

most useful features of the mobile app. Mobile app increased the level of knowledge of preeclampsia by 179%. User feedback from alpha-testing informed the development of high-fidelity prototype for beta testing. 95.2% of pregnant women surveyed were willing to download the mobile app. The final app developed was uploaded on Google Playstore (MyBelle Pregnancy App) for free download.

Conclusion mHealth apps have the potential to increase access to prenatal information and services in Nigeria and may reduce maternal and childhood mortality. This paper has described the process of development of first indigenous mobile app specifically for pregnant women in Nigeria using user-centred design thinking approach.

PA-675 NAVIGATING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC FOR PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT AND FOLLOW-UP: EXPERIENCES FROM THE PEDICAP CLINICAL TRIAL CONSORTIUM

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Background COVID-19, first reported in Wuhan, China in December 2019, was declared a pandemic in March 2020, causing restrictions of movement of people and goods worldwide. This affected every aspect of life, including the conduct of clinical trials. We highlight the challenges faced by the PediCAP consortium and how we navigated them.

Methods The PediCAP consortium is composed of 14 partners (<https://projectpedicap.org/the-consortium/>) in Africa and Europe. The EDCTP-funded clinical trial (ISRCTN63115131) is enrolling children aged 2months to 6years with pneumonia in Mozambique, Uganda, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Participant recruitment started in December 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic; and by end of April 2023, 987 of the targeted 1100 participants (89.7%) had been enrolled. The challenges faced by the clinical sites, and measures taken to mitigate them, were obtained from minutes of monthly teleconferences and interviews with site staff, and summarized in themes.

Results The following were reported as challenges and their mitigating measures:

- Delays in obtaining ethical and regulatory approvals: Ethical and regulatory bodies adopted paperless submissions, virtual review meetings, and used online tools to interact with applicants.

- Slow recruitment of participants resulting from reduction in numbers of patients attending hospitals, due to fear of contracting COVID-19, and lockdowns restricting movement. This was solved by adding a partner and satellite sites. Additionally, a no-cost extension of the project was made to allow for extension of the recruitment period.
- Site initiation, protocol training, procurement of trial drugs, and clinical trial monitoring were delayed/problematic. The sponsor adopted virtual platforms and local monitors to mitigate this.
- A need to protect site staff and participants from contracting COVID-19. Country specific COVID-19 risk management plans were developed and implemented.

Conclusion COVID-19 impeded smooth progress of PediCAP trial activities. However, a joint and collaborative effort was key in navigating the challenges.

PA-679 ENGAGING YOUTHS ON SOCIAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES AROUND BIO-BANKING IN KILIFI, KENYA. USE OF DELIBERATIVE CONSULTATION WORKSHOPS

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Background There is increasing attention to bio-banking in health research due to its value in providing rapid turnaround of research results. However, bio-banking in Sub-Saharan Africa is still in infancy and is wrought with many ethical and social-cultural challenges. There's a dearth of research focusing on informed views of young people, who are likely to be the greatest consumers of health research information. At the KEMRI Wellcome Trust Research Programme (KWTRP) with nearly 1.5million biological specimens stored for over 30years, social science research investigated opinions about biobanking, and the ethical and social-cultural considerations from diverse stakeholders including youth.

Methods One-day deliberative consultation workshop with 44/47 Young Persons Advisory Group members from three secondary schools in Kilifi County. This aimed at informing and seeking opinions of the youth on the ethical and social-cultural issues of biobanking. Activities included discussions about DNA, KWTRP biobank tour, plenary and focus group discussions. Topics discussed included views on sample storage, sharing, consent, assent, and benefits of bio-banking. Data was transcribed, translated to English, and analyzed using thematic analysis.

Results Participants seemed to understand health research and supported bio-banking due to its associated benefits. They emphasized strict adherence to ethical guidelines on sample sharing, especially confidentiality. They supported initial parental consent for continued storage and sharing of samples collected for research while they were minors. Tracing participants who transit to adults, and recall biases were some of the reasons given for not re-contacting minors to re-affirm consent for continued secondary sample use. They also suggested that assent age should be lowered to 9–16years [as opposed to 13–17 years].

Conclusion Engaging the youth in bio-banking was regarded as an important step. Therefore, with careful considerations, youth can be engaged to demystify health research and bio-banking through well-tailored and suited engagement strategies.

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PA-682 OVERCOMING DIVERSE CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH INNOVATIVE MULTICOUNTRY COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES: THE KENYAN EXPERIENCE OF THE PREV_PKDL PROJECT

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Background The EDCTP-funded PREV_PKDL project was designed to: i) advance the clinical development of a vaccine for prevention of visceral leishmaniasis (VL)/post kala azar dermal leishmaniasis (PKDL) and ii) to gain a greater understanding of the immune determinants of treatment outcome, using multidimensional, multiparameter phenotyping of patient cohorts recruited across the countries of the Leishmaniasis East Africa Platform (LEAP; Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda). Central to the latter objective was the establishment of a distributed Center of Excellence in Flow Cytometry across the collaborating sites (Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan Uganda and UK).

Methods Accomplishing the project objectives required acquisition of specialised equipment (CytoFLEX LX Cytometer), sourcing and validation of custom antibody panels, specialised training of flow cytometry managers, and renovation of space to develop a Flow Cytometry Laboratory. Study approvals were obtained for implementation at Kimalel and Chemolingot subcounty hospitals in Baringo County.

Results Multifaceted challenges were numerous, including delays in laboratory allocation and renovation, UK VISA issues precluding travel of the flow manager, supply chain delays occasioned by government requirements, late arrival of equipment, relocation of personnel and equipment from initial study site to current site, in-country insecurity and an ongoing curfew in the study area due to cattle rustling. Despite these challenges, the study has been initiated and high quality immunological data obtained from 24% of the target sample size. In addition, six *Leishmania* isolates have been obtained from splenic aspirates of VL patients enrolled as part of a nested collaboration that seeks to understand how parasite genotype affects clinical status and treatment response.

Conclusion Developing the capacity to conduct in depth immune phenotyping of patients enrolled in clinical studies in East Africa faces many hurdles that can be overcome by perseverance and a common objective.

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PA-684 STRENGTHENING NATIONAL ETHICS COMMITTEES IN WEST AND CENTRAL FRANCOPHONE AFRICA: PROGRESS, CHALLENGES, AND PERSPECTIVES

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Background National Ethics Committees (NECs) are critically required to ensure rigorous and ethically sound health research. In Francophone Africa, in spite of a rise in the bulk of clinical and biomedical research, and the fact that the region is highly vulnerable to emerging infectious diseases, NECs have not reached the institutional maturity of their counterparts in Anglophone Africa. To address these challenges, the Cameroon Bioethics Initiative (CAMBIN) received funding for strengthening the capacity of NECs in four Francophone African countries: Cameroon, Chad, Mali and Niger. **Methods** Through the project called “Strengthening National Ethics Committees in West and Central Francophone Africa (SNECFA)”, CAMBIN supported NEC members (1) to write/update their Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the review of research protocols during routine and emergency health situations; (2) register/renew their Federal Wide Assurance number (FWA); (3) develop and/or revise Training and Resources in Research Ethics Evaluation (TRREE) national supplement for their country; (4) disseminate the SOPs and TRREE national supplements and (5) draft a collaboration plan (Mali with Niger and Cameroon with Chad).

Results CAMBIN provided customized training programmes for NEC members. The four NECs have developed their SOPs following the WHO guidelines and are currently using them for the review of research protocols. They all have an active FWA registration – improving their international visibility. The NECs are developing and/or updating their TRREE national supplements. Finally, a groundwork for knowledge sharing, exchange of ideas and good practice between the NECs has been created through the development of two (Mali/Niger and Cameroon/Chad) collaboration plans.

Conclusion The capacity of NECs in Cameroon, Chad, Mali and Niger is being strengthened. The dissemination of the SOPs and the TRREE national supplements within the scientific community will further boost their national and international visibility. Collaboration plans will be implemented in the coming months.

PA-690 WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND UPTAKE OF SULFADOXINE-PYRIMETHAMINE FOR INTERMITTENT PREVENTIVE TREATMENT OF MALARIA DURING PREGNANCY: RESULTS FROM A CROSS-SECTIONAL SURVEY IN THE LAKE ENDEMIC REGION, KENYA

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