Research Ethics Policy

Version 4

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Document Control

The DDG-Research will be responsible for the periodic review of this document.

Document Responsibility

Title	Research Ethics Policy
Directorate	Research
Unit	Office of the DDG-Research
Manager	DDG-Research
Applicable to	All Staff

Document Revision History

Version	Endorsed By	Meeting Reference	Date Endorsed	Approved By	Meeting Reference	Date Approved	Effective Date	Sections Modified
1	Senior Leadership Team	SLT-2004	2-Mar-04	Board of Trustees	BOT-2004	2004	2004	Original draft
2	Senior Leadership Team	SLT-SI-05-10	22-Mar-10	Board of Trustees	BOT-2010	2010	1-Dec-10	Version 2
3	Senior Leadership Team	SLT-SI-03-14	2-Apr-14	Board of Trustees	BOT-60-4.11	26-Nov-14	1-Dec-14	Version 3
4	Senior Leadership Team	SLT-Fin-06-19	31-Oct-19	Common Board of Trustees	CB2	22-Nov-19	1-Dec-19	• Revised sections: 1, 2, 3 & 4 • New sections: 5, 6 & 7

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1. Purpose

ICRAF adopts the Research Ethics Policy to:

1.1. Describe the ethical principles and standards ICRAF expects staff, students and consultants working on ICRAF projects to adopt.

1.2. Describe the procedures for ensuring these standards are implemented and maintained.

1.3. Ensure that the ethical standards are explained to those with an interest in the Center's research, including current and potential donors, partners and staff.

2. Scope

2.1. The policy applies to all research activities undertaken by ICRAF, irrespective of the source of funds or the research partnerships involved.

2.2. This policy describes the minimal accepted ethical standards, and is not a guide to best scientific practice.

2.3. There are ethical considerations in other areas of our operations, such as in financial and human resource management. These are covered in separate policies

3. Definitions[1]

3.1. **Research** means any original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding, which may include systematic studies for testing theories and evaluation as well as scaling support studies.

3.2. **Research Ethics** means application of moral rules and professional codes of conduct to the collection, analysis, reporting, and publication of information about research subjects, in particular active acceptance of subjects' right to privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent.

3.3. **Privacy** means the state of being free from unwanted intrusion into one's personal space, private information, or personal affairs.

3.4. **Confidentiality** means the obligation to keep some types of information secret. In science, confidential information typically includes: private data pertaining to human subjects, papers or research proposals submitted for peer review, personnel records, and proprietary data among others.

[1] Mainly adapted from: Glossary of Commonly Used Terms in Research Ethics. David B. Resnik, National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, National Institutes of Health, May 2015

3.5. **Researcher** means any person engaged in research or outreach under the auspices of ICRAF including employees (both internationally and nationally recruited) designated as research scientists, research support staff and post-doctoral scientists and others such as consultants or collaborators (paid or unpaid), research students, visiting scientists, scientific interns, and ICRAF fellows, among others.

3.6. **Research subject (or research participant)** means a living individual who is the subject of an experiment or study involving the collection of the individual's private data or biological samples.

3.7. **Informed consent** means the process of making a free and informed decision (such as to participate in research). Individuals who provide informed consent must be legally competent and have enough decision-making capacity to consent to research.

3.8. **Competence** means the legal right to make decisions for one's self. Adults are considered to be legally competent until they are adjudicated incompetent by a court.

4. Policy Principles

4.1. Guiding ethical principles

4.1.1. **Respect for persons -** ICRAF is committed to ensuring that individuals are treated as autonomous agents in its research projects and that persons with diminished autonomy are entitled to protection.

4.1.2. **Beneficence -** ICRAF has obligation on its researchers to strive to ensure benefits to both individuals and society, while minimizing risk of harm.

4.1.3. **Justice –** Researchers have an obligation to do all within their power to ensure a fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of research

4.1.4. **Respect for ecosystems** - ICRAF is committed to ensuring the Center's research minimizes disturbance to ecosystems.

4.1.5. **Scientific integrity** - ICRAF has an obligation to ensure research is conducted honestly, thoroughly and without conflict of interest.

4.1.6. **Respect for open enquiry** - ICRAF requires its researchers to ensure methods utilized in its research and results are available to all.

4.2. Acceptable standards and aspirations of ICRAF research with communities

4.2.1. **Respect for human dignity**: protecting the multiple and interdependent interests of the person – from bodily to psychological to cultural integrity.

4.2.2. **Respect for free, prior and informed consent** (FPIC).

4.2.3. **Respect for vulnerable people:** ethical obligations towards those whose situation make them vulnerable.

4.2.4. **Respect for privacy & confidentiality**: standards to protect the access, control and dissemination of personal information. The ICRAF Personal Data Protection Policy applies.

4.2.5. **Respect for justice and inclusiveness:** fairness and equity in the way the benefits and adverse risks of research are distributed among individuals and communities.

4.2.6. **Minimizing harm, maximizing benefits**: the foreseeable benefits should outweigh anticipated harms, at the same time minimizing harm to individuals or communities.

4.3. Guiding practice for ICRAF work with human subjects

4.3.1. **Selection of participants** must be made on the basis of the objectives of the study, rather than on non-research interests.

4.3.2. **Researchers have to make a non-arbitrary, systematic and fair assessment of the possible harms and benefits of the research**. This must include physical, psychological, legal, social and economic harm and benefits accruing to individuals, families, and communities.

4.3.3. **Free, prior informed consent[2] to take part in research must be obtained**. Researchers have to ensure that research participants have complete understanding of the nature of the research (purpose, methods and associated demands) and the potential harm and benefits.

4.3.4. **Participation in research is voluntary**. No coercion or undue inducements should be given by the researcher or by those in authority acting for the researcher. Participation in research should not be linked to any attempt to influence or control behavior in areas unconnected with research. Consent to participate may be given by an adult, a parent, guardian, or other agent legally authorized to act on a person's behalf.

4.3.5. **Confidentiality of personal information**. Researchers must ensure that personal information about identifiable individuals remains confidential and is not used without

[2] For instance see the UN-REDD Programme's website for guidelines

permission or made available to any third parties. Permission must also be obtained to use photographs of recognizable individuals.

4.3.6. **Interaction with research participants must be void of deception**. Researchers must avoid deception either by *omission* where participants are not informed of certain aspects of the investigation, or by commission where false information is given about the investigation, either partially or totally.

4.3.7. Researchers must make every effort to **make results of the research available to participants**, in a format they can understand.

4.3.8. Particular attention to each of the above must be applied **when working with vulnerable individuals and communities**. Vulnerability can be particularly associated with age (very young children or the elderly) or disability whereby such individuals can be rendered powerless in exercising free will on serving as research participants. The CIFOR-ICRAF Safeguarding Policy as well as ICRAF Policy on Local Knowledge apply for communities.

4.4. Guiding practice for ICRAF work with animal subjects[3]

4.4.1. **Requirement of expertise on animals –** studies involving live animals must be handled by staff who have adequately updated and documented expertise on animals.

4.4.2. **Respect for animals' dignity -** animals as living, sentient creatures have an intrinsic value which must be respected regardless of their utility value in the study. Researchers must be respectful of animals' interests when choosing study topics and methods involving animals, and when disseminating the results.

4.4.3. **Responsibility when intervening in a habitat** – in studies such as those regarding environmental technology and surveillance researchers should ensure minimal disruption and impact on the natural behavior, populations and surroundings of animals.

4.4.4. **Responsibility for considering options (*Replace*)** – Where studies involve experiments on animals, researchers are responsible for studying whether there are alternative options to generate the same knowledge or whether the research can be postponed until such alternative methods have been developed.

[3] Adapted from: Norwegian National Committees for Research Ethics. 2018. Ethical Guidelines for the Use of Animals in Research. Earlier version indicated that

4.4.5. **Responsibility for considering and balancing suffering and benefit –** where animals involved and suffering expected[4] the possible benefits of the study must be considered, substantiated and specified in both the short and the long term.

4.4.6. **Responsibility for reducing the number of animals (*Reduce*) and/or minimizing the risk of suffering (*Refine*) –** researchers must include only the minimum number necessary to maintain the scientific quality of the experiments and the relevance of the results.

4.4.7. **Responsibility for maintaining biological diversity** - researchers must consider the consequences to the stock and to the ecosystem as a whole. The use of endangered and vulnerable species must be reduced to an absolute minimum.

4.4.8. **Requirement of due care -** researchers must familiarize themselves and comply with national laws and rules and international conventions and agreements regarding the use of laboratory animals.

4.5. Respect for ecosystems

4.5.1. Researchers have to make a non-arbitrary, systematic and fair assessment of the possible harms and benefits of the research to the environment.

4.5.2. Researchers will set up protocols that ensure that their research does not degrade ecosystems, biodiversity and natural resources.

4.5.3. Wherever appropriate, researchers will need to abide by national regulations, environmental laws, and international conventions as they relate to management and protection of the natural environment.

4.6. Open enquiry

4.6.1. Research methods used in any investigation are regarded as public property and will be made available

4.6.2. Every effort will be made to ensure methods are appropriate and conclusions valid

4.6.3. Research will be completed, documented and made publicly available irrespective of the conclusions. This transparency and sharing are important in order to avoid unnecessary repetition of studies.

[4] Suffering includes pain, hunger, thirst, malnutrition, abnormal cold or heat, fear, stress, injury, illness and restrictions on the ability to behave normally/naturally

4.6.4. The fact that research results and outcomes contradict the views or interests of any stakeholder will not have negative consequences in ICRAF's evaluation of the researcher.

4.7. Professionalism

4.7.1. ICRAF expects all professional research staff to be aware of, and follow relevant codes of conduct from their professional organizations.

4.7.2. Researchers have to ensure that all necessary skills and experience are available to carry out the proposed research either in the proposed research team or through collaboration with carefully selected partners.

4.7.3. Where research is a partnership ICRAF researchers should ensure the standards and aspirations of this policy are applied across the study by both ICRAF and partner organization(s) researchers.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

5.1. Board of Trustees

5.1.1. Ensure that sufficient resources are assigned to the Research Directorate to carry out their responsibilities as per this policy.

5.2. Senior Leadership Team (SLT)

5.2.1. Continuously assess the extent to which the Centre is managing compliance with the provisions of this policy.

5.2.2. Monitor compliance and receive and review exception reporting.

5.2.3. Approve the Standard Operating Procedures of the Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC)

5.2.4. Review, approve and implement the provisions of this policy.

5.3. Deputy Director General- Research

5.3.1. Ensure that an effective arrangement for training on research ethics is set up and implemented to ensure competence of the institutional research ethics committee and scientific staff.

5.3.2. Ensure that staff are aware of the risks associated with breach of the provisions of this policy.

5.3.3. Appoint the Chair and members of the IREC.

5.4. Regional Coordinators, Country Representatives, Heads of Units, Theme Leaders

5.4.1. Remain vigilant in ensuring compliance to this Policy by their staff.

5.4.2. Immediately report any breach of the Policy to the IREC.

5.4.3. Ensure their staff are sufficiently trained on how to comply with relevant laws, regulations, policies and procedures in their relevant jurisdictions.

5.4.4. Review, with respect to any proposed research project, the potential risks to ICRAF, the health, safety and well-being of researchers and research participants with the assistance of the IREC and Legal Office where required.

5.4.5. Ensure that national ethical clearance has been obtained where the field work will be carried out, if this is required.

5.5. Institutional Research Ethics committee (IREC)

5.5.1. Review all proposed research studies (both project proposals and specific studies such as student proposals within a project) on ethics probity which will include consideration of the design, outputs and proposed conduct of the research.

5.5.2. Make a proportionate judgement concerning whether there is an appropriate balance of risks and benefits of the research to both the researcher and research participants.

5.5.3. Seek the advice of an independent researcher with experience and expertise in the research methods and paradigm described in a proposal where members lack expertise or a judgement does not come easy.

5.5.4. Review the informed consent and other materials intended for research participants.

5.5.5. Conduct inquiry on any allegations of research misconduct that may come up at any stage of research and advise the SLT through the DDG Research on appropriate remedial actions.

5.5.6. Embed a research ethics culture in the institution by engaging researchers continuously on approaches to achieving the highest ethical standards in their work.

5.6. Legal Office

5.6.1. Has representation in the IREC.

5.6.2. Advices the IREC on legal implications of any research ethic issues under review.

5.6.3. Advices the IREC and SLT on remedial actions where issues of unethical practice have been raised for any project or study.

5.6.4. Participate in the development and implementation of training programs for staff, either with staff from the Unit or with external consultants.

6. Review

6.1. This policy will be reviewed every three years or earlier if required by the Deputy Director General – Research or upon recommendation by the IERC.

6.2. Any changes made to the Policy will be presented to the Senior Leadership Team for endorsement and thereafter submitted to the Board of Trustees for approval.

7. Related Documentation

7.1. Research and Science Quality Policy

7.2. Research Misconduct Policy

7.3. Research Data Management Policy

7.4. Personal Data Protection Policy

7.5. Local Knowledge Policy

7.6. Research and Science Quality Policy

7.7. Social and Environmental Safeguards Policy

7.8. Tree Genetic Resources Policy

7.9. Invasive Alien Species Policy

7.10. Intellectual Assets Policy

7.11. CIFOR-ICRAF Safeguarding Policy