

# Health Research Policy in South Sudan

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## Introduction

- ❖ South Sudan has witnessed perhaps the longest liberation war in modern Africa, beginning just before independence in August 1955, ending with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in January 2005. The war destroyed the physical infrastructure and social structures as well as causing the deaths of over 2.5 million people and displacement of over 4.0 million people. Consequently, the health system collapsed. During the last phase of the war (1983-2005) international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and faith based organizations (FBOs) assumed responsibility for basic health service delivery in liberated areas
- ❖ Survey data from South Sudan demonstrate high levels of poverty, poor health indicators and low health service coverage (Household Health Survey; Health Facility Assessment). The Ministry of Health recognises that a sound evidence base is necessary for both effective health care practice and planning and that high quality health research can make an important contribution to this
- ❖ As set out in the Health Research Policy, the Ministry of Health will provide leadership and support for health research in South Sudan
- ❖ As part of this process, the Ministry of Health has set itself the mission of improving the health status of the population and to ensure quality health care to all the people of South Sudan. The Ministry has laid out its plans to achieve this in its Health Policy 2007-11.
- ❖ Development Plan 2011-2015, which provides a strategic framework for achieving the objectives of the Health Policy
- ❖ The Health Policy 2007-11 recognises the importance of research that contributes towards the improvement of health and asserts the Ministry's commitment to support health research
- ❖ The Republic of South Sudan (RSS) established a Research Ethics Committee (REC) in June 2006 to ensure that Research in South Sudan is conducted according to internationally accepted norms to protect healthy volunteers and patients from exploitation and harm by Researchers and commercial organization

## Rationale for Health Research Policy

- ❖ Between 2006 and 2010 approximately 20 research studies a year are known by the Directorate of Planning and Coordination to have been undertaken in South Sudan
- ❖ Non-governmental organisations initiated 36% of studies and only a minority (7%) have been externally sponsored by academic institutions from developed countries
- ❖ Compliance with these guidelines helps to ensure that the dignity, rights, safety, and well-being of research participants are promoted and that the results of the investigations are credible
- ❖ As of 2010, there was no independent scientific or ethical review of proposed research at National, State or Institutional (e.g. university, hospital) level
- ❖ There was no catalogue of these reports and no mechanism for the active dissemination of research findings to the relevant directorates within the Ministry of Health, the States or the wider community
- ❖ A few studies have been published in peer-reviewed journals

## Principles of health research in South Sudan

- ❖ Priority setting of health research can provide direction for investigators wishing to conduct research and serve as a template against which the relevance of proposed research may be judged
- ❖ Integration of health research priorities into a national or essential health research agenda allows decision makers to influence the direction of health research
- ❖ To be credible, a priority setting process for health research should be transparent and inclusive and involve representatives from policy, research, health services and the wider community
- ❖ In the absence of a completed priority setting process for health research, health research priorities for a population should reflect the health care priorities of that population

## Mechanism and structures

- ❖ Mechanisms, exist to ensure the scientific validity of health research. This is usually the responsibility of research ethics committees. An d ethics committee can verify that a competent body has judged the research to be scientifically sound
- ❖ The existing structure of the research department includes research data hub, ethical committee and the research secretariats
- ❖ The National ethical committee composes of seven (7) people and from various different fields and not necessarily all from ministry staff. National ethics committee (NEC) will undertake the independent, competent and timely ethical review of research proposals
- ❖ Applications for Research Ethics approval will be accompanied with the following documentation
  1. Completed application form signed by the Lead Researchers
  2. Covering letter from the Researcher or researcher institution
  3. Attach copy of REC approval if this proposal was reviewed by another institution
  4. Curriculum vitae of all those involved in the Research
  5. Soft copy and Seven Hard copies of the Research proposal
  6. Patient information leaflet to inform patients of the nature of the Research project and how they may be involved
  7. A guarantee of patient indemnity in case they should come to harm as a result of participation in the Research
  8. Patient consent form with a provision for spaces for patient signature and finger print, respectively, in case a patient or volunteer is unable to write

## Map of Republic of South Sudan



## Conclusions

- Southern Sudan is emerging from a decade's long civil war, which has degraded
- the country's social and physical infrastructure.
- The Health research policy have presented the Government of South Sudan with
- the opportunity to start building a nation and to regulate and monitor research in
- the country