

# Research ethics and security during field research

# WHY ARE ETHICS AND SECURITY IMPORTANT?

- Human rights documentation and reporting is about exposing abuses and making recommendations to remedy them. But it should not harm anyone, especially those you are trying to help.
- There are different types of security: security of the people being interviewed; your personal security; and the security of the information which you gather.

# PRINCIPLE: “DO NO HARM”

- No research justifies causing serious distress or injury to those individuals involved.
- It is important to discuss before the interviews take place, together with the individual and in consultation with local contacts, the risk of security threats and other harm such as stigma and community division.
- It is important to respect individuals’ informed decisions in respect of the level of risk they are prepared to take.
- It is important to take all reasonable steps to ensure activities do not put individuals at risk. You can use pseudonyms and plan for appropriate follow up action where harm occurs.
- Examples of community division include where: NGOs are given priority or more attention than others in a community that does not find that attention legitimate and then may turn against the particular NGO receiving attention.

# CONFIDENTIALITY AND INFORMED CONSENT

## – Confidentiality

- All participants should be assured that their contributions will be kept confidential and non-attributable, unless they provide informed consent for disclosure and publication. Any security concerns should be addressed in the discussion.

## – Informed Consent

- It is important to explain as fully as possible, and in terms meaningful to the individual, how their information will be disseminated and for what purpose.
- Informed consent should be seen as an ongoing process, allowing individuals to express their own opinions and make their own decisions.

# RESPECT AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

- **Respect – dignity, autonomy, privacy**
- It is important to respect individuals' privacy. Individuals are autonomous agents with the right to make choices to determine their own future.
- Participation should be respectful of individuals' local traditions and customs, including religious times and working hours.
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- **Equity and Non-discrimination**
- It is important to include the voices of those who face discrimination in research through cultivating a diverse group of contacts, using a range of selection methods and research design.

# TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY, FLEXIBILITY

## – **Transparency, Integrity**

- It is important to act with integrity, transparency and humanity.
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- It is important not make promises they cannot commit to – for example, that you can solve the problem.
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## – **Accountability and non-exploitation**

- Participation in all field research should be voluntary. It is important to respect and value individuals' time and intellectual property e.g. their images, statements, testimony, life history or quotes.
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## – **Flexibility**

- Most importantly respond to each situation in a flexible manner and be prepared to continually adapt and develop your style in line with accepted best practice.

# SECURITY OF INTERVIEWEE

- The security of the interviewee is of the utmost importance. That is why it is important to interview them in private and confidentially.
- Their security relates to the first principle of “do no harm”.
- If you can, it is a good idea to check back with the community after you have left to make sure that they are safe and have not suffered any threats or reprisals.
- When writing your report, you should not reveal the names of the individuals you interviewed.

# PERSONAL SECURITY

- You should also ensure your own security. Before you travel to an area, you should discuss with your colleagues any security issues that may come up, so that you can deal with them.
- If you have a mobile telephone which works in the area, you should ensure that a colleague at the office has the mobile number.
- You may want to consider checking with your office at the end of each day in the field, by SMS or email if you can.



# SECURITY OF INFORMATION

- It is crucial to keep all information you have recorded from field interviews in a safe and secure place.
- This is true for all information, no matter how it is recorded. Laptops, mobiles, cameras, recording devices, and handwritten notes should be kept with you at all times when you are in the field.
- You should not share this information with anyone outside of your organization.
- When you return home to the office, keep the information in a secure place.