



International Water
Management Institute

Research Ethics Policy

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Research Ethics Policy

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1. INTRODUCTION

The **International Water Management Institute (IWMI)** is a non-profit, scientific research organization focusing on the sustainable use of water and land resources in developing countries. IWMI's Mission is to provide water solutions for sustainable, climate-resilient development. IWMI is committed to adhere to high ethical standards in its research respecting the principles of integrity, excellence in research, safety and well-being and respect for persons and ecosystems, as set forth in the CGIAR Ethics Framework and CGIAR Research Ethics Code.

The policy aims at providing a framework for conducting and reporting of research by:

- Setting out the ethical principles underpinning all research activities conducted by IWMI;
- Defining the responsibilities of IWMI and IWMI's researchers, staff, hired consultants and e.g. interns in view of research ethics;
- Providing guidance on the application of those principles, by defining standards that researchers and staff involved in IWMI projects and activities will adhere to; and
- Defining scientific misconduct and related mechanisms.

Ethical research conduct does not mean that researchers will avoid potentially high-risk research. An ethical approach to research involves an identification of the potential risks and a plan on how to address and manage these.

2. SCOPE AND DEFINITIONS

IWMI research ethics policy applies to all research conducted or supervised by IWMI's researchers.

By '**research**,' we mean: 'original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding' (UK Research Assessment Exercise 2008, p. 34), or 'a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge' (US OHRP 2008).

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‘Researcher’ refers in this policy to any person who conducts research as an IWMI employee; any individual engaged in research under the auspices of IWMI or on behalf of or in association with IWMI such as an independent contractor, consultant or collaborator (paid or unpaid); a research student; a visiting or emeritus member of staff; interns, and staff working or volunteering for another institution on an IWMI-commissioned research project or program, including the ONE-CGIAR initiatives and/or their components if led by IWMI. IWMI employees falling in the research category typically include researchers, research officers, research support staff and post-doctoral scientists, among others.

A **‘research participant’** or **‘human subject’** refers to a living individual who is the focus of research or about whom a researcher conducting research obtains: (1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or (2) identifiable private information, including photographs, film and audio or video recordings.

‘Vulnerable research participants’ include pregnant women, children (legal minors), prisoners, persons with diminished mental capacity, and those who are educationally or economically disadvantaged, like many farmers in those countries where the CGIAR is working.

The term **‘ethics’** refers to systems of moral principles or values, principles of right or good behaviour in relating to others, and the rules and norms of conduct binding together members of a profession.

3. PRINCIPLES

IWMI as an organisation and its research staff will adhere to the following principles. These principles set out the rights, responsibilities and values relevant to research. Some principles might appear self-evident and there might be some overlap but the ethical principles aim to encourage all researchers to consider the broader and long-term consequences of their work. Research ethics are to be meaningful to and accepted by researchers – adhering to ethical principles will not become merely a ‘tick the box’ exercise. IWMI’s policy and procedures aim at engaging researchers in a self-reflective and ethically-aware approach to research.

INTEGRITY

Independence and Impartiality: IWMI researchers must comply with all legal and ethical requirements relevant to their field of study. They will declare any potential or actual conflicts of interest that might jeopardise the integrity of the methodology or the outputs of research and, where necessary, take steps to resolve them.

When the object of investigation (e.g. an evaluation) is an intervention or programme led by any organization (including IWMI), the researchers’ team will ensure research is conducted independently of those implementing this intervention or programme under study. Researchers will report if they feel that undue pressure is being put on them jeopardizing their independence.

Honesty: IWMI will work to create and maintain a culture of research that fosters and supports honesty in research. Researchers will be honest in relation to their own research and that of others. They will do their utmost to ensure the accuracy of data and results, acknowledge the contribution of others and neither engage in misconduct nor conceal it.

Accountability: IWMI researchers will recognize that in and through their work they are ultimately accountable to the general public for their actions and will act accordingly. They will ensure that any

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research undertaken complies with any agreements, terms and conditions relating to the project, and allows for proper governance and transparency. Researchers will follow the (e.g. data management) requirements and guidance of any professional bodies in their field of research.

EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

Competence: Research must be relevant and high quality with clear developmental and practical value following the CGIAR framework of Quality of Research for Development (QoR4D). IWMI should provide adequate training and opportunities for development for their researchers and offer the necessary resources to conduct research to the required standards. Research managers will ensure that the best available competence is assigned to research activities, or if researchers miss the necessary skills or resources to carry out research themselves that they will collaborate with specialists in relevant fields, or report any unmet needs they identify to identify solutions.

Co-operation: IWMI researchers will promote the open exchange of ideas, research methods, data and results and their discussion, scrutiny and debate, subject to any considerations of confidentiality. This includes presenting and sharing research results to stakeholders including research participants (transparency).

SAFETY AND WELL-BEING FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS AND RESEARCHERS

Avoiding harm and contributing to well-being: IWMI researchers will ensure the dignity, rights and safety of groups and individuals involved in research, in particular of children and any other vulnerable research participants, but also of research staff, interns, and fellow researchers. Researchers will make sure that their research and related communication (photos, film, etc.) is not detrimental to well-being or expose vulnerable individuals. Researchers will report and address any concerns relating to the dignity, rights, safety and well-being of those involved in research.

RESPECT FOR PERSONS AND ECOSYSTEMS

Cultural sensitivity: IWMI will be sensitive to the values and cultures of partner organisations in the countries where IWMI has offices and research projects. Researchers will be sensitive to the values and cultures of the groups being studied, and how this may affect research participants' understanding of the purpose and nature of research. In particular, researchers need to take account of differences in education, local behaviour and norms, religious beliefs and practices, sexual orientation, gender roles, disability, age and ethnicity and other social differences such as class when planning studies and communicating findings. Ethical and political issues relating to disparities in wealth, power and political-economic interests are taken into account in planning research projects.

Respect for local knowledge: Researchers seek to integrate and respect views of third parties, including research participants, in the research design and implementation of activities. They recognize and support the efforts of indigenous groups and communities to produce, store and disseminate their own knowledge, especially women and marginalised groups and individuals and do not assume the superiority of one knowledge system over another.

Voluntary participation: Research participants have the right to consent to participate, withdraw from, or refuse to take part in research. All research participants have the right to withdraw individual data collected from them at any point without fear of penalty. They will be informed by researchers about their rights and the safety of their data. Information on the research will be provided to the research participants to allow transparency before consent will be sought.

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Openness: The project leaders will ensure that the researchers and research participants are fully informed about the purpose, methods, and intended possible uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails, and any risks/benefits to them and others induced by the research or possible through the dissemination and use of the research findings.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: Personal information or identifiable data, including photographs and films, will not be disclosed/published/shared without participants' clear consent so that the confidentiality of research participants' data is respected.

Respect for animals and ecosystems: Researchers will ensure that their research respects ecosystems, biodiversity and natural resources when designing and conducting research. Researchers will set up research protocols that will avoid or reduce potential harm to animals, their study sites and studied ecosystems in line with the CGIAR Research Ethics Code.

4. OBLIGATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

This section defines the obligations of all parties under this policy.

IWMI recognizes that the responsibility for ethical conduct first lies in individual researchers interacting with research participants. However, the institute is responsible to create a favourable working environment and organisational culture that promotes the respect of ethical research principles. In addition, the Institute has an obligation to provide adequate guidance, human, financial and institutional resources for researchers to comply with the principles.

Research funding bodies as well as national partners and authorities might have their own research ethics policies/requirements in which case compliance with these requirements may take precedence over IWMI's research ethics policy, if they impose a higher standard or duty of care. In general, IWMI's ethical guidance should not replace, but complement, the researchers' compliance with local standards, laws and guidelines. In case of conflicting recommendations, the IWMI Research Ethics Coordinator (REC) should be informed for advice.

Researchers must:

- Conduct research in accordance with the principles of research ethics outlined in this policy with due respect for local customs and the policies of our donors, partner or host organizations;
- Avoid research misconduct as defined in this policy; and
- Report instances of behaviour by fellow IWMI researchers that they reasonably believe represents ethical or research misconduct.

Researchers will recognize that research misconduct, if tolerated or ignored, undermines the entire IWMI research community, the reputation of IWMI and the CGIAR, and the trust of our funders.

IWMI must:

- Implement, and periodically review, procedures for:
 - The ethical review and approval of all research projects or project components led by IWMI through an Institutional Review Board (IRB), either internally or externally, to determine if they entail human subject research, and if yes, how best vulnerable participants can be protected;

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- o The adoption of the CGIAR Responsible Data Guidelines for handling personal data of research participants; data anonymization and data sharing with third parties;
- o The reporting of complaints relating to research quality and ethics, and investigate and determine allegations of research misconduct;
- Provide training and mentoring in research ethics and ethics procedure for IWMI employees in the research category and/or managing research data, interns, field enumerators, and for those involved in investigating research misconduct at IWMI; and
- Adequately resource the implementation of this policy, the ethical review of projects through an IRB, and its associated procedures.

5. IMPLEMENTATION

RESEARCH DESIGN

When designing research projects, IWMI researchers will ensure that:

- The proposed research addresses pertinent R4D questions and is designed either to add to existing knowledge about the subject in question or to develop methods to research into it;
- The design of the study is appropriate for the questions being asked and addresses the most important potential sources of bias;
- All necessary skills and experience will be available to carry out the proposed research, in the proposed research team or through collaboration with specialists in relevant fields;
- Sufficient resources will be available to carry out the proposed research and that these resources meet all relevant standards;
- National ethical clearance has been obtained where the field work will be carried out, if this is required; in addition to approval from IWMI's IRB, and
- Any issues relating to the above are resolved as far as possible prior to the start of the research.

IWMI researchers will conduct as part of the proposal development a risk assessment of the planned study to determine:

- the potential for risks to IWMI, the research, the health, safety and well-being of researchers and research participants; as well as any animals affected by the research, and
- which legal requirements govern the research in the study locations.

Where the design of a study has been approved under this policy and IRB procedures, the researchers will ensure that any subsequent alterations to the design are subject to appropriate review to determine that they will not compromise the integrity of the research and its approval.

IWMI will set up systems to ensure that when there are risks that proposed research or results may be misused for purposes that are illegal or harmful, those risks are identified and addressed. IWMI will make these systems known to researchers and provide guidance and support to researchers where such risks are identified.

Researchers will try to anticipate any risks that the proposed research might produce, or results that could be misused for purposes that are illegal or harmful. Researchers will report any such risks to the IRB for guidance to minimise those risks.

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COLLABORATIVE WORKING

IWMI researchers will pay particular attention to additional legal and ethical requirements and other guidelines that may apply in the countries where IWMI conducts research or its host and partners.

IWMI will assist partner organisations to ensure the agreement of, and compliance with, common standards and procedures for the conduct of collaborative research, including the resolution of any issues or problems that might arise and the investigation of any allegations of misconduct in research if they occur.

Researchers will promote the meaningful involvement of all relevant parties, especially research participants, in the design and implementation of research, to foster the respect for local knowledge, ethics and culture.

Researchers will be aware of any contractual requirements involving public, private, or other partner organisations, seeking guidance and assistance where necessary and reporting any concerns or irregularities to the appropriate person(s) as soon as they become aware of them.

Researchers will try to anticipate any issues that might arise as a result of working collaboratively and agree in advance with its partners how they might be addressed, communicating any decisions to all members of the research team. In particular, agreement will be sought on the specific roles of the entities and researchers involved in the project and on issues relating to intellectual property of data and publications, branding, or the attribution of authorship, recognising that, subject to legal and ethical requirements, roles and contributions may vary by output and can change during the time span of the research.

RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Through this policy, the IWMI Board of Governors supports the set-up of an Institutional Review board (IRB) and process at IWMI and grants the IRB the authority to approve, require modifications in (to secure approval), or to disapprove all research activities involving human subjects reviewed, managed or conducted at or by IWMI. The IRB is further authorized to suspend or terminate approval of research that is not being conducted in accordance with the IRB's requirements.

The IWMI Board of Governors and Director General are committed to ensure that the IWMI IRB is allowed to function independently and free from undue influence. Officials or committees of IWMI may not approve (and allow to commence) research involving human subjects if it has not been approved or has been disapproved by the designated IWMI IRB, any national IRB, or a centralized ONE-CGIAR ethical review board.

All research involving human subjects, whether conducted at IWMI or conducted by researchers or representatives of the organization at other sites, must receive approval by a designated IRB before the start of any field research activities involving human subjects. This may be approval by IWMI's IRB (full review or expedited process), and/or approval by a research partner IRB, and/or a national IRB in the project country, verifying that the research design will address any possible risks and the project qualifies for minimal risk exemption.

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Procedures, templates and guidelines necessary to operationalize and oversee IWMI's ethical project review process will be available to staff on its Intranet and be revised from time to time following e.g. CGIAR guidance. They are directly authorized and enabled under this Research Ethics Policy, as defining documents for assurances that IWMI makes with its stakeholders and research donors.

REPORTING AND DISSEMINATING RESULTS

IWMI researchers will ensure the prompt publication and dissemination of research results by the most appropriate means, subject to intellectual property, privacy, data confidentiality and contractual considerations.

Researchers will be honest in reporting results on their contribution and the contribution of other researchers, organisations and previous body of knowledge.

Researchers will not use offensive language or be politically biased when reporting results, or express arrogance towards the knowledge of their study population.

Researchers will ensure that reporting results serve and do not compromise the initial goals and purpose of the research.

PUBLICATION

IWMI researchers will accept their duty to publish and disseminate research in a manner that reports the research and all the findings of the research accurately and without selection that could be misleading. Open-access publishing is highly recommended while the use of so called predatory journals and publishers with questionable peer-review practices is discouraged.

IWMI will ensure that sponsors and funders of research (i) respect the duty of researchers to publish their research and the findings of their research; (ii) do not discourage or suppress appropriate publication or dissemination; and (iii) do not attempt to influence the presentation or interpretation of findings inappropriately.

IWMI will provide training and support to guide researchers in the publication and dissemination of research and the findings of research that involves: confidential or proprietary information; issues relating to patents or intellectual property; findings with serious implications for public health; contractual or other legal obligations; and/or interest from the media or the general public.

Researchers will address issues relating to publication and authorship, especially the roles of all collaborators and contributors, at an early stage of the design of a project, recognising that, subject to legal and ethical requirements, roles and contributions may change during the time span of the research. Decisions on publication and authorship will be agreed jointly and communicated to all members of the research team.

Authorship will be restricted to those contributors and collaborators who have made a significant intellectual or practical contribution to the publication or the research it is based on. No person who fulfils the criteria for authorship will be excluded from the submitted work. Authorship will not be allocated to honorary or "guest" authors (i.e., those that do not fulfil criteria of authorship).

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Researchers will be aware that anyone listed as an author of any work will be prepared to take public responsibility for that work and ensure its accuracy, and be able to identify their contribution to it.

Researchers will list the work of all other contributors, partners or supervisors, who do not meet the criteria for authorship in an acknowledgements section. All funders and sponsors of research will be clearly acknowledged and any competing interests listed.

Researchers must clearly acknowledge all sources used in their research and obtain permission from any individuals if a significant amount of their work has been used in the publication.

Researchers must adhere to any conditions set by funding or other bodies regarding the publication of their research findings and related data in open-access repositories within a set period.

Researchers will declare any potential or actual conflicts of interest in relation to their research when reporting their findings at meetings or in publications.

Researchers will be aware that submitting research reports to more than one potential publisher at any given time (i.e., duplicate submission) or publishing the same set of findings in more than one publication without disclosure and appropriate acknowledgement of any previous or simultaneous publications (i.e., duplicate publication) is unacceptable.

Researchers who are discouraged from publishing and disseminating their research or its findings, or subjected to attempts to influence the presentation or interpretation of findings inappropriately, will discuss this with the appropriate person(s) in their organisation so that the matter can be resolved

DATA MANAGEMENT

Data management at IWMI follows the CGIAR Responsible Data Guidelines, the CGIAR Good Practice Note on Research Data Management, and any related IWMI Policies (e.g. Open Access Policy). IWMI is committed to 'open' and 'responsible' data. To protect the privacy of a research participant and counter the risk of harm, the safest approach is to strip human survey data of personal identifiable information (PII), that is, to de-identify the data in order to anonymize it so that individuals are no longer identifiable; or to implement a strict data protection plan. For photos and videos, IWMI's Visual Communications Guide outlines the Code of Conduct.

SUPERVISION OF STUDENTS AND INTERNS

IWMI will promote and maintain an environment for research of high ethical standard, learning and exchange of ideas.

IWMI welcomes students and interns and will provide sufficient resources for researchers to ensure their supervision in conditions which do not harm them or threaten their safety and which allows students and interns to build their skills and knowledge during the time of their internship.

Researchers will provide clear direction and supervision of students and interns, inform them of the IWMI Research Ethics Policy and procedures and provide them with the necessary resources and training to comply with the IWMI Research Ethics Policy.

IWMI staff should not take on more students and interns than they can effectively supervise and coach.

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6. MISCONDUCT

Professional misconduct or performance by a researcher that exhibits one or more of the following characteristics shall be treated by IWMI as research misconduct. The presence of any of these characteristics in a research project will indicate behaviour that falls significantly short of the principles of ethical research set out in this policy or defined by the CGIAR.

Interpretation of these categories will depend on the context of the research project, and will reflect the judgement and experience of those charged with investigating whether research misconduct has occurred. Misconduct includes:

i. Fabrication: e.g., the creation of fictitious data, evidence, documentation or results

ii. Falsification: e.g., the inappropriate manipulation or selection of data, evidence, imagery or documentation

iii. Misrepresentation: This may include:

- a) **Misrepresentation of data:** e.g., the undisclosed suppression of evidence or findings, or the deliberate or negligent presentation of a flawed interpretation of data;
- b) **Misrepresentation of interests:** e.g., the failure to disclose the interests of the researcher or of the funder of the research;
- c) **Misrepresentation** by the researcher of their qualifications or experience;
- d) **Misrepresentation of involvement:** e.g., the inappropriate or unjustified claim by a researcher to authorship or attribution, or the denial of others' rights to authorship or attribution; and
- e) **Misrepresentation of publication:** e.g., the undisclosed duplication of publication or undisclosed duplicate submission of works for publication, where this involves deception or the deliberate circumvention of publishers' or funders' policies.

iv. Plagiarism: the misappropriation or use of the ideas, intellectual property or work (written or otherwise) of others without acknowledgement or permission

v. Mismanagement of research data or results: the failure to ensure that research data, evidence and research results are preserved and accessible for a reasonable period after the completion of research, in accordance with IWMI's data management policies and funders' requirements

vi. Breach of duty of care: This may occur where the researcher deliberately, recklessly or negligently:

- a) Discloses improperly the identity of research participants, or information provided by research participants, without their consent or in breach of confidence [Particular care must be taken when conducting research involving vulnerable human participants or privileged or personal data];
- b) Places research participants and researchers at risk of harm, without their prior consent and without appropriate safeguards;
- c) Induces physical or mental harm to research participants, research colleagues or partners through his/her behaviour, e.g., obstructs others' research activities, or exercises undue mental pressure through moral harassment;
- d) Fails to take reasonable care to ensure the informed consent of research participants;

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- e) Fails to observe legal, regulatory, contractual or ethical requirements, and obligations to research funders;
- f) Fails to observe the procedures set by IWMI's IRB or any other IRB, and related decisions; or
- g) Conducts themselves improperly in the peer review of applications or publications: e.g., through the gross misrepresentation of the content of material; inadequate disclosure of system boundaries, data gaps, or limited spatial or temporal competence; or the abuse of material provided in confidence for peer review.

Conduct or performance by a researcher that falls into at least one of the above categories will be research misconduct if it involves deliberate intent, negligence or recklessness. Research misconduct includes acts of omission as well as acts of commission. However, research misconduct does not include:

- Genuine academic disagreements, e.g. over research methodology; or
- Honest errors or mistakes, where no negligence, recklessness or deliberate intention is involved.

Researchers who detect errors or mistakes in their research are expected to make all reasonable efforts to rectify them: e.g., by publication of a correction or retraction. Deliberate failure to rectify research errors will be treated as misrepresentation.

Responsiveness: IWMI will address research misconduct following the analysis and recommendations of its IRB or Research Quality Advisor. Some poor practices can be corrected through appropriate training. However, in some cases, the actions of researchers may result in reputational harm for IWMI and requires sanctions up to dismissal from IWMI and notification to professional bodies or the police for further investigation and sanction.

Researchers are encouraged to report likely misconduct of any research staff as soon as possible either to their supervisor, project leader, IWMI's legal officer or trust/ombuds person.

7. SOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

IWMI wishes to acknowledge the use of the following documents in the development of the Research Ethics Policy. IWMI would also like to thank the individuals who responded to the survey on a research ethics policy in February 2014 and to those who provided comments on the draft for their contributions to this publication and its updates in 2018, 2019 and 2022.

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<http://www.wma.net/en/30publications/10policies/b3/index.html> [last accessed: 3rd February 2017]

CGIAR Responsible Data Guidelines <https://bigdata.cgiar.org/responsible-data-guidelines>

CGIAR Ethics Framework
<https://storage.googleapis.com/cgiarorg/2020/09/CGIAR-Ethics-Framework-Sept-2020.pdf>

CGIAR Good Practice Note on Research Data Management
<https://cgspace.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10568/113823/GPN-Research-Data-Management-Sept-2017.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

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8. OTHER IWMI POLICIES CITED

This policy cites and relies upon the IWMI Research Data Management Policy and its implementation guidelines, the IWMI Open Access, and Intellectual Property Policy, IWMI's Code of Conduct and Whistle Blowing Policy.

9. COMING INTO FORCE PROVISION AND EFFECTIVE DATE

Once approved by the IWMI Board of Governors, this revised policy will become effective.

The policy should be reviewed at regular intervals (e.g., every three years) by the Deputy Director General - Research for Development, or his or her designate.

It is expected that the standards and processes outlined in this policy will be further refined based on the CGIAR reform process, like the implementation of the system-wide ethics code of conduct and related procedures.

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