COVID-19 Bioethics Webinar for Eastern Africa Region


DATE: 13 May 2020 (10:00 – 11:30 EAT)

Join the Webinar through Microsoft Teams

I- Introduction

Governments and knowledge institutions all over the world are working to address the unexpected outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, following its declaration as a global pandemic by the World Health Organization on 11 March 2020, and a further call on governments to take action to stop the spread of this virus. COVID-19 poses a serious threat to institutions and individuals and by extension to nations not only through implications to public health but also consequences on global economy and social-cultural fabric. Many countries have not only intensified containment operations but have also put in place preventive diagnostic and therapeutic medical interventions. Some of the measures taken include public actions such as restrictions on individual autonomy through quarantine, lockdown or travel restrictions and ban, the use of ICT technologies in contact tracing, crisis communication, including, handling personal health data, technologies associated with containment of COVID-19. As an approach to develop a long-term solution, scientist are putting their best foot forward in search of vaccines and cure. There are many more efforts at research and development fronts as a response to the pandemic.

II- Context

In 2005, UNESCO Member States adopted the Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights, providing a global framework for reflecting on the rapid developments in science and technology, which increasingly affect our understanding of life and life itself, resulting in a strong demand for a global response to the ethical implications of such developments. The Declaration further “recognize[ed] that ethical issues raised by the rapid advances in

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science and their technological applications should be examined with due respect to the
dignity of the human person and universal respect for, and observance of, human rights
and fundamental freedoms.”
Through this commitment, Member States are also “resolving that it is necessary and
timely for the international community to state universal principles that will provide a
foundation for humanity’s response to the ever-increasing dilemmas and controversies
that science and technology present for humankind and for the environment.”
The COVID-19 pandemic certainly brings to the front the very essence of this important
instrument. The UNESCO International Bioethics Committee (IBC) and the World
Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST) further
echoed this relevance, when issuing in March 2020 a “Statement on COVID-19: Ethical
Considerations from a Global Perspective”. It reiterates that “a bioethics and ethics of science and
technology perspective, rooted in human rights, should play a key role in the context of this
challenging pandemic”.

Considering various strategies, responses and approaches developed by different countries
to fight against COVID-19, UNESCO, through its Regional Office for Eastern Africa in
Nairobi is calling on bioethics experts in the Region to reflect deeply on the current and
post COVID-19 situations, while addressing specific principles of the Declaration on
Bioethics and Human Rights.

How does the ethical principles apply in the context of the region for human rights to
prevail, despite exceptional and unprecedented restrictive measures imposed due to the
pandemic? What recommendations could be formulated to governments and special
Committees and Task Forces at the front line of national responses for a more effective
integration of the Universal Declaration of Bioethics and Human Rights? What are the
major lessons and good practices emerging from the region in the fight against COVID-19
and how should principles of the Declaration be used in shaping a better future for post-
COVID-19?

III- Objectives

1. To reflect on the COVID-19 management measures with specific reference to the
principles of the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights, and the
IBC/COMEST Statement on COVID-19;

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2 See provisions of the Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights Articles 3 to 17 referring to principles of Human dignity and human rights, Benefit and harm, Autonomy and individual responsibility, Consent, Persons without the capacity to consent, Respect for human vulnerability and personal integrity, Privacy and confidentiality, Equality, justice and equity, Non-discrimination and non-stigmatization, Respect for cultural diversity and pluralism, Solidarity and cooperation, Social responsibility and health, Sharing of benefits among other emerging bioethical issues in relation to prevention, preparedness and management of public health emergencies? (http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=31058&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)
2. To share ideas on current and future implications of COVID-19 pandemic for the effective implementation of the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights and other related normative instruments in the countries of the region;
3. To explore a perspective from African countries of the ethical challenges posed by COVID-19, and to amplify the voice of experts in the region on this topic.

IV- Expectations

1. Identify major ethical issues in our region arising from this pandemic.
2. Share knowledge, ideas and experiences on how such issues can be addressed.
3. Formulate recommendations for the National Ethics/Bioethics Committees to play a more active role in providing ethical standards, frameworks and advice to the decision makers in the region in the response to and recovery from the COVID-19.

V- Format and Language

The working language of the webinar is English, and will all experience sharing and discussions featuring bioethics experts in Eastern Africa Region, especially members from National Bioethics Committees and institutions from Comoros, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda and Tanzania. The webinar will open with remarks from the Directors of UNESCO at Headquarters and Nairobi Office and the UNESCO Regional Centre for Documentation and Research on Bioethics.

VI- Technical Specification

The webinars will use Microsoft Teams as a technical platform. Participants do not require an individual account, but can join the Webinar as guests through Microsoft Teams.
VII- Draft Agenda

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Agenda items</th>
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<tr>
<td>10:00am-10:10 am</td>
<td><strong>Opening Remarks</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ms. Ann Therese Ndong- Jatta, Director, UNESCO Regional Office for Eastern Africa</td>
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<td>• Prof. Julius Kipkemboi, Coordinator UNESCO Regional Centre for Documentation and Research on Bioethics</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:10am-10:20 am</td>
<td><strong>Bioethical issues related to COVID-19 Pandemic</strong></td>
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<td>• Prof. Alice Mutungi, Chair of National Bioethics Kenya</td>
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<td>10:20am-11:00am</td>
<td><strong>Bioethics and the Management of COVID-19: Regional and Country Experiences</strong></td>
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<td>• Representative from East African Health Research Commission (EAHRC) of the East African Community (EAC)</td>
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<td>• Prof. Telahun Teka Wolde, Senior National Bioethics Advisor, Ministry of Science &amp; Higher Education – Ethiopia</td>
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<td>• Dr. John Mary Mooka, Uganda Martyrs University, Uganda</td>
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<td>• Dr. Renatha Joseph, Muhimbili University of Health and Applied Sciences (MUHAS), Tanzania</td>
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<td>• Prof. Elizabeth Anne Bukusi, Chair Bioethics Society of Kenya</td>
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<td>• Dr. David Tumusiime - General Secretary, National Ethics Committee of Rwanda.</td>
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<td>• Dr. Dhoinine/Dr. Zaitoune - National Bioethics Committee of Comoros</td>
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<td>11:00am-11:20am</td>
<td><strong>Questions and Answers</strong> followed by a short discussion</td>
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<td>(Moderator: Dr. Stephen O. Muhudhia)</td>
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<td>11:20am-11:30am</td>
<td><strong>Closing Remarks</strong></td>
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<td>Prof. J. Kipkemboi, Coordinator UNESCO Regional Centre for Documentation and Research on Bioethics</td>
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