The establishment of Research Ethics Committees (RECs) in charge of reviewing research protocols answers the need to regulate with an ethical framework the development of clinical trials, biomedical research and technologies affecting human health. The first RECs were instituted at the national level in the 60s, and were gradually put in place in Africa as a result of research projects development in the area of epidemics such as HIV infection, and to meet one of the major requirements of the Helsinki Declaration and the international ethical Guidelines CIOMS: “each research protocol involving humans has to be reviewed by an independent ethics committee”. However, RECs in Africa are still facing various challenges in the accomplishment of their missions. Among them, RECs located in the West-African French speaking area are reporting an urgent need for networking and coordinating their effort.

Supported by EDCTP, AFREENET (AFRica Ethics Excellence NETwork) is a 3-years collaborative project between three RECs, respectively in Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea and Benin, and coordinated by the Ethics Unit of Institut Pasteur (France), which aim is to reinforce RECs capacities.

The project will lead to reinforce training capacities on a long-term based strategy with the establishment of mechanisms to ensure and update members’ training, and make emerge a pool of ethics trainers. Based on RECs experiences, network activities will permit to share and identify valuable practices on global ethics oversight, such as monitoring, SOPs, regulatory issues and sensitization. The preparation of Ethics Committees to the potential occurrence of outbreaks will be specifically addressed through an Outbreak preparation plan built up on lessons learnt from the Ebola crisis.

Creating synergies and mutual empowerment between African RECs will increase their visibility, their capacity for advocacy and their recognition as key actors of a responsible ethics research framework at the national, regional and international level.