



Ethical Guidelines for PhD Projects - draft¹

LERH acknowledges its responsibility for standard-setting in environmental related research within both the natural and social sciences. Consequently, LERH is committed to maintaining an up-to-date set of ethical guidelines. All LERH doctoral candidates and supervisors are obliged to read and abide by these guidelines.

This LERH Ethical Guidelines for PhD Projects concern the participants or subjects in research or the researcher (hereafter named the PhD project). LERH conducts natural and social science research on natural resources and their users (typically at the household rather than individual level). LERH does not conduct research activities that include experiments on human subjects, animal testing or other such activities with high profile ethical concerns.

The LERH Ethical Guidelines for PhD Projects are meant as guiding in the true sense of the word, i.e. other codes of conduct, such as those issued by academic relevant bodies, funding body requirements and/or ethical guidelines from home or visiting universities, should be adhered to. However, researchers, as well as the research community, bear a responsibility here, and they should take a strong interest in considering and abiding by these guidelines.

A. General ethical guidelines²

- #1. **Skill and care.** The PhD project will act with skill and care in all scientific work.
- #2. **Misconduct.** The PhD project will take necessary steps to prevent corrupt practices and professional misconduct and declare conflicts of interest.
- #3. **Impact on others.** The PhD project will be alert to the ways in which research derives from and affects the work of others.
- #4. **Lawfulness.** The PhD project will ensure that its work is lawful and justified.
- #5. **Adverse effects.** The PhD project will minimise and justify any adverse effect its work may have on people, animals and the natural environment.
- #6. **Awareness and openness.** The PhD project will seek to discuss the issues that science raises for society.
- #7. **Misleading.** The PhD project will not knowingly mislead, or allow others to be misled, about scientific matters.

¹ These Guidelines are derived from the FONASO PhD Program Guidelines. LERH acknowledges the work of prof. Christian Gamborg from University of Copenhagen in developing these ethical guidelines.

² The present guidelines are adapted from a number of sources, including (i) David King (UK Chief Scientist) 'universal code of ethics for researchers' (2007), (ii) Kumar, R. 2005. Considering ethical issues in the data collection. In: Kumar, R. (ed) 2005. Research methodology. London: Sage, pp. 209-216, and (iii) the Economics and Social Research Council Ethics framework (http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/Framework_for_Research_Ethics_tcm8-4586.pdf).

B. Ethical guidelines concerning research involving research participants (i.e. respondents, research subjects)

#8. **Collecting information.** The PhD project will consider the usefulness and relevance of the research before collecting information.

#9. **Seeking consent.** Before collecting information the PhD project will seek the informed, voluntary consent from participants, i.e. participants are made adequately aware of the type of information sought, why and with what purpose, how they are expected to participate, and how it will directly or indirectly affect them.

#10. **Providing incentives.** If it is considered absolutely necessary, the PhD project will only provide incentives (a token of appreciation) for sharing information *after* having obtained the information.

#11. **Seeking sensitive information.** Certain types of information can be regarded as confidential or sensitive, and thus constitute an invasion of privacy. The PhD project will, if such information is sought, make sure to inform participants, giving reasons (#8) and making sure consent is obtained (#9) without any prior incentive (#10).

#12. **The possibility of causing harm to participants.** When collecting information or otherwise involving research participants, the PhD project will make sure to avoid harm, or minimise risks of harms with all means and all necessary steps are taken to prevent this.

#13. **Maintaining confidentiality.** The PhD project will ensure that all information obtained is only used for research purposes. If information obtained has to be put into context (i.e. identifying study population), information given by participants must be kept anonymous. Identifying individual respondents is unethical. Confidentiality must also be kept by all other, e.g. funding parties.

C. Ethical guidelines relating to the researcher

#14. **Avoiding bias.** The PhD project will avoid bias, i.e. the deliberate attempt to hide or highlight something in a way which is disproportionate to its true existence. Bias is thus different from subjectivity.

#15. **Provision of a treatment.** If the PhD project involves a treatment/intervention, the ethical guidelines concerning research involving research participants will be adhered to.

#16. **Using inappropriate research methodology.** The PhD project will see as its obligation the use of appropriate methodology when conducting a study. It is considered unethical to use a procedure or method which is known by the researcher to be inappropriate.

#17. **Incorrect reporting.** The PhD project will ensure that findings are reported in a way which does not change or distort findings to serve the project's or others' interests.

#18. **Inappropriate use of information.** The PhD project will make sure that the use of the information obtained does not directly or indirectly adversely affect research participants or study population.