



NEBRA
Analyze of the survey

**Annex 7 : The Gambia – Groupe
Interview S2E**

FINAL REPORT
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N.E.B.R.A.

WP2 – Information gathering process

Guide for the group discussion with the Committee

S2E

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WP2 – Information gathering process

Round table discussion led by Ms Aisha Baldeh of NEBRA - the ethical process in the Gambia.

The meeting was attended by...

Mr. Malcolm Clarke	- EC Chair
Ms. Kathy Hill	- MRC
Dr. Hilton Whittle	- MRC
Dr. Philip Hill	- MRC
Dr Mariatou Jallow	- Director Health Services DOSH
Dr Tumani Corrah	- Director MRC
Dr. Ousman Nyan	- Dean Medical School University of Gambia

Dr Nyan said that the NEBRA Project was trying to find out what there was to improve in ethical processes in Africa. Our own Ethics Committee had been involved with this process for sometime and had participated in the interviewing and completion of the forms. Ms Baldeh from NEBRA had been invited to the Committee meeting to Chair the round table discussion on the ethical process in The Gambia.

Ms Baldeh thanked the members for inviting her to the meeting which allowed her to see first-hand the work of The Gambia Government/MRC Ethics Committee.

The Committee then discussed the following questions.

S2E.1. Do you think the law/regulations of research meet the needs of your country?

Dr Nyan said there was no law in The Gambia that stated there must be a local Ethics Committee. However, The Gambia Government/MRC Ethics Committee had been established for a long time (1982) and worked very well. The Committee was in an enviable position that it met monthly and 80% of the time it was quorate, which was unusual in a developing country. Although the Committee served research and the research process very well it was uncertain whether all research that was being undertaken in The Gambia came through the Committee.

S2E.2. In terms of international guidance, are the current standards acceptable? How should they evolve? Do they conflict with local values or existing regulations?

Dr Nyan explained that the regulations were what the Committee had drawn up themselves. However the guidelines were not written in stone and as new international guidelines were established the Committee looked at these to see if they could be adapted for The Gambia. In some cases, however, donor led guidelines had caused problems because of complex, hard to understand information sheets and consent forms. Also the American and EU went beyond what was required by the international guidelines and in such cases the Committee would write

to them and ask them to reconsider their requirements to bring them in line with international guidelines.

S2E.3. What is your opinion on exchanging information with other Committees in either your country or outside? What kind of cooperation would be useful?

Dr Corrah explained that this was the only Ethics Committee in the country. The Committee had links with Ethical Committees in the UK and also Ethics Committees of sponsoring bodies. MRC Head Office through the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine also reviewed all projects that went to the Committee although the local Committee in The Gambia took the final decision on whether the project could proceed. This local Committee was one of the most experienced Committee's in the region and would be very willing to share their experiences with other Ethics Committees and to learn from them.

S2E.4. How do you think such cooperation should be implemented?

The members suggested that workshops should be held with other Ethics Committees in the developing world.

S2E.5. What would be most helpful for you as a Committee?

There was a discussion on whether the Committee should be called the National Ethics Committee of The Gambia. One of the challenges that the current Committee faced was to demonstrate that it was not an MRC controlled Committee. Dr Corrah said that one of the issues that it faced was the question of gender, as he would like to see a larger number of women on the Committee. Also the inclusion of an Anthropologist and a Social Scientist would be of considerable benefit when reviewing certain projects. Dr Corrah stressed that the members did not receive payment for attending the meetings and gave their time to ethics free of charge, which was not the same in many other countries.

S2E.6. In terms of education, what should be improved in the research ethics area? (concerning Committee members, researchers and other stakeholders).

In terms of education, the members suggested holding workshops to discuss and review ethical issues.

Another issue that was raised was the question of checking to see whether research in the field had been undertaken ethically. For larger projects and control trials the Committee did receive feedback as this was written into the project proposal although not for the smaller studies. However, the Committee was empowered to investigate any project and make site visits to look at ongoing trials.

S2E.7. What other points would you like to raise with us today for the NEBRA Project

Ms Baldeh raised the issue that as an MRC research institute that undertook a lot of the projects and hosted the Committee it could be felt that the Committee was biased. In response Dr Corrah explained that nearly all the other research institutes in the developed world had their own Ethics Committees. However, when the University of The Gambia was fully established their research proposals would also go through The Gambia Government/MRC Ethics Committee so in the future there would be a larger number of projects that were not MRC generated.

Ms Baldeh explained that NEBRA was trying to obtain funds to strengthen Ethics Committees in Africa. In response to a question from one of the members on networking, Ms Baldeh said that the meeting in Benin had shown that NEBRA could set up their own network to see what each country was doing.

Interviewers Observation : I was privileged to attend an ethic committee meeting and from the beginning. I observed the members review research protocols and discussions before reaching an agreement. Decision were based on consensus and it was agreed by all members present that their was a need for more women to join the committee.

Among the issues discussed, was the issue of remuneration, members agreed that it would be good to obtain remuneration for their time but they preferred to keep the EC members on voluntary bases.

When asked about the independence of the EC and if there are external influence in decision making especially at the government level, the Director Health Services, who represents the Gambia Government emphasized that the committee is independent and issues are debated at length until a consensus is reached.