

DOWN2EARTH Ethics Deliverable

H - Requirement No. 2:

2.1. The procedures and criteria that will be used to identify/recruit research participants must be kept on file.

2.2. The informed consent procedures that will be implemented for the participation of humans must be kept on file.

2.3. Templates of the informed consent/assent forms and information sheets (in language and terms intelligible to the participants) must be kept on file.

A comprehensive ethical protocol has been designed for the project, that all staff will read and sign on to. This includes the approach to recruitment, informed consent and various other key issues around ethics.

The relevant section of the ethical protocol can be found below.

The templates of the informed consent/assent forms and information sheets will be stored on Office 365, which is secure and encrypted. These will be translated into the appropriate languages of the communities in which we will be seeking participants. All research coordinators and assistants, and anyone else entering the communities must take copies of these with them – in the appropriate languages for the specific communities. All participants will be asked to read the form (information sheet and consent form), or listen while the researcher reads out what is on the forms.

Recruitment Process, Selection Criteria and Sustaining participants' consent

Participant category 1: community members

- Participants will be approached by the RCs/RAs, who will present a verbal summary of our research objectives in their local (native) language.
- Female RAs will approach and interview female participants and male RAs will approach and interview males, which is context-appropriate.
- Participants will be given a summary in writing in their local language too, and asked to read it carefully, in full. How their information will be used will be disclosed in as much detail as possible.
- If the potential participant is illiterate, the RCs/RAs will read the contents of the information sheet out to them.
- After the information sheet has been read (or heard), participants will be asked if they have any interest in participating, and any concerns or questions they would like to discuss.

- Participants will be briefed in full verbally and in writing about their rights to confidentiality and their right to withdraw their participation and data at any time before a specific date (which is yet to be determined).
- Telephone numbers and email details of the principal researchers (the research Coordinator, Dr. Roger Few and Dr. Amiera Sawas and Ms. Ruby Moshenska, ActionAid International's global head of Safeguarding), will be shared with all participants and they will be encouraged to make contact if they have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, or should they want to withdraw.
- The contact details of an external person, and member of the 'legacy board' will also be shared, in case they prefer to reach out to a party not from ActionAid or UEA.
- Once this has all been discussed, and the RC/RA has clarified that everything is understood by the potential participant, written or verbal consent will be sought.
- There will be no incentives for participation and the RCs/RAs will make this very clear. It is key to always remain honest and transparent about the research objectives, what it aims to achieve and what it is realistically capable of doing (May, 2011). It will be re-iterated to communities and participants that our research aims to observe and understand the issues of water access, climate and environmental change, governance and adaptation. It will be stated that we cannot prevent, reduce or improve any of those issues, but what we can do is try to understand and develop research data, which can be used to illustrate the issues to various stakeholders.
- If consent is given, then the survey/interview/ will either be conducted then, or a convenient time/day will be scheduled with the participant. RCs/RAs will ask the potential participant to first take a couple of days to think about it/reflect upon the possibility of participation, if they sense any hesitation in their provision of consent.

Please note: For photography covering participants' or their life worlds, the RCA/RAs will share a separate information and consent sheet (again in their native language):

- The RCs/RAs must talk the potential participant through the information and consent sheet
- This will explain, verbally and in writing, how the photos are likely to be used; and will include release of photos/images of participants and their life spaces.
- It will also clearly state the participant's right to withdraw their images/participation at any date up to a specific date (yet to be specified) by informing the research team verbally, by phone, text, email or in writing.
- We will only introduce this method to participants with whom we have interacted with for some months and built trusting relationships with. We will seek written consent through signature (if it does not cause the participant distress) or thumbprint on the consent form.

Vulnerable groups

The application of vulnerability and its scope in research has also been a subject of much debate and this deserves more attention in the context of different forms of vulnerability that are emerging around systemic risks like climate change, Covid-19, conflicts, and more

(Bracken-Roche et al, 2017). However, to be very clear, as per XXX university's guidelines on vulnerable participants - there will be no vulnerable groups recruited or participating in this research project (see XXX document).

Please note that in our theoretical work on climate change, we use the term 'vulnerability' when speaking about potential communities or participants in which we wish to work with. This understanding of vulnerability is derived from academic debates in Human Geography and Development Studies which are summed up by Mustafa and Ahmed (2010, p. 3) here:

"The concept of vulnerability, even at the definitional level, has generated considerable debate in the academic community. While the physical scientists and engineers have typically equated it with physical exposure to extreme events and adverse outcomes, on the social [scientific] side the emphasis has been on failure of entitlement to resources, and [social] structural factors making certain groups differentially disadvantaged in the face of disasters (Adger, 2006). Some have attempted to bridge the gap between the physical and social scientific perspectives on vulnerability by proposing the concept of a 'vulnerability of place' where biophysical exposure intersects with political, economic and social factors to generate specific configurations of vulnerability (Cutter, 1996; Cutter et al., 2000)."

This project conceptualises vulnerable populations as people who are vulnerable to the following things:

experiencing significant social, political and/or structural **marginalisation** by society and/or the state (by being of an ethnic, religious, social or geographic group which is recognised to be marginalised from access to basic services, rights and human security through research and/or civil society) or,

environmental hazards which could become disasters e.g. drought, for example. One would be vulnerable to disaster if they live in a dryland area experiencing protracted drought that has knock on effects for livelihoods, food security and health.

Please note that we will **strictly not recruit any participants who are defined as 'vulnerable' on the UEA University Risk Checklist** e.g. no participants will be unable to give their own informed consent, no participants will be in a dependent position and unable to make their own decisions, no one under the age of 18, no over-researched groups, no people with learning difficulties, no people with mental health problems, no young offenders and no people in care facilities, including prisons. To re-iterate this, our recruited participants are only vulnerable as defined by 'vulnerability of place' – thus living in a region which has more exposure to structural marginalisation or hazards.

[Sustaining on-going consent in community participants](#)

While written consent will be sought for the individual fieldwork activities (except for photography), these are isolated in time, whilst our interactions with the community are on-going, through ActionAid's longstanding programming in each community, and through follow up visits by the research teams. Our researchers will therefore try to verify on-going/sustained consent through conversations with key stakeholders about their

understandings of and perceptions of our research, concerns they may have and then verbal consent will be re-sought periodically throughout the project period. The importance of ongoing verbal consent, rather than relying on written consent, is highlighted in the below quotes.

Shamim and Qureshi (2013), researchers from Pakistan highlight:

“International guidelines, implicitly as well as explicitly, recognize Informed Consent as a ‘written’ document, a form to be read and signed by the research participant(s). In some cultures, like Pakistan, oral or informal consent is more binding on the participants than formal written consent. In fact, often, signing a written consent form is regarded with suspicion, especially in non-literate communities, where signatures or thumb impressions (in cases of non-literate participants) are often required for legal documentation only. Similarly, in research environments characterised by oral cultures, the power of the written word can also be invoked for shifting the blame onto someone else ” (472-473)

Furthermore, Alaei et al (2013) explain that:

“Developing effective informed consent documents requires thoughtful consideration of the language of participants as well as the social and cultural context where a study will be implemented. In resource poor settings where illiteracy rates are high, challenges associated with comprehension of informed consent documents may be exacerbated.

Trust is an essential aspect of communication during the consent process and influences decisions regarding participation. Levels of trust vary considerably depending upon an individual’s or communities past experience with research and factors associated with social status and power. Socio-economic background, residence, gender, age, and education both express and reinforce differences in the relative power of individuals during the consent discussion. Individuals are more likely to experience trust when the person seeking their consent shows respect for their cultural beliefs, language, perceptions of risks, and social and political history.

Verbal consent is appropriate when risks associated with research are low and the potential harm for participants is unlikely. Hyder and Wali have surveyed more than 200 researchers involved in collaborative international studies and found that almost 40% did not use written consents. Physician researchers were more likely to use written consent than non-physicians and that written consent was more likely to be used in areas of high literacy. Moreover, in many cultural settings, agreements based upon trust do not require a signature. For example, in comparing the negotiation of informed consent in Pakistan and Swaziland, Upvall and Hashwani have reported that some participants were uncomfortable signing the form if they were illiterate or did not understand its contents” (39-40)

Finally Riessman (2005) reflects on the problem in trying to ask consenting female participants to sign consent forms, in her ethnographic research in India:

“Narrative researchers face a particular set of dilemmas that challenge the thinking of institutional review boards, accustomed to assessing risks and benefits in drug trials and other treatment regimens... I hear their [the women’s] worry. The consent form was a

government document – an import from the West, designed to meet my university’s institutional review board requirements that are, in turn, dictated by the National Institutes of Health, a US government agency. Signing documents in the Indian context carries a history of well-deserved suspicion: government intrusion into property rights, inheritance, marriage customs and reproductive health. Strangers seeking information and bearing forms are not easily trusted, especially in rural villages... Committees have been guiding investigators with universal propositional ethics; many of us in the field need alternatives – an ethics-in-context, grounded in the exigencies of settings.” (477-478 and 486)

Participant Category 2: Key Informants

- Key informants will be approached by scheduling a meeting at their office, online, or if they request – somewhere else (e.g. ActionAid’s offices or a coffee shop).
- The researchers attending the meeting will explain in detail the nature of the research project, including its aims, scope, methodology and proposed analysis mechanisms. An information sheet will be shared with them, and they will be asked if they have any questions about the research.
- Participants will be asked to read the information sheet and will also be briefed in full verbally about their rights to confidentiality and their right to withdraw their participation and data at any time before a specific date (which is yet to be confirmed).
- Telephone numbers and email details of the principal researchers (the research Coordinator, Dr. Roger Few; Dr. Amiera Sawas and Ms. Ruby Moshenska, ActionAid International’s Global Head of Safeguarding), will be shared with all participants and they will be encouraged to make contact if they have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, or should they want to withdraw.
- The contact details of a member of the legacy board will also be shared, in case they prefer to reach out to a party not from ActionAid or UEA.
- Once this has all been discussed, and the researcher has clarified that everything is understood by the potential participant, verbal consent will be sought.
- If consent is given, then interview will either be conducted then, or a convenient time/day will be scheduled with the participant

In both participant categories the right of the participant to refuse to participate without giving reasons must be respected. All participants are free to withdraw at any time from the study treatment without giving reasons.

This project holds gender issues at its core. Taking into account intersectionality and gender issues (Sheilds, 2008), RAs will be from similar socio-economic backgrounds to participants. Female RAs will interview female participants and male RAs will interview males, which is context-appropriate. The team will be extremely sensitive when interviewing women, especially (Ellsberg and Heise, 2002; Sinner et al, 2013; Jacobs et al, 2000). We will try to minimize the risks involved in discussing any issues related to disasters or conflict/violence by acknowledging our understanding of the emotional difficulties of the research process, and empathic listening, at times sharing our own experiences.

4. Right to Withdraw

All participants will be briefed in full, verbally, about the purpose, aims, objectives and methods of this research project. This will be done in their native language. They will be offered the same information in writing. Participants will also be briefed on the possible risks or benefits to taking part. This will include the right of withdrawal.

Before each interview, FGD or participatory action research session, participants will be informed of the confidentiality and anonymity of their participation as well as their right to withdraw at anytime before a specific date, which is yet to be determined. Contact details will be provided and they will be encouraged to get in touch should they have any concerns or wish to withdraw.

Participants can withdraw verbally, in writing (letter or email) or over the phone (text or voice), to any RC, RA, Dr. Few, Dr. Sawas, Dr. Tebboth or Dr. Singer.