

## **SANPARKS RESEARCH STATEMENT OF ETHICAL PRACTICE**

*(Adapted with kind permission from the Tree-house Research Programme for People and Conservation)*

### **PREFACE**

Research of all kinds—social, biophysical, economic—carries consequences, both negative and positive, to the subjects of the research and others as well. Social Science Research for People and Conservation has as an overall objective, the production and dissemination of knowledge that ultimately will increase human welfare through enhanced capacity of protected area stewardship. Social Science Researchers need to acknowledge that their research will carry consequences and as such must be committed to minimizing the negative consequences to study participants in specific projects. Key to understanding the potential negative consequences of Social Science research is an understanding of the social, political, cultural and biophysical context of individual research projects.

Social Scientists need to recognize that there are varying risks of negative consequences to different subject populations. Social Scientists must ensure that study participants are made aware of any risks attendant to specific studies. To that end, Researchers must commit to addressing and reducing risks and to informing potential respondents of such risks, and to gaining consent from study participants prior to the use of interviews and questionnaires.

To promote ethical social science research, Social Scientists should commit themselves to the following:

- a. participation by selected elements of a study population is voluntary; subjects will be asked if they are willing to participate;
- b. no harm will be done to study participants; in addition, given the disparities in capacity in the South African society, Researchers have a responsibility to, where ever possible and appropriate, to reasonably empower research subjects, at least in terms of their confidence and understanding.
- c. Social Scientists will seek informed consent from selected subjects.
- d. Social Scientists will act to ensure in their data collection, analysis and display methodologies that respondent data is kept both confidential and anonymous;
- e. Social Scientists will act to ensure that Researchers and interviewers in projects are trained in ethical responsibilities;
- f. Findings of studies will be peer reviewed prior to release and publication; limitations to the study will be described; and the study respondents will be provided an opportunity to view findings.

The Social Science Researcher should recognize that an ethical code of conduct to guide social research is only as robust in as far as it is brought to bear in the research process. The research should therefore ensure that any study proposal and/or study plan will demonstrate an awareness of potential harmful consequences or risks of the proposed research and how the Researcher will deal with them.

Finally, Social Science Researchers should agree to follow the attached statement of ethical principles:

### **The Principle of Due Consideration of Consequences**

- In the planning of research, Researchers should consider the foreseeable consequences of their research. The ability to reasonably predict the consequences of social research will rely on an understanding of the context of the research subjects. Due diligence on the part of the Researchers should therefore be shown in terms of understanding the context and the anticipated research consequences within the given context. Due diligence facilitates attention to fairness towards research subjects in the planning phase of the research.

### **The Principle of Respect and Protection**

- Research should preferably be undertaken with, and not merely on, the identified community. Research should be conducted with respect for the dignity and self-esteem of the individual and for basic human rights.
- Research and the pursuit of knowledge should never be regarded as the supreme goal at the expense of participants' personal, social and cultural values.
- The Researcher must respect the autonomy and protect the welfare of all participants, and must therefore obtain the informed consent of the participants. This consent should be given in writing where necessary, according to accepted guidelines, especially if the research is of a sensitive nature. The Researcher should be concerned particularly about the rights and interests of more vulnerable participants, such as children, the aged and the disabled. In general, all research must observe the international norms of avoiding harm, providing benefit wherever possible and acting justly.
- Constitutionally, a 'child' means a person under the age of 18 years. Research that can equally well be done with adults should never be done with children. However, where children are the participants, legal consent should be given in writing by either the parents, guardian, or custodian - whenever possible, on the understanding that the child has the freedom to withdraw from the research at any stage.
- The Researcher should respect the right of individuals to refuse to participate in research and to withdraw their participation at any stage. Participation in research requires informed, uncoerced consent of participants. Researchers should inform participants, in language they can understand, of the aims and implications of the research project and of any other considerations which might reasonably be expected to influence their willingness to participate.
- Information obtained in the course of research that may reveal the identity of a participant or an institution should be treated as confidential unless the participant or institution agrees to its release. Research findings relating to specific individuals, institutions and organisations should be reported in a way that protects the personal dignity and right to privacy of participants. Furthermore, whenever methodologically feasible, participating individuals and institutions should be allowed to respond anonymously or under a pseudonym to protect their privacy. The Researcher should be constantly aware that the research might prejudice the position of research participants if measures are not taken to prevent such prejudice.
- Participants may be suitably recompensed on condition that all participants are offered similar rewards and that such rewards are related to the sacrifices required

of them to make their contribution, e.g. transport costs, meals, and tokens of appreciation, thereby observing the norms of justice and the avoidance of detriment.

### **The Principle of Transparency**

- Before undertaking any research the Researcher should ensure that the participants are clearly briefed on the aims and implications of the research as well as the possible outcomes and benefits of the research. Participants should also be informed of any additional factors that might reasonably be expected to influence their willingness to participate.
- Should the methodology of a research project necessitate the concealment of information, the Researcher should before conducting such a study determine whether the use of such a methodology is justified by the project's prospective scientific, educational or applied value, determine whether alternative procedures that do not require the concealment of information could be used instead, and ensure that the participants are given the reasons for the concealment of information as soon as is practically possible.
- In the communication of their findings, Researchers should subscribe to the principles of honesty, transparency and scrutiny by the public and their peers.
- No financial or other inducement should be offered to participants, whether children or adults, or parents/guardians of children, to ensure a particular research result.

### **The Principle of Scientific and Academic Professionalism**

- Researchers should conduct their research, if applicable, in accordance with the professional code of the association of which they are members.
- Researchers should not misuse their positions or knowledge as Researchers for personal power or gain.
- Researchers should at all times strive to achieve the highest possible level of scientific quality in their research.

### **References**

- Human Science Research Council of South Africa. [Available online: <http://www.hsrc.ac.za/about/researchEthics/draftCode.html>]
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