November, 2014, marks the 10th anniversary of the Mexico Ministerial Summit on Health Research, attended by 20 ministers of health and delegations from 51 countries. Convened by the Government of Mexico, the Global Forum for Health Research, and WHO, the Summit endorsed the role of knowledge for better health1 through the Mexico Statement2 and a resolution passed at the World Health Assembly in 2005.3 Initially driven by the strong personal commitment and vision of WHO’s then Director-General, the late Lee Jong-wook, much progress has been made in the past decade; however, substantial challenges remain. Although the Summit emphasised the importance of research to strengthen health systems,2,4 can the knowledge-to-action message embodied in the spirit of Mexico help to achieve the goals of the post-2015 sustainable development agenda?

Let us begin by reviewing the progress made since 2004. First, substantial improvements have been made in the accountability and transparency of research. WHO established the International Clinical Trials Registry Platform (ICTRP) after the Summit and the WHO Trial Registration Data Set now contains records of roughly 280 000 clinical trials.5–7 Major trials registries are now partners of the ICTRP and it has defined international standards, leading to the establishment of national registries in countries including China, India, and Brazil, as well as a Pan-African registry.5

Further support for trial registration was provided by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), which made trial registration a requirement for publication of the results of clinical trials.5 The ICMJE example has been followed by developing-country journals (eg, in China and India), major research funders, and countries that now have legislation for the mandatory registration of clinical trials (eg, Argentina, Brazil, Israel, and South Africa).5

Second, much progress has been made in the strengthening of links between scientific evidence and the development of health policy. To promote such links, WHO established EVIPNet (Evidence-Informed Policy Network), which has since created country teams in 39 middle-income and low-income countries that now have legislation for the mandatory registration of clinical trials (eg, Argentina, Brazil, Israel, and South Africa).5

Third, despite developing its own strategy for research in 2010, WHO’s own commitment to research seems to be waning. Its highest level scientific advisory body, the Advisory Committee on Health Research (ACHR), has not convened for 4 years, although a meeting for a reconfigured entity is planned in the near future. Although the global ACHR in Geneva seems moribund, the ACHRs in the regions have been active in the promotion of research (eg, in the Americas, European, and Eastern Mediterranean Regions of WHO).
As 2015 approaches, has the Mexico spirit contributed to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets, and will it continue to have a role in the quest for sustainable development as embodied in the post-2015, post-MDG agenda?

The momentum created in Mexico was reinforced in a second ministerial conference 4 years later in Bamako, Mali, which emphasised the fact that support for health policy and systems research had increased. Health-systems research has also gained more prominence through the Global Symposium on Health Systems Research conferences in Montreux, Switzerland (2010), Beijing, China (2012), and Cape Town, South Africa (2014). Stronger health-system foundations were thus laid for the achievement of universal health coverage in developing countries, one of the cornerstones of the post-2015 sustainable development agenda.

Importantly, the Mexico Summit has helped to narrow the gap between scientists and decision makers. The then Philippine Secretary of Health, Manuel Dayrit, summed up the situation well at the end of the Summit: “This Summit has been both an inspiring and a humbling experience. I learnt of the knowledge gaps and some rational ways of tackling the problems—and I return home a better minister”.

In the future quest for sustainable development, and in the face of complex multisectoral and intersectoral challenges pertaining to the health of the planet as a whole, future policy makers in all sectors need to be infected by the spirit of Mexico.

We declare no competing interests.