



Research Ethics Committees (RECs) and REC Professionals (RECPs) Operations in Africa



<http://healthresearchweb.org/files/AARECFinalReport>

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RECs in Africa

- Requirement by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Over 165 RECs are currently known to be operating in 34 African countries
- Great variability in skills, membership, capacity, and efficiency.[1]
- 70% (115) have a chairperson and an administrator;
- 30% Chairpersons function as chair and administrator for the remaining



Manual vs. Modern Information Management System



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Manual review



High 80-100%

- Improved protocol submission
- Improved protocol distribution
- Platform accessibility
- Improved communication between the REC and researchers
- Improved data confidentiality and security
- Increased adherence to international ethics review standards
- Potential contribution towards standardisation and harmonisation of the ethics review process

Medium 60-80%

- Reduction of workload for REC administrators
- Prompt receipt of notifications
- Reduction of RECs' administrative costs

Low Concurrence (<60%)

- Easing the review of multicenter trials
- Reduction in review time

Reported Impact of a Modern Information Management Platform

Mokgatla B, et al., (2017) Enhancing the Efficiency and Quality of African Research Ethics Review Processes – Through an Automated Review Platform. *J AIDS Clin Res* 8: 658. doi: 10.4172/2155-6113.1000658





RECs Attributes

RECs must have:

- a clear mandate,
- autonomy and accountability,
- well-described roles and responsibilities for their members





REC Structures

- Institutional (Academic, Research)
- Regional
- Centralized (Ministries, NGOs)
- Private



REC Functions

- Provide competent review of all ethical aspects of a research project
- Undertake independent review
- Advise researchers on all aspects of the welfare and safety of research participants
- Protect the dignity , rights & welfare of potential participants
- Monitor approved research and report adverse events
- Provide an opinion on the compensation to research participants(inconvenience, injury, death)



REC PROFESSIONALS (RECPS)

- Person who manages the operations of a REC
- Key actors in achieving the goal of conducting high-quality ethics review in a timely and responsive manner.
- Most Sub-Saharan countries RECPS are highly qualified, have no defined position, and job description, varied responsibilities & work context, no RECPS-specific training,



Silent Roles of RECs

Managing day- to- day Ethics Procedures	
Provide information to researchers on the process for ethical review	Checking progress of applications within online system and prompting where necessary.
Managing Research Ethics records	Bringing appeals from to the attention of relevant authorities
Screening applications for completeness	Contacting external reviewers where necessary
Distributing ethics applications to ethics reviewers manually or virtually	Preparing Annual Ethics Report
Appointing reviewers	Monitoring Approved
Ensuring an equitable spread of workload between ethics reviewers.	Review of SAE's
Provide written confirmation of the ethics decision to the applicant	Drafting oversight guidelines





Challenges

- The effectiveness and efficiency of RECs is exacerbated by lack of:
 - recognition (ambiguous position, roles & responsibilities)
 - a career path
 - incentives and sustainably
 - adequately developed RECs (leadership, meetings, membership)
 - adequate resources (financial, space)



Challenges Cont'd

- occupation-specific training
- autonomy
- Effectiveness and efficiency due to overwhelming manual workload
- nuanced application of relevant regulations, ethics guidelines, and management of diverse aspects of the ethics review process
- Relevant, harmonized guidelines





Opportunities

- Highly qualified and experienced members in their fields
- Funding from international bodies like NIH Fogarty Initiative, EDCTP
- An increased volume and complex research conducted in Africa
- MARC website (<http://www.researchethicsweb.org/hrweb/>) REC visibility, support documents, networking etc.
- Aspiration of many sub-Saharan countries to develop knowledge based economies
- Current interest and prioritization of Science, Research, Technology and Innovation by most sub-Saharan African countries.





Conclusion

- There is need to:
 - Establish and strengthen capacity of RECs in all sub-Saharan countries at all levels
 - Critical need to recognize RECPs
 - Establish a career path for RECPs to professionalize the role
 - Develop RECP occupation-specific certified training programs at academic institutions
 - Governments , funders, institutions provide electronic Information Management Systems





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**THANK YOU FOR
LISTENING AND
REMEMBER TO
FOLLOW UP AT:**

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