

# **INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE IN REGIONS WHERE THERE IS NO REQUIREMENT FOR AN IRB (RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD), AND HOW UNETHICAL RESEARCH MAY ENSUE**

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Research activities are sparse in resource-poor settings and developing countries such as Nigeria and other parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Reasons include not only lack of funding, but also the practical difficulties of conducting research in an uncertain political and economic context, and conditions of poor literacy, lack of infrastructure (including reliable electricity supply) and administrative obstacles. Universities are not adequately funded to carry out meaningful research. Education is generally in a deplorable state in many instances. The practice of environmental epidemiology is in its infancy. Very few studies are from donor agencies or part of international collaboration or postgraduate theses. Some local universities constitute Grants and Ethics committees for such. However, there are reports that the committees may not be effective. Private consultants often carry out environmental studies for the industry without the need for ethics approval.

Application of ethics principles from the Western developed countries to the least developed countries that has different values and priorities and in the absence of Institutional Review Boards is challenging. For example, informed consent as an underlying principle of ethical research implies the individual research participant's ability to understand and make a decision autonomously. However, the reality is that in many low SES regions, the literacy levels are low and the family structure/community norms are complex. It may be the prerogative of a community leader or a male head of household to make decisions for others in some regions. The concept of individual consent may be seen as challenging an established structure in customs where the head of the extended family takes decisions for widows and orphans.

This presentation will use published examples to review the importance of applying key elements of the newly revised international ethics guidelines and the process by which the guidelines can be implemented by Institutional Review Boards.