ECID Research Ethics and Integrity Implementation Guidelines

These guidelines support the implementation of the ECID programme's Ethics and Integrity Framework which is situated within the broader ethics, safeguarding and data protection policy and procedures of the ECID programme (e.g. the GESI strategy) and Christian Aid as programme lead.

These guidelines should be used at the design stage of each new ECID 'research' activity, which we define as any purposeful commissioning, collection, analysis, adaptation or communication of 'data' (which might include: survey responses, registration information, photos, stories, etc.) The guidelines are grounded in the following definitions:

Ethics: Do no harm and ensure a beneficial contribution to knowledge and practice

- How did this research/programme come about? Whose interests does it serve? Have all conflicts of interest been disclosed?
- Does the research/programme make a beneficial contribution to society's knowledge and practice?
- How should we treat the people involved in the research activities (both as research subjects, co-researchers and analysts)?
- Are there activities or data collection/data sharing practices that could cause harm?

Research integrity: a commitment to integrity means ensuring that the research/programme is needed, that the research/programme design is appropriate and that it adheres to professional standards

- Is there a real need for this research which can't be met by secondary analysis of existing research?
- Is the research design appropriate to address the problem or research questions?
- Will the data be securely managed?
- Is the research transparent and will the methodology, findings (including negative results) and data be shared in a way that enables others to use it?

1. Reflect on purpose

- What is the purpose of this research activity? What type of evidence will it generate?
- Has existing evidence of a similar nature been reviewed and how will the proposed research interact with this existing evidence?
- How will this evidence contribute to the ECID programme aims? How does it align with the GESI Strategy and principles?

2. Consider context and power

- Ensure that the research team understand the local context and potential sensitives – e.g. by sharing the latest GIPP analyses.
- Ensure all researchers have received ECID's language guide to ensure appropriate and sensitive use of language when engaging with different groups e.g. PWD.
- Review the country level GESI strategy and glossary of terms to understand how different concepts are understood in that context e.g. inclusion, equality. Each country will develop a key words document translating some of these different concepts into local dialects if needed.
- Consider the power relations with which the research will engage (see Framework)
- Identify any national or international legislation which might affect the collection or communication of data.

3. Plan the research

- Are the proposed methods appropriate for meeting the evidence needs and responding to the context addressed above?
- Have we minimised the amount of questions we are asking as much as possible?
- Is any of the data being collected particularly sensitive (see Framework for examples of sensitive topics)?
- Have we considered personal data? Should we separate it from the beneficiaries answers? Should we anonomise the data?
- Do you have informed consent? Are the beneficiaries clearly told what their data is being used for?
- Are there risks of bias in our data?
- How will you ensure data accuracy?

4. Develop a context-sensitive referral mechanism

- How you will report on any adverse events or incidents (including safeguarding and protection incidents)?
- Undertake a referrals mapping to ensure that that those showing distress or raising issues of concern can be given information of available services in the area and be clear about the responsibilities of different stakeholders for acting on issues of concern
- Put in place a mechanism to ensure that respondents can make a complaint or provide feedback and ensure this is well communicated.

5. Conduct a risk assessment

Collecting data can put people at risk. Assess risks and take action to avoid negative consequences for respondents. Complete the checklist at the end of this document and carefully consider whether the benefits of collecting this data outweigh the risks.

6. Responsibly recruit and train appropriate researchers

- Who will be conducting the research? How were they recruited and how do they relate to the respondents?
- Will they be fairly compensated?
- Have they received adequate training in research ethics and integrity?
- Will there be clear support structures in place over the course of the research?
- **Has a code of conduct been signed?**

7. Collecting Data: Get Informed Consent

- Tell respondents how you will use their data and why you need it.
- How will you store it?
- Who will own it (this may well be communities themselves) and who you will share it with?
- How will you ensure these groups don't share it further?
- What if respondents change their mind about consent?
- How can they contact you?
- Ask respondents if/how they want feedback on what you do with their information.
- Only collect the data if respondents opt-in

8. Manage the Data: Transfer/Access/Store/Share

Process – Agree common formats for the different types of data and also common standards to describe the data ('meta-data') to ensure it is accessible

Transfer – Whenever you send data (email, sharepoint etc) make sure to password protect it.

Access - Have two Kobo accounts per country, (1) to build forms and host data and (2) for data collection. Share surveys from (1) to (2) with Add submission only permission. This will keep the number of people with access to the data to a minimum.

Ensure that other data is shared securely via an encrypted USB device and regularly upload data onto a secure central system

Store

- If it is paper data, is it kept in a locked safe?
- Does data need to be held on paper or could all data be collected digitally?
- If it is digital data, is it password protected?
- Who has the password?
- Don't let people keep data on personal Kobo accounts, what happens when they leave the project?

Share

- Don't share data without getting consent from respondents.
- Set up sharing agreements with partners and anyone else who will have access to the data – civil society organisations? Government?
- Some organizations 'open' (i.e. publish) data. Seek specialist advice and check for risks and sensitivities before opening any data set. Simply removing names is not enough to hide identities.

9. Do something with the data

This might be lobbying, advocacy, making adjustments to programmes or providing datasets for other researchers to build on. – Don't collect anything which you do not have a definite use for.

10. Feedback to respondents

It is vital that research is not extractive and that respondents feel that they have some ownership of their data. Meet respondents to validate results and ensure they represent their views where possible. Give them feedback on what happened with their data and where possible, involve them in any subsequent action planning.

11. Dispose/Archive

Always plan for how long you need to keep data – remember, data loses relevance very quickly.

Delete data as soon as it is no longer needed, in line with the organisational Data Retention Policy.

Keep data on one Kobo account that someone in the country team can manage and change the password regularly.

Appendix I: Risk assessment

Assess your proposed research activity against the definition of sensitive topics and information in the framework document and according to the criteria for the three levels of ethical risk below[1]

1. **High ethical risks**:

Does your research involve one or more of the following?

- Children (and people under 18 years) or vulnerable adults
- Significant concerns around personal safety or physical discomfort beyond normal experience, for the participants or researchers
- Sensitive topics such as trauma, bereavement, drug-use etc.
- Data which comes under the Official Secrets Act[2]

➢ **If YES, your project needs to go through a formal ethical review process. To initiate this process, complete the checklist below.**

2. **Medium ethical risks:**

Does your research involve any one or more of the following?

- Non-vulnerable adults
- Personal data referring to a living individual
- Secondary data not in the public domain
- Environmental issues
- Commercially sensitive information.

➢ **If YES, your project needs to go through a programme level ethical review process. To initiate this process, complete the checklist below.**

3. **Low ethical risks:**

Does your research involve any of the following?

- The analysis of secondary data which has been previously published
- Desk or lab-based research which does not involve collecting data from people (other than pilot data collected solely within the research team).

If YES, your project needs to go through a task force level review that involves an external person to act as a 'critical friend'. You are not obliged to complete the checklist below but should consider the questions around purpose and context above as well as any issues relating to the ethics or integrity of the secondary data that you will be accessing.

[1] Adapted from Research Ethics and Governance Handbook, Northumbria University, Newcastle.

[2] The Official Secrets Act refers to legislation that provides for the protection of state secrets and official information, mainly related to national security. See: https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7422

Checklist...	Description of risk	Mitigation strategy
Age, vulnerability and capacity of Participants		
Engagement with sensitive topics / issues		
Information and Consent Procedures (meaningful)		
Anonymity and confidentiality		
Power relations (race, ethnicity, gender, language, class, health status...)		
Security / Harm (self)		
Security / Harm (participants)		
Complies with legal and ethical standards		
Safeguarding (potential for sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment, physical or emotional abuse or neglect committed by staff/representatives or participants)		
Other points?		