

AIDS programme faces donor fatigue

- WHO donations 30 per cent below target
- Crisis postponed by "creative accounting"

THE World Health Organization (WHO)'s high-profile AIDS programme faces a funding crisis, with pledges of donations for 1991 running at 30 per cent below the planned budget of \$100 million.

Michael Merson, director of WHO's Global Programme on AIDS (GPA) says the shortfall will "affect all aspects of the programme at a time when the epidemic is getting worse". Revised estimates of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection released by WHO last month show that 8-10 million people worldwide now carry the virus, with infection in developing countries spreading rapidly.

GPA relies on donations from WHO member countries above their basic WHO subscriptions, and has grown from its inception in 1986 to be WHO's largest health programme. The programme is involved with many aspects of the fight against AIDS and spends a large proportion of its budget in developing countries.

But donations to GPA are now levelling off, when Merson believes action needs to be stepped up to keep pace with the epidemic. US donations, for example, grew from \$2 million in 1986 to about \$25 million in 1989. But the 1990 and the proposed 1991 donations have remained at this level. One of Merson's staff says that GPA has until now managed to postpone the crisis by some "creative accounting" — pooling two years' donations from some countries into a single year's budget.

GPA staff are now preparing two 1991 budgets, one for \$100 million, and a \$70 million version with many schemes pared back. These will be considered in November by the programme's management committee, made up of representatives from WHO member states. In the meantime, Merson hopes to persuade developed countries currently giving very little to the programme, to contribute more.

Merson says that GPA's funding problems are shared by other agencies. If developed countries' bilateral donations to combat AIDS in developing countries were growing, and other intergovernmental organizations had increased resources, then the budget shortfall at GPA would not be a problem. Ideally, GPA should be "the donor of the last resort", helping developing countries to establish sound AIDS programmes and "filling in the gaps" left by other donors.

But some experts on the AIDS epidemic in developing countries argue that ensuring the effective spending of existing funds is a more urgent concern

than simply expanding programmes such as GPA to keep pace with the epidemic. Tony Klouda, of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, which runs an AIDS programme funded partly by the UK Overseas Development Administration, says that "just ploughing money into AIDS programmes won't address the factors that cause the spread of HIV". He says that in India, a major factor in the current explosion of HIV infection (see *Nature* 346, 499; 9 August 1990) is the pressure on poor people to give blood for money. Aid should be aimed at solving such underlying problems.

Hilary Hughes, editor of the *AIDS action* newsletter, believes GPA should continue to forge links with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in develop-

INSTITUT LAUE-LANGEVIN

Researchers irradiated

Paris

Two researchers and two technicians were slightly irradiated on Wednesday last week by a neutron beam while setting up an experiment at the Institut Laue Langevin (ILL), Grenoble.

Although an inquiry team has still to report, the scientists apparently believed that the beam was closed when a shutter was still open. The two researchers are thought to have received a dose of about 2 rem and the technicians much less. The annual dose accepted to be safe is 5 rem. They were all back at work the following day after medical examinations.

According to Peter Day, director of ILL, one of the researchers was within the beam for "about 20 minutes", the other for less time. The estimated 2 rem dose is, he said, "an upper limit, based on the assumption that the scientists were in the beam for the whole time". But, he explained, they were reorienting a metal sample for a small angle scattering experiment and were "likely to have been moving around".

"Fortunately", said Day, "the incident is not serious, but we are treating it as if it were because it ought not to be able to happen". The 'D17' instrument being used by the researchers has a low flux on the sample and uses a cold neutron beam. "If the same thing happened on some of the 30 other instruments, the consequences could be more serious."

Day explained that safety precautions at ILL include a system of visual and aud-

ible warnings. A number of countries' national AIDS programmes have little impact on the poor majority of their populations, she says, but NGOs typically work closely and effectively with local people.

GPA built up strong links with NGOs under its founding director, Jonathan Mann. But this policy was opposed by WHO director-general Hiroshi Nakajima, and was one of the sources of conflict between the two men that led to Mann's resignation earlier this year. Merson has stated in public his intention to continue cooperating with NGOs, but some observers fear that Nakajima's influence will limit this policy. **Peter Aldhouse**

■ FACING AN EXPECTED 1-1.5 million people with HIV infection by the year 2,000 in Asia alone, representatives from 31 countries at the meeting on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific held in Canberra last week announced the creation of the AIDS Society for Asia and the Pacific (ASAP). The society will be modelled on the African Association for the Prevention of AIDS; it has support from GPA and will be seeking membership in the International AIDS Society. Tania Ewing

ible warnings. Green and red lights indicate whether or not the neutron beam is on, while infrared 'trip' beams trigger an audible alarm if a person enters certain areas when it is not safe. It seems that last week these signals may have given contradictory information about the state of the instruments.

A researcher at the Rutherford Appleton Isis neutron scattering laboratory in Oxfordshire in the United Kingdom, who also works at ILL, said that ILL's safety record is generally "first rate", but added that it depends partly on the training and "professionalism" of full-time staff and is open to human error. At Isis, he explained, all the beams are interlocked and captive keys make it impossible to enter risk areas unless the beam shutters are closed (the same key has to be used either to open the shutter or to open a door).

"Our level of safety is absolute, the level at ILL is very safe", he said. But the Isis laboratory is both more recent and inherently more dangerous, using a spallation neutron source with energy up to 100 MeV, compared to the 1 MeV at ILL. "I've been in many laboratories around the world where safety is non-existent", he said, "but ILL is not one of them."

Peter Day expected the inquiry to report "within a day or two", with investigators currently looking at the shutter as a possible cause of the error. By an apparently unrelated coincidence, the post of safety officer at ILL is vacant.

Peter Coles