ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

The latest Independent Evaluation of GDN (2014) recommended that GDN integrates ethical considerations and related training in its portfolio of research capacity building activities for young researchers in developing and transition countries. This document outlines the basic areas covered under Research Ethics at GDN, in the context of research capacity building in economics and social sciences. GDN is fully committed to other more process-oriented aspects of ethical conduct, such as transparency of proposal review processes and grants management as well as accountability and transparency in the use of financial resources or avoiding conflict of interest. They are addressed through specific program and grants management policies and described elsewhere.[1] This document focuses on Research Ethics and it draws on a number of articles, manuals and guides produced by research organizations, professional associations and funders from around the world, given GDN's global focus.

DEFINITION

As a concept, 'research ethics' refers to "a complex set of values, standards and institutional schemes that help constitute and regulate scientific activity."[2] It includes a broad range of issues, from how the research is designed, how data is collected, analyzed, and communicated to various stakeholders to plagiarism and transparency. The generally acceptable principles below adapted from other international research organizations and associations[3] apply to GDN's activities and supported research also:

1. *Upholding scientific standards:* ensure that the highest standards of scientific inquiry are complied with, that the data is not manipulated and results and recommendations are based on the analysis conducted, which can be easily validated.
2. *Respect for persons*: when research involves human participants, it should respect the dignity, autonomy and privacy of the individual. Researchers should do no harm (non-maleficence) in the process of conducting their research.
3. *Equity and transparency*: the obligation to treat researchers and research subjects fairly, equitably, and in a just, transparent manner.
4. *Legal Compliance*: with international laws and any special provisions specified in the funding or grant agreements from donors.

In addition to adhering to the above universal principles, researchers, research funders and managers (at GDN and among the grantees) should also "remain sensitive to the cultural norms and practices of the

---

[1] GDN Finance Manual, forthcoming Grants Manual.

[2] Nasjonale Forskningsetiske Komiteer (2006), Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Law and the Humanities.

[3] Respect Project (2004), RESPECT Code of Practice for Socio-Economic Research, and IDRC Research Ethics, http://www.idrc.ca/EN/AboutUs/WhatWeDo/Pages/Research-ethics.aspx.

localities where the research is carried out."[4] Researchers will have to identify potential ethical issues in their proposed research and when necessary seek guidance on how to address them.

The following stipulation has been included in GDN's Calls for Proposals:

"GDN-supported research programs must be carried out in accordance with common research and professional ethical standards, related to plagiarism, surveys and other forms of data collection that involve human subjects, confidentiality and transparent use of financial and human resources. In their proposals, applicants are required to clearly identify all possible ethical issues relating to their proposed program."

CATEGORIES

1. Upholding Scientific Standards

This section is intended to guide researchers on the rigorous conduct and communication of research, with the highest level of integrity and professionalism, in line with the best codes of practice.

Intellectual Property Rights

GDN views plagiarism as a serious offense and a violation of intellectual property rights. GDN defines plagiarism as "an unauthorized use of other people's work, ideas and/or writings (in part or in full) and presenting or giving notion of these work(s), ideas and/or writings being one's own work, idea(s) and/or writing(s)."

Similarly, GDN identifies **self-plagiarism** as a serious offense, tantamount to violation of intellectual property rights. As per conventional definitions, GDN defines self-plagiarism as the "practice of presenting one's own previously published work as though it were new."[5] Both forms of plagiarism constitute grounds for immediate grant termination in the case of ongoing studies and for not selecting a proposal. Research proposals, reports and essays are scanned for plagiarism. GDN's policy on Plagiarism is clearly stipulated in the Calls for Proposals and in all Grant Agreements.

Other forms of academic fraud

Other forms of academic fraud include:
   a. Manipulation of the research design or the data to deliberately mislead or obtain stronger results.
   b. Inaccurate or Partial Reporting of Findings - not communicating research findings that contravene to the original hypothesis.
   c. False Citations – This constitutes any citation of a source from which the referenced material was not in fact obtained, including use of a quoted reference from a non-original source while implying reference to the original source.[6]
   d. Misrepresentation of the skills of the team when submitting a research proposal for funding.
   e. Multiple Submissions[7] - The definition of "multiple submissions" varies with respect to institutional context. In case of GDN, "multiple submissions" is considered a mal-practice when applicants for new grant funding submit grant proposal for work already funded and undertaken, or for the same data collection without acknowledging contribution from other

---

[4] IDRC Research Ethics, http://www.idrc.ca/EN/AboutUs/WhatWeDo/Pages/Research-ethics.aspx.
[5] American Psychological Association (2010), as cited in iThenticate (2011), White Paper on The Ethics of Self-Plagiarism, http://www.ithenticate.com/self-plagiarism-free-white-paper/
[6] Florida State University, Statement on Plagiarism & Academic Fraud, accessed at
http://history.fsu.edu/Undergraduate-Program/Statement-on-Plagiarism-Academic-Fraud, accessed on April 8, 2015
[7] University of Viginia(2012), What Is Academic Fraud? Accessed at http://www.virginia.edu/honor/what-is-academic-fraud-2/, on April 8, 2015

donors and explaining the extension or value added to the work already funded. In case of projects co-funded by GDN along with other donors, "multiple submissions" would constitute the act of submitting the same or substantially same research output to different donors without acknowledging and branding the other donors/supporters.

2. Human Subjects

Definition: "A living individual about whom an investigator conducting research obtains (1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual; or (2) identifiable private information."[8]

Much of social science research involves direct interaction with human subjects, through primary data collection (surveys, interviews, FGDs, experiments or simulated games etc). This also extends to communications, where for instance, a video or a short brief is produced on the beneficiaries of a certain program or the human impact of research (more broadly). The following set of guidelines must be strictly observed when dealing with human subjects:

    a. Obtain informed consent – after revealing the purpose of the research, the way in which the data will be collated, aggregated and used. It applies at all stages of the research, including publication;

    b. Ability to withdraw – if a participant in a survey or interview or simulation/game wishes to withdraw, they should be allowed to do so freely;

    c. Avoid deception – the real purpose of the research should be divulged to the participants;

    d. Protection from mental, physical, and social harm and suffering;

    e. No unwarranted material gain for any participants.

When dealing with minors and vulnerable[9] populations (this includes illnesses or deformity, ethnic and religious minorities, migrants, illegal workers etc.), the potential for direct or indirect 'harm' increases and therefore these groups require additional care in applying the fairness, transparency, anonymity and informed consent principles described in this document.

3. Data Confidentiality and Protection[10]

This is closely related to the issues above around research involving "human subjects." Especially with the push towards open data, the need for confidentiality and data protection is heightened. It includes the following aspects:

    a. Anonymity / Coding of personally identifiable data.
    "Before data obtained from research with people can be shared with other researchers - either archived or published - data may need to be anonymised so that individuals, organizations or businesses cannot be identified."[11]

    b. Collect the data only for specified, legitimate and stipulated purposes.

    c. Collect only data that are relevant and not excessive for the purpose of the stipulated research.[12]

    d. Encryption/password protection for electronic data transfer.

---

[8] Definition adopted as per US Department of Health and Human Services Regulations [45 CFR Part 46] accessed at http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/45cfr46.html#46.102, on 08 April, 2015.

[9] It should be noted that there is no standard and uniformly applicable definition of "vulnerability" in this case.

[10] The UK Data Service (http://ukdataservice.ac.uk/manage-data/legal-ethical.aspx)

[11] Ibid. 10

[12] EU RESPECT Code of Practice for Socio-Economic Research 2004, http://the-sra.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/respect_code.pdf.

e. Data storage and proper disposal of field notes.
    f. Adequate back-ups.
    g. Control access.[13]

The following clause has been included in the GDN Grant Agreements regarding the use of human subjects in research and related data protection and confidentiality:

"The Recipient shall comply with all applicable international laws in connection with the performance of the activities under the Project, including but not limited to all applicable rules, policies and procedures governing the use of human subjects in research and privacy. In particular, the Recipient shall take all necessary steps to ensure that any data confidentiality and data protection requirements are complied with."

PROCESS – ENSURING COMPLIANCE

The Principal Investigators of shortlisted proposals will need to demonstrate that their planned research complies with internationally acceptable standards regarding the ethical conduct of research as well as national laws in the countries of implementation. In cases where applicants are based at Universities who have an Ethical Review Process (including an Institutional Review Board), this approval will need to be secured before the Grant Agreement is issued. An online checklist will be provided by GDN to other shortlisted applicants to determine the need for further review.

Ethics Review Committee

The Grants Manager and the Program Manager responsible for each program at GDN will identify cases where special attention needs to be paid and these will be discussed by a dedicated Ethics Review Committee at GDN. Grant Agreements will only be issued after clearance from this committee.

TRAINING

In line with GDN's capacity building mission, training on Research Ethics will be provided to GDN's grantees as part of the methodological workshops. The Scientific Advisors/mentors assigned to each grantee will also emphasize the ethical considerations surrounding the proposed research, particularly on sensitive topics or when working with marginalized communities, children and other vulnerable populations etc.

---

[13] Ibid 10.

References

American Psychological Association (2010), *The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, Sixth Edition, Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Florida State University, *Statement on Plagiarism & Academic Fraud*, accessed at http://history.fsu.edu/Undergraduate-Program/Statement-on-Plagiarism-Academic-Fraud on March 15, 2015.

IDRC, IDRC Corporate Principles on Research Ethics, accessed at http://www.idrc.ca/EN/AboutUs/WhatWeDo/Pages/Research-ethics.aspx, on February 1, 2015.

iThenticate (2011), *White Paper on The Ethics of Self-Plagiarism*, accessed at http://www.ithenticate.com/self-plagiarism-free-white-paper.

Nasjonale Forskningsetiske Komiteer (2006), *Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Law and the Humanities*, accessed at https://www.etikkom.no/globalassets/documents/english-publications/guidelines-for-research-ethics-in-the-social-sciences-law-and-the-humanities-2006.pdf

RESPECT Code of Practice for Socio-Economic Research, accessed at http://www.respectproject.org/code/respect_code.pdf on March 20, 2015.

The University of Chicago Press (2010), *The Chicago Manual of Style Chicago*, 16th Edition, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (2009), *Code of Federal Regulations, TITLE 45 - PUBLIC WELFARE, Department of Health and Human Services, PART 46 - PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS*, accessed at http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/45cfr46.html#46.102, on 08 April, 2015.

UK Data Service (2012), *Legal and ethical issues*, accessed at http://ukdataservice.ac.uk/manage-data/legal-ethical.aspx, on February 27, 2015.