts focused on malaria.

To follow those stars, the MIM Review Panel offers four major recommendations, discussed in detail in Sections IV–VII of this report:

Recommendation 1. Refine and clarify MIM's vision, goals and objectives for the next five years, and develop a strategic plan to fulfill them.

Despite notable progress by MIM's four components the Review Panel's interviews and discussions revealed an important potential stumbling block: MIM's lack of a *single overarching* set of goals and a strategic plan to guide its spectrum of activities and to secure the needed funding to achieve them. The Review Panel *recommends that MIM refine and clarify its mission and objectives* for the future and that *MIM develop a strategic plan to carry out this mission*. The Panel believes this recommendation to be of such importance that it urges *every effort be made to begin this process of refining and strengthening MIM's strategic priorities at MIM's upcoming Third Pan-African Malaria Conference* to be held in Arusha, Tanzania, in November 2002.

Recommendation 2. Enhance communication and coordination between MIM's four component organizations.

The Panel feels it is essential that *MIM's overall strategic plan should be designed and adopted by all MIM's components*. Moreover, *the components' individual working goals and plans should be revisited to ensure they serve MIM's overarching mission and objectives*. The review Panel believes a round of thoughtfully communicated strategic planning at all levels is necessary for bringing all MIM components into a productive, self-reinforcing union. The task at hand is to strengthen the components' activities by building better ties between them. The Panel also believes that the development and communication of a co-

herent, well-articulated strategic plan will be crucial for MIM to attract donor-funding organizations—including large national and international programs—and to maintain their support.

Recommendation 3. Strengthen MIM’s organizational structure by creating an Advisory Board, increasing the tenure of MIM’s Secretariat, and planning for transferring the Secretariat responsibilities to African institutions.

The Panel makes several operational suggestions for MIM. *A small but powerful Advisory Board with a strong African voice should be formed to guide MIM.* The Advisory Board should provide technical expertise, involve itself in fundraising, help open doors in the public policy arena, and help leverage advocacy for African science. It should also provide much needed oversight and continuity of care for MIM, thereby helping overcome a number of existing and potential weaknesses in MIM’s current decentralized structure. The Panel recommends *extending the term of the Secretariat to a longer, standardized tenure of at least four years* to alleviate difficulties in “learning the ropes,” scheduling conferences, and fundraising created by too-frequent transfers. The Panel also recommends that the Secretariat *focus on strengthening MIM’s operations and funding base and working with interested African entities to build necessary organizational capacity so that a successful Secretariat can exist in Africa in the future.*

Recommendation 4. Plan strategically to augment and secure MIM’s long-term resources and funding.

MIM’s current funding approach is to identify critical issues for focus, then identify funding bodies with related interests—an approach that provides a tried and true formula for partnership investments. Such an opportunistic strategy will continue to play an important role in supporting MIM activities. But such a piecemeal funding approach detracts from MIM’s ability to approach overarching strategic goals such as building African scientific capacity for malaria research. The Panel feels that *with the development of a stronger, more coherent strategic vision and plan for MIM, potential focal activities will be clarified as parts of a whole, and funding for “the Big Picture” may be more easily solicited.*

The Panel commends the excellent staff of the MIM component organizations, and thanks them and the many researchers, administrators, and partners who participated in this review.