UNESCO Bioethics Programme

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On behalf of
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UNESCO’s MANDATE

• Julian Huxley, the first Director-General of the Organization, pointed out that, in order to make science contribute to peace, security and human welfare, it was necessary to relate the applications of science to a scale of values. (Huxley, 1946)
UNESCO’s Mandate

• Activities in promoting science and international co-operation should serve as a channel to address the basic problems and needs of the world population, such as poverty.

• Respect for cultural diversity is one of the main concerns of UNESCO.
UNESCO is the only UN agency with a specialized mandate in the social and human sciences (meaning socio-cultural perspective, values, etc.)

Strategically positioned to promote a global ethics framework for medicine, science and technology.
UNESCO’s Bioethics programme
Established in 1993 by Federico Mayor

1. Conduct multidisciplinary and pluralistic reflection of emerging ethical issues.

2. Conduct normative action regarding of ethics of science and technology and life sciences.

3. Provide concrete guidance to States in the application of these ethical principles.

4. Develop top down and bottom up strategy to ensure ethical and democratic governance of medicine, life sciences, technology and innovation development and its applications. Ensure every individual and group has quality and human health care, etc (advisory bodies, education for strategic target groups and foster public debate).

5. Fostering alliances and partnerships (network of universities, individual experts, chairs, professional organizations).
International Advisory Bodies at UNESCO

• 1993 International Bioethics Committee (IBC) composed of 36 individual experts appointed by the DG of UNESCO

• 1998 Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee (IGBC) composed of 36 Member States

• 1998 World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST) composed of 18 individual experts appointed by the DG
Report of the IBC

- Report on Social Responsibility and Health (2010)
- etc.

Standard Setting Action

From 1993-2017:

• **Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights** (1997, endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 1998)

• **International Declaration on Human Genetic Data** (2003)

• **Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights** (2005).

• **Declaration of Ethical Principles in relation to Climate Change** (2017)

• **Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers** (2017)
Achievements

• First international documents with global consensus to provide the ethical framework for the world policies on sensitive and emerging issues
  (human genome, genetic data and global bioethics, ethical principles of Climate Change).

• Unique documents and procedure:
  – Governments need input from experts- This is an example of global academia and experts informing policy makers (IBC-IGBC, GC).

• Multidisciplinary and pluralistic expert reflection informing governments (Bioethical approach).
Impact of normative instruments:

• Criteria: ten years after.

• The UDHGHR, and the IDGD first ones to set principles for protection of information, promotion of benefit sharing, preventing the financial gains from the human genome (in its natural state)....

• The USA Supreme Court: Myriad Genetics, INC.
Achievements: Impact of normative instruments

Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights: Has been used as reference documents by:

The European Court of Human Rights (several cases)

The Interamerican Court of Human Rights, Supreme Court in Brazil, Costa Rica.

At least two of the Declarations are included in national legislation for research (Spain).
Achievements: Impact of normative instruments

Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights:

• UNESCO was instrumental in bringing bioethics to a global stage: moving from a narrow view in interpretations:
  • Biomedical sphere
  • Research and STI

To the wide range of topics covered included in the Declaration, particularly, social (LA since 1990’s)

– Global bioethics means the field of applied ethics that calls for ethical, social, legal, environmental dimensions to be taken into account.
Achievements: Impact of normative instruments

Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights:

The link with bioethics and human rights it’s a milestone:

- Linking bioethical reflection to International Human Rights law, a new legal-ethical minimum has been established.

- Any government needs to take it into account when planning public policies and actions in medicine, biotechnologies, life sciences and its applications.
IN THE FIELD OF BIOETHICS

• UNESCO has become the leading agency to develop a laboratory of ideas but also mechanism to deliver normative instruments and to implement them.

• Has developed an international credibility.
Achievements

- UN Interagency Committee on Bioethics:
- By promoting the establishment and being the permanent secretariat since its establishment 10 years ago.

- UNESCO leads systematized efforts aiming at cooperation and avoiding overlapping on bioethics at the UN level and beyond.
Capacity Building: Assisting Bioethics Committees

• Establishing and reinforcing national advisory bodies in bioethics (NBC):

• Regulation (in broad sense) of bioethical issues by NBC: advising or being consulted. States and society recognize their need.

• Also by them promoting REC, Clinical Committees and public policies on research, biotech, biosafety, etc.

• They are means to translate and implement international instruments and universal principles in national and concrete cultural context.

• They enrich and help shaping the international reflection by bringing their specificities.

• Social laboratories of pluralism and multidisciplinarity
Assisting Bioethics Committees Project (ABC)

UNESCO Guides

Guide N°1: Establishing Bioethics Committees
Guide N°2: Bioethics Committees at Work: Procedures and Policies
Guide N°3: Educating Bioethics Committees
Guide N°4: Ethics Committees and Public Policies
Guide N°5: Ethics Committees and Public Debate

Available in English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Chinese, Turkish
NBC: Some results:

- *The National Guidelines for accreditation of research ethics committees, as well as the process of accrediting them*
- *National Policy regarding tissue transplantation*
- *Developing an agreement for material transfer*
- Visit REC countrywide and training at least 2 members of each committee
- *Improving relationships with other regulatory agencies*
- The Guidelines for research ethics committees
- Some have conducted self training
- *Public sessions, TV shows*
Achievements:
Ethics Education Programme Launched in 2005

• Engagement of all stake and share holders to become active and responsible.
• Establishing common standards for bioethics education through Core Curriculum and different regional initiatives.
• Technical support to different institutions in the different regions, to implement educational programs.
• Teaching current and future teachers in a specific methodology
• By establishing networks of experts (Redbioética)
• Raising awareness and public policies through academic events in different regions such as Asia and LA, some recent efforts in Arab region.
• In Latin America Training in Clinical and Social Bioethics and Research ethics: 1200 students from many countries, 500 activities at institutional level as a result of the training.
UNESCO Bioethics Core Curriculum

• Largely adopted by Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME)

• Used for the revision of medical ethics and law curricula in the U.K and backed up by the General Medical Council of the UK and the British Medical Association

• Essential component of Master in Bioethics of the National Guard Health Affairs in Saudi Arabia

_Aim: to facilitate the introduction of bioethics primarily in medical and science schools_
Supplements to the UNESCO Bioethics Core Curriculum:

- **Casebook on Benefit and Harm**
- **Casebook on Human Rights and Human Dignity**

Designed to be used with the Core Curriculum, or as stand-alone study material for one of the bioethical principles in the Declaration.

Freely available in hardcopy as well as for electronic download through the UNESCO website (www.unesco.org)
Achievements: Ethics Education

Diversifying target populations:
• Current and future ethics teachers (ETTC)
• Health care related students and professionals

To:
• Judges
• Journalists
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<th>Country</th>
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<td>Kenya</td>
<td>Egerton University, Njoro ETTC</td>
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<td>Côte d'Ivoire</td>
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<td>Brazil</td>
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<td>Israel</td>
<td>University of Haifa, Haifa Network of UNITS, case books, ETTC, International Conferences on Bioethics Education, mobilizing strategic partners and funds</td>
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<td>Spain</td>
<td>University of Barcelona : Publications and seminars on the UDBHR, on research committees policies based on UNESCO, movies and bioethics.</td>
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<td>Italy</td>
<td>The Ateneo Pontificio Regina Apostolorum, Università Europea di Roma Dialogue between religions</td>
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<td>Portugal</td>
<td>Universidade Católica Portuguesa</td>
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<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>University of Presov Ethics and bioethics Intl workshop</td>
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<td>Austria</td>
<td>Medical University of Vienna, Translation of BCC in German</td>
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Concluding remark

• Bioethics Program should continue to strike a balance to reflect and act upon emerging and persistent topics.
• Should go beyond reflection, contributing to the implementation of its normative instruments, analyzing the obstacles to the full development of the rights and fundamental freedoms.
• The obstacles are beyond high tech, mainly in the basic and classical worries:
  – protect the rights of people in different contexts, integrating the intercultural perspective,
  – paying due regard to the needs of each country, in order to adapt the framework adopted by consensus by Member States.