POLICY BRIEF

The Impact of an Automated Review Platform on Ethical Review Efficiency in Africa

AT A GLANCE

KEY ISSUES

- 169 Research ethics committees (RECs) are operational in 37 African countries.
- 93% of these use a complex paper based review system that contributes to inefficiency in review time-lines.
- An automated Review Platform, called *RHInnO Ethics* was introduced in 2012 with the goal of increasing efficiency of review timelines by 50%.
- By 2015, *RHInnO Ethics* had been actively used by 25 RECs (8 national and 17 institutional) in 8 African countries.
- We conducted the first-ever survey to evaluate the impact of *RHinnO Ethics* in Africa between 2012 and 2015.

KEY AREAS OF IMPACT OF RHINNO ETHICS

- RECs that used *RHInno Ethics* for > 2 years, indicated a reduction in review timelines of approximately 56% of all studies, both low and high risk.
- More than 80% of RECs that use *RHInnO Ethics* reported improved protocol submission and protocol distribution processes.
- 60-80% of RECs that use *RHInnO Ethics* reported a reduction in both administrative workloads and administrative costs.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Policy makers should facilitate policies and efficient approvals to move from paper-based to automated review platforms.
- RECs should ensure standardization of automated review platforms and cross-functionality between (RECs) and National Regulatory Authorities (NRAs) to optimize efficiency.
- *RHInnO Ethics* developers should optimize functionality of the platform to generate relevant performance indicators and user friendly reports to support critical decision making for RECs and NRAs.
- Developers of *RHInnO Ethics* and sponsors should ensure optimal pricing for annual maintenance fees, which remains one of the key barriers to RHInnO Ethics adoption by RECs in Africa.
- Longitudinal evaluation is recommended to identify long-term impact of *RHInnO Ethics*.

INTRODUCTION

Health research initiatives worldwide are growing in scope and complexity, particularly as they move into the developing world.[1] This increased cascade of biomedical research poses new challenges for African research ethics committees (RECs), particularly impacting on review efficiency and quality. The sheer amount of research now being conducted has resulted in an unprecedented increase in REC's workload.[2] This has led to inefficiencies or long review timelines – which ultimately lengthens the time to licensure for new medicines, vaccines and medical technologies.

One of the major bottlenecks for ethical clearance is the complex paper based review systems widely used by African RECs, which are unable to absorb significantly increased submission volumes.[3] To address this issue, The Council on Health Research for Development (COHRED) developed an automated ethics review technology (*RHInnO Ethics*), which has been introduced to 25 RECs in 8 African countries. This policy brief provides initial insights on *RHInnO Ethics'* impact after 22 months of utilization.

Current RHInnO Ethics Usage in Africa