



**Workshop on the establishment
of a National Bioethics Committee in Nigeria
Nasarawa State, Kini Hotel, Akwanga,
7- 8 June 2017**

Concept Note



Background

Progress in the life sciences is giving human beings new power to improve health and control the development processes of all living species: Stem cell research, genetic testing, cloning, protocol treatment, drug use, etc. Concerns about the social, cultural, legal and ethical implications of such progress have led to one of the most significant debates nationally and globally. On the other hand, a new word has been coined to encompass these concerns: “bioethics”.

UNESCO’s work on Bioethics started in 1993, within the Organization’s Programme on Ethics of science and technology, within its Social and Human Sciences Sector. Its major successes includes, among others, the Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights (1997), International Declaration on Human Genetic Data (2003) and the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights (2005), adopted by UNESCO and which are reference standard setting instruments in this area.

This 1997 Declaration advocates specifically for the establishment of independent, multidisciplinary and pluralist bioethics committees at national, regional, local or institutional levels. Bioethics Committees reinforce the role of UNESCO as an international clearing house for ethical issues while serving as important intermediary bodies for the implementation of the normative instruments adopted by Member States. Besides, they contribute to advance the reflexion at the national level on issues related to bioethics and ethics of science and technology, bridging in this regard academic thinking and policy making to address different aspects of the life in society.

Nigeria which is a Member State of UNESCO presently has no National Bioethics Committee either at local or national level. From March 29 to April 1, 2009, the “First Preparatory Meeting on the Establishment of a National Bioethics Committee in Nigeria” was held at the Transcorp Hilton in Abuja, as an expression of the government of Nigeria to set-up such a body.

About 30 participants representing institutions and stakeholders in Nigeria and abroad were in attendance. The meeting agreed on the need for a National Bioethics Committee that is independent, pluralist and multi-disciplinary, and that such a Committee should enjoy a broad mandate and could incorporate among its stakeholders other entities such as the National Health Research Ethics Committee of Nigeria.

The need to convene a meeting of stakeholders to prepare and review drafts of the following documents was recommended:

- Statutes of the proposed National Bioethics Committee, drawing lessons from existing committees;
- Memorandum of Understanding to be signed with UNESCO.

From the above and as a follow up, it is important to revamp the process and move forward with this meeting gathering relevant stakeholders to discuss the above-mentioned. It is only after these statutes are developed and the legal framework passed at the national level that the NBC could be formally established and inaugurated, and the MoU with UNESCO signed accordingly.



Justification

Under its Assisting Bioethics Committee project (ABC), UNESCO provides support to its Member States for the establishment of ethics and bioethics committees at all levels (national, regional, local), with the following objectives:

- Provide the national authorities with the information required to make steps towards the establishment of a NBC.
- Support the process of creation of the NBC
- Enhance the functioning of the NBC established and train its members.

Hence, once established, the NBC provide to its Members a venue for working together, cross-fertilized by its interdisciplinary nature. Indeed, Members of the NBC can come from a variety of fields as science, physics, nursing, judiciary, notably with specialization in health law, administration, social or behavioral scientist, bioethics and others. The Committee will also provide expertise and represent different viewpoints concerning ethical issues raised in biology, medicine and the life sciences. It will also protect patients and healthy participants who become involved in physiological, biological, behavioural, or epidemiological research trials; and facilitate the acquisition and use of new knowledge directed to improving health and the delivery of health care in Nigeria.

Objectives and Expected Results:

The objective of the workshop is to provide support to national authorities, led by the National Commission for UNESCO in Nigeria, to engage further towards the establishment of this NBC. This workshop also serve as a follow-up to the first meeting that was held in 2009, which recommended stakeholders meeting as a key step forward to, amongst others:

- Share take lessons from already established NBC in other African Countries;
- Develop the statutes of the NBC and draft the legal framework;
- Recommend Terms of Reference for members of the NBC; and
- Propose an Action Plan for the NBC.

Background documents for the workshop:

It is highly recommended that all participants get acquainted with the documents bellow, in preparation of and for an effective participation to the discussions to take place during the upcoming Stakeholders Meeting on the establishment of an NBC in Nigeria. They include the following:

1. [UNESCO and Bioethics. Make bioethics everyone's business](#)
2. [UNESCO Guidelines for establishing bioethics committee](#)
3. [National Bioethics Committees in Action](#)

Further readings

- [Global Bioethics: What for? 20th anniversary of UNESCO's Bioethics Programme](#)
- [Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights \(1997\)](#)
- [Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights \(2005\)](#)
- [More about UNESCO and Bioethics](#) (UNESCO Website on Bioethics)

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