



World Agroforestry Centre
TRANSFORMING LIVES AND LANDSCAPES

ICRAF Policy Guidelines Series

Research Ethics

March 2004

World Agroforestry Centre Policy Guidelines on Research Ethics

ICRAF's mission and research ethics

ICRAF's mission is to advance the science and practice of agroforestry, and in so doing to transform landscapes and the lives of the rural poor in developing countries. The pursuit of this mission requires carrying out research that involves people and the environment and has consequences for both, directly through the research activity and indirectly through the results. There are therefore ethical considerations to take into account when planning and implementing the research and this policy sets out the principles and standards ICRAF has adopted to guide our work.

Purpose

- Describe the ethical principles and standards ICRAF expects staff, students and consultants working on ICRAF projects to adopt.
- Describe procedures for ensuring these standards are implemented and maintained.

Scope

ICRAF is a multicultural organisation working in diverse social and biophysical environments. The organisation has a responsibility to ensure that all research activities are undertaken in ways which meets some common standards, and to explain these standards to those with an interest, including current and potential donors, partners and staff. The policy applies to all research activities undertaken by ICRAF, irrespective of the source of funds or the research partnerships involved.

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

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

Principles

The basic ethical principles¹ relevant are:

1. Respect for persons

Respect for persons incorporates at least two ethical convictions: that individuals should be treated as autonomous agents and that persons with diminished autonomy are entitled to protection.

2. Beneficence

Researchers have an obligation to strive to ensure benefits to both individuals and society, while minimising risk of harm.

3. Justice

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

These have been interpreted to give the following common standards and aspirations of research communities²:

1. Respect for human dignity: protecting the multiple and interdependent interests of the person – from bodily to psychological to cultural integrity.
2. Respect for free and informed consent
3. Respect for vulnerable people: ethical obligations towards those whose situation make them vulnerable.
4. Respect for privacy & confidentiality: standards to protect the access, control and dissemination of personal information
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.
6. Minimizing harm, maximising benefits: the foreseeable benefits should outweigh anticipated harms, at the same time minimising harms to individuals or communities.

Three other ethical standards are relevant to ICRAF's mission and operating mode:

7. Respect for ecosystems: ensuring research minimises disturbance to ecosystems
8. Scientific integrity: ensuring research is conducted honestly, thoroughly and without conflict of interest
9. Respect for open enquiry: ensuring methods and results are available to all

Implications for ICRAF work

Human subjects

These items apply to both individuals and communities

1. Selection of participants must be made on the basis of the subject of the study, rather than on non-research interests.
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.

3. Prior informed consent to take part in research must be obtained. The researchers therefore have to ensure that participants understand the nature of the research and the potential harm and benefits.
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 behaviour in areas unconnected with research.
5. Confidentiality of personal information. Researchers must ensure that personal information about identifiable individuals remains confidential and is not used without permission. Permission must also be obtained to use photographs of recognisable individuals.
6. Researchers must make every effort to make results of the research available to participants, in a format they can understand.
7. Particular attention to each of the above must be applied when working with vulnerable individuals and communities.

Animal subjects

Standards and practices developed by ILRI must be used when research has animal welfare implications.

Environmental protection

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

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.

Open enquiry

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

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

Research will be completed, documented and made publicly available irrespective of the outcome.

The fact that research results and outcomes contradict the views or interests of any stakeholder will not be used by ICRAF in evaluation of the researcher.

Professionalism

ICRAF expects all professional research staff to be aware of and follow relevant codes of conduct from their professional organisations³.

Fraud

Described under another policy

Intellectual property

Described under another policy

Partners

Adoption of compatible standards and principles of research ethics will be a criterion for selecting research partners.

¹ These are described in The Belmont Report (US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (1979) Belmont report: ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects of research), available at

<http://ohrp.osophs.dhhs.gov/humansubjects/guidance/belmont.htm>

² These are explained more fully by, for example, Tri-Council of Canada (1998) Ethical conduct for research involving humans. Medical Research Council of Canada, Natural Sciences Research Council of Canada and Social Sciences Research Council of Canada. Available at <http://www.nserc.ca/programs/ethics/english/policy.htm>

³ See, for example, <http://csep.iit.edu/codes/codes.html>, <http://onlineethics.org/>, and <http://www.cre.gu.se/links.html>