

IITA Research Ethics Policy

International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA)

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IITA's mission and Research Ethics

IITA's mission is to offer a leading research partnership that facilitates agricultural solutions for hunger, poverty, and natural resource degradation throughout the tropics. IITA's mission is in line with that of the new CGIAR and focuses on the three system-level outcomes (SLOs); (1) reduced poverty, (2) improved food and nutrition security for health and (3) improved natural resource systems and ecosystem services.

The pursuit of this mission requires carrying out research that involves people and sometimes also animals, and can have consequences for both, directly through the research activity, and indirectly through the research results. There are therefore ethical considerations to take into account when planning and implementing the research.

This policy sets out the principles and standards IITA has adopted to guide our work.

Purpose

The purpose of IITA's Research Ethics is:

- To describe procedures for ensuring these standards are implemented and maintained.
- To ensure compliance with the ethical principles and standards IITA expects all its staff, students, consultants and partners, working on IITA projects to adopt.

Scope

IITA is a multi-cultural organisation working in diverse social and cultural environments. IITA has a responsibility to ensure that all research activities are undertaken in ways that meet some common internationally accepted standards, and to explain these standards to those with an interest, including staff, students, consultants, partners, and current and potential donors.

This policy applies to all research activities undertaken by IITA, 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 IITA's operations, such as in financial and human resource management, and with regards to the environment. These are not covered in this policy.

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 person with diminished autonomy are entitled to protection.
2. Beneficence².
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 communities:

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 and 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.

Other ethical standards are relevant to IITA's mission and operating mode as well:

1. Scientific integrity.
Ensuring research is conducted honestly, thoroughly and without conflict of interest.
2. Respect for open enquiry.
Ensuring methods and results are available to all.

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://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/belmont.html>.

² Beneficence is action that is done for the benefit of others. Beneficent actions can be taken to help prevent or remove harms or to simply improve the situation of others.

Implications for IITA's work

Human subjects

Implications and instructions below apply to individuals, families, groups of people 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 benefits and harms of the research. This must include physical, psychological, legal, social, cultural and economic harm and benefits accruing to individuals, (extended) families, (social, cultural or religious) groups of people and communities.
3. Prior informed consent to take part in research must be obtained. If subject is under 18 years of age, parental consent and subject assent is required
4. Benefit and risk: The researchers have to ensure that participants understand the nature of the research and the potential benefits and harm.
5. 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 the research.
6. 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, videos, and audio recordings of identifiable individuals.
7. Researchers must make every effort to make results of the research available to participants and/or stakeholders, in a format they can understand.
8. Particular attention to each of the above must be applied when working with vulnerable individuals and communities.

Animal Subjects

Standards and practices developed by ILRI³ must be used when research has animal welfare implications.

Open enquiry

Research methods used in any investigation are regarded as public goods 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.

³ <http://www.ilri.org/iacuc>

Research results and outcomes contradicting the views or interest of any stakeholder will not be used by IITA in evaluation of the researcher.

Professionalism

IITA expects its research staff to be aware of codes of conduct for researchers and to create awareness of these amongst the other involved in the research (staff, students, consultants, research partners).

IITA Internal Review Board (IITA IRB)

The IITA Internal Review Board (IITA IRB) implements the above policy and sets up procedures. All research proposals involving human participants and vertebrate animals conducted at IITA should be reviewed by the IITA IRB that decides on the application status of the research proposal (approving, disapproving, modifying, or recommending further review)