



**ACORCA • COARCA**

African Coalition for Research & Communication on Abortion

Coalition Africaine pour la Recherche et la Communication sur l'Avortement

## **Charter for the African Coalition for Research and Communication on Abortion/Coalition Africaine pour la Recherche et la Communication sur l'Avortement (ACORCA-COARCA)**

**We, ACORCA-COARCA, are a newly formed African Coalition focused on abortion research and its effective use within policy and practice.** Our Coalition is motivated by the burden of unsafe abortion on the African continent, the need for policy reform to support access to safe and comprehensive abortion care (CAC), and the need to bridge the gap between the production of research and its use by policymakers and civil society. ACORCA-COARCA is the first African-led entity focused on pooling institutional and individual efforts for improving the quality and effective use of research on abortion. ACORCA-COARCA was formed in late 2024 and was originally comprised of 16 Founding Member institutions from across East, South, Central, and West Africa, including universities, research and training institutions and non-governmental organizations. We are fully bi-lingual in English and French, ensuring engagement from different sub-regions.

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### **Our Vision**

An Africa where every woman and girl has access to safe, high-quality abortion services, free from stigma, enabling them to exercise their full reproductive rights with dignity and autonomy.

### **Our Mission**

To advance policy-relevant research, evidence-based advocacy and partnerships that drive transformative policies, practices and societal change for equitable access to safe abortion across Africa.

### **Aims and Strategies**

Combining our strengths, drive and innovation we will serve as a platform for agenda-setting and coordinated strategic engagement with the African policy community, leveraging our existing

networks and partnerships to build capacity and leadership on abortion research and amplify research findings across the continent.

We hope to achieve this through the following three strategic pillars:

**Pillar 1: SUPPORT and EMPOWER abortion researchers**

By building an enabling environment for high-quality, context-specific and policy-relevant abortion research in Africa.

**Pillar 2: STRENGTHEN abortion research CAPACITIES**

By building a critical mass of skilled and empowered researchers in Africa who generate and effectively communicate high-quality, policy-relevant evidence on abortion.

**Pillar 3: COMMUNICATE & ADVOCATE for safe abortion with evidence**

By increasing engagement of researchers and advocates with policy-makers, health practitioners, the media and community to shift public perceptions and influence policy and practice on abortion.

**Coalition Structure**

ACORCA-COARCA is a collective of different members (institutions and individuals) who are engaged in abortion research, communication or advocacy in Africa. It has 16 'Founding Member' institutions, all based in Africa. The coalition is governed by an **Executive Committee** of 11 members, voted every three years by the wider membership at an annual meeting of the membership called the Annual **Coalition Meeting (ACM)**. An **Advisory Council**, comprising senior experts on abortion and advocacy from within and outside Africa provides strategic and networking support. The daily work of ACORCA is coordinated by a **Secretariat**, located within a **Secretariat Host Institution** – Health Development Initiative, Rwanda. Implementation of the three pillars and corresponding activities will be led by three corresponding **Coalition Working Groups (CWG)**, with coordination support from the **Secretariat**.

**Executive Committee**

The Executive Committee comprises 11 members who will be nominated and voted by the Coalition's wider membership at the ACM. Ten members will be regional representatives from institutions registered in Africa, two each from North, East, South, Central and West Africa and one from the African diaspora. At least half of the Executive Committee members will be female. Tenure for each representative shall be for 3 years and terms renewable once. The Executive Committee will be led by three Co-Chairs, also voted every three years and will be responsible for the management of the Coalition and its funded activities. There will be a gender and linguistic balance among the Co-Chairs.

Key functions and responsibilities:

- Provides strategy, direction and guidance to the Coalition.
- Oversee the activities of and manages the Secretariat.
- Leads resource mobilization and carries out any representational duties.
- Manage and consult with the ACORCA Advisory Council.
- Oversee the Coalition membership and its expansion.
- Host and manage the ACM.
- Host Regional Partnership Forums (in EC members' their respective regions).
- Participate actively in and engage with each of the three coalition working groups.

The Executive Committee will meet virtually at least once every two months and will be considered quorate in the presence of at least 5 members.

### **Advisory Council**

The Advisory Council is established to provide strategic guidance and advice to the Executive Committee. It does not participate in any of the other ACORCA-COARCA structures. It will comprise 6-8 members on a voluntary basis who are experts in areas of strategic interest to ACORCA-COARCA, including but not limited to abortion research, communications and fundraising. Members will be identified through a nomination process led by the Executive Committee and guided by criteria to ensure disciplinary and linguistic diversity, gender balance and potential for strategic partnerships.

The Advisory Council will meet **at least** once a year and members will serve for a term of two years, renewable upon mutual agreement.

### **Secretariat**

The Secretariat is the administrative office of ACORCA-COARCA and is responsible for the coordination of the Coalition's activities. It is staffed by a bi-lingual team comprising a Senior Manager and supported by an Administrative or Clerical Officer (or other similar administrative/junior support that may be provided by the Secretariat Host). The Secretariat staff will be recruited through an open competitive process and will be accountable to the Executive Committee.

Functioning bi-lingually in English and French, the Secretariat will act on behalf of all ACORCA-COARCA members and the Executive Committee and support ACORCA-COARCA's three Coalition Working Groups to ensure the implementation of the Coalitions' strategic pillars.

Key functions and responsibilities include:

- Networking and fundraising including proposal writing, budget development, donor engagement and consultation with Coalition members.
- Coalition grants management, including budgetary management of grants distributed to Coalition members and donor reporting.
- Oversight of and support to the Executive Committee and the ACORCA-COARCA Coalition Working Groups, including organization and minute-taking of meetings.
- Organization of the ACORCA-COARCA Annual Coalition Meeting (ACM), including organization of any nomination and voting processes.
- Organization of any Regional Partner Forums and other Coalition event management.
- Coordination and communication with Coalition members, including ACORCA-COARCA newsletters.
- External communications on the Coalition including maintenance of the ACORCA-COARCA website.
- Other administrative functions including record-keeping, creation and maintenance of databases of members and potential funders, and membership application processes

The Secretariat will not implement ACORCA-COARCA activities itself. It will distribute any Coalition funds raised to its Coalition members to implement on behalf of the Coalition. Grant proposals for ACORCA-COARCA should include an administrative overhead to cover the costs of the Secretariat.

The performance of the Secretariat will be monitored by the Executive Committee. The Secretariat Senior Manager will be line-managed jointly by a Director at the Secretariat Host Institution and one of the Executive Committee co-chairs.

Resources received into the Secretariat will be managed in a separate bank account to ensure that ACORCA-COARCA funds are fire-walled from those of the Host Institution, though for legal reasons the bank account may be in the name of the Host Institution.

### **Secretariat Host Institution**

The Secretariat Host Institution is a Coalition member that provides institutional hosting for the Secretariat. The Host Institution, Health Development Initiative (HDI) based in Rwanda, acts as a physical and administrative host to the Secretariat. It may also provide a contracting and financial entity for the Coalition. HDI was selected by the Coalition's Executive Committee in January 2025 in a competitive process, based on the following criteria: financial management capacity; infrastructure (physical and administrative capacity, including office services, high-speed internet connectivity, finance staff); travel and visa requirements for the host country; abortion research capacity and experience; commitment to abortion rights; networks and partnerships; and languages capacity (anglophone and francophone).

Primary functions of the Secretariat Host Institution, HDI will include:

- Act as the financial and legal sponsor for the Coalition
- Support the management of Secretariat staff:
- Provide the relevant infrastructure for the Secretariat Office

A senior Director at the Secretariat Host Institution will co-manage the performance of the Secretariat staff, along with one of the Co-Chairs of the Executive Committee.

### **Coalition Working Groups (CWG)**

The role of the ACORCA-COARCA Working Groups is to implement the strategies and activities which align with each of the Coalition's three strategic pillars:

Pillar 1: SUPPORT and EMPOWER abortion researchers

Pillar 2: STRENGTHEN abortion research CAPACITIES

Pillar 3: COMMUNICATE & ADVOCATE for safe abortion with evidence

This will include working on fundraising initiatives together with the Secretariat, and participating members may receive grant funding from ACORCA-COARCA to implement activities on behalf of the Coalition. CWG members will be drawn from ACORCA-COARCA's membership.

Each CWG will have a lead who will be drawn from the institutional membership (see below) and can be elected or nominated.

### **Annual Coalition Meeting (ACM)**

An Annual Coalition Meeting (an annual general meeting) will be held every year either in-person, virtually, or hybrid, pending funding, and all Coalition Members (individual and institutional) will be invited to attend. The ACM will host elections for the Executive Committee (when applicable) as well as strategic discussions on ACORCA-COARCA's activities, achievements, challenges and future plans. CWG leads will present their achievements and subsequent workplans. It is mandatory for the Executive Committee and CWG leads to participate in the ACM.

## **Regional Partnership Forum**

Executive Committee members from each of the five regions (East, Central, Southern, West and North Africa) may host, during their tenure a Regional Partnership Forum in their respective region. This may be virtual or face to face if funding permits. The Partnership Forums will function as the consultative group for each region and representation in the forum will comprise the regional institutional membership.

## **ACORCA-COARCA Membership**

Coalition membership comprises both institutions and individuals actively involved in abortion research and advocacy in Africa.

- **Founding Members:** A group of 16 initial research institutions from sub-Saharan Africa helped establish ACORCA-COARCA and are referred to as Founding Members (see annex). The diverse institutions comprise universities, research institutes and NGOs, and include experts in abortion incidence and safety measurement, clinical research, operational research, social research, as well as institutions focused on the communication of research findings for advocacy and policy impact. During a co-creation workshop held in November 2024, the Founding Members agreed on a preliminary vision, mission and strategies for ACORCA-COARCA, which forms the basis of this Charter. The Founding Members represent the ACORCA-COARCA first Institutional Members.
- **Institutional Members:** Institutional Members must represent organizations actively conducting research or advocacy on abortion in Africa and are based in Africa. The Executive Directors of the participating institutions will be invited, and a senior representative is required to attend the ACM. Institutional Members will: participate in the ACORCA-COARCA Working Groups; hold the Executive Committee to account; and can stand in the elections of the Executive Committee convened at the ACM.
- **Individual Members:** Any individual involved in abortion research or abortion advocacy in Africa and who are based in Africa can become a Member of the ACORCA-COARCA. Individual Members will be invited to participate in the Coalition Working Groups; and vote in the election of the Executive Committee (if they belong to a Coalition Working Group). Individual Members will receive the benefits of being a Coalition member.
- **Observer member\*:** Either an institution or individual based outside of Africa who has experience in abortion research or advocacy in Africa and is willing to contribute to the work and mission of the Coalition.

\*Note on observers: The number of observer members will be limited to 10 institutions and 20 individuals at any one time and applications will be reviewed on a first-come, first-served basis. Observer members can participate in working groups but cannot lead them. They cannot usually participate in the Executive Committee, unless they self-nominate to serve as the African citizen (diaspora) position in the Executive Committee. Observer members can attend the ACM but do not have voting rights.

## **Membership fees**

All Members of the Coalition will be required to pay a standard annual fee as a commitment to the work of the ACORCA-COARCA and to benefit from its opportunities (see below). Membership fees will be based on membership type (individual, institutional, observer). Waived membership fees will be considered against criteria outlined in the 'Membership Structures and Expansion Strategy)

**Benefits and obligations of membership** are articulated in ACORCA-COARCA's membership policy document.

To apply to become ACORCA-COARCA members, individuals and institutions can do so via the ACORCA-COARCA <https://www.acorca-coarca.org/>. All applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis and acted on by the Secretariat.

## Values and Principles

- **Collective action:** We believe in the power of collaborative research and advocacy. Our approach emphasizes co-creation and co-ownership, allowing all Members to actively participate in designing and implementing our initiatives. This inclusive ethos ensures that diverse perspectives shape our work, leading to more effective outcomes.
- **Regional diversity and linguistic inclusion:** We celebrate all cultures and languages within our and the communities we serve. We are intentionally bilingual French-English to ensure participation across the different sub-regions of Africa. By incorporating regional and linguistic diversity into our research, communication, and advocacy efforts, we ensure that our work resonates with and is relevant to different contexts, ultimately promoting greater understanding and support for abortion rights across the African continent.
- **Using research to drive social and policy change:** Our Coalition is dedicated to leveraging research as a tool for transformative social and policy change. We aim to produce rigorous and compelling evidence that informs public policies and societal attitudes towards abortion. By producing timely quality research, we can help advocate for policy reforms that safeguard reproductive rights and improve access to care for all individuals.
- **Clear communication within our network:** We prioritize open and effective communication among all ACORCA-COARCA members and stakeholders, ensuring that our messages are accessible and understood across diverse linguistic backgrounds. We foster inclusivity and engagement, empowering every individual to participate fully in discussions and decision-making processes.
- **Total commitment by all ACORCA Members:** We seek unwavering commitment from the membership to actively embrace, engage and implement our mission, vision and goals. This dedication is essential to ensuring a supportive and collaborative environment where every Member feels valued and motivated to contribute their expertise and resources.
- **Respectful and non-exploitative research:** We treat each other and our research with mutual consideration and sensitivity. We ensure that any funded research subscribes to the highest ethical and data protection standards, and promote these standards across our respective countries.
- **Transparency, accountability, and rigor:** Our Coalition is committed to maintaining a high standard of integrity in all our activities. We operate with transparency by openly sharing our research findings, methodologies, and decision-making processes. Each member is held accountable for their contributions, ensuring that our work is not only credible but also scientifically rigorous, allowing us to build trust with the communities we serve.

- **Equity:** Our vision is equitable access to safe abortion services for all African women and girls, regardless of socio-economic status, location, or background. Our Coalition addresses disparities in access; seeks to remove barriers caused by social and cultural norms; and promotes and actively encourages inclusion and diversity in our research, communication and advocacy efforts.
- **Rights-based:** Each Member of ACORCA-COARCA embodies a human rights perspective, recognizing that access to safe and legal abortion is a fundamental human right. This principle informs our research and advocacy, ensuring policies and programs are designed to respect, protect, and fulfil the right to safe abortion.
- **Commitment to Constructive Conflict Resolution:** ACORCA members are expected to resolve conflicts constructively through open communication, addressing issues promptly and seeking collaborative solutions. Where conflicts are unresolved, mediation may be sought to ensure fairness and impartiality

#### Additional Information

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- For more information about the African Coalition for Research and Communication on Abortion (ACORCA) —visit: <https://www.acorca-coarca.org/>





## Annex

ACORCA-COARCA Founding Members:

