

### **Building Bridges Between Community Advisory Boards and Ethics Committee**

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Funding: Medical Research Council , Zimbabwe

Topic: International

#### **Problem/Issue Statement**

The NEC (National Ethics Committee) in Zimbabwe has a sufficient Human Research Protection System (HRPS) that is unknown to the communities it protects. This protection system is arguably paternalistic and in the past there have been haphazard efforts for the NEC to firmly connect with the research communities. Community participation through CABs in research has been argued to be an effective method of protecting researched communities. In order to strengthen the HRPS, the NEC embarked on a public awareness programme of the role of research gatekeepers (IRBs, CABs) and how they can network for the benefit of the participants they protect.

#### **Intended Outcomes:**

- To create a gateway of information and a forum where CABs meet the NEC and share ideas on how to best protect participants
- To explore ways in which the CAB could form part of the Human Research Protection System

#### **Description of Program**

There are five components to the program as follows:

- A. Participation in Research Forums. In the 2008 Annual Health Research Forum the NEC adopted the theme "Empowering Communities through Research" and dedicated the whole forum to community issues.
- B. Monthly CAB/NEC meetings. This is the forum where CAB and representatives of the NEC share ideas and find means and ways of solving problems without the researchers.
- C. Annual CAB meeting. The NEC dedicated funds to sponsor CAB members from different studies and communities to meet and network annually.
- D. CAB Training series ie Research Literacy, Research Ethics. This two day training covers ethics and research literacy and how to review protocol.
- E. Development of CAB newsletters, pamphlets, and CAB Handbook. This material is targeted for dissemination to research participants.

**Evaluation:** As the NEC and CAB get acquainted information sharing has been enhanced. The CAB is managing to articulate their views on various ethical issues. They now may influence decisions on how the consent process is done. They also started a process of passing on participant complaints to the NEC. Their participation in Forums has led to the NEC appreciating the major role of the CAB. The NEC is exploring ways in which they can be part of the HRPS without creating another bureaucratic hurdle. This enhances ownership of approved studies by CABs.

**Suggestions:** Other IRBs can use this approach as it gives you an insight of exactly what happens in the community compared to the IRBs own prejudiced paternalistic judgment of what is good and bad for the participants. A strong link with the projects is also vital for this process to flow to avoid duplication of efforts.

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