Guidelines

on Safeguarding Good Research Practice and Preventing Research Misconduct at the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS)

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German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS)

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Preface

Based on the recommendations of the German Research Foundation (DFG, 2022), the German Institute of Development and Sustainability has agreed its own Guidelines on Safeguarding Good Research Practice. The Guidelines were presented to the researchers for discussion in the relevant bodies and were adopted by the Institute Council. They are available both on the Institute's intranet and on the IDOS website. All researchers new to IDOS are made aware of the Guidelines at the beginning of their work at the Institute.

These Guidelines are primarily intended to raise awareness of the basic rules of research practice, keep them fresh in people's minds and communicate them to both early-career and experienced researchers as self-evident requirements of research work. They relate to all activities in the research process. They are also designed to make clear that IDOS will not tolerate research misconduct, given that this undermines public confidence in the scientific community and trust between researchers themselves.

Academic integrity is a commitment considered by all researchers to be a matter of basic ethics. Compliance with the following Guidelines is thus part of our understanding of how research is conducted at IDOS.

Section 1
Good research practice

(1)   Research work is underpinned by basic principles that apply equally to all academic disciplines; compliance with these principles is mandatory for everyone at IDOS. These principles include the following in particular:

- o   documenting results and sources of data and knowledge carefully and, wherever possible, making them accessible to other researchers;

- o   consistently questioning one's own findings;

- o   allowing and promoting critical discourse in the research community;

- o   being absolutely honest about the contributions of third parties.

Other aspects of good research practice include:

- cooperation and assumption of leadership responsibility in working groups;

- provision of support to early-career researchers;

- compliance with the rules for personal data collection laid down in the General Data Protection Regulation of the European Union (European Union, 2016);

- protection and storage of primary data in accordance with legislative requirements;

- use of research publications as a means for researchers to provide accountability regarding their work;

- observance of third-party intellectual property rights;

- clarification of rights of use of data and products in agreements at the earliest possible opportunity;

- compliance with ethical standards when carrying out data collection.

(2)   All researchers at IDOS are responsible for ensuring that their own conduct meets the standards for good research practice. They regularly bring themselves up to date on these standards and on the latest research. Experienced and early-career researchers liaise regularly and support one another in continuing learning and training processes.

(3)   The Institute's management creates the general framework for academic work and ensures that the necessary conditions prevail to enable researchers to comply with legal and ethical standards. In particular, it ensures that the tasks of leadership, supervision, quality assurance, career support and conflict management are clearly assigned and are communicated to the Institute's staff in an appropriate way. The Institute has produced guidelines to do so:

- The Institute's human resources development policy describes procedures and principles for recruiting and developing staff. This includes measures relating to gender equality and diversity in the workforce, the promotion of early-career researchers and career development of staff at IDOS. The Gender Equality Officer and the Works Council are involved in staff recruitment; they help ensure that processes are transparent and help prevent abuse of power and exploitation of relationships of dependency.

- The Code of Conduct for the Institute's doctoral programme describes objectives, procedures and responsibilities for academic and professional training of doctoral students at IDOS. The IDOS management and the spokespersons of the doctoral students liaise regularly on this matter.

IDOS reports to its Board of Trustees at regular intervals on the make-up of its staff with

regard to gender equality and diversity.

(4) The Institute's research programmes and their heads carry out the tasks assigned to them with regard to training, the promotion of early-career researchers and the organisation of research and academic activities. The heads of the research programmes are responsible for their entire unit. They organise collaboration such that both collective and individual work and career goals can be achieved. They implement structures, rights and obligations for their programmes and guarantee appropriate support for early-career researchers and career development.

Good research practice can only be established if all IDOS staff members work together. Project managers, heads of working groups, supervisors, holders of other leadership positions and experienced researchers have a particular responsibility to comply with the principles of good research practice in supervisory relationships. The Service Facilities assist research staff with shaping the research process, taking account of the aforementioned principles. The Ombuds Office ensures that researchers receive information regularly and organises training if necessary. The Institute's ombudspersons serve as the first port of call for questions about good research practice and as the first instance in the event of disputes.

(5) The performance of staff working at IDOS is assessed as part of annual, semi-structured staff assessment and development talks. If necessary, additional six-monthly talks are held. The assessment includes performance with regard to research, training, advice and contributions to collective goods (for example involvement in the Institute's official bodies). Performance is primarily assessed on the basis of qualitative criteria, whereby quantitative indicators, such as the number of refereed publications, are included in the assessment in a nuanced and considered way. Personal circumstances that may be apparent from individual details stated in a staff member's individual biography are included in the assessment.

(6) Researchers at IDOS carry out all the steps of the research process in a proper and professional manner. If research findings are made publicly available, the quality assurance mechanisms applied must always be described. This particularly applies to compliance with subject-specific standards and established methods, the collection, processing and analysis of research data, the selection and use of research software and its development and programming. The origin of data, materials and software used in the research process is disclosed and the reuse of data is clearly indicated; original sources are cited in line with the usual standards of research practice. The type and extent of research data accrued in the research process are described in the form of metadata. The source code of publicly available software must be persistent, citable and documented. Research findings must be documented in such a way that they can be replicated or confirmed by other researchers.

If researchers at IDOS have made their findings publicly available and subsequently become aware of inconsistencies or errors in these findings, they must correct them as necessary. If the inconsistencies or errors constitute grounds for retracting a publication, the researchers will endeavour to have the publication retracted as soon as possible and ensure that a statement is made to this effect. The same applies if researchers are made aware of inconsistencies or errors of this kind by third parties.

(7) The roles and responsibilities of the Institute's staff involved in a research project must be clear at every stage of the project. The staff involved in a research project engage in regular dialogue. They define their roles and responsibilities in a suitable way and adapt them where necessary, for example if there are changes in the priority areas of work.

(8) When planning a project, researchers at IDOS take full account of and acknowledge the

current state of research. To identify relevant and suitable research questions, they familiarise themselves thoroughly with the research that have already been made publicly available. The Institute creates the necessary framework conditions to do so. In the research design, internal peer review processes are used to ensure that (unconscious) distortions in the interpretation of findings are avoided to the greatest possible extent and that the relevant general conditions are taken into account appropriately. Researchers at IDOS examine whether and, if so, to what extent gender and diversity may be significant to research projects (with regard to the methods, work programme, objectives, etc.).

(9)   Researchers at IDOS adopt a responsible and considered approach to the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of research, liaising regularly with the management bodies. They take account of rights and obligations, particularly those arising from legal requirements but also from contracts with third parties. They are mindful at all times of the risk of misuse of research findings. Their responsibility is not restricted to compliance with legal requirements but also includes an obligation to use their knowledge, experience and skills such that risks can be identified, assessed and evaluated, particularly including those associated with security-relevant research.

In its Guidelines on Research Ethics, IDOS has adopted binding principles on research ethics and procedures for assessing research projects. The guidelines stipulate that the potential consequences of research projects must be thoroughly examined and the relevant ethical aspects assessed. They specify standards and processes that all researchers at IDOS undertake to comply with when collecting primary data and conducting empirical research. A research plan must be submitted to the IDOS Research Ethics Committee for approval at the beginning of each research project. The Committee is made up of IDOS researchers from various programmes at the Institute.

The legal framework of a research project also includes documented agreements on the rights of use relating to research data and results generated by the project. Such agreements should be entered into at the earliest possible opportunity, particularly if the research project is being conducted with other institutions in Germany or abroad or if it is already clear that a researcher may wish to use the data thus generated for their own research purposes. Those researchers who collected the data in particular are entitled to use it. During an ongoing research project, those entitled to use the data decide whether third parties should be given access to the data (particularly subject to data protection regulations).

(10) To answer research questions, researchers use scientifically sound and transparent methods. When developing and applying new methods, they attach particular importance to quality assurance and to establishing standards to guarantee that research results are comparable and transferrable.

(11) Researchers at IDOS document all information relevant to the production of a research result with regard to the development of hypotheses, research data, methods, and the steps involved in evaluation and analysis as clearly as is required by and is appropriate for the relevant academic discipline to allow the result to be reviewed and assessed. In principle, this also includes documenting individual results that do not support the research hypothesis. Researchers must avoid selecting results in this context. Where subject-specific recommendations exist for review and assessment, researchers create documentation in accordance with these guidelines. If the documentation does not satisfy these requirements, the constraints and the reasons for them must be clearly explained. Documentation and research results may not be manipulated and they must be protected against manipulation by third parties as effectively as possible. The source code must be documented when developing research software.

(12) As a rule, all research results obtained at IDOS are fed into the academic discourse and are made publicly available in a complete and transparent form. If there are any reasons why results should not be published, the researchers themselves are responsible for deciding whether or not to publish the results. This does not include documents that are produced within the scope of the Institute's mandate to provide policy advice and that are subject to a confidentiality agreement from the outset.

Whenever possible, the researchers make the research data and key materials on which a publication is based available in recognised archives and repositories in accordance with the FAIR principles (**F**indable, **A**ccessible, **I**nteroperable, **R**e-Usable). Research data or research findings and the key materials on which they are based and any research software used is adequately secured in accordance with the standards that apply to the relevant academic discipline and are kept for an appropriate period of time (usually ten years from the point at which they were published). IDOS ensures that the infrastructure required for archiving is available. If there are plausible reasons why certain data should not be kept, the researchers must present these reasons.

Researchers should avoid inappropriately segmented publications. Repetition of content from previous publications of which they were (co-)authors must be limited to what is necessary to enable the reader to understand the context. They must cite results already made publicly available unless, in exceptional cases, this is deemed unnecessary by the general conventions of the discipline.

(13) An author is deemed to be someone who has made a genuine, identifiable contribution to the content of a research publication of text, data or software. An identifiable, genuine contribute is deemed to exist particularly in instances in which a researcher – in a research-relevant way – takes part in

- the development and conceptual design of the research project;
- the gathering, collection, acquisition or provision of data, software or sources;
- the analysis/evaluation or interpretation of data, sources and conclusions drawn from them; or
- the drafting of the manuscript.

If a contribution is not sufficient to justify authorship, the individual's support may be properly acknowledged in footnotes, a preface or acknowledgements. Honorary authorship where no such contribution has been made is not permissible. A leadership or supervisory function does not itself constitute co-authorship.

Researchers agree on authorship of the research results. The decision as to the order in which authors are named is made in good time, normally no later than when the manuscript is drafted, and in accordance with clear criteria that reflect accepted practice within the relevant subject area. Researchers may not refuse to give their consent to publication of results without sufficient grounds. Refusal of consent must be justified with verifiable criticism of data, methods or results.

All authors agree on the final version of the work to be published. Unless explicitly stated otherwise, they share responsibility for the publication. Authors seek to ensure that, as far as possible, their contributions are identified by publishers or infrastructure providers such that they can be correctly cited by users.

Authors select the publication medium carefully, with due regard for its quality and visibility in the relevant field of research. This also applies to publication in academic repositories, data and software repositories, and blogs. A key criterion for selecting a publication

medium is whether it has established its own guidelines on safeguarding good research practice. Researchers who assume the role of editor carefully select where they will carry out this activity. The academic quality of a contribution does not depend on the medium in which it is published.

(14) Researchers at IDOS who evaluate manuscripts, funding proposals or applications from individuals or who sit on academic advisory and decision-making committees are obliged to maintain strict confidentiality with regard to this process. They disclose all facts that could give rise to the appearance of a conflict of interest. If they gain access to third-party material in connection with this work, they may not share it with third parties or make personal use of it.

Section 2
Research misconduct

(1) Research misconduct is deemed to have occurred if, in a research context, ethical standards have been violated, false statements have been made, third-party intellectual property rights have been infringed or the research work of third parties has been interfered with, whether intentionally or due to gross negligence concerning the aforementioned due diligence requirements. The circumstances relating to each individual case are decisive (German Rectors' Conference, 1998).

(2) Research staff are considered to have committed misconduct in the following cases in particular:

1. False information in the form of

    -   fabrication of data;

    -   falsification of data and sources, for instance by means of

        o   withholding the relevant sources, documents or text,

        o   manipulating sources, figures or images,

        o   selecting desirable results and omitting undesirable results without making a declaration to this effect;

    -   making incorrect statements in an application letter or in a funding application (including supplying false information about the publication medium and publications currently being printed);

    -   making incorrect statements about the research output of applicants in selection or expert committees.

2. Infringement of intellectual property rights in regard to a copyrighted work produced by a third party or significant research findings, hypotheses, teaching content or research approaches originating from a third party in the form of

    -   unauthorised exploitation under the claim of authorship (plagiarism);

    -   exploitation of research approaches and ideas, in particular as an expert in peer review and selection processes and/or in the role of supervisor for early-career researchers (theft of ideas);

    -   claims of academic authorship or co-authorship without having made any contribution to the research oneself;

    -   falsification of content;

- unauthorised publication or unauthorised granting of access to third parties prior to publication of the work, the findings, the hypothesis, the teaching content or the research approach;

- claims of (co-)authorship for another person without their consent.

3. Interference in third-party research in the form of

   - sabotage, including

     o deceitful relocation or theft of books, archives, manuscripts or data sets,

     o intentionally rendering research information media unusable;

   - disposal of primary data insofar as this violates legislative requirements or generally accepted principles of academic practice in a particular discipline;

   - unauthorised destruction or unauthorised sharing of research material.

(3) An individual may share responsibility for misconduct as a result of actively participating in third-party misconduct, having knowledge of third-party falsification, co-authoring falsified publications, or committing gross negligence in regard to their supervisory duty.

Section 3
Preventing research misconduct

(1)   In order to safeguard good research practice and prevent research misconduct, the following rules must be observed at IDOS in addition to the principles and standards mentioned in Section 1:

    1.   All staff members must be made aware of the principles of research work and good research practice at the earliest possible opportunity, with appropriate emphasis placed on the particular importance of due diligence, honesty and ownership in academic work. The different manifestations and sources of research misconduct must also be addressed in order to raise sufficient awareness of the issue among staff members.

    2.   It is necessary to inform all staff members of the existence and role of the ombudspersons (see Section 4) at the Institute and to make them aware that these ombudspersons serve as the first point of contact in the case of doubt or disputes.

    3.   Cooperation within working groups must be designed in such a way that the results achieved through the specialised division of tasks can be shared on a mutual basis, subjected to critical discourse, and integrated into a common body of knowledge. When it comes to joint research products, all co-authors share responsibility for observing the guidelines.

    4.   The Institute shall make suitable anti-plagiarism software available and draw staff members' attention to this software on a regular basis. Use of the software is voluntary. Authors of IDOS publication series confirm with their signature that they are aware of this option and have intentionally chosen to use or not to use the software.

Section 4
Ombudspersons

(1)   The Directorate appoints an ombudsperson and a deputy ombudsperson for a period of five years. These individuals should be members of research staff with management experience on a permanent contract of employment. They do not belong to any of the Institute's central management bodies. They may be reappointed once.

(2)   Ombudspersons serve as trusted individuals and contacts for staff members, receive tip-offs about research misconduct, and are on hand as contacts to deal with all questions that any IDOS staff members have about good research practice.

(3)   Ombudspersons have the following responsibilities:

    -   provision of advice on academic integrity;

    -   mediation in the event of conflict over suspected research misconduct;

    -   informing staff members about procedures and potential conflict situations.

(4)   In the event of suspected research misconduct, the Institute's research staff have the option of contacting IDOS' ombudspersons or the DFG-appointed body, the German Research Ombudsman.

(5)   The ombudspersons report once a year to the Directorate. Reports must be composed in such a way that the individuals concerned cannot be identified.

(6)   The ombudspersons enjoy the full support of the Institute's management in terms of both

content and organisation and are fully accepted by management and staff in carrying out their duties.

Section 5
Procedure in the event of tip-offs concerning research misconduct

(1)   If the ombudspersons are notified about a case of suspected research misconduct on the part of the Institute's staff, they will conduct a summary assessment of the tip-offs in terms of their factual basis and implications, potential motives and options for resolving the allegations or mutually clarifying disputed issues. To this end, the ombudspersons will notify without delay the individual(s) about whom suspicions have been raised in relation to research misconduct that such a tip-off has been provided, inform them of the incriminating facts and, where relevant, the associated evidence, and offer both them and the party providing the tip-off an opportunity to make a written or verbal statement.

(2)   Once the summary assessment has been conducted, the ombudspersons will notify the individuals concerned of the result and the subsequent procedural steps to be taken. The ombudspersons can offer the affected individuals a facilitated meeting or mediation at this stage, along with recommendations for amicably concluding the procedure. If the party providing the tip-off and the individual(s) about whom suspicions of research misconduct have been raised agree to the recommendations in writing and implement any instructions they contain, then the procedure is deemed to have been concluded.

(3)   If the ombudspersons are unable to bring about mutual resolution of the conflict based on the aforementioned requirements or if they believe that there is reasonable suspicion of serious infringement of the rules of good research practice, then they will inform the affected individuals of this. They will also inform the Directorate immediately and ask it to set up a commission to establish whether and in what form research misconduct has been committed. The commission will comprise one programme head and two further members of research staff. In the event of a member of the commission being unable to carry out their role, the Directorate will nominate a deputy without delay. The commission members must not belong to the same programmes as the individuals involved in the suspected case of research misconduct.

(4)   The commission is authorised to obtain the information and statements required to establish the facts and, in individual cases, to call upon expert reviewers from the research sector concerned, as well as other experts. The commission will freely appraise the evidence to determine whether research misconduct has been committed. Both the suspected individual(s) and the party providing the tip-off must be afforded a suitable opportunity to make a statement; they must also be given an oral hearing if so requested. The suspected individual(s) and the party providing the tip-off can each call upon a trusted person to provide support.

(5)   The ombudspersons can also present relevant facts during the investigation procedure on behalf of the party providing the tip-off without disclosing the identity of that party, unless the party has agreed to their identity being disclosed. If the identity of the party providing the tip-off is not known to the suspected individual(s), then it must only be disclosed if the suspected individual(s) would not otherwise be able to defend themselves appropriately. In this case, the party providing the tip-off is free to retract the allegations prior to their identity being disclosed.

(6)   The commission must present to the Directorate a final report on the outcome of its investigation, along with a recommendation as to the next steps. At the same time, the commission must inform the individuals concerned and the ombudspersons of the outcome of their investigation.

(7)   The Directorate will decide, based on the final report and the commission's recommendation, whether the procedure should be terminated or whether sufficient evidence of research misconduct has been provided. In the latter case, it will also decide upon the measures to be taken. These may include the following:

-   calling on the suspected individual to retract or correct incriminated publications or to refrain from publishing incriminated manuscripts;

-   barring the suspected individual from acting as a reviewer or sitting on a board or committee for a specified period of time;

-   reporting the matter to the police or the public prosecutor;

-   asserting claims under civil law.

(8)   The scientific organisations concerned and any third parties that have a justified interest in the decision will be informed of the result of the investigation after the procedure has been completed.

Section 6
General procedural principles

(1)   As general procedural principles for the procedure in Section 5, it is determined in particular

-   that the party providing the tip-off must make their allegations in good faith. Parties providing a tip-off must be protected in a suitable manner even after the end of the procedure provided that they have not been shown to have made a false or malicious allegation. A false allegation may in itself constitute research misconduct;

-   that neither the party providing the tip-off nor the suspected individual(s) should be disadvantaged in their own research work or professional career as a result of the allegations before the procedure has been concluded;

-   that the individual(s) suspected of research misconduct should be given the opportunity to make a statement in every phase of the procedure;

-   that even anonymous tip-offs will be followed up on provided that the ombudspersons are able to establish that there is reasonable suspicion;

-   that an ombudsperson or commission member can recuse themselves or be recused by the parties involved in the procedure from participating in the procedure on grounds of partiality;

-   that all those involved in the procedure and the findings up to that point must be subject to strict confidentiality until culpable misconduct has been proven. In particular, this means that only the individuals listed in Section 5 may be notified of the subject of the procedure, its progress and the identity of those affected, and only to the extent necessary for those individuals to carry out their respective role in the procedure;

-   that the individuals listed in Section 5 will seek a swift conclusion to the procedure in the interests of all involved;

- that the results of individual procedural phases will be recorded transparently in writing and the affected parties will be notified of the results in a timely manner;

- that the principle of innocent until proven guilty will apply until the procedure outlined here has been concluded.

Bonn, December 2023

References

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