



# Integrity and Ethics in Research, Partnership and Policy Engagement

## IIED commitment

1. IIED is a policy and action research organisation. We promote sustainable development to improve livelihoods and protect the environments on which these livelihoods are built. We specialise in linking local priorities to global challenges. IIED is based in London and Edinburgh and works in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and the Pacific, with some of the world's most vulnerable people. We work with them to strengthen their voice in the decision-making arenas that affect them - from village councils to international conventions. Our mission is to build a fairer, more sustainable world, using evidence, action and influence in partnership with others. IIED's approach to ethics is informed by our core values - **Collaboration, Impact** and **Fairness**.
2. IIED is concerned to protect the rights, dignity, health, safety and privacy of research participants. IIED is also concerned to protect the health, safety, rights and research freedom of its researchers and the reputation of IIED as a centre for high quality research. IIED is committed to ensure that researchers are appropriately trained in research ethics, supported, and supervised, for example through raising this issue in performance and development reviews and including this document in induction packs.
3. IIED has an international reputation for working with partners on action research around sustainable development. We aim to ensure that our research findings contribute to change for the public good. Our long-term strategic engagement with processes and people aims to redress power imbalances, tackle inequalities and create fairer access to resources and services. We acknowledge and respect the intellectual property rights of those communities with which we work. An IIED partnership is one in which:

- a) The work agenda is jointly defined
  - b) All parties contribute to, and derive benefit from the collaboration
  - c) All parties share learning and knowledge production
  - d) Partners share a common worldview shaped by like-minded values and beliefs
  - e) Operational strategies and ways of working are compatible across parties
  - f) There is trust between and among all parties
  - g) This trust extends to providing moral support and solidarity when needed.<sup>1</sup>
4. IIED respects the prerogative of members of staff to make individual ethical choices about which projects or partners they work with<sup>2</sup>, and which methodologies they use. This document respects that prerogative, but seeks to provide a general framework that can help inform choices and decision making. We subscribe to ethical principles for research that emphasise<sup>3</sup>:
- a) **Respect** for people's autonomy, and protection from harm when that autonomy is compromised, including free, prior and informed consent, accountability, openness and transparency.
  - b) **Beneficence** i.e. going beyond avoiding harm to actually improving wellbeing.
  - c) **Justice** i.e. an equitable distribution of research benefits and burdens.

## Background

5. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that ethical considerations inform the design and conduct of IIED research, partnerships and policy engagement activities. The policy seeks to facilitate ethical conduct and foster a commitment to meaningful collaboration and reciprocal responsibilities of all parties involved in IIED work. The ethics policy is informed by IIED's mission statement, core values and guiding ethical principles for research, namely; **Respect**, **Beneficence** and **Justice**. It takes the form of principles and guidelines to govern the conduct of researchers, enabling IIED to pursue these values through its work. IIED recognises that ensuring high ethical standards requires continued reflection and engagement, and this document is intended to function as a set of guidelines to be revised and improved over time rather than a fixed statement of the organisation's position on these issues.
6. The ethics policy provides a set of general principles and guidelines outlined below.

<sup>1</sup> IIED (2016) IIED Annual Report 2015/2016: Powering Global Change Through Partnership. London: IIED. <http://pubs.iied.org/G04093/>

<sup>2</sup> IIED (2006). Draft Guidelines on IIED Business Engagement. London: IIED. <http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/G00273.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> IIED (2014). Research Ethics: Putting our Principles into Practice. London: IIED. <http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/G03763.pdf>

These must be supplemented by the judgement of the Project Leader and relevant research staff, and adapted to the specific research context. In planning all phases of a project, from design to dissemination of findings, researchers and other staff should consider the likely consequences (positive and negative) for society at large, groups and categories of persons within it, respondents or other subjects, and future research. The policy acknowledges that research, partnership and policy work undertaken, without the informed participation of target communities, has the potential to do harm. IIED commits to work collaboratively, in ways that: support communities' needs, respect cultural and intellectual property rights and contribute to positive, reciprocal and beneficial partnerships. Definitions for some of the terms used below can be found in Appendix 2.

7. As a policy and action research organisation, much of IIED's research is closely linked to policy-makers and seeks to assist decision-making, and seeks to support grassroots organisations representing poor and vulnerable groups. This policy document therefore covers a spectrum of activities ranging from research as a 'public good' through to advisory work which may involve elements of client confidentiality, and work with local organisations and communities.
8. All research, partnership and policy engagement activities must be framed with ethical considerations in mind. However, there are some areas where ethical implications will be particularly important. Some examples of ethically challenging research are: where it involves children, vulnerable adults or groups suffering discrimination and disadvantage (including indigenous peoples); where it may place informants at risk; where there are serious health and safety implications; where there is a risk of damage to the environment; where the impact of the research may be emotionally damaging; where the research is politically, socially or culturally sensitive; where the source of funding for the research has the potential to compromise IIED's reputation as a leading independent policy and action research organisation on international development and environmental issues.

## Policy: Principles and guidelines

### Research Quality and Integrity

9. Research should be designed, undertaken and reviewed to ensure integrity, quality and transparency throughout the research process.<sup>4</sup> Developing a theory of change can aid research planning and assist in the design of more realistic goals, clarify accountability and establish how certain stakeholder groups may be affected by potential research and engagement activities undertaken by IIED and partners. It can also be used to identify both the positive and negative impact of potential

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<sup>4</sup> IIED (2012). Towards excellence: policy and action research for sustainable development. London: IIED. <http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/G03432.pdf>

research.

- 9.1. Lead research staff should identify ethical considerations in the planning of research and risk assessment processes. Concerns should be identified, recorded and counter measures outlined. At the forefront of research planning should be an understanding that research (where appropriate) should benefit the public good and minimise harm. This applies in particular to the design of the impact strategy targeted at influencing decision-makers and its potential for negative consequences for research subjects through information disclosure on sensitive topics.
- 9.2. Serious breaches of practice in relation to integrity of practice in the conduct of research, partnership or advisory work are covered by IIED's policy on **Disciplinary & Dismissal**. IIED has a zero tolerance position on cases of plagiarism and procedures to address this are outlined in the **Disciplinary & Dismissal Policy**.
- 9.3. Research staff should ensure appropriate competence is applied to the task in hand as well as to the choice and application of individual researchers and methodologies. Researchers should endeavour to ensure that an appropriate research method is selected on the basis of informed professional expertise alongside the selection of a research team (including partners) that has the necessary professional skills and support.

## Terms of engagement in IIED Research, Partnership and Policy Work

10. Research staff and participants should be informed fully about the purpose, methods and intended uses of the research, what their participation entails and what potential risks, if any, are involved.
  - 10.1. All possible efforts should be made to inform key stakeholders, notably prospective research partners and affected communities and authorities, on the purpose and scope of research.
  - 10.2. Every effort should be made to involve Southern partners, local organisations and communities in research design, to ensure their priorities and needs are addressed. Research staff should ensure that all co-authors, reviewers and contributors, where appropriate, are properly acknowledged.
11. Researchers should obtain free, prior and informed consent from participants and participants will remain anonymous unless permission to be identified is given.
  - 11.1. It is customary practice to assume for interviews with key informants (e.g. development agency staff, staff of governmental service delivery agencies) that the individual is content to be identified as a research participant unless they specify otherwise. It is good practice to formalise this understanding by checking with the interviewee that they are content to be identified, and to

speak on the record – either verbally at the time of interview or by written communication before or afterwards.

12. Research participants must take part voluntarily, free from any coercion.
13. Harm to research participants must be avoided in all instances.
  - 13.1. IIED research should respect the knowledge, integrity and associated rights of participants in the research process. Researchers should endeavour to ensure that research is commissioned and conducted in a manner respectful of all groups in society, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, disability, religion or culture. Further to this, IIED researchers respect the cultural and intellectual property rights of focus communities and seek to establish positive, reciprocal and beneficial partnerships.

## Transparency and Disclosure

14. Research processes should operate with a presumption of full disclosure, offering confidentiality only if disclosed information would negatively affect either:
  - a) the prospects for sustainable development or
  - b) the reasonable and justified interests of research participants
  - c) the ability of indigenous peoples and other traditional knowledge holders to protect their intellectual property rights and cultural values<sup>5</sup>.
- 14.1. Advisory work (which may or may not involve research) is work which is orientated towards assisting specific clients or stakeholders to address particular issues. Contracts or relationships which frame the conditions for advisory work may specify or imply that IIED cannot independently publish or disclose elements of the research findings. This may be justified in order to fulfil IIED's mission under certain conditions. Where such a relationship of full or partial confidentiality is proposed it should be noted in the Research Ethics Review Form.

## Independence and Partnership

15. The independence of research must be clear, and any conflict of interest or partiality must be made explicit.
  - 15.1. Sources of research funding should be declared to all participants, unless to do so would pose significant risks to the researchers or research participants.
  - 15.2. IIED should strive to protect the independence and integrity of its research

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<sup>5</sup> Research involving indigenous peoples and traditional knowledge holders must ensure Free Prior and Informed Consent and should not publish details of traditional knowledge which could be used commercially without equitable benefit-sharing (e.g. knowledge about medicinal plant uses).

from bias attributable to pressures from donors and/or individuals.

16. IIED has an international reputation for working with partners on action research. For IIED, partnership is a mutual commitment between IIED and other organisations to achieve common goals in pursuit of sustainable development. Partnership is based on a shared set of values, equity within the relationship, a joint vision of success and a mutual commitment to working and learning together. When establishing partnerships it is important that ethical considerations are discussed e.g. local practice and political sensitivities. It is also necessary to act in accordance with the legal and ethical requirements of the countries in which research is being conducted. IIED partnerships usually fall into one of the five categories.
  - a) Research and action partnerships
  - b) “Ideas” partnerships
  - c) Sharing and learning partnerships
  - d) Advocacy partnerships
  - e) Organisational partnerships
17. The selection of funding, policy and operational partners for research and policy engagement should be conducted with careful consideration of IIED’s mission and values, as well as the capacity of prospective partners and the types of work being undertaken.
  - 17.1. Researchers/Directors of Research Groups must use their judgement to determine whether IIED’s values, mission or reputation might be compromised by any proposed partnership or relationship, and if they judge that a risk exists, raise this issue for discussion with the REC and/or the Strategy and Management Team (SMT).
  - 17.2. Researchers/Directors of Research Groups must use their judgement to determine the appropriate partner for a given project. This should be based on an assessment of partners’ alignment with IIED’s values, cultural appropriateness, ensuring to do no harm and representation of principles in challenging contexts.
18. IIED acknowledges the importance of the private sector and its potential to contribute positively to sustainable development; however, there may be potential tensions between IIED’s mission and the profit-maximising motivations of many private sector organisations. The ethical principles identified in this policy are relevant for researchers to consider and discuss when partnering with the private sector. Though finding a space to promote ethics within existing methods for partnership selection and management will require careful and strategic thinking, IIED can take additional steps to ensure the ethical achievement of objectives through partnership, including the following:
  - a) developing criteria for exclusion of certain industries or businesses from

- partnership,
- b) criteria for inclusion of socially responsible businesses,
  - c) conducting a due diligence review of the partner's track record as part of the partner selection process,
  - d) utilising existing risk assessment and management processes for assessing partnerships with the private sector, determining parameters of accountability to be included in contractual agreements with the private sector and ensure all aspects of partnerships are transparent.

## Policy: Implementation

### Mechanisms

19. The application of this policy document requires individual staff members to exercise good judgement and common sense, having assessed the particular context and being guided by Directors of Research Groups and other relevant colleagues. Research ethics shall be placed at the forefront of project planning and proposal development and guide the ongoing conduct of research and its dissemination. This will be complemented by regular discussions, peer review and horizon scanning regarding research ethics. The following mechanisms are designed to support this:

19.1. **Ethics Review Form.** A Project Ethics Review Form, including a checklist of ethical issues (as outlined in Appendix 1) must be completed by the Project Leader for all projects prior to implementation. This task must not be delegated to another team member who may lack the competence or knowledge necessary to complete it. For higher value projects (>£500,000) the form should be completed as part of the Proposal Development Process. For all other projects, the form should be completed at Contracting stage and attached to the donor contract and forwarded to Finance, prior to contract signature. In instances where an ethics review is required prior to the issuance of a contract, project leads must complete the Project Ethics Review form (available in Appendix 1) and submit this for REC review.

19.2. **Research Ethics Committee.** All research projects involving children or vulnerable adults must be referred to the REC, as should projects where the funder or research partner requires ethical review by committee (e.g. ESRC). Researchers or Directors of Research Groups may also submit projects for review by the REC if deemed appropriate<sup>6</sup>. The REC secretary will coordinate

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<sup>6</sup> It may be appropriate for projects involving indigenous peoples or traditional knowledge, or those which involve private sector partners which could pose a reputational risk for IIED, to be referred to the REC

reviews by the REC if requested by the REC Chair, or if the Ethics Review Form indicates this is necessary. Terms of Reference for the REC can be found in Appendix 3.

- 19.3. **Consultation and communication.** Based on initial self-assessment by the Project Leader (assisted by the Ethics Review Form checklist), ethical concerns should be discussed with Directors of Research Groups, or if the Project Leader is Director of a Research Group, with the REC Chair. If this meeting does not resolve ethical concerns this should be indicated on the form when it is attached to the Contract, and discussions should be escalated to involve a member of the SMT (the REC Chair in the first instance, another member of SMT if the REC Chair is already involved or is unavailable).
- 19.4. **Peer review.** IIED strives to ensure that all research is peer reviewed externally whenever possible, and peer reviewers are expected to comment or flag ethical issues as part of that process. Peer review is often held up as the gold standard for ensuring quality in academic publications. IIED similarly acknowledges the importance of having research reviewed by peers. However, ‘peers’ in sustainable development research extend far beyond the traditional definition of other researchers. We have long recognised the need for peer review to emphasise local knowledge and provide the holders of such knowledge the opportunity to judge the validity of our research.

## Complaints Handling Procedure

20. The policy document will be made publicly accessible on IIED’s website. IIED’s Director is responsible for oversight of all instances where complaints or concerns are raised about the institute’s ethical practice. Any external stakeholder or staff member may raise concerns about the ethical conduct of IIED with the Director, or any other member of the SMT who must immediately inform the Director that such a communication has been received.
21. In cases where an individual wishes to raise ethical concerns, in confidence, regarding the conduct of IIED, its staff or partners, IIED will ensure the anonymity of the individual. These may be of the following kind: a general concern that IIED is not meeting appropriate ethical standards; a specific concern that the principles of this policy document have not been adhered to; or an allegation of Scientific Misconduct. The procedures for dealing with an allegation of Scientific Misconduct are outlined in the Disciplinary & Dismissal Policy. With relation to other concerns or complaints raised by stakeholders, the Director (or another member of the SMT delegated to respond on behalf of the Director) shall respond within ten working days, indicating a process for resolving the complaint/concern.



## Responsibilities

22. This policy document applies to everyone carrying out research, partnership or policy engagement activities under the auspices of IIED. This includes, but is not limited to, all staff, visiting researchers, associates and those conducting research on IIED's behalf. It is the responsibility of the Project Leader to ensure that all researchers involved in a project (including sub-contractors) are aware of and comply with this policy, and have adequate competence to implement it.
23. All staff should be made aware, as part of their induction, that IIED has an ethics policy and should be directed to its location, and line managers should use the performance development review process to ensure that staff are adequately equipped to put the policy into practice. They should also be made aware of other IIED policies related to ethical practice (Health and Safety Policy, Travel Policy, Security Policy, Fraud and Bribery Policy, Whistleblowing Policy, Procurement Policy, Disciplinary & Dismissal Policy, Evaluation Policy, Partnership Policy, Financial Regulations). These policies should also be shared with subcontractors when relevant.
24. Where the circumstances of a project change during implementation, in such a way that the policy is affected, it is the Project Leader's responsibility to review the project and decide whether action is needed (e.g. revising the Ethics Review Form checklist, adding actions or requesting review by the REC).
25. In the case of consortium project bids, the policy should still be applied in full. If it is determined that review by the REC is necessary, then other partners should be informed. If an Ethics Committee review is to be carried out by another partner, then IIED must decide whether this process takes precedence over IIED's policy. In this case the minutes of that review should be filed with the REC Secretary and a written statement made by the chair of IIED's REC accepting that the process adequately covers IIED engagement.
26. If any staff member has an ethical concern about an IIED project or practice, they should communicate this to the REC secretary, keeping the appropriate SMT member informed of any potential ethical issues. See the section on IIED's Complaints Handling Procedure above for more information.<sup>7</sup>

## Contacts

David Dodman, REC Chair

Beth Downe, REC Secretary

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<sup>7</sup> This policy document was developed by a University of Birmingham Research Fellow through a consultative process that involved IIED staff.

## Appendix 1 – Ethics Review Form

### IIED PROJECT RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW FORM

Project Leader:	
Project Title:	
Project Ref. No.:	
Group:	
Group Director:	
Project Start Date:	

#### Preamble

The purpose of this checklist is to ensure that responsible parties within IIED (the Project Leader and the Director of Research Group) have given adequate consideration to any ethical issues in a proposed activity, its fit with IIED’s mission and values, and its compliance with IIED’s policy on Research Ethics. In line with this intent the checklist should be used to surface ethical concerns and help the project team to devise strategies to improve the project’s ethical standards and introduce appropriate risk mitigation measures where required.

Where ethical concerns are raised in the checklist, it should be indicated how these will be handled on p.3 of this form. Appropriate responses include:

- Robust strategies for **risk mitigation**.
- A robust case that the **benefits** of the proposed activity for either sustainable development or for research participants outweigh concerns with the risks of negative outcomes.
- **A further deliberative process** involving senior management which will accompany the development of the project – with plans for resolving any outstanding issues prior to implementation.
- Full review where appropriate by the **Research Ethics Committee**.

Under the following circumstances projects will be referred to IIED’s Research Ethics Committee for formal review:

- Where children or vulnerable adults are subjects or participants (see Annex 2 of the Ethics Policy for a definition of “vulnerable adult”).
- Where a partner or funder requires review by committee.
- Where a researcher or Research Group wishes to volunteer a project for formal review for any reason<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> It may be appropriate for Projects which involve indigenous peoples or traditional knowledge and those that may pose a reputational risk for IIED to be referred to the REC

### Review Checklist

<b>Research Quality/Integrity</b>	Yes	No
1. Are there any significant risks in the project context – identifiable in advance - which might lead to the delivery of unreliable, inaccurate information or the generation of poorly founded research or policy advice?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Terms of Engagement in Research/Policy work</b>		
2. Could the principle of anonymity be compromised in practice?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Does the project activity raise any significant risks to the physical, emotional, financial, environmental or social well-being of participants?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Does the project activity raise significant difficulties/challenges in the communication of all appropriate information in advance to research participants?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Does the research involve any of the following:		
(i) vulnerable adults or children ( <b>requires Ethics Committee review</b> )	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(ii) participants belonging to groups suffering severe discrimination or disadvantage?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(iii) personal data which might place informants at risk of negative impacts from follow up actions by third parties?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Will the operation of the principle of free, prior and informed consent to participate in the research be problematic?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Transparency and Disclosure</b>		
7. Does the project activity offer provisions for confidentiality of information to research partners (including funders)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Independence and Partnership</b>		
8. Does the project activity involve any form of partnership or relationship which may significantly risk compromising IIED's mission or values?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Is there a risk that any ethical guidelines of other partners (including funders) will be compromised in the project activity?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Are there any threats to the independence or integrity of the research arising from relationships (including contractual provisions) with key partners (including funders)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Will your research risk failure to comply with any legal requirements and applicable legal guidelines, including those from other organisations and countries if relevant?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Projects/Proposals should be placed before the Research Ethics Committee for a full review when they meet one or more of the following criteria:

<b>Research Ethics Committee Review</b>	Yes	No
1. The research involves vulnerable adults or children ( <b>requires Ethics Committee Review</b> )	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Funder/partner requires ethics committee review	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The Project Leader requests ethics committee review	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Statement of Ethical Issues and Actions**

If the answer to any of the questions in the checklist is “Yes”, or there are any other ethical issues that arise that are not covered by the checklist, please summarise below and state the action that will be taken to address them. If you believe there to be no ethical issues, please enter “NONE”.

Risk	Action

**Research Ethics Committee**

If the research requires review by the REC, please state whether there are particular issues that should be noted and what the timing requirements are:

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**Statement by the Project Leader**

I believe the information I have given in this form to be correct (type name if completing online).

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Affirmation by the Director of Research Group (or REC Chair if the Project Leader is a Director of Research Group)**

I have read this document and I can confirm that, to the best of my understanding, the information presented is correct and sufficient to allow an informed judgement on whether further ethical approval is required (type name if completing online).

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Recommendation of Project’s Status**

Having satisfied myself of the accuracy of this document I believe that the appropriate action is:

The project proceeds in its present form, taking into account any actions proposed above (including where appropriate REC review)	<input type="checkbox"/>
The project proposal needs further assessment by SMT	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Next Steps**

Once any ethical concerns have been discussed and this form has been reviewed and signed by all parties, it should be forwarded to the Research Ethics Committee Secretary (copying all signatories) for central storage and if required, further review by the SMT and/or REC.

## Appendix 2 – Definitions

### DEFINITIONS

#### Respect for Persons

Respect for persons means treating people as autonomous agents, and protecting them from harm in situations that explicitly limit their autonomy (for example illness, disability, lack of liberty). For development research, maintaining respect includes obtaining the free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) for research activities from both partners and local people, and responding meaningfully to doubts, suggestions or alternative visions of how a project should proceed. IIED has a tradition of going beyond FPIC and giving people involved in research (for example in indigenous and local communities) significant roles in producing and validating knowledge and in establishing the research agenda. Ensuring that IIED, research partners and researched groups all share both the learning process and the outputs can help equalise power relations, as well as generating research that is richer and more dynamic than conventional research activities. This sharing requires researchers to accept their own fallibility, and give full respect to local forms of knowledge.

IIED acknowledges that communities involved in the research are entitled to share in and benefit from the results and outcomes that accrue directly or indirectly from research and related activities that involve their knowledge and resources. This includes, where appropriate, acknowledging the contribution of participants in all agreed publications and dissemination in accordance with their preference.

Another key element of respect is transparency and openness. In a respectful relationship, partners and researched groups should have access to information on funding sources and potential conflicts of interest. Openness regarding research techniques and data is crucial to ensuring a high degree of objectivity in research.

#### Beneficence

Beneficence entails not just protecting people from harm, but actively striving to secure their wellbeing. For example, research that offers participants only indirect, uncertain and long-term benefits, while not harming them, may do little to secure tangible benefits.

#### Justice

Questions of justice are central to research efforts, particularly when it comes to

distributing possible benefits and burdens. The Belmont Report<sup>9</sup> was particularly concerned that vulnerable minorities might be unfairly targeted for medical tests. Development research often involves poorer communities with the aim of making their voices heard. But this can create problems of fairness for example, if researchers require people to contribute large amounts of time without any tangible rewards. Participation in research activities can entail time spent away from livelihood activities and may imply costs that are not apparent to outsiders. Equally, working only with people who are available and enthusiastic may mean that highly vulnerable groups become even more marginalised. Compensating people for their time can be one way of ensuring that a range of people participate in the research without undue sacrifices.

### **Vulnerable adults, groups and communities**

IIED is concerned to protect the rights, dignity, health, safety and privacy of research participants. This is particularly important when engaging with vulnerable adults, groups and communities. Vulnerability results from an interaction between the resources available to individuals and communities and the challenges they face. It may result from developmental problems, personal incapacities, disadvantaged social status, inadequacy of interpersonal networks and supports, degraded neighbourhoods and environments, and the complex interactions of these factors over the life course of individuals and groups.

Further to this, IIED researchers will need to assess the power dynamics at play in any research context. These will include the dynamic between individuals, groups and communities. Researchers are responsible for taking steps to ensure that those disempowered at an individual, group or community level are afforded opportunities for active inclusion and participation in the research process.

### **Vulnerable adults**

The UK Department of Health defines a vulnerable adult as someone aged 18 or over, who is vulnerable to abuse or exploitation as a result of individual characteristics. Abuse can affect any vulnerable adult, but particularly someone who is, or may be, unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation, for example:

- Older people
- People with mental health problems
- Disabled people
- People with learning difficulties

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<sup>9</sup> See here [http://www.fda.gov/ohrms/dockets/ac/05/briefing/2005-4178b\\_09\\_02\\_Belmont%20Report.pdf](http://www.fda.gov/ohrms/dockets/ac/05/briefing/2005-4178b_09_02_Belmont%20Report.pdf)

- People with acquired brain damage
- People who misuse substances.

While this definition is of use, it must operate alongside an understanding of social vulnerability. Social vulnerability refers to the inability of people, organisations, and societies to withstand adverse impacts from multiple stressors to which they are exposed. These impacts are due in part to characteristics inherent in social interactions, institutions, and systems of cultural values.

### **Vulnerable groups and communities**

Groups and communities that face various forms of social exclusion and disadvantage will experience vulnerability disproportionately. This is because adaptive capacity and resilience is dependent on access to financial, material and social resources, with certain groups facing a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion than the general population. IIED often conducts research in situations where large groups of people are systemically vulnerable to abuse or unable to protect themselves, particularly in humanitarian contexts, but also as a result of social or political discrimination.

Vulnerability is exacerbated by stigma, prejudice, and discrimination which may in turn lead to segregation by race, ethnicity, religion, gender, caste or class etc. Ethnic and religious minorities, migrants, disabled people, women and the young often face difficulties that can lead to further social exclusion, such as low levels of education and unemployment or underemployment. Stigmatised populations are commonly excluded from decision making processes and prevented from participating fully in the economic, social, and political life of the society in which they live.

### **Free, Prior and Informed Consent**

Free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), is the principle that an individual or community has the right to give or withhold its consent to proposed projects that may negatively impact upon them. FPIC is a key principle in international law and jurisprudence related to **indigenous peoples**. This principle recognises that informed consent requires an educative process that may involve bilingual and intercultural education methods and tools to ensure the understanding of all parties involved.<sup>10</sup>

FPIC should take the form of an open, easily understood communication process. Typically, this involves a verbal exchange between researcher and subject. The verbal discussion should be brief, and simply phrased at such a level that the subjects can understand it. When the research procedure is long and complex it is especially important that the researcher makes it clear that the subject is free to ask questions at any time. Informed consent, as a conversation (not a form), needs to be available

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<sup>10</sup> For more details see the International Society of Ethnobiology Code of Ethics.  
[http://www.ethnobiology.net/wp-content/uploads/ISE-COE\\_Eng\\_rev\\_24Nov08.pdf](http://www.ethnobiology.net/wp-content/uploads/ISE-COE_Eng_rev_24Nov08.pdf)

throughout the research process, as subjects do not necessarily develop questions or concerns about their participation until they are well into the research experience. For example, a discussion of confidentiality may not capture a subject's attention or comprehension until they are asked some quite personal questions in the ensuing research.

Subjects must receive enough easily understood, accurate information to judge whether the risk or inconvenience involved is at a level they can accept. The responsibility rests with the researcher to describe any risks in an accurate and easily understandable manner.

Courtesy and professionalism require that the identity of the researcher and research institution be mentioned, along with the nature and purpose of the research. However, if there are no apparent risks, benefits, or confidentiality issues involved, these topics and the right to refuse to participate could be mentioned informally.

Verbal informed consent need not be detailed and written consent is not appropriate when the research is not concerned with sensitive personal information and when subjects are peers or superiors of the researcher.

The cultural norms and lifestyles of subjects should be considered when deciding how to approach informed consent. Informal conversation may provide the best opportunity to discuss research with participants and raise issues they may wish to clarify with the researcher. The conditions under which the research is conducted can then be negotiated orally between the researcher and the community members. Written documents and signed forms can, in some circumstances, expose subjects to risk of arrest and serve no purpose.

When it is important to have some record of the informed consent but when written or signed consent would place the subject at risk or be difficult for the subject to read and understand, one useful procedure is to have a trusted colleague witness the verbal consent.

Community consultation, or meeting with community leaders of the potential subjects, is a useful way to plan research that is likely to raise sensitive questions among those to be studied and members of their community. This is not a substitute for individual informed consent, but often clears the way for potential subjects to decide whether to participate.

Involved communities have the right to make decisions on any programme, project, study or activities that directly affect them. In cases where the intentions of proposed research or related activities are not consistent with the interests of these people or societies or communities, they have a right to withhold or withdraw their consent at any point during the research process.



## Confidentiality and anonymisation of data

IIED respect the need for confidentiality at all times. Internally, we hold partner details securely on our database systems and these details are never shared with third parties. Externally we apply the Chatham House rule to partner events when it is particularly requested or appropriate and adapt our communications around the event accordingly.

Before research data can be shared or archived, it needs to be anonymised so that individuals, organisations or businesses cannot be identified. Here we provide guidance on anonymising quantitative and qualitative data appropriately in order to retain as much meaningful information as possible.

Other users of our research data have the same legal and ethical obligations NOT to disclose confidential information. Anonymisation may be needed for ethical reasons to protect identities; for legal reasons to safeguard personal data; or for commercial reasons.

Personal data should never be disclosed by research publications, unless a respondent has given specific consent, ideally in writing.

In some research, for example where oral histories are recorded or in anthropological research, it is customary to publish and share the names of people studied, for which they have given their consent. The same applies to key informant interviews, where interviewees often assume that their views are being sought on record. It is good practice to double-check that the interviewee is content to be identified – either during the interview or through written communication prior to publication.

Procedures to anonymise data should always be considered alongside obtaining informed consent for data sharing or imposing access restrictions. An individual's identity may be discerned from:

- **direct identifiers** such as names, addresses, postcode information, telephone numbers or photographs etc.
- **indirect identifiers** which, when linked with other publicly available information sources, could identify someone, e.g. information on workplace, occupation, salary or age etc.

Direct identifiers are often collected as part of the research administration process but are usually not essential research information and can therefore be removed from the data. Anonymising research data can be time consuming and therefore costly. Early planning can help reduce costs.

Anonymisation techniques for quantitative data may involve removing or aggregating variables or reducing the precision or detailed textual meaning of a variable. Special attention may be needed for relational data, where connections between variables in related datasets can disclose identities, and for geo-referenced data, where identifying spatial references also have a geographical value.

When anonymising qualitative material, such as transcribed interviews, identifiers

should not be crudely removed or aggregated, as this can distort the data or make it unusable. Instead pseudonyms, replacement terms or vaguer descriptors should be used. The objective should be to achieve a reasonable level of anonymisation, avoiding unrealistic or overly harsh editing, whilst maintaining maximum content.

## Appendix 3 – Research Ethics Committee Terms of Reference

# IIED Research Ethics Committee –Terms of Reference

The Research Ethics Committee (REC) is responsible for advising IIED (through the Director) on research ethics. The Research Strategy Team provides oversight of the REC and is responsible for approving policy updates recommended by the committee membership.

### Terms of Reference

1. To assess the ethical issues raised by projects submitted to it for consideration, and to decide on follow up action in terms of one of the following:
  - 1.1. The project should proceed as proposed (including risk mitigation actions outlined in the checklist)
  - 1.2. The project should proceed on the understanding that recommended actions and changes from the REC will be taken on board, but without further review
  - 1.3. The project proposal needs further assessment and will be returned to the REC for further review following changes to the proposal in areas outlined by the REC
  - 1.4. The project should not proceed.
2. To advise Research Groups on procedures for reviewing the ethics of each project relating to children and vulnerable adults.
3. To provide support and advice, when requested, to researchers and others on ethical matters relating to research, including research by staff at all levels.
4. To review regularly (at least once a year) IIED's guidelines on ethics related to research, with a view to ensuring that such research conducted under the aegis of IIED complies with recognised ethical standards, that the public, staff and research participants are protected from harm, and that IIED's reputation is safeguarded.
5. To advise the Strategy and Management Team (SMT) on the framing of policy within IIED on matters to do with research ethics.
6. To establish, monitor and review procedures for the examination of proposals for research, which involve human participants and are to be undertaken by staff of the IIED and through that examination to ensure that such research conforms to generally accepted ethical principles and standards as outlined in the Ethics Policy for Research and Policy Engagement.

## Operational Details

### *Membership*

- Chair: \_\_\_\_\_ (tbc)
- 1 Director of Research Group (DRG)
- 1 Senior/Principle Researcher
- 1 Researcher
- 1 Independent Member

The membership shall comprise a minimum of 5, appointed by or on behalf of the SMT. The SMT shall ensure that, as far as possible, the membership includes general representation from the major research areas practised by IIED and at least one independent member.

- Independent members shall have no connection with IIED either as an employee or in any other capacity (e.g. Associate or Trustee). At least one member shall have experience of working with vulnerable participant groups.
- The REC shall have powers to co-opt such other members as it may, from time to time, judge necessary to assist it in the discharge of its responsibilities.
- A member may resign from the REC at any time upon giving notice in writing to the Chairperson. Membership will lapse if a member fails without good reason to attend two consecutive meetings of the REC. The member will be notified of such lapse of membership by the Chairperson in writing. Steps shall be taken by REC (with SMT backing) to fill any vacancy which may arise.
- A Deputy Chairperson shall be elected from amongst the members of the REC. Appointment will be based on the members' relevant experience and willingness to take on the role. In the absence of the Chairperson, a Deputy Chairperson will perform the role and duties of the Chairperson to include taking Chairperson's action and officiating at REC meetings.
- Members of the REC must inform the Chair if they have a personal or financial interest in any research project or project sponsor. The Chair will decide whether the interest disqualifies the member from the discussion.

### *Quorum*

For the purposes of holding a meeting of the REC, a quorum will be constituted by the presence of at least 4 members, including the chair and the independent member. The same will apply for virtual reviews by the Committee – responses must be received from at least four members for a review to be considered quorate.

### *Meeting Dates*

The REC will meet a minimum of once per year in person to review IIED's ethics policy and discuss any reviews due at that time. All other decisions (including reviews required before the next annual meeting) can be reached through virtual (via email) decision making.

### *Appeals*

Appeals to a decision of the REC should be sent to the Director of IIED, and will be handled according to the procedure agreed by SMT.

### *Committee Servicing*

A suitable IIED staff member shall act as Secretary to the REC.

*Approved by IIED's Strategy and Management Team – 27/03/2017*