



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

SHS/EST/ABC/REP/05

**UNESCO ASSISTING BIOETHICS COMMITTEES PROJECT**  
**2007**

**Draft Minutes of the 1<sup>st</sup> Preparatory Meeting on the Strengthening of the National  
Bioethics Committee in Malawi.**

**Held on: Friday 16<sup>th</sup> February 2007**

**Venue: Malawi National Commission for UNESCO Library**

**Time: 14 hours**

**Present:**

1. Mr. F. R. Mkandawire; Executive Secretary Malawi National Commission for UNESCO, Chairperson of meeting
2. Ms Hyacinth Kulemeka-Kishindo; Deputy Executive Secretary, Malawi National Commission for UNESCO, Secretary of the meeting
3. Prof. Joseph Mfutso Bengo; Professor of Bioethics, the University of Malawi, College of Medicine, Blantyre
4. Mr. A. K. Manda; Chief Scientific Officer, National Research Council of Malawi, Lilongwe
5. Mr. W. N. Chitaukali; Head; Department of Biology, the University of Malawi, Chancellor College, Zomba
6. Mr. D. D. Kathyola; Deputy Director (Research), Ministry of Health, Lilongwe

**Apologies:**

1. Dr. Charles Mwansambo; Ministry of Health, Lilongwe

**Proceedings:****1.0 Welcoming Remarks:**

The Executive Secretary, Malawi National Commission for UNESCO, Mr. F. R. Mkandawire, called the meeting to order and welcomed all present. He extended a special welcome to those that had traveled from outside Lilongwe. He thanked everybody for having spared their precious time to attend the meeting.

**Aims and Objectives of the Meeting:**

In outlining the aims and objectives of the meeting, Mr. Mkandawire gave a brief background of the role of UNESCO in the field of Bioethics. He talked about the various standard-setting instruments that the international community has put in place under the exigencies of UNESCO that give UNESCO the mandate to cooperate with its member states in the implementation of several protocols including the Universal Declaration of the Ethics of Science and Technology that informs the current activity.

He then outlined that the Division Ethics of Science and Technology at UNESCO, upon invitation by the Malawi government, had agreed to cooperate with the Malawi government in an effort to strengthen the National Bioethics Committee. Through this agreement, UNESCO has planned for a two-day visit; 18-19<sup>th</sup> June 2007 where a team of four experts including the Director of the Division of Science and Technology at UNESCO would come to Malawi to meet the local experts and draw strategies on how to strengthen the National Bioethics Committee.

He explained further that the purpose of the current meeting was to give the local experts an opportunity to plan for the June 18-19<sup>th</sup> 2007 visit.

**2.0 Self-Introductions:**

This being the first meeting in this activity, members were given the opportunity to introduce themselves and explain what they were doing in their various departments.

**3.0 Adoption of the Draft Agenda:**

Although the prepared agenda of the meeting was not carried through in the sense that people preferred to have open-ended discussions on what each institution represented were doing, by the end of the meeting it transpired that all the outlined items of the agenda were discussed.

**4.0 Election of the Chairperson and Secretariat of the Meeting:**

The meeting proceeded on the assumption that Mr. Mkandawire was the Chairperson while Ms Kulemeke-Kishindo was the Secretary, but no elections were made to this effect

**5.0 Brief Remarks on the Functions for the Current Bioethics Committee:**

The meeting revealed that it is not quite true that in Malawi there exists a structure that can qualify to be called the 'National Bioethics Committee' at the moment. It transpired that between the Ministries and the College of Medicine, as well as other stakeholders, there exist various committees that have been mandated by the National Research Council to regulate research work to ensure that subjects, especially people and other living things are protected – to ensure that ethics of scientific research are adhered to.

The National Research Council confirmed this position and further stated that within the National Research Council there are no less than nine (9) committees responsible for various research areas. It further indicated that of the nine committees the health committee is the one that is most effective in that it meets frequently.

At this point, each department was given the opportunity to explain what each one of them were doing in the field of ethics and research and to further explain what gaps they have and what proposals they could make to address the challenges.

A summary of the presentations revealed the following common challenges:

- i. There is no National Bioethics Committee
- ii. There is no common National Policy in bioethics
- iii. There is no coordination in research and bioethics
- iv. Institutions have no mechanism for exchange of information
- v. There is a general lack of awareness on the part of government and the general public on the importance of bioethics issues
- vi. There is need to develop capacity among the stakeholders in terms of education at post-graduate level – establishment of a Centre of Excellency – to offer MAs, PhDs etc
- vii. Need for networking among all stakeholders
- viii. Need for the National Bioethics Advisory Council that will be in a position to advise government on matters of national/international interest relating to issues of science, technology and ethics.
- iv. There is need for all stakeholders to be sensitized on the provisions of the Universal Declaration on the ethics of Science and Technology
- v. There need to put in place a system of monitoring issues of scientific research, and ethics – proposal was to establish a secretariat for monitoring
- vi. Issue of ethics is broader than health. There is need to loop-in the other players to ensure a common framework

(The brainstorming in agenda item **5.0** took care of agenda items **6.0**, and **7.0** as well)

### **8.0 Expected Assistance from UNESCO:**

The following came out as some of the indicative areas that would require UNESCO's assistance:

1. Establishment of the National Advisory Council
2. Establishment of a National Network
3. Capacity building/training at post graduate level

4. Sensitization workshops on the provisions of the Universal Declaration and other internationally recognized standard-setting instruments
5. Development of a National Policy
6. Awareness raising on the importance of bioethics at national level

#### **9.0 Program of the two-day Visit by UNESCO Team:**

The meeting agreed that in order to maximize out-put from the visit, the following should be the program of the visit. The program will of course be revised and refined as and when the preparations advance in consultation with the UNESCO team

##### **Day One:**

A presentation from the local team. This to come from a paper that Prof. Mfutso Bengo will prepare on the situation of bioethics in Malawi following the first preparatory meeting.

Following the presentation, the visiting team will also make their own presentation based on the Universal Declaration and other relevant instruments in science, technology and bioethics

Day one therefore will be organized like a workshop to exchange idea

##### **Day Two:**

Day two will focus on coming-up with an **Action Plan/a framework** to cover the three year cooperation between the government of Malawi and UNESCO. This could include a memorandum of understanding between Malawi Government and UNESCO on the type of cooperation the two partners will enter into.

#### **11.0: Way Forward:**

The meeting agreed that as a way forward, all institutions represented should forward to Prof. J. Mfutso Bengo electronic versions of details of what they are doing, research, documentation, etc to enable Prof. Mfutso Bengo come-up with the paper referred to in 9.0 above, bearing in mind that Prof. Mfutso Bengo has a two-week dead line; i.e., up to 5<sup>th</sup> March 2007.

The meeting further agreed that when Prof. Mfutso Bengo has prepared the paper, members should go through it in readiness for a follow-up meeting scheduled for the 9<sup>th</sup> March 2007

The meeting further agreed that this paper will be used to inform the UNESCO team on how best to prepare for the visit scheduled for the 18 – 19<sup>th</sup> June 2007.

#### **12. Date of Next Meeting:**

The next meeting was scheduled for Friday 9<sup>th</sup> March 2007 at the National Commission for UNESCO Library at 14 hours.

**AOB:**

The secretariat announced that in the subsequent meetings it will invite the Philosophy Department of Philosophy of the University of Malawi recognizing their role in issues of bioethics. The secretariat conceded the oversight for failing to involve the Department in the current meeting.

The secretariat then announced logistical arrangements for those participants who had come from outside Lilongwe in terms of travel and accommodation arrangements.

There being no any other pertinent issues to discuss, the Executive Secretary thanked people for attending and wished them a safe return to their respective work places. He then declared the meeting closed.

**Chairperson .....**

**Date .....**

**F. R. Mkandawire**

**Secretary .....**

**Date .....**

**H. Kulemeka-Kishindo**