

Research Ethics Committees and REC Administrator Operations in Africa

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RECs in Africa

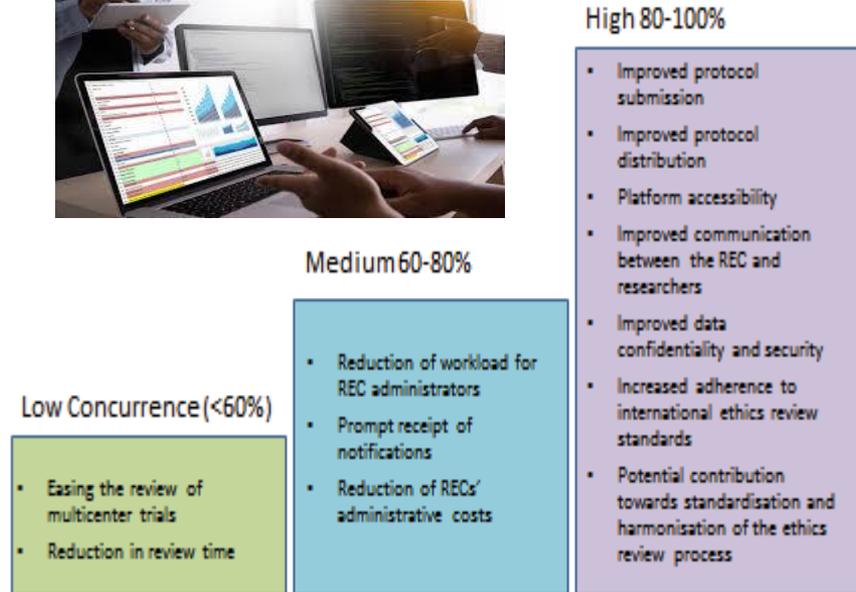
- Requirement by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Over 165 RECs are currently known to be operating in 34 African countries
- Great variability in skills, membership, capacity, and efficiency.[1]
- 70% (115) have a chairperson and an administrator;
- 30% Chairpersons function as chair and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

Manual vs. Modern Information Management System



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

Manual review



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,
- explicit authority 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 ADMINISTRATORS (RECAs)

- Person who manages the operations of a REC
- In most Sub-Saharan countries RECAs have no defined position, and job description (roles & responsibilities)
- Key actors in achieving the goal of conducting high-quality ethics review in a timely and responsive manner.

Silent Roles of RECAs

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)
- occupation-specific training
- autonomous RECs - no decision making
- Effectiveness and efficiency due to weak or non-existent electronic information management systems
- nuanced application of relevant regulations, ethics guidelines, and management of diverse aspects of the ethics review process

Opportunities

- Highly qualified and experienced members in their fields
- Funding from international bodies like NIH Fogarty Initiative
- An increased volume and complex research conducted in Africa
- 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 RECAs
 - Establish a career path for RECAs to professionalize the role
 - Develop RECA occupation-specific certified training programs at academic institutions
 - Governments , funders, institutions provide electronic Information Management Systems

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

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References

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2. Ndebele, P. et al., Research Ethics Capacity Building in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Review of NIH Fogarty Funded Programs 2000-2012. *J. Empri Res Ethics*.2014 April; 9(2): 24-40
3. Mokgatla B, IJsselmuiden CB, Marais D, Wassenaar DR (2012) Mapping African ethical review committee activity onto capacity needs: The MARC Initiative and HRWeb's Interactive database of RECs in Africa. *Dev World Bioeth* 12: 74-82.
4. Nika A, et al (2009) Capacity building of ethics review committees across Africa based on the results of a comprehensive needs assessments survey. *Dev World Bioeth* 9: 149-56.