



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

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UNESCO ASSISTING BIOETHICS COMMITTEES PROJECT
2007

1st Preparatory mission on the establishment of a National Bioethics Committee in Togo.
Lome, Togo, 9-10 March 2007

Objective

The technical mission was undertaken as a rotating conference. The conference took place in cooperation with the University of Lome, the University of Kara and the National Commission for UNESCO, under the patronage of the Minister of Higher Education and Research and the Minister of Health. It involved Professor Claude Huriet, the Vice-President of IBC. The Chairperson of COMEST, Mrs Armanet, was scheduled to participate but unfortunately not able to attend. The SHS Regional Advisor in the Dakar Office, Mrs Carrie Marias, also participated as observer. The Director of the Division of Ethics of Science and Technology was in charge of the mission.

Conference

This conference followed the pattern for rotating conferences. It was very well organised by Mr Koungblenou, the secretary-general of the National Commission, and Professor Christophe Dikenou, professor of ethics in the University of Lome. They have brought together 40 participants from various fields of science and policy-making. It was also an interactive session with many questions, contributions and exchanges.

The conference was opened with welcome addresses. Professor Koffi Ahadzi-Nonou, President of the University of Lome underlined the importance of ethics for the development of science and technology in the country. The Director of the Division of Ethics of Science and Technology in UNESCO, Paris, was subsequently invited to greet the participants on behalf of UNESCO. Finally, Mr Adimodo Aduayom, Minister of Higher Education and Research, and President of the National Commission for UNESCO welcomed the participants, also stipulating the significance of ethics for the current situation in the country, and in particular its relation to the current process of political reconciliation. He also underlined that the conference will also be an opportunity to create more long-term cooperation with UNESCO in the field of ethics, now that he has given instruction to establish a national bioethics committee.

The next section of the conference included the presentation about UNESCO, First the Director EST explained the ethics programme of UNESCO with its various components as Global Ethics Observatory (and the need to have more data regarding Togo), the Ethics Education Programme (through which UNESCO can assist in development of programs and training courses) and the Assisting Bioethics Committees Project (which aimed at supporting bioethics committees in order to make them as sustainable and effective as possible).

The subsequent presentation was made by professor Huriet. With his large ethical, political and scientific experience he demonstrated the importance of the inter-professional, interdisciplinary and multicultural approach of the International Bioethics Committee

The afternoon session was in fact a working session in order to discuss and approve the Statutes of the “Comite Consultatif National de Bioethique”. The participants in the conference acted as the Constitutive Assembly for this national bioethics committee. The CCNB Togo will be an association according to law and will have its location at the National Commission for UNESCO. It will be an independent and pluralist body of experts in various domains as bioethics, philosophy, health sciences, law, social and human sciences and natural sciences.

The objectives of the CCNB are (a) to conduct reflections on relevant bioethical problems, (b) to play a role of advisor in regard to the formulation of ethical principles and rules for the conduct of scientific research, and (c) promote the teaching of bioethics. The membership of the CCNB will be founding members, active members and honorary members. Since it is an association by law, there can not be a turnover of members with specified and limited terms of membership. This will be a disadvantage on the longer run since it will be increasingly difficult to involve new and younger members. The Committee will have a General Assembly (meeting once a year) and an Executive Office (meeting every 3 months). The Statutes of the CCNB have been amended and approved by the participants of the conference. The next step will be the installation of its members by the Minister of Education. From that moment on, the committee will be a separate body of experts in the field of ethics in Togo. It will therefore be included in the Assisting Bioethics Committees Project as one of the partners.

As an exercise in public sensibilisation and awareness raising, there was a public conference on ethics given by professor Huriet in the later afternoon and organised by the Centre Culturel Francais in Lome. This was a well attended meeting with many young participants.

The second day of the meeting started with a presentation on the activities of COMEST. The Director EST could present the work in the fields of environmental ethics, science ethics and technology ethics. Especially the issues of the environment and nanotechnology raised many questions. After this presentation the final report of the meeting was made and approved by the participants. Closing addresses have been given by the Secretary General of the National Commission for UNESCO and the representative of the Minister of Health.

Evaluation

This rotating conference had two positive results. First, it engaged the participants in the activities of UNESCO. Information has been disseminated and many experts could discuss the ethics program in connection to the situation in Togo. Second, the meeting has been an occasion to approve the statutes of the National Consultative Committee for Bioethics in Togo. The Committee is now ready to be officially inaugurated and at that moment will be one of the partners of UNESCO in the ABC project.

The follow-up of this conference will be practical. As soon as the Committee is inaugurated and its members appointed, we will proceed in making a Memorandum of Understanding, specifying the needs of the Committee and the technical assistance given by UNESCO in the context of the ABC project. Preliminary planning will focus on (1) developing a training course in working methods (following Guide 2 in the series of guides for national bioethics committees) perhaps later this year or early next year, (2) developing a training course in the field of ethics, based on the proposal for a core curriculum in the area of bioethics. As a subsequent step following these two activities, a training course for ethics teachers can also be provided, perhaps for a group of francophone countries in West-Africa.