

Research Guidelines

Centre for Pastoralism

Guidelines for Research on Pastoralism

CfP's Research Guidelines document seeks to provide ethical guidelines to safeguard the rights and interests of research participants, support researchers and reviewers in navigating stages of the research process, and clarify the roles and responsibilities of CfP's Research Advisory Committee (RAC).

CfP's Research Guidelines are also applicable to Sahjeevan and its work on biodiversity, conservation, and pastoralism. Research projects, fellowships, and researchers associated with Sahjeevan will use these guidelines to inform their work, and submit their project for the RAC review process.

Guidelines for Research on Pastoralism

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Abbreviations

CfP:	Centre for Pastoralism
FPIC:	Free, Prior and Informed Consent
EC:	Ethical Clearence
HREC:	Human Research Ethics Committees
IRB:	Institutional Review Board
LGBTQIA+:	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual Plus
NBAC:	National Bioethics Advisory Commission
RAC:	Research Advisory Committee
RAMBLE:	Research and Monitoring in the Banni Landscape
WCS:	Wildlife Conservation Society



Introduction

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About CfP

Centre for Pastoralism (CfP) is a Sahjeevan Initiative that seeks to undertake research aimed at enhancing our understanding of pastoralist ecosystems, develop collaborative programs to strengthen pastoralist livelihoods, recognize and conserve animal breeds developed by pastoralists, facilitate the restoration of grazing lands and undertake outreach with policymakers, the media, students, and society at large on a wide range of issues relating to pastoralism. Its work is undertaken in collaboration with various researchers and institutions. CfP, which works at the national level, arose out of the work done by Sahjeevan.

Sahjeevan is a voluntary organisation working in the Kachchh District of Gujarat since 1991. The organisation works on a range of Natural Resource Management and conservation issues, specifically on Biodiversity and Pastoralism.



National consultation on Pastoralism and FRA

About CfP's Research Guidelines document

CfP's Research Guidelines document seeks to provide ethical guidelines to safeguard the rights and interests of research participants, support researchers and reviewers in navigating stages of the research process, and clarify the roles and responsibilities of CfP's Research Advisory Committee (RAC).

The history of research with humans, non-human animals, and the environment has shown that principles such as respect, justice, and beneficence are essential to such activities. This document combines internationally followed ethics codes such as the Nuremberg Code (1947), the principles of the Belmont Report (1976), research ethics guidelines put forward by The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees and the European Commission, research ethics put forth by indigenous communities (San Code of Research Ethics), by pastoralists around the world (Segovia Declaration of Nomadic and Transhumant Pastoralists, 2007), and those adopted by Indian organisations working in overlapping fields such as the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment (ATREE).

Each of these source documents contains valuable, even essential formulations on research ethics. However, they represent the concerns of entities involved with diverse areas of research as well as of diverse communities that are researched. Thus, each source provides some unique points while many, if not all, have a degree of overlap as well. We believe that ethical integrity arises from a dynamic internalisation of this totality of reference frameworks. In other words, it comes from a continuing engagement with the widest possible set of relevant criteria, and from constantly examining one's intentions and actions to ensure that they meet the highest possible standards. Where research is concerned, it is better to err on the side of caution than adopt a cavalier approach that might ignore the rights and well-being of living beings, the safety of the environment

or the integrity of the activity and its findings. This is the spirit in which we present this composite guide to you.

Finally, ethics 'are products of their own time and circumstances'.¹ CfP's guidelines are thus particularly relevant to research on pastoralism in India; though, like the formulations we have referred to while drafting them, they may have a utility beyond that domain. Their aim is to ensure that all research will maintain sensitivity to sociocultural practices and norms in every context, and uphold principles of equity and justice.²



Collecting the detail in Khunmoo area of Srinagar

2 See RAMBLE website. Link: https://bannigrassland.org/

¹ See MacClancy & Fuentes. (2013)



Research guidelines for human participants

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All researchers and collaborators are expected to be respectful of all humans, non-human animals, and all elements of the environment such as water bodies.³CfP expects that the research undertaken does not cause any harm (material, emotional or intellectual) to individuals and communities with whom the researcher engages. All research conducted should be respectful of individual autonomy and decision-making, be concerned about the welfare of participants, and make efforts to benefit participating individuals or communities. CfP expects all researchers to ensure that all participants are treated fairly and with dignity.⁴⁴

Researchers' rights to conduct free and independent research will be safeguarded by CfP and the RAC, so as to prevent any unwarranted deviations from the research design influenced by any external parties. Along similar lines, while commissioners and funders of the research projects may select the research theme and topic, the selection of specific data, methods, conclusions, or results should not be attempted or influenced.⁵CfP expects that all CfP members, researchers, collaborators, and members of the RAC disclose any potential conflicts of interest of an academic or financial or other nature for each research project.⁶CfP aims to ensure participation equity, i.e., a representation of diverse voices within the purview of the specific research ecosystem being studied as opposed to research favouring the voices of dominant communities.⁷

⁴ Ibid; see Universities Australia et al., (2018)

⁵ See Straksrud et al., (2022)

⁶ See 'Research ethics and compliance'. Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology & the Environment.

⁷ See Acharya et al., (2006)

Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) is a process intent on ensuring that the autonomy of human participants is upheld.CfP expects that researchers will follow FPIC as outlined by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)'s Policy on Indigenous Peoples:

'**Free**' entails that individuals and communities providing their consent for research do so voluntarily, without experiencing any pressure or being coerced into participation.

'Prior' entails that consent is sought before any research activities are begun.

'**Informed**' entails that participants are provided with information about the purpose of the research study, nature of their participation and the risks and benefits associated with their participation.

'**Consent**' refers to an individual or where appropriate, a collective decision undertaken by individuals or communities agreeing to participate in research.⁸

Researchers are expected to ensure that information about the study is communicated to individuals and community representatives (where necessary) in a way that is unambiguous, complete in that it does not leave out details considered difficult to explain, and in a language understood by the research participants or translators supporting the activity.

While individual consent has to be sought in every case, it may be necessary to take collective consent for conducting research from representatives of pastoralist collectives or local decision-making bodies. This would be in recognition of their community's right to self-determination and decision-making regarding the sharing of cultural, livelihood,

8 see Rodgers, C., (2021); FAO report

and other information. Consent from collectives may, in fact, need to be taken before individual consent is sought.⁹

The above-mentioned statements follow the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki which was adopted by the World Medical Association in 1964, as well as the Segovia Declaration of Nomadic and Transhumant Pastoralists in 2007 where pastoralists from 60 communities from Asia, Africa, America, and Europe came together and demanded that all public, private and multilateral institutions as well as leaders of their own communities, 'seek prior and informed consent before all private and public initiatives that may affect the integrity of mobile indigenous peoples' customary territories, resource management systems and nature...'¹⁰



Monitoring of long-term plots

10 see Tetra Tech. (2020); FAO report

⁹ see Walker, SE et al., (2020); FAO report

Checklist for informed consent

Participants above the age of 18 years can be directly requested for consent, while for those below 18 years, consent must also be sought from the individual's guardian before requesting consent from the participant themselves.¹¹Researchers can use the checklist below to put together the information they must communicate to potential participants in order to obtain their consent.

- Information about the purpose of the research
- Explanation for why the participant has been selected to participate
- Expected duration of participation
- How and by whom it is expected that the data will be used
- Potential risks, harms and discomforts that might be experienced by participants at an individual and community level. Researchers must identify and communicate to participants the potential material, political, livelihood, and other risks that individuals and communities might experience on participation in the research, as well as on publication of findings
- Potential benefits that participants may derive from participating at an individual or community level, including aspects such as compensation for their participation, access to information published, or any others. Before research activities are begun, researchers should discuss participants' expectations regarding their participation and proceed once an understanding is reached. Compensation, if any, should be provided in accordance with the local customs of the participants.

• Explanation of how the data collected from participants will be stored and who will be accessing it, in terms of the degree of anonymity and confidentiality that will be afforded.

Permissions for long-term storage and re-use of data will need to be sought additionally.

- The expected form of publication of the information collected, such as a research paper, book, documentary, visual gallery etc.
- Contact information of the person/s whom the participants may get in touch with after the completion of the interaction in case they have any questions or concerns
- Any potential conflict of interests between the researchers and organisations conducting the research
- Names of organisation/s funding the research
- Additional consent must be sought from participants for the audio and visual recordings or photographs taken of participants, their property or areas that hold cultural and historical meaning such as shrines and sacred groves, and their animals
- Participants must explicitly be informed that participation is voluntary and that they can choose not to participate
- Participants must explicitly be informed that they can choose to withdraw at any time during the study without providing a reason; that they will not experience any repercussions on account of withdrawing; and that their withdrawal will not affect their relationship with the researchers or those who introduced them to the researchers.¹²

¹² See Rauhala & Kalokairinou. (2021); National Research Council (US) Panel on Collecting, Storing, Accessing, and Protecting Biological Specimens and Biodata in Social Surveys. (2010); Universities Australia et al., (2018); Straksrud et al., (2022)

Mode of communication

Communication of the details of the study to participants can be undertaken by researchers through written forms, visual depictions such as cartoons or photographs, and oral explanations. The mode or combination of modes of communication should be chosen by the researcher keeping in mind the level of comfort of potential participants in understanding them.¹³



Final phase of data collection in Samad

¹³ See Quinn, Sandra Crouse, et al. (2012); Shivayogi, Preethi. (2013)

Documentation of consent

Consent can be documented in written form through signatures or through audio recordings of the consent of participants. Collective consent of community representatives should also be documented as above. In some cultural contexts, written consent may be associated with making permanent official records of events such as marriage or payment of taxes. Participant communities may be uncomfortable with providing their signatures as consent for participation owing to concerns related to the usage of their signatures and stemming from previous experiences. Depending on the local context researchers are expected to select the manner in which consent will be documented. Researchers could also offer participants different modes by which their consent could be documented in consideration of the principle of justice.¹⁴



Mapping exercises of traditional grazing routes of Kharai camels towards making FRA claims in Saurashtra

¹⁴ See Iphofen, Ron (n.d.); Human Research Protection Program and Institutional Review Board. (n.d.)

Risks and benefits

As a part of the consent process, researchers are expected to ensure that participants have all critical information about the risks and benefits associated with their participation in the study, to ensure that participants are able to make an informed decision.

Risks disclosed should include any physical, psychological, social, economic, and legal risks, i.e., any and all potential harms, discomfort, or inconveniences that participants might experience. Researchers are expected to inform participants about the kind of risks posed by participation, both at an individual level and for their larger community. To identify potential risks, researchers are expected to:

1. Do a scoping exercise mapping probable risks (in cases where possible, a participatory assessment of risks can be undertaken involving community representatives)

2. Gauge the severity of the risks

3. Identify any ways in which the researchers can minimise the risks themselves, such as adopting stronger data security measures for the storage of sensitive information.¹⁵

Benefits disclosed should include any direct or indirect benefits individual participants, their communities, researchers, academic institutions, organisations, funding organisations, and larger society may experience. Benefits disclosed should be those realistically achievable by the study. Material benefits in the manner of monetary or other compensation for their time or the absence of any such compensation should be discussed before the research is begun.¹⁶While the gathering of certain information might be valuable, researchers are expected to undertake research with careful consideration of the local context and norms, and minimise activities that participants may experience as intrusive or inappropriate for their culture.¹⁷

¹⁵ See Universities Australia et al., (2018).

¹⁶ See Canadian Institute of Health Research et al., (2014).

¹⁷ See Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology & the Environment; Quinn, Sandra Crouse, et al. (2012)

Special groups

(vulnerable communities and marginalised groups)

The medical and social sciences have a history of unethical research being conducted with disadvantaged communities. A vulnerable or marginalised status implies that participants may have a diminished capacity to provide informed consent; or that they may be more likely to experience harm as a result of their participation; or a combination of the two.

Vulnerability may be classified as categorical or contextual

Categorical vulnerability involves groups or populations identified as vulnerable because of certain shared characteristics such as socio-economic status, access to resources, age, etc. Examples include children, minority groups, and prisoners.

Contextual vulnerability refers to the vulnerability of individuals in certain situations or contexts. The American National Bioethics Advisory Commission (NBAC) has specified certain categories of contextual vulnerability:

- a. Cognitive or communicative vulnerability: Individuals experiencing difficulties while communicating, comprehending, or in decision-making. Examples include children, and adults with intellectual disabilities or participants with no understanding of the language used by the researcher
- b. Institutional or deferential vulnerability: Individuals in hierarchical relationships involving economic or other dependencies, where it might be difficult or uncomfortable for them to refuse participation. Examples include employer-employee relationships, students, and prisoners
- c. Medical vulnerability: Serious health-related ailments might make individuals more inclined to participate, with a higher than realistic expectation of associated benefits. Examples include research on experimental medical treatments that involves those with rare diseases and limited treatment options.

- **d. Economic vulnerability:** Individuals with limited access to and possession of resources, property, assets, and sources of income. In cases where monetary or other compensation is offered for participation in research studies, those that are economically vulnerable may express greater willingness towards participation with less regard for the risks associated with it¹⁸
- e. Social vulnerability: Individuals from groups with continuing histories of experiencing discrimination on the basis of their gender, caste, religion, culture, or occupation. Social vulnerabilities are also intersectional. Examples include women; Scheduled Castes; Dalits; Scheduled Tribes; nomadic and pastoral groups that are vulnerable because of their mobility; and sexual minorities- LGBTQIA+. ¹⁹

Researchers are expected to approach their research with a sense of accountability towards the individuals and communities they work with. Understanding the local context. social fabric and relations of communities will enable researchers to conduct their research respectfully.²⁰ CfP expects researchers to undertake research with participants keeping in mind their vulnerabilities and minimising their exposure to harm. There is, however, a countervailing consideration as well: while safeguarding the interests of vulnerable groups in research is important, 'excessive protection of cultural groups is inappropriate as it might result in their perspective being excluded in research'.²¹ In line with the principle of justice, researchers should take steps to include women, children, and the elderly members of communities in their studies, with sufficient safeguards- thus preventing the exclusion of perspectives.²²

p. 21

¹⁹ See Shivayogi, Preethi. (2013)

²⁰ See Straksrud et al., (2022)

²¹ See Canadian Institute of Health Research et al., (2014)

²² Ibid

While conducting research with participants under the age of 18 years, researchers are required to gain the consent of their guardian before requesting the consent of the child themselves. In the case of women participants, researchers should take cognisance of the local norms regarding women's interactions with outsiders as also with those of the opposite sex, and be mindful of not causing any perceived disrespect.

Best practices surrounding research with vulnerable groups recommend that:

- Researchers avoid the usage of lengthy research tools for data collection
- Ensure the usage of language which does not stigmatise or discriminate against the groups
- Ensure that their research does not focus mainly on community resource persons, gatekeepers or more influential/powerful sections of a community but combines insights from a diversity of community stakeholders (particularly important with such groups)
- Ensure that their research outputs do not make sweeping generalisations about the communities studied.²³



Gujjar committee

²³ See Universities Australia et al., (2018); Straksrud et al., (2022); Potnis, Devendra, and Bhakti Gala. (2020)

Fieldwork guidelines

Researchers should expect to navigate their research through their own personal ethics, those of CfP and collaborating organisations, those of their academic discipline, those of the communities they are researching, and those of community resource persons who may often be gatekeepers of their communities.²⁴ Some considerations researchers are expected to keep in mind during fieldwork:

- Research is typically a collective exercise involving principal investigators, collaborators, cartographers, field staff, field researchers, interns, transcribers, translators, and community resource persons. CfP views it as the responsibility of the lead researcher or principal investigator to ensure that all members contributing to the research are sensitised and up to speed on the ethical principles and research guidelines for special groups
- The San's Code of Research Ethics emphasises that any research undertaken in their community should be done with respect for the community, their culture, histories, and their relationship with the environment. It also asks that researchers not adopt a patronising approach towards the community, and maintain transparency with regard to the purpose of their research.²⁵
- Communities involved as participants in cross-cultural and conservation research in Kenya recommend that researchers:
 - a. Maintain 'critical consciousness', which pertains to researchers developing an in-depth understanding of the community's culture and reflecting on the appropriateness of their research design and tools in relation to that culture
 - b. Engage in pre-research 'relationship-building' with the community to build trust and a mutual understanding between the researchers and the community

²⁵ See Chatfield, Kate. (2017); South African San Institute. (2017)

- c. Uphold 'reciprocity' by providing community members, during the pre-research period, with a transparent picture of any compensation or benefits they stand to receive for their participation.
- d. Keep up an 'adaptive research process' responding to cultural sensitivities or sociopolitical changes in the environment.²⁶
- Researchers should ensure that interactions are scheduled based on the convenience and availability of participants, and do not overlap with or disrupt livelihoods, daily activities or chores of the latter.
- CfP expects researchers to chart an exit plan laying down how the team plans to depart from the field, in terms of conveying their gratitude for participation to community members, allowing the latter some time to ask clarificatory questions, and giving them information about how the research data will be used and can be accessed by them.
- Given CfP's association with pastoralism across India and its plans of continuing work across locations in India, researchers and their teams are expected to be sensitive towards the values the organisation stands for and its commitment to ethicality.
- In a larger sense, CfP expects research teams to be considerate of the sentiments of all stakeholders they interact with such as community resource persons, community members, government officials in positions of authority, collaborating field researchers, and guides.

Data security and protection

CfP is responsible for the storage, quality, verifiability, re-use, sharing, and, where applicable, the destruction of data collected in all research studies undertaken with the organisation.

Before data collection, researchers are expected to

- specify if the information collected will be shared with parties, organisations, or funding agencies other than collaborators specified in the final research proposal
- specify the duration for which the information collected will be stored, and whether it will be archived or destroyed
- collect only as much information from participants as is required

For studies involving particularly sensitive data, a Data Safety Monitoring Committee²⁷ could be set in place to provide guidance and monitor the data handling processes²⁸

After data collection

- Data collected after obtaining consent for a single purpose will not be used for a different purpose
- Researchers are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality and privacy of participants. For this, each research study is required to designate the responsibility of handling data to a single person²⁹
- Data collected must be stored securely in password-protected storage, user authentication should be used and unauthorised access should not be allowed
- Data must be stored in an anonymized format, ensuring that the linking of participant names and other identifier information is not possible.

²⁷ See Shivayogi, Preethi. (2013)

²⁸ See Straksrud et al., (2022)

²⁹ See Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology & the Environment

For this purpose, two separate databases should be maintained:

- 1. One with identifier information
- 2. The second with non-identifier information
- Raw data should also be shared with transcribers or other members external to the team in an anonymised format
- Metadata automatically collected while taking photographs, audio recordings or video recordings, or automated transcripts for the research study should be removed

After completion of the research

- 1. Data should be shared with CfP for storage and reuse
- 2. If the data contains sensitive information, CfP should be informed of this before it is archived
- 3. 'Data that is of cultural, historical or other significance must be retained beyond the minimum retention period...dispensing (with) it would violate respect'³⁰
- 4. In the case of unexpected/unintended criminal findings particular care should be taken to protect sensitive information of illegal conduct which if released could damage participants in terms of financial well-being, employability, and reputation
 - Inform participants beforehand of an obligation to report anything that should be shared.³¹

31 See Rauhala & Kalokairinou. (2021)

.....

³⁰ See European University Institute. (2019); Universities Australia et al., (2018)

Communication of research findings

In line with ethical principles of beneficence, respect, and justice, CfP believes that findings emerging from the interactions and contributions of participants should be communicated to them after project completion.³² The responsibility of informing participants as to how they can access the findings lies with the researcher. In cases where reaching participants individually or as a collective are not possible, public dissemination of the findings is sufficient. Researchers are not expected to share individual-level findings but aggregate findings that have emerged from their research.³³

Where possible before public dissemination in any format, researchers should also attempt to discuss their findings with participant communities in a language understandable to them to provide them the opportunity to correct factual inaccuracies.³⁴Communication of findings should be undertaken in a manner respectful to participants.³⁵A plan for the communication of the findings should be discussed and shared with the RAC. CfP expects that all researchers, collaborators, organisations, and institutions should view the sharing of research findings with participants as an integral part of the research process.

³² See Universities Australia et al., (2018)

³³ See Straksrud et al., (2022)

³⁴ See MacClancy & Fuentes. (2013)

³⁵ See Walker et al., (2020)

Publication and dissemination

Publication guidelines CfP expects researchers to follow are stated below:

- Researchers have the right to publish their research but are expected to avoid publication in predatory journals.³⁶
- CfP recommends the inclusion of (a) the RAC approval statement for the research project, (b) mentions of the limitations of the research design, methodology, and challenges experienced, as well as (c) areas identified for future research
- Researchers are expected to give due credit in the form of co-authorship to their collaborators, as well as acknowledge others who might have made significant contributions to their research output in a way that might not have been initially planned
- Researchers are expected to provide citations of all sources of reference- secondary literature, art, historical records, photographs, videos, archival audio recordings, and ensure that personal communications with any stakeholders are appropriately credited in their research
- Reports and published content must ensure plagiarism is avoided. Plagiarism refers to representing the ideas or words of someone else as your own.³⁷
- The University of Oxford³⁸ provides a succinct overview of the different kinds of plagiarism and how they can be avoided. Researchers are encouraged to go through these before beginning the research process
- CfP will not tolerate any fabrication or distortion of evidence and researchers are expected to ensure their works do not misrepresent their findings

³⁶ Predatory journals are those that claim falsely that their publications follow a peer review process, and that exhort fees from authors while misrepresenting their publishing practices. Researchers can access information on how to identify and avoid them. See Elmore & Weston (2020)

³⁷ See Straksrud et al., (2022)

³⁸ See Oxford Students. (n.d)

• In cases where researchers wish to participate in public debates regarding their research, they should do so in a personal capacity.³⁹



A discussion over grassland management in the Banni

Grievances Redressal Mechanism

Researchers should ensure that participants have avenues to contact their team and share any grievances, concerns, suggestions, or disagreements pertaining to the research. At the second and third levels, CfP and the RAC respectively are also expected to have grievance redressal mechanisms in place. At the fourth level for grievances related to the practices of the RAC, an external agency should be appointed for stakeholders to register their grievances. As outlined by the FAO, the grievance redressal mechanisms at all levels should be 'legitimate, accessible, predictable, equitable, transparent and rights compatible'.

Records of grievances registered and their redressal are required to be maintained by all stakeholders in a secure manner⁴⁰

⁴⁰ See FAO report; Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology & the Environment.



Research Guidelines for Non-Human Participants

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During organisations' work with marginal communities and ecosystems, they often miss or overlook the basic ethical ideals applicable to humans and to botanical, aquatic, atmospheric, and inanimate environments. The ideals:

- Do no intentional harm
- Respect all life
- Treat all individuals with compassion
- Step lightly into the lives of other beings, bodies of water, air, and landscapes.⁴¹

Harms to human and non-human participants can arise directly (injury or unnecessary suffering, material compromise, or ecosystem disruption) or indirectly (publications stigmatising vulnerable groups or individuals, and unsanctioned use of research for policies that undermine human rights or right to life).⁴²

A comprehensive understanding of demography, habitat, natural history, ecosystems, and community structures is required to evolve strategies or interventions to conserve and manage biodiversity and ecosystems at large.⁴³

The need for research should be weighed against all possible risks that it can cause to plants and wildlife populations and their viability in their context. To minimise harm to native or rare species, we are laying out step-by-step guidelines for researchers to design their studies after careful consideration of ethical safeguards and national laws and regulations, such as the Forest Conservation Act (1980), Wildlife Protection Act (1972), the Biological Diversity Act (2002), the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1960), and guidelines issued by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Government of India.

⁴¹ See Bekoff, M. (2002)

⁴² See Nature Plants (n.d).

⁴³ See Farnsworth, E. (2005)

Guidelines for conducting research on plant species

All researchers will have to submit separate applications for clearances from the RAC with regard to plant and wildlife-related research.

- 1. Determine if the study of a rare plant is essential to the research and its relevance
- 2. Conduct a literature survey and review prior secondary research to avoid duplicating existing work
- 3. Carefully select the species after studying the impacts of extracting them from their context
- 4. Consult botanists and subject matter experts for selection and methodological framework development
- 5. Establish an analytical framework beforehand based on established analysis methods to ensure research feasibility
- 6. Make detailed notes on the species and location of the field research
- 7. Obtain permissions from the landowners or relevant authorities such as the forest department, private landholders and communities whose bio-cultural relationships place significance on the plants concerned
- 8. Provide complete information about yourself and the study to obtain free informed consent from the relevant authorities
- Submit the proposal for review after reconnaissance is complete. A successful proposal will:
 - a. Justify the use and selection of the plant/plant parts
 - b. Minimise the removal of whole plants
 - c. Anticipate any ecological impacts of the study
 - d. Demonstrate how impacts from visits and manipulation will be minimal

- e. Establish that the research is statistically feasible
- f. Discuss the benefits of research for conservation
- g. Establish your credentials and experience for the study
- 10. Design minimally invasive experiments and be conservative in collecting plants and plant parts
- 11. Avoid transporting any invasive species or predators from one location to another
- 12. Take time to collect observational data essential for conservation
- 13. Maintain confidentiality of the precise location of rare plants in any publications (popular or academic) for public consumption to avoid illegal extraction or poaching
- 14. Minimise any long-term impact of the study, remove all outside materials from the site, and conduct a follow-up visit to check on the habitat



Banni restoration in Kachchh

Guidelines for conducting research on non-human animals:

Any research or study design should respect the dignity and rights of non-human participants, tangible and intangible heritage, natural resources, and the environment.⁴⁴ Research on wildlife can range from observational to more intrusive methods.

- 1. Respect the dignity and rights of non-human participants, tangible and intangible heritage, natural resources, and the environment in all research or study designs
- 2. Recognize that research on wildlife can range from observational to more intrusive methods like handling, tagging, killing, and collecting genetic material.
- 3. Where the research involves the lethal collection of animals, ensure that the rationale is ethical, the necessary legal permits are obtained, and animal welfare remains paramount
- 4. Adopt the 3Rs of wildlife research ethics from the Canadian Council for Animal Care (Refusal, Replacement, Reduction) and a 4th R (Refinement) from Curzer et al, 2013 for studying free-ranging and captive wild animals, all introduced and domestic species or their habitat:

Refusal is the rejection of the initial research plan completely to prevent animals from suffering or harm

Replacement involves seeking an alternative method that decreases harm, such as replacing it with non-sentient entities or a lower value order of animals or ecosystems

Reduction involves minimising the number of animals or parts of the ecosystem without decreasing the amount of knowledge gained

Refinement involves using methods to minimise pain, suffering, and distress or lasting harm. Examples of refinement methods include proper use of anaesthetics and analgesics, use of better and lighter tags, less obtrusive methods, minimal habituation to humans, etc.⁴⁵ By following these guidelines, researchers can ensure that their research on non-human animals is ethical and minimises harm to the animals and their habitat.

44 See Nature Plants (NA)

45 See Curzer et al, (2013)

Ethical code of conduct for camera trapping methods:

Camera trapping is a widely used technique in wildlife research to understand diversity, species richness, animal abundance, movements, and behaviours. However, camera traps can also capture human images, ranging from harmless behaviour to serious crimes, which can put researchers in ethical dilemmas. To help researchers navigate these issues, the British Ecological Council⁴⁶ have laid down a well-researched framework, which can be customised based on the organisation's work, requirements, and values.

- **1. Permission:** Cameras should only be installed after obtaining due permission from relevant authorities, including government bodies, local communities, and groups with user rights
- 2. Purpose limitation: Researchers must define the purpose, intent, and expected outcomes of the study in the application for permission. The written permission should be documented in advance, and the use of images should be limited to the stated hypothesis. Any additional human images should be deleted and cannot be used for media reporting
- **3. Disclosure:** Local communities and users in the buffer zone should be informed about the study and method without any concealed information. This can be achieved through consultations, meetings, and village gatherings. Signages and leaflets can be used to inform people about the camera trapping. However, the exact location of the installation should not be revealed to reduce the risk of camera loss
- 4. Legality: Researchers must be aware of the laws of the land and understand the demography well. If the images capture any illegal activity by humans, researchers must consider the rule of law and the likelihood of the human getting a fair trial and treatment. This is particularly important if there are vulnerable groups in the area that are at greater risk of persecution.

- **5. Privacy:** The privacy of individuals or groups captured by the camera traps must be protected. If the law or conditions laid down in the permits require that illegal activities are reported, such obligations must be declared to the communities prior to the installations
- 6. Participation: Communities should be encouraged to take part in and co-create methodologies for the camera trap study and research design. For their time and effort, communities should be compensated financially
- **7. Sharing:** The cameras, their function, and their abilities should be explained to the communities for purposes of transparency. Researchers should consider sharing data with the authorities concerned and with partners, and due acknowledgements should be given to them.⁴⁷

Guidelines for ethical photography

Unethical photography is a prevalent issue in the age of the internet. Many photographed humans are unaware that their images are being used on popular articles, websites, and reports. While, obviously, plants and animals cannot give verbal consent to photographers looking for unique and perfect shots in the wild, there are many safeguards to consider when photographing wildlife.

To better understand the issues, we are citing some stories from the guidebook 'Stop! Don't shoot like that.'.⁴⁸ These stories are considered disgraceful events in the history of India's wildlife photography.

'Nest Photography in India gained craze during the early 1990s and to out-do each other in the pursuit of the best photographs, they would scout around or offer rewards to the locals for finding nests, remove the leaves and twigs leaving the nest exposed, obstruct the nest activity, take a nice photo, and exit from the site. This would expose the eggs for predation and some sadistic photographers would even destroy the nest so that other photographers could not exploit their 'find'.

In other news, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change issued a circular to curtail photography of the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard during the breeding season. The bird stops its activity since it is extremely wary of intruders. As long as the human or the camera is looking at it, it won't feed, court, or mate, impacting its survival.'

In line with fostering wildlife conservation and animal welfare, we define the values that should be upheld while researchers or photographers are photographing wildlife:

• **Respect Wildlife:** Avoid photographing if it exposes animals to stress, threats, physical harm, predation, or impairment of reproduction. Do not interfere with their routine. Avoid

48 See Datatri, S., & Sreenivasan, R. (2016)

crowding, or using baits like food, bird calls, or any other means to attract or distract the animals or birds. Respect their space and don't intrude. No one should photograph their nesting and denning fauna. Exposing the den and nest is harmful to the young ones as it exposes them to predation

- **Do Not Harm:** It is illegal to handle or feed fauna under the Wildlife Protection Act (1972). One should never use attractants like a scent or visual lures to attract animals
- **Call Out Unethical Practices in the Field:** Encourage good photography practices and call out and correct unethical practices in your community
- Follow Safety Procedures: Research well about the species and the habitat, and know what to do in uncertain situations and in times of conflict. Use safeguards for both parties human (the photographer) and non-human (any animal, bird, etc.). Read the wildlife law, know what is illegal and legal, study animal behaviour and be careful especially when it comes to physically handling wildlife where required. If you are doing this for scientific purposes, get proper training, sign a NOC with the forest department, and get ethics clearance from the RAC of the affiliate organisation
- Protect Rare, Endangered, and Threatened Species: Be aware of the potential consequences of sharing the location of a rare sighting. Many species are shy and can be easily disturbed by human presence. Many species become exposed to illegal poaching and hunting. Thus it is not advisable to publish sensitive information like sightings and locations. Photographers should report new sightings to the local conservation authority (in our case, it would be the Forest Department)
- Avoid Off-Roading and Speeding in Wildlife Habitats: Wildlife often dies in India owing to roadkill, and speeding should be avoided at all costs. Off-roading should be avoided, and habitats should not be altered by vehicle pressure
- **Support Conservation:** By following such practices, wildlife photographers can contribute to the protection of wildlife and simultaneously can raise awareness and appreciation for wildlife.⁴⁹

..... 49 Ibid



CfP's Research Advisroy Committee (RAC)

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Role

The role of CfP's Research Advisory Committee is to act as a reviewing body for research proposals and determine if they are following ethical research principles. Evidence points towards the need for Human Research Ethics Committees (HRECs) and Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) to uphold research ethics by providing researchers with supportive guidance on following ethical principles, instead of an approach solely focused on regulation and monitoring. Bodies similar to CfP's RAC such as HRECs and IRBs have been found to play a role in 'structuring bodies of knowledge'.⁵⁰The RAC is expected to maintain a reflective and conscious approach toward its processes.⁵¹

The RAC is a body independent of CfP, in that it serves as a reviewing body for all research projects undertaken by CfP, by itself or in collaboration with any other researchers, organisations, or institutions but it does not represent the interests of CfP or the organisation itself.

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⁵⁰ See MacClancy & Fuentes. (2013)

⁵¹ See American Psychological Association (n.d.)

Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the RAC are outlined below:

- Review research proposals to gauge if they are following the principles of respect, justice, beneficence, and other ethical principles outlined above
- Review research methodologies and tools to gauge if participants are at risk of experiencing harm and assess the benefits associated with the research. The RAC is responsible for reviewing the informed consent process associated with the research project and it also decides on whether or not to provide clearances in cases where limited disclosure is suggested by the researcher.⁵²The RAC has the right to refuse the use of limited disclosure based on its assessment of the risks and benefits associated with participation
- In cases where there are differences in power and resources between researchers and their participants, the RAC is expected to understand how these differences will be addressed to ensure that advantage is not taken of participants
- Determine if participant communities included in the study are in need of additional safeguards or protection
- Review ongoing projects on a yearly basis; also, review projects where researchers have asked for modifications in their research design or methodology or any other changes
- Utilise their knowledge and refer to legislation pertaining to the research theme, in the Indian context and with regard to the specific communities or animals being studied
- Securely maintain records of research project applications forms submitted, research materials submitted, and minutes of meetings.

⁵² See Universities Australia et al., (2018)

Composition and selection

CfP's RAC will comprise subject matter specialists with academic or professional experience to review and evaluate research proposals. The RAC will have six members, two of whom will be internal members from CfP and four external members. The RAC is required to have a minimum of one member from a pastoralist community and have a representation of individuals across gender and caste.

Similar to criteria adopted by WCS's IRB, CfP's RAC will select RAC members on their academic qualifications, experience in the field of pastoralism and grassland ecology, and on the basis of their having published peer-reviewed publications.⁵³The selection of RAC members will be decided by CfP's steering committee members in consultation with CfP's advisors. Members will be part of the RAC for a period of two years, after which a selection process for new members will be initiated.

Given that external members of the RAC will not be provided with monetary compensation for their involvement, the RAC will require their participation in the review process on a rotational basis. In cases where projects under review include any of the RAC members, the RAC members in question should recuse themselves from the RAC.

Review process

The review process for research proposals is outlined below:

- Researchers wishing to submit a research proposal must submit an application form, and other relevant documents in order for their projects to be considered by the RAC
- The approval form requires researchers to provide
 - a. Information about the project they wish to undertake, the communities or animals they wish to study, and the reasons for their selection
 - b. Materials such as tools (surveys, questionnaires) designed for the purpose of the research
 - c. Details of the participant recruitment strategy, reconnaissance visits (to function as a preliminary risk and benefits assessment) for which data collection is not required, risk minimization efforts by researchers, informed consent, practices to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, fieldwork training for team members, data sharing plans, data storage and security protocols, and disclose any conflicts of interest researchers might have
- After receiving a research proposal, internal CfP members of the RAC are expected to complete an initial review of the proposal and determine whether the proposal can be exempt from the review process (see section 4.6 below), or if external reviewers should be consulted.
- If it is the second case then the project submissions are to be forwarded to the external RAC members for their review.
- The timeframe for the review process is as specified below
 - a. Determining RAC exemption: 3 working days

- b. Initial review: 15 working days
- c. Final review: 5 working days
- d. Changes to the project: 5 working days
- Once reviewed the RAC will inform researchers if their projects:
 - a. Have been approved,
 - Require modifications, In such cases, researchers are provided with suggested modifications and can re-submit their revised research proposal for the review of the RAC. The RAC can approve or decline the approval of the project post-resubmission.
 - c. Or have been declined, In cases where the RAC declines approval of the research proposal, they are required to provide the researcher with reasons behind their decision.
- Re-submission once declined
- The RAC approval letter for each research project is valid for a period of three years after which it will be subject to reassessment.⁵⁴

^{.....} 54 Ibid

RAC exemption

Certain research proposals can be exempt from RAC review. The cases in which exemption could apply are stated below:

- Methods proposed by the research project solely involve the review of secondary literature or archival or publicly available databases, where participants cannot be identified by name or through identifier information
- Methods proposed involve only the use of tools of observation in public spaces
- Research and demonstration projects conducted for the approval of department/ agency heads designed to study, evaluate or examine
 - a. Public benefit or service programs
 - b. Procedures for obtaining benefits or services under these programs
 - c. Possible changes in or alternatives to those programs/procedures
 - d. Possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under programs.⁵⁵

If projects meet the above-mentioned criteria for exemption, but fall under any of the below-mentioned categories they are not eligible for exemption:

- Research involving participants from vulnerable or marginalised groups (as specified in Section 4)
- Project conducted in a region notified under the V Schedules or VI Schedule
- Any project that contributes to generalizable knowledge in the form of research papers, publications, reports, or any other publicly available documents cannot be eligible for exemption.⁵⁶

Changes to the project

In cases of changes made to RAC-approved projects by researchers, an updated form with details of all changes is required to be submitted for RAC approval. The internal RAC members will do an initial screening of the updated form to determine whether the changes to the project are major or minor. In case the changes involved are major, the external RAC members will be consulted to review the revised project documents.

RAC members can use the below-mentioned criteria to determine the magnitude of the changes:

- **1. Minor modifications:** Wherein the risks and benefits expected for participants remain the same. Examples provided by WCS are changes in research team members, alterations in compensation, recruitment strategy, etc
- 2. Major modifications: Wherein participants stand to be exposed to risks that were not approved by the initial RAC review. Examples provided by WCS include the inclusion of new communities, modifications to inclusion/exclusion criteria or informed consent process, or to data sharing practices.⁵⁷

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⁵⁷ Ibid; see American Psychological Association

Collaborative Research

In cases where CfP and multiple institutions or organisations are involved in the project review and approval process, it may be decided that the review conducted by the RAC/ corresponding body of a single institution or organisation would suffice. In cases where a single review has been decided upon, CfP and the other organisations/institutions need to sign an agreement specifying that they have agreed for the RAC from the specific organisation or institution to act as the reviewing body for the research project.

Alternatively, CfP and any collaborating institution or organisation may choose to undertake their own review of the research project.⁵⁸



References & Annexure

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• Research ethics form

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Annexures

Research proposal form

The exemption form (Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment; Garcia, 2018) is applicable only to those projects which do not involve primary data collection from human participants. Other projects for which the exemption form might be relevant have been elaborated on in Section 4.



Does it involve human participants?

Examples:

- 1. Survey, questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, map-making
- 2. Case studies
- 3. Story telling that will or may draw broad conclusions about the population, cultures, norms & practices
- Physical or biomedical procedures image scanning, blood scanning, blood collection, anthropomorphic procedures
- 5. Diet and nutrition studies
- 6. Use of instruments or devices, including phones to collect data or monitor/influence behaviour
- 7. Passive observation of public behaviour
- 8. Any other activity that involves observation of, or interaction with individualts to gather information

Does it involve secondary data analyses invloving 'restricted-use' data, non-anonymous data or analysis for which the findings may negatively impact vulnerable stakeholders & communities?



Project is required to undergo CfP's review procedure.

Annex 1: Forms

Declaration:

I hereby declare that I am qualified and experienced in conducting the research.

I certify that the research has been proposed after due literature survey and review, hence doesn't imitate or is unnecessarily duplicative in nature.

I confirm that all the essential permits and permissions will be taken before the start of the experiment.

I declare that I will not make major changes to the proposed research in the middle of the project. However, if it does become necessary for me to make any significant changes for whatever reason, I will obtain approval for them from the RAC.

The research will start after due ethical clearance from the Research Advisory Committee.

Signature and Date Investigator

Proposal form for projects pertaining to human participants

Tick the form you are filling



Exemption form Human research ethics form Human research ethics re-evaluation form

- 1. Name (s) of Primary Investigator
- 2. Please mention the organisations/ institutions the primary investigator (s) belong to, if any
- 3. Title of research project
- 4. Please specify the proposed duration of the research project
- 5. Aim/ purpose of research
- 6. Please provide a comprehensive summary of the proposed research
- 7. Please describe the research methodology for your proposed project (sampling strategy etc)
- 8. P lease describe your expected participants (expected sample size, inclusion, exclusion criteria/s, and gender)
- 9. Will your sample include participants from potentially vulnerable groups (Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, Other Forest Dwelling Communities, children, etc- please refer to CfP's Research Guidelines for the list of vulnerable groups)? If yes, please specify
- 10. Does your study area include any region notified under the V Schedule or VI Schedule?
- 11. Please provide a summary of:

- Potential ethics issues pertaining to the proposed study, and details of how they will be addressed
- Benefits to research participants or third parties
- Risks (physical, emotional, and situational) to participants or third parties
- Risks to researchers (physical, emotional, and situational)
- Any potential conflicts of interest
- 12. Please briefly summarise the expected results of the research project (outcomes,

impacts, and benefits of research)

13. Please provide a brief summary of:

- Process to be followed for consent (information provided and methods for documenting)
- Confidentiality, and data protection and transfer plan
- Research findings dissemination plan (feedback to participants, ethicalimplications of dissemination, if any, expectations for publishing)

14. Please specify the budget of the project against the below-mentioned categories

- Personnel: Research Assistant/ Research Officer
- Travel for field work (estimated number of trips and fare)
- Stationary and communication
- 15. Please mention the funding sources of the proposed project
- 16. Please provide any additional information you would like to bring to the attention of the Research Advisory Committee (RAC). This might help to determine whether the study can be exempted from RAC review

Research proposal form for projects pertaining to Non-Humans

<<Note: If the research is interdisciplinary in nature and involves human participants, please fill out a separate ethics form for RAC approval>>

- 1. Title of the Project:
- 2. Name of Lead Investigator:
- 3. Name of Co-Investigator:
- 4. Duration of the project (Start to Completion):
- 5. Who is funding this project:
- 6. Objectives of the study:
- 7. Brief description of Methods:
- 8. Full documentation of the field site (including jurisdiction, ownership, inhabitants, nature, and related information):
- 9. Plants to be collected:
- 10. Common name
- 11. Scientific name
- 12. Number required (amount)
- 13. Purpose of collection
- 14. Is the plant under the RED list (specify category):
- 15. Status of plant as per Indian Law:
- 16. Why is this plant central to your research? Justify why a less rare species cannot be substituted?
- 17. Give full documentation on the species, including whether it is an endemic and keystone species for the area.
- 18. Is there expected damage or harm to the ecological structure of the region?
- 19. What is the risk associated with the plant or plant population if the research is carried out? Describe if the sampling is destructive in nature.

- 20. Justify the analytical framework to establish technical coherence between the hypothesis and methods deployed.
- 21. Has permission been sought from the forest department?
- 22. Has permission been obtained from local residents/users/right holders of the land?
- 23. Are there any risks associated with handling the plant? What kind of precautions will be taken during the fieldwork?
- 24. What is the conservation outcome of your research project?
- 25. Is there any trading of the plant/plant parts associated with the project?
- 26. If yes, has permission for research been sought from the National Biodiversity Authority?
- 27. Explain how you are fit for the project execution (preparedness, credentials, experience, etc.)

Research proposal form for projects pertaining to Non-Human Animals

<< Note: if the methods are non-intrusive and depend on indirect observations, the investigator is required to fill Section A. If the research includes human participants, then a separate form be filled for Ethical Clearance by the RAC and the guidelines for minimally intrusive research for fauna should be followed by the researchers.>>

- 1. Title of the Project:
- 2. Name of Lead Investigator:
- 3. Name of Co-Investigator:
- 4. Duration of the project (Start to Completion):
- 5. Who is funding this project:
- 6. Objectives of the study:
- 7. Brief description of Methods:
- 8. Full documentation of the field site (including jurisdiction, ownership, inhabitants, nature, and related information):
- 9. Is the method intrusive? Yes or No
- 10. Name the animal which is central to the study:
- 11. What is its status under the IUCN Red List?
- 12. Does your study directly deal with or handle the animal? Explain your procedure in detail.
- 13. Why is direct handling central to your study? Justify your selection and research question.
- 14. How damaging, stressful, or harmful do you feel this study can be for the animal?
- 15. What is your preparedness for minimising the risk to the animal?
- 16. Has permission been obtained from the forest department of the region?
- 17. Has the local community been informed about the study?
- 18. Does it impact locals in any way?

- 19. Is the researcher at risk because of the research which requires, for example,, direct encounters with wildlife??
- 20. What precautionary measures have been mapped for the researchers?
- 21. Does the research protocol prohibit the use of an anaesthetic or analgesic for the conduct of painful procedures (any which cause more pain than that associated with a routine injection or blood withdrawal)? If Yes, please provide an explanation and justification.
- 22. Provide details of animal transportation methods (in cases involving capture and release)
- 23. Explain how fit you are for such experiments.