Guiding principles for researchers working with government in the developing world

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1.1 My research involves interacting with, working for, and directly influencing governments in the developing world. These guidelines outline my commitments to the research community and to the governments with whom I work in the course of that research.

1.2 The importance of such guidelines arise from a number of concerns unique to this context. One, close proximity to the organisations on which I work means that I sometimes have influence on the actions of the organisation. Two, there exists a tension between access to sensitive information and the responsibility to disclose it. Three, mere interaction with government can change the way it works and its effectiveness in ambiguous ways.

1.3 I commit to upholding the following principles in the course of my research.

2. Responsibilities

2.1 I have two central responsibilities, neither of which should be compromised in the course of my inquiries:

   i)   My responsibility to the research community is, to the best of my abilities, to be objective, transparent, and independent in all of my work.
   ii) My responsibility to the government with whom I am working is, to the best of my abilities, not to cause it harm, to respect its rights as the information provider, and to respect the administrative, cultural, and social context of the organisation.

2.2 Building on the first of these, I commit to uphold the ethical guidelines provided by the Social Research Association (available at www.the-sra.org.uk/ethical.htm) as far as they are relevant to the setting. More generally, I will uphold currently prevailing professional ethics and standards in all my work.

3. Impact

3.1 I am responsible for the impact and welfare consequences of my research work.

3.2 Under no circumstances should I take action that is likely to cause harm to the government with whom I work, or to any of the officials with whom I interact.

3.3 If the welfare consequences of my research are apparent before the initiation of my research, I must outline these responsibilities in full to the government agency with whom I am working. If I believe the undertaking of my research is having unintended consequences on the welfare of the government, government officials, or the citizenry, I must communicate these consequences at the earliest possible time to the relevant official(s). Where continued investigation is likely to have negative consequences for government, its officials, or the citizenry, I should seek to minimise that damage as quickly as possible, and discontinue the research if necessary.

3.4 During the course of my research, I aim to assist and support the development of good government, such that our interaction is mutually beneficial. This work should not contravene the responsibilities laid out above. Where I feel the benefits of my activities are highly skewed towards myself, I will identify ways to reset this balance.

3.5 In circumstances where I believe there is a tension between causing no harm and the development of good government, I should choose the former. As a researcher, I should not use the position provided

me by my work to directly campaign against the activities of any government or government official. More broadly, I should not undertake actions that harm the perception of the research community by government.

4. Disclosure of information

4.1 The disclosure of information to third parties, including publication in the public domain, must be agreed to by the agency under study or that facilitated the research. Whenever I have uncertainties about disclosure or publication, I will seek clarification from the relevant member of government.

4.2 Where there is disagreement within government over such permissions, I will act on the advice of the party/ies with whom I have been working.

4.3 I commit to trying my utmost to gain permission to release information important to my central arguments without endangering my relationship with the government with whom I work. Where it is not possible to disclose such information, I commit to making a fair and objective assessment of the relationship of interest, making clear important caveats.

4.4 I commit to being honest and explicit about the interests of the government agency with whom I work in the data generation process. I will report truthfully to the research community on the origins of data I receive, any financial support received for generating the data, and the political and/or bureaucratic process that led to its existence. If there is cause for concern as to the validity of the data, I commit to highlighting these concerns clearly to the research community.

5. Documentation

5.1 If possible, all major decisions by government or myself regarding my work should be agreed in writing. It is best practice to provide the agency with whom I have been collaborating with the final copy of whatever publications arise from the research.

5.2 I commit to communicate with the agency in a way that is accessible to officials there. All communications should be honest, transparent, and encompass all information relevant to the argument being made.

6. Working practice

6.1 At all times I must display honesty and integrity in my behaviour. I will negotiate honestly with government agencies concerning the costs to them of my work, tasks to be undertaken, and uses of data resulting from a specific piece of research. It is primarily my responsibility to initiate discussion and clarification of these matters, not the governments.

6.2 I commit to being sensitive to the administrative, cultural, and social context of the organisation with whom I work. To the greatest extent possible, I should integrate these practices into my engagement with the agency.

6.3 I will make clear to my government partners all significant changes made to the originally negotiated project plans, and the reasons why the changes were made.