

# MAPPING OF ETHICS REVIEW CAPACITY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA (MARC)



## ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

COHRED launched the MARC (Mapping African Research Ethics Review Capacity) project in 2010, through the support of EDCTP (European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership) and Pfizer. MARC provides an interactive web-based map of basic contacts and capacity information for RECs (research ethics committees) and MRAs (medicines regulatory authorities). All facilities available to RECs and MRAs in Africa will also be available to any REC globally. In this way, COHRED intends to contribute to effective ethics review of health research globally. These activities result in better and more efficient systems for research ethics review.

The COHRED Group



Supporting research and innovation systems for health, equity and development



## THE CHALLENGE

In many low and middle-income countries, the waiting time for research ethics review can be up to 1.5 years. This bottleneck in the research system is a major hindrance to advancing much needed research for health in these countries. EDCTP supported MARC because it recognized the need for a more efficient and effective ethical review of health research, including clinical trials, in sub-Saharan Africa. Without the latter, progress toward the development of medicines, interventions and medical technologies in and for Africa would be hindered.

## THE SOLUTION

Through the MARC project, COHRED has identified 158 RECs to be operating across Africa—with great variability in skills, membership, and efficiency. To date, MRAs have been mapped in 16 countries' and almost all of the 54 African countries have been verified as having MRAs. A supplementary grant from the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) enabled the launching of a new interactive MARC website with an integrated social networking platform ([www.researchethicsweb.org](http://www.researchethicsweb.org)). The social network is intended to facilitate better communication between RECs and MRAs across Africa. The success of this initiative will add a new dimension to African Research Ethics training and capacity building Initiatives. It may expand to create a virtual network of trained individuals—a pan African research ethics discussion platform. All of this will help to increase efficiencies in research ethics review.

## WHO BENEFITS AND HOW?

- **Research ethics committees and medicines regulatory authorities** in Africa and beyond, though exchange of information, knowledge and interactions.
- **Researchers** benefit because they can easily find the relevant REC and its requirements for project submission.
- **Governments** benefit because ethics review becomes more transparent and efficient.
- **Strengthened research ethics** review capacity maximises the protection of human participants in research.
- **Donors and partners** interested in supporting ethical research, clinical trials and the development of medicines, interventions and medical technologies in and for Africa benefit because they have access to a more transparent system and can identify the appropriate RECs when needed for research approval.

## SUCCESS STORIES

The MARC project has had many successes since its conception in 2010. To highlight just a few:

- MARC has been so successful that its use has spread well beyond the African continent. MARC found rapid uptake in Latin America, resulting in a new collaboration with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and now over 1000 RECs have been mapped in Latin America.

- MARC has led to the creation of [www.researchethicsweb.org](http://www.researchethicsweb.org). This tool was recognized in the US Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethics (December 2011, page 49-50). Specifically it stated, "Other notable efforts to enhance accountability and access to information about human subjects' research are also underway. For example, 'Health Research Web', initiated by the Council on Health Research for Development compiles information on studies taking place around the world, as well as information about IRBs and research ethics committees, countries' governance policies and other useful data."

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

COHRED seeks donors and partners to assist in the continued expansion of the MARC project. The next phase of this project will focus on RECs capacity building including onsite training, implementation of an online review system, development of an accreditation system for RECs in Africa, enhanced social networking to facilitate joint review of multicentre trials and continued mapping of MRAs. The expected outcomes include the increased use of MARC as an international index of REC and MRA information, improved and efficient research ethics review systems, increased learning and communication between the different stakeholders including RECs, MRAs, researchers and governments.