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Policy on Integrity and Ethics in Research, Research Partnerships, and Policy Engagement

Version control

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Contents

[1] V1 approved by IIED's Strategy and Management Team – 27/03/2017; revised V2 January 2018 and V3 May 2018

Note: This policy was developed and approved by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) for internal use. It is believed to be an accurate reflection of the legislation and other regulatory requirements at the time it was approved. It should not be incorporated into or used by other organisations without permission.

Policy overview

Purpose

This Policy on Integrity and Ethics in Research, Research Partnerships, and Policy Engagement (IIED's 'ethical research policy') is intended to ensure that ethical considerations underpin the design, conduct and dissemination of IIED research, research partnerships and policy engagement activities. It aims to enable ethical conduct and foster a shared commitment to meaningful collaboration by all parties working with IIED. The policy and related processes also aim to ensure we are compliant with relevant donor and legal requirements (relevant IIED policies and guides are highlighted in blue in this document for ease of reference).

Statement

The framework provided within the policy covering integrity and ethics in research, research partnerships and policy engagement aligns with the following principles for ethical research: maximise benefit; respect rights; ensure inclusivity; act with integrity; and commit to reflexivity and decolonisation.

These principles describe an approach to research ethics that is concerned not only with avoiding harm, but with actively maximising positive benefits for research participants, communities and researchers. This approach, often referred to as 'virtue ethics', should support research that is undertaken with respect, sincerity and humility; while the research ethics process strives for sensitivity, cooperation and ongoing reflexivity.

Scope

This policy applies to all IIED staff, associates, interns, consultants and volunteers who are involved in the design, conduct or dissemination of IIED research, research partnerships or policy engagement activities. The policy should be shared with our partners to facilitate discussions around ethical conduct of planned project activities and to ensure all parties reach a shared understanding of expectations in this regard.

Definitions

See Appendix 1 for useful definitions.

Introduction

Our commitment

1. IIED is a policy and action research organisation, working across the world with local, national and international partners. We promote sustainable development solutions that improve livelihoods and protect the environments on which they depend. We specialise in linking local priorities to global challenges, working with some of the world's most vulnerable people to strengthen their voices 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 shaped by our core values: **collaboration**, **impact** and **fairness**. IIED's UK offices are in London and Edinburgh; IIED-Europe is based in the Netherlands.

2. IIED will make every effort to protect the rights, dignity, health, safety and privacy of everyone who contributes to our research ('research participants'). IIED will also make every effort to protect the health, safety, rights, dignity and research freedom of its researchers and its reputation as a centre for research excellence. To do this, IIED will provide its researchers with appropriate ongoing training in research ethics and with support and supervision, for example through inductions and regular discussion around ethical issues encountered in our work. All staff and contracted individuals are required to sign the IIED Code of Conduct.

3. IIED aims to ensure that our research findings and processes contribute to change for the public good. Through strategic and often long-term engagement with people and processes, IIED seeks to redress power imbalances, tackle inequalities, and create fairer access to resources and services. We respect the intellectual property rights of the communities we work with, as well as their right to give, deny or revoke consent to take part in research. The seven core principles of IIED partnerships, set out more fully in our Partnership Statement, are:

   a) Shared objectives

   b) Complementary attributes

   c) Values in common

   d) Transparency and accountability

   e) Significance of personal relationships

   f) Commitment to learn, monitor and develop the partnership as appropriate

   g) Safety and wellbeing of staff and partners.

4. IIED respects its employees' right to make individual ethical choices about the projects and partners they work with and the methodologies they use, as long as decisions meet our research governance and ethical guidelines.

5. The framework provided within the policy covering integrity and ethics in research, research partnerships and policy engagement ('the policy') aligns with the following principles for ethical research:

   a) **Maximise benefit:** IIED research should maximise benefit for individuals, communities and society, particularly low-income and marginalised groups in the global South, including through: active participation in the whole project cycle as co-researchers, remuneration, supporting self-empowerment, and capacity strengthening. Researchers should minimise risk and harm.

   b) **Respect rights:** the rights and dignity of individuals, communities and groups should be fully respected; participation should be voluntary, fully informed and agreed in advance; and communities should be able to place conditions on and deny consent.

   c) **Ensure inclusivity:** all relevant individuals and groups, especially the most marginalised and those relevant to the research outcomes, are listened to and included, while also respecting privacy, confidentiality and dignity.

   d) **Act with integrity:** research should be conducted with integrity and transparency; lines of responsibility and accountability should be clearly defined and shared with partners; research independence should be maintained and where conflicts of interest cannot be avoided, they should be made explicit.

   e) **Commit to reflexivity[2] and decolonisation:** IIED has committed to deepening its understanding of the many ways in which international development practice and research mirror and reinforce colonial relationships. Research should be carried out in a reflexive manner that seeks to redress power imbalances and decolonise relationships between IIED and partners in different parts of the world.

   Together, these principles describe an approach to research ethics that is concerned not only with avoiding harm, but with actively maximising positive benefits for research participants, communities and researchers. This approach, often referred to as 'virtue ethics',[3] should support research that is undertaken with respect, sincerity and humility; while the research ethics process strives for sensitivity, cooperation and ongoing reflexivity.

Background

6. This ethical research policy ('the policy') intends to ensure that ethical considerations underpin the design, conduct and dissemination of IIED research, research partnerships and policy engagement activities. It aims to enable ethical conduct and foster a shared commitment to meaningful collaboration by all parties involved in IIED work. The policy is informed by IIED's mission statement and core values (see paragraph 1, above) and its

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[2] Reflexivity in social science research is defined by the University of Warwick as 'the examination of one's own beliefs, judgments and practices during the research process and how these may have influenced the research'. Link accessed 22 June 2022:
https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ces/research/current/socialtheory/maps/reflexivity/

[3] See, for example, Carpenter, D (2018) 'Virtue Ethics in the Practice and Review of Social Science Research: The Virtuous Ethics Committee' In *Virtue Ethics in the Conduct and Governance of Social Science Research.* Published online: 22 Mar 2018; 105-125. Permanent link to this document:
https://doi.org/10.1108/S2398-601820180000003006

ethical principles for research (see paragraph 5, above). The policy (set out below) offers principles and guidelines to support IIED researchers and others to pursue these core tenets through their work. IIED recognises that achieving high ethical standards requires continuous reflection and engagement; the guidelines set out in the policy are not a fixed position – they will be revised and improved over time (this iteration is the result of substantial revision in 2021/22, drawing on the insights from an independent external review). Definitions for some of the terms used in the policy can be found in Appendix 1.

7. The policy's principles and guidelines provide a framework within which the project leader and relevant research staff must make their own ethical judgements, adapted to the specific research context. In every phase of project planning, from design to dissemination of findings, researchers and other staff must consider the likely consequences (positive and negative) for society at large – particularly on low-income communities, marginalised groups, people experiencing intersectional discrimination, respondents or other participants. The policy acknowledges that research, partnership and policy work carried out without the informed participation and consent of target communities and individuals can cause significant harm. IIED commits to work collaboratively, in ways that support communities' leadership and meet their needs, respect cultural and intellectual property rights, and contribute to positive, reciprocal and equal partnerships.

8. Much of IIED's research is linked to the interests of policymakers and seeks to inform decision making; it also aims to support grassroots organisations representing poor and vulnerable people and groups. Consequently, the policy must cover activities ranging from research as a 'public good' through to advisory work which may involve elements of client confidentiality, as well as work with governments, local organisations and communities.

9. All our research, research partnerships and policy engagement activity must have ethical framings informed by local context, such as national policies and community belief systems. However, certain research will pose particular ethical challenges, including any that:

    • Involves children, vulnerable adults or groups suffering discrimination and disadvantage (including Indigenous Peoples and LGBTQI+ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and other] populations)

    • Could place informants at risk

    • May have serious health and safety implications

    • May risk damage to the environment

    • Has potential for the research impact to be emotionally damaging

    • Has political, social or cultural sensitivities, or

    • Has a funding source with the potential to compromise IIED's reputation as a leading independent policy and action research organisation on international development and environmental issues.[4]

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[4] See IIED's Donor Due Diligence Policy

Principles and guidelines

Research quality and integrity

10. Research should be designed, carried out and reviewed in ways that help ensure integrity, quality and transparency throughout the research process.[5] Developing a theory of change can support research planning as well as assist in the design of realistic goals, clarify accountability, and establish how certain stakeholder groups (including disadvantaged groups) may be affected by potential research and engagement activities by both IIED and its partners. A theory of change can also be used to identify the positive and negative impacts of potential research.

    10.1. Lead research staff (including partners) should identify ethical considerations when planning research and risk assessment processes. Concerns should be identified and recorded, with counter measures outlined. The following understanding should be at the forefront of all planning activity: IIED's research should benefit the public good and minimise harm. This particularly applies to the design of the impact strategy targeted at influencing decision makers, as this has potential to negatively affect research participants by disclosing information on sensitive topics.

    10.2. IIED's Disciplinary Procedure (including dismissal) and Safeguarding Policy cover gross and general misconduct in relation to our work. IIED provides staff with guidance on how to manage publications,[6] how to use and credit content produced by others,[7] and on what activity counts as authorship.[8]

    10.3. IIED will ensure that staff have the right skills for their roles, and those staff will use their informed professional expertise to select:

        a) An appropriate research method

        b) A research team (including partners) with the necessary contextual understanding, professional skills and support.

    Participatory approaches should be used wherever possible throughout the project cycle, along with co-validation and triangulation. Researchers should reflect on how their own biases, beliefs and judgements might impact on the research, as well as on the wider power dynamics involved, and should seek to mitigate the effects of these.

Terms of engagement

11. IIED researchers should meaningfully engage all partners, participants and communities involved in a research project in defining the purpose, methods and intended uses of the research, to ensure their priorities and needs are addressed. They should be fully informed about what participation asks of them and any potential risks or burdens.

    11.1. Researchers should make all possible efforts to inform key stakeholders – notably prospective research partners, participants in research and affected communities

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[5] IIED (2012) Towards excellence: policy and action research for sustainable development. London: IIED. See https://pubs.iied.org/g03432
[6] See IIED Publications Process guidance
[7] See Getting permission to use other people's content in your work: Legal and ethical guidance
[8] [Pending]

and authorities – about the purpose and scope of research.

11.2. Researchers should seek to avoid conflict in norms, beliefs and value systems between actors from the global North and global South by:

   a) Using research methods that acknowledge and deconstruct colonial legacies and gender stereotypes

   b) Ensuring that research highlights the knowledge and meanings of the communities and organisations that IIED works with

   c) Recognising, valuing and strengthening local and traditional knowledge through research activity

   d) Emphasising cognitive justice and pluralism, and

   e) Properly acknowledging all co-authors, co-producers, reviewers and contributors in any publications or presentations.[9]

12. IIED researchers should obtain **voluntary**, **prior, informed** and **continuing consent** from all research participants who have sufficient capacity to give consent and have been given the necessary information to ensure their consent is valid. 'Continuing' consent is an element not always covered by the widely accepted principles of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC); it recognises that consent can be withdrawn at any time in the research process. While participants and wider contributors have a right to be identified and acknowledged (see paragraph 11.2 above), they also have a right to remain anonymous. Participants and contributors should be clearly informed about any limits to confidentiality. For ethical reasons and to meet data protection regulations, individuals must confirm that they are willing to speak 'on the record' and be identified, either verbally at the time of engagement or via written communication (either before or after). For more information on obtaining and recording consent in the context of data protection regulations, refer to IIED's Data Protection Policy. For specific advice around participant consent for taking and using photographs, see Using, choosing and taking photos at IIED.

13. Research participants must take part voluntarily, free from inducement or coercion. Reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses, fair payment for their time and the burden of participation, and the provision of small incentives are acceptable, provided this does not breach the project donor's terms and conditions.[10,11]

14. IIED staff must minimise harm to research participants in all instances.

15. IIED should maximise benefits for participants and communities, for example by employing community members as co-researchers, building local capacity to conduct research and influence policy, and reducing power imbalances.

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[9] See IIED guidance on authorship [pending]

[10] Gelinas, L, Largent, EA, Cohen, IG, Kornetsky, S, Bierer, BE and Lynch, HF (2018) A Framework for Ethical Payment to Research Participants. *The New England Journal of Medicine*, *378*(8), pp.766-771. DOI: 10.1056/NEJMsb1710591

[11] See guidance from the University of Oxford (link accessed 22 June 2022): https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/files/bpg05paymentsandincentivesinresearchv10pdf

16. IIED research should respect the knowledge, integrity and associated rights of participants in the research process. Researchers should seek to ensure that research is co-designed and conducted in a way that respects all groups, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, gender, disability, religion or culture, or other characteristics. IIED researchers will also respect the cultural and intellectual property rights of partner communities and seek to establish positive, reciprocal and beneficial partnerships.

Transparency and disclosure

17. Research processes should operate with a presumption of full disclosure of the objectives, methods and findings of the research to the research participants and other stakeholders. Researchers should offer confidentiality in research processes only if disclosing the information would negatively affect the:

   - Prospects for sustainable development

   - Reasonable and justified interests of research participants, or

   - Ability of Indigenous Peoples and other traditional knowledge holders to protect their intellectual property rights and cultural values.[12]

18. Consultancy and advisory work (which may or may not involve research) is orientated towards assisting specific clients or stakeholders to address particular issues. Contracts covering consultancies or advisory work may specify 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 full or partial confidentiality – often commercial confidentiality – is proposed by a funder, it should be noted in the Research Ethics and Data Protection Review Form (see 'Related forms' below).

Independence and partnership

19. The independence of IIED research must be clear; any conflict of interest or partiality must be made explicit.

   19.1. Researchers should declare funding sources to all research participants, unless this would pose significant risks to researchers or participants, or the donor has stipulated anonymity.

   19.2. IIED should make every effort to protect the independence and integrity of its research from bias caused by pressure from donors and/or individuals.

20. For IIED, partnership is a mutual commitment between itself and other organisations to achieve common goals in pursuit of sustainable development. Partnership is based on shared values, equity within the relationship, a joint vision of success, and mutual commitment to working and learning together. IIED should support Southern-led partnerships wherever possible, which in turn support Southern research priorities and agendas, or at the very least co-defined objectives. IIED should strive to provide flexible support to enable Southern leadership and institutional strengthening. When establishing partnerships, it is important that ethical considerations are discussed, such as local

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[12] 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 (eg knowledge about medicinal plant uses).

practice and political sensitivities. All parties must also act in accordance with the legal and ethical requirements of the countries where research is being carried out – recognising that national and organisational requirements can sometimes conflict. If such a conflict arises, the project lead and research team should seek a resolution through respectful discussion between IIED, its partners and, where appropriate, the funders.

21. When selecting the funding, policy and operational partners for research and policy engagement, careful consideration should be given to IIED's mission and values, the capacity of prospective partners, and the types of work involved.

    21.1. Researchers, supported by team leaders and directors of research groups (as appropriate), must use their judgement to determine whether IIED's values, mission or reputation might be compromised by any proposed partnership or relationship. If they believe a risk exists, the researcher should raise this with the Research Ethics Committee (REC) and/or the Strategy and Management Team (SMT).[13]

    21.2. Researchers, supported by team leaders and directors of research groups (as appropriate), must use their judgement to determine the appropriate partner(s) for a given project. Criteria will include how closely prospective partners align with IIED values and whether they can commit to the ethical research principles outlined in the policy.[14]

    21.3. IIED's Donor Due Diligence Policy supports staff to assess potential ethical risks associated with sources of funding.

22. IIED recognises the importance of the private sector and its potential to contribute to sustainable development. However, there may be tensions between its mission and that of private sector organisations, which are usually driven by profit. Researchers should consider the ethical principles identified in the policy when partnering with the private sector. While not embedded in current IIED partnership selection and management processes, it is possible to introduce space to promote ethics, assuming this is done carefully and strategically. Additional steps that IIED can take to ensure partnerships deliver project objectives in an ethical manner include:

- Developing criteria to exclude certain industries or businesses from partnership

- Developing criteria for including socially responsible businesses (those helping to deliver public goods)

- Conducting a due diligence review of the potential partner's ethical track record and how they align to responsible business conduct as part of the partner selection process, and

- Using existing risk assessment and management processes to assess potential partnerships with the private sector, determining parameters of accountability to be included in contractual agreements, and ensuring all aspects of the partnership are transparent.

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[13] The 'go/no-go' assessment exercise conducted at the start of the Proposal Development Process should be used to identify such risks early on in the process.

[14] Subcontractors/subgrantees are also subject to appropriate due diligence processes carried out by IIED Finance.

Implementation

Mechanisms

23. To apply the policy, individual staff members must exercise good judgement and common sense, having assessed the particular context in which the research is taking place and been guided by directors of research groups and other relevant colleagues. Research ethics will be at the forefront of project planning and proposal development; they will guide how the research is carried out and how it is shared. This approach will be complemented by regular discussions, peer review and horizon scanning focused on research ethics. The following mechanisms are designed to support this:

   23.1. **Ethics and Data Protection Review Form**. Before the project begins, the project leader must complete an Ethics and Data Protection Review Form ('the form'), including a checklist of ethics and data protection issues (outlined in Appendix 1). This form can be completed as early as during the proposal development process, if ethical issues are identified that:

   a) Relate to the funding source (including those identified by the IIED Donor Due Diligence Policy)

   b) Suggest the project may be particularly sensitive or high-risk in nature, or

   c) If the project leader feels for any other reason that early ethical review would be beneficial.

   For all other projects, the project leader should complete the form at contracting stage, or at the latest by the end of the project's inception stage (for example, where methodologies and partnerships are developed during the inception stage, so ethical issues can only be identified during that process). In all cases, both the form and all necessary reviews **must be completed before** any primary data collection begins. The form should be re-completed and re-submitted if changes occur at any point during the project or if new ethical issues arise.

   23.2. **Research Ethics Committee (REC)**. All research projects involving children (anyone under 16 years old) or vulnerable adults **must** be referred to REC, as should projects where the funder or research partner requires an ethics review by committee. However, IIED researchers or directors of research groups may submit any project for a REC review if they believe this to be appropriate.[15] The committee secretary will coordinate a REC review if the Ethics and Data Protection Review Form indicates this is necessary, or as requested by the chair. REC's terms of reference can be found in Appendix 2 of the policy. Any issues related to data protection or the UK's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) will be referred to IIED's data protection lead (as appropriate), to ensure they are also reviewed from a legal perspective as well as an ethical one.

   23.3. **Consultation and communication.** If the project leader, assisted by the Ethics and Data Protection Review Form checklist, perceives any early ethical concerns,

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[15] For example, 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 REC.

these should be discussed with directors of research groups (or if the project leader is a director, with the REC chair). If the discussion does not resolve the concerns, the project leader should indicate this on the form when it is submitted for review, and discussions should be escalated to involve a member of SMT (the REC chair in the first instance; another member of SMT if the chair is already involved or is unavailable).

23.4. **Peer review.** *Of publications:* IIED acknowledges the importance of peer review in upholding research quality. We also recognise that 'peers' in sustainable development research extend far beyond the traditional definition used by other disciplines; this is reflected in IIED's Peer Review Policy and process. All IIED research outputs must meet a clearly documented set of standards for research excellence,[16] with certain 'knowledge products' requiring independent, documented and accountable peer review.[17] The peer review form requires reviewers to comment on or flag ethical issues.

Of our work: To support researchers' commitment to act ethically, REC will provide regular peer-to-peer learning and discussion events to encourage debate around the ethical issues we face in our work.

Complaints procedure

24. The policy will be publicly accessible on IIED's website.[18] IIED's director is responsible for overseeing any complaints or concerns about the organisation's ethical practice. Any external stakeholder or staff member can raise concerns about IIED's ethical conduct with the director by using the organisation's complaints procedure,[19] or by contacting any other member of SMT (who must immediately inform the director).

25. If an individual wishes to raise ethical concerns in confidence, whether they concern the conduct of IIED, its staff or partners, IIED will ensure their anonymity. These kinds of concerns may be: a general concern that IIED is not meeting appropriate ethical standards; a specific concern that the principles in the policy have not been met; or an allegation of scientific misconduct. They can be raised via the processes described in IIED's Whistleblowing Policy (an internal document) or through the **complaints procedure** (see paragraph 24, above). Concerns or complaints raised by stakeholders will receive a response from IIED's director (or another member of SMT, responding on the director's behalf) within ten working days; this will suggest a process for resolving the complaint or concern.

Responsibilities

26. The policy applies to everyone carrying out research, research partnership or policy engagement activities for IIED. This includes, but is not limited to, staff, visiting researchers, associates and senior associates, and those carrying out research on IIED's behalf. The project leader is responsible for ensuring that all researchers involved in a

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[16] See www.iied.org/research-excellence-impact (accessed 22 June 2022)

[17] See www.iied.org/research-excellence-impact#Peer%20review (accessed 22 June 2022)

[18] See www.iied.org/research-excellence-impact#Integrity-ethics (accessed 22 June 2022)

[19] See www.iied.org/complaints-procedure (accessed 22 June 2022)

project (including sub-grantees and sub-contractors) are aware of and comply with the policy and are competent to apply it.

27. All staff should be made aware of the policy during their induction and shown where they can access it. Line managers should use the performance development review process to check that all staff are able to put the policy into practice. New research staff joining IIED will receive mandatory training on the policy and review process; these induction sessions will also be made available to existing staff as 'refresher' training. During induction, staff will also be made aware of other IIED policies and processes related to ethical practice (including the Data Protection Policy, Safeguarding Policy, Health and Safety Policy, Travel Policy, Security Policy, Anti-fraud & Bribery Policy, Whistleblowing Policy, Procurement Policy, Disciplinary Procedure, Evaluation Policy, Partnership Statement, Financial Regulations, Donor Due Diligence Policy, Proposal Development Process, and IT policies). These policies should also be shared with sub-grantees and sub-contractors when relevant.

28. If project circumstances change part-way through in a way that affects compliance with the policy, the project leader is responsible for carrying out a review and deciding whether action is needed (for example, updating and resubmitting the Ethics and Data Protection Review Form, adding actions, or requesting a REC review).

29. The policy should be applied in full to consortium project bids. If a REC review is necessary, partners should be informed. If an ethics committee review is to be carried out by another partner, IIED must decide whether this process takes precedence over the policy; if IIED agrees, the minutes of the external review should be filed with the REC secretary and the chair should accept in writing that the process adequately covers IIED engagement.

30. Any staff member with an ethical concern about an IIED project or practice should communicate this to the REC secretary, keeping the appropriate member of SMT informed. See the complaints procedure for more information (see paragraphs 24 and 25, above).

Contacts

Florence Crick, REC chair

Fiona Roberts, REC secretary

Email: ethics@ iied.org

Related policies, guidelines and documents

The following policies, guidelines and documents have all been created by and belong to IIED:

- Authorship Guidelines [pending]

- Code of Conduct

- Data Protection Policy

- Disciplinary Procedure

- Donor Due Diligence Policy

- Evaluation Policy

- Financial Regulations

- Anti-fraud & Bribery Policy

- Getting permission to use other people's content in your work: Legal and ethical guidance

- Health and Safety Policy

- IT Policies

- Partnership Statement

- Peer Review Policy

- Procurement Policy

- Proposal Development Process

- Publications Process

- Safeguarding Policy

- Security Policy

- Travel Policy

- Using, choosing and taking photos at IIED

- Whistleblowing Policy

Related forms

The Research Ethics and Data Protection Review Form v7 (Oct 2022) is available to IIED staff via SharePoint

Appendix 1: Useful definitions

Respect for persons

'Respect for persons' means treating people as self-governing individuals, and protecting them from harm in situations that explicitly limit their decision-making power (for example illness, disability, lack of liberty). In development research, demonstrating respect includes obtaining free, prior and informed and continuing consent for research activities from both partners and participants, and responding meaningfully to doubts, suggestions or alternative visions of how a project should proceed. IIED has a tradition of going beyond FPIC to ask that the people involved in research (for example, those in Indigenous and local communities) play a significant role in producing and validating knowledge and in establishing the research agenda. Ensuring that IIED, research partners, and the people taking part in the research all share both the learning process and the outputs can help equalise power relations, as well as produce research that is richer and more dynamic than that generated by conventional studies. This sharing requires researchers to accept they may make mistakes and to give full respect to local forms of knowledge.

IIED recognises that the communities involved in 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 participants' contributions in all relevant research outputs (where they are in agreement), and disseminating the findings in accordance with their preferences.

Transparency is another key element of respect. In a respectful relationship, partners, research participants and communities will have access to information on funding sources and potential conflicts of interest. Being open about research techniques and data is crucial to ensuring a high degree of objectivity in research.

Finally, showing respect also involves demonstrating virtues such as kindness, compassion, sensitivity and empathy for others' circumstances and concerns.

Beneficence

'Beneficence' goes beyond protecting people from harm: it means striving to secure their wellbeing. For example, research that offers participants only indirect, uncertain and long-term benefits, while not harmful, may do little to secure tangible benefits and so could not be considered beneficent.

Justice

Questions of justice are central to research efforts, particularly in terms of distributing possible benefits and burdens. The benefits and burdens of research should be distributed fairly; this does not necessarily mean **equal** distribution, but rather **defensible** distribution. The Belmont Report[20] – a landmark document prepared in the 1970s in response to significant malpractice in medical research – was particularly concerned that vulnerable minorities might be unfairly targeted for medical research. Development research often involves poorer communities, seeking to make their voices heard. But this can create problems of fairness; for example, if researchers ask participants to contribute large amounts of time without tangible reward,

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[20] United States (1978) The Belmont Report: Ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects of research. Bethesda, Maryland: The Commission.

volunteers may be limited to those able to afford time away from livelihood activities. Participation may also incur other costs that are not apparent to outsiders. Equally, working only with people who are available and enthusiastic may mean that highly marginalised groups become even more so. Compensating people for their time can be one way of ensuring that a range of people participate in research without undue sacrifice.

Vulnerable adults, groups and communities

IIED will make every effort 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 support, degraded neighbourhoods and environments, and the complex interactions of these factors over the life course of individuals and groups.

IIED researchers must assess the power dynamics at play in any research context, including those 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 to participate fully in the research.

Vulnerable adults

We are required by law to screen for research that involves 'vulnerable adults', using the UK government definition: someone aged 18 or over and who is vulnerable to abuse or exploitation as a result of individual characteristics.

Abuse can affect any adult, but particularly someone who is, or may be, unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation, such as:

• Older people

• People with mental health problems

• Disabled people

• People with learning difficulties

• People with acquired brain damage, and

• People who misuse substances.

This definition must operate alongside an understanding of social vulnerability. Social vulnerability occurs when people, organisations and/or societies cannot withstand adverse impacts from multiple stressors to which they are exposed. These impacts are partly due to characteristics inherent in social interactions, institutions, and systems of cultural values.

Researchers should also consider the principle of inclusion when determining whether or how to involve people who may be legally categorised as 'vulnerable adults'.

Vulnerable groups and communities

Groups and communities facing various forms of social exclusion and disadvantage will experience disproportionate levels of vulnerability. This is because adaptive capacity and resilience are dependent on access to financial, material and social resources; groups with less access face a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion than the general population.

IIED often carries out research in situations where large groups of people are systemically vulnerable to or unable to protect themselves from abuse, particularly in humanitarian contexts, but also due to 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, class, etc. Ethnic and religious minorities, migrants, disabled people, women and young people 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 their society.

Free, prior and informed consent

Free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) is the principle that an individual or community has the right to give, withhold or withdraw their consent to participate in proposed research projects. 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.[21] FPIC is a key principle in international law and jurisprudence related to **Indigenous Peoples**.

FPIC should take the form of an open, easily understood communication process. Typically, this involves a verbal exchange between researcher and participant. The verbal discussion should be brief and phrased at the right level for the participant to fully understand it. When the research procedure is long and complex, it is especially important that the researcher makes it clear that the participant is free to ask questions at any time. Informed consent, as a conversation (not a form), needs to be available throughout the research process, as participants 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 participant's attention or make sense to them until they are asked personal questions in the ensuing research.

For the purposes of this policy, we adopt the related principle of voluntary, prior and **continuing** consent. Researchers should obtain voluntary, prior and continuing consent from participants who have sufficient capacity and have who been provided with the necessary information required to ensure that consent is valid. This framing emphasises that consent can be withdrawn at any time, and for any reason; it also recognises that the signing of a form is not the only valid way to give consent. Participants must receive enough easily understood and accurate information to judge whether the risk or inconvenience involved are acceptable to them. It is the researcher's responsibility to accurately describe any risks to participants in a way that they can easily understand.

When seeking consent, courtesy and professionalism require that the identity of the researcher and research institution be stated, 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 stated verbally.

Researchers should consider participants' cultural norms and lifestyles when deciding how to

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[21] For more details, see the International Society of Ethnobiology Code of Ethics (accessed 22 June 2022): www.ethnobiology.net/wp-content/uploads/ISE-COE_Eng_rev_24Nov08.pdf

approach informed consent. An 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 participants to risk through being identified while serving no purpose.

When it is important to have a record of the informed consent (for example, if processing special category or criminal offence data), but when written or signed consent would place the participant at risk or be difficult for the participant to read and understand, one useful procedure is to have a colleague or other research partner witness the verbal consent. Alternatively, an entry in the researcher's log can be a good mechanism to document that the consent process has taken place and to note any issues arising from it.

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

Communities involved in research 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, societies or communities, they have a right to withhold or withdraw their consent at any point during the research process.

Personal data, confidentiality and anonymisation

IIED respects the need for the lawful processing of personal data. 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 this is requested or appropriate and adapt our communications around the event accordingly.

Before research data can be shared or archived, it must be anonymised so that individuals, organisations and businesses cannot be identified – unless they have given their consent to 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 personal data. Anonymisation or pseudonymisation 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 in research publications or other outputs, unless a participant 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, where 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. A person's identity may be revealed by:

- **Direct identifiers** such as name, address (specific or area), contact details, photographs and so on

- **Indirect identifiers** which, when linked with other publicly available information, could identify someone, for example information on their workplace, occupation, salary or age.

Direct identifiers are often collected as part of research administration, 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 has 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, while maintaining maximum content.

Appendix 2: 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 (RST) provides oversight of REC and is responsible for approving policy updates recommended by it.

REC terms of reference

1. To assess the ethical issues raised by projects submitted for review, and advise one of the following actions:

   - The project should proceed as proposed (including risk mitigation actions outlined in the checklist)

   - The project should proceed without further review on the understanding that recommended actions and changes from REC will be taken on board

   - The project proposal must be submitted for further assessment by REC after changes to the proposal have been made in areas outlined by REC, or

   - The project should not proceed.

2. To advise research groups on procedures for reviewing the ethics of every project involving children and/or vulnerable adults.

3. To provide support and advice, on request, to any member of IIED staff and on ethical matters relating to research.

4. To review regularly (at least once a year) IIED's ethical research policy, with a view to ensuring that research conducted by or for 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 any IIED policy related to research ethics.

6. To establish, monitor and review the procedures that examine proposals for research to be carried out by IIED staff that will involve human participants, and through that examination ensure that such research conforms to generally accepted ethical principles and standards as outlined in IIED's policy for integrity and ethics in research, research partnerships, and policy engagement ('the policy').

Operational details

Core membership

- 1 chair

- 1 secretary (an IIED staff member with the necessary skills will act as secretary to REC)

- 1 research group director or senior fellow

- 1 senior or principal researcher

- 1 researcher, and

- 1 independent member

REC must have a minimum of five members, appointed by or on behalf of SMT. SMT will 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. Building on a review undertaken in 2021, REC (under guidance from RST and the director of IIED) will explore expanding membership to include a lay representative and a representative from a Southern partner organisation.

Notes on membership

- Independent members will have no connection to IIED as an employee or in any other capacity, such as associate or trustee. At least one member will have experience of working with participants from groups suffering discrimination and disadvantage.

- REC will have powers to co-opt such other members ('advisers') as it may, from time to time, judge necessary to assist it in the discharge of its responsibilities. Advisers will be selected based on the relevance of their professional expertise to the research project undergoing review, and will be invited by the chair to attend a particular meeting or participate in a virtual review to provide specialist advice to REC. The final outcome of the review rests with REC.

- A member may resign from REC at any time upon giving notice in writing to the chair. Membership will lapse if a member fails without good reason to attend two consecutive REC meetings;[22] the member will be notified of the lapse by the chair in writing. Steps will be taken by REC (with SMT backing) to fill any vacancy which may arise.

- A deputy chair will be elected from among the REC membership on an ad hoc basis as the need arises. Appointment will be based on the members' relevant experience, availability and willingness to take on the role. In the absence of the chair, a deputy chair will perform their role and duties.

- A REC member 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. For the independent member, this includes disclosing whether any of their affiliated organisations are potentially competing with IIED for project funding.

Review procedure[23]

The standard procedure for ethical review by REC is as follows:

- The project leader completes the Ethics and Data Protection Review Form ('the review form') and the relevant group director (or equivalent) authorises it.

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[22] REC will meet a minimum of once per year in person to review the policy and discuss any reviews due at that time.

[23] REC has the right to defer the ethical review of a project to the REC of a project partner organisation, if that organisation's review process is deemed sufficiently rigorous and reputable to serve in place of IIED's own. In such cases, the partner organisation must provide IIED's REC with copies of all relevant paperwork regarding its review (including application forms, approval letters, amendment requests, and so on).

- **If** the form has identified the need for full REC review, the group director emails the authorised form to ethics@iied.org, the project leader and project manager.

- The REC secretary requests a copy of the full project description (for example, a funding proposal, concept note, summary outline, or similar) from the project leader, and forwards this together with the completed review form to all members of REC with a request to review the project. The email should clearly outline the basic details of the project, the main ethical issues identified on the form, and planned mitigation actions, using the template below.

- REC members review the information and respond by 'replying to all' to the email from the REC secretary, with their responses added to the body of the email in red text.

- Once the Chair is satisfied that all members have had the opportunity to provide their input, s/he will indicate whether the REC has come to a decision.[24] When REC has come to a final decision, the secretary sends an email to the project leader with the Statement of Ethical Issues and Actions section (from the review form) in the body of the email, including any additions and comments from REC in red text; and with a paragraph confirming REC's recommendation. The recommendation could be: the project should proceed as proposed (including risk mitigation actions outlined in the checklist); the project should proceed without further review on the understanding that recommended actions and changes from REC will be taken on board; the project proposal will be returned to REC for further assessment following changes to the proposal in areas outlined by REC; or the project should not proceed.

- The REC secretary saves all email correspondence as PDF documents in the secure SharePoint file location.

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

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[24] For the purposes of holding a meeting of REC, a quorum is constituted by the presence of at least four members, including the chair and an independent member.

Email template

Subject: REC REVIEW: Ethics & Data Protection Review Form [Ref. No.]; Project [Project No.]; [Project leader surname]

Dear REC members,

Please find attached a request for ethics review alongside supporting documentation. Please provide input by [INSERT DATE].

Project leader:	
Project title:	
Group:	
Project start date and duration:	
Brief summary of project's objectives and methods/activities	

Supporting documents provided:
- Doc 1: Ethics and Data Protection Review Form
- Doc 2: Project proposal [or other]
- Doc 3: [ETC]

Notes for REC
Issues/timing requirements that the project leader has highlighted to be noted by REC:

Statement of ethical issues and actions (REC: If highlighting additional risks/issues and actions please do so in red in the box provided below):

Risk/Issue	Action

Any other REC comments (please add in red below):

REC recommendation (please add your initials in red below):

The project should proceed as proposed (including risk mitigation actions outlined in the checklist)	
The project should proceed without further review on the understanding that recommended actions and changes from REC will be taken on board	
The project proposal needs further assessment and will be returned to REC for further review following changes to the proposal in areas outlined by REC	
The project should not proceed	

Regards,

[REC Secretary]