

# Guidelines

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



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## **Foreword**

Based on the recommendations of the German Research Foundation (DFG, 2019), the German Institute of Development and Sustainability has agreed its own Guidelines on Safeguarding Good Research Practice.

These Guidelines are primarily intended to raise awareness of the basic rules of research practice, keep them fresh in people's minds and communicate them to early-career researchers as self-evident requirements of research work. They relate to all activities in the research process. They are also designed to make clear IDOS' unwillingness to accept research misconduct, given that this undermines public confidence in the scientific community and trust between researchers themselves.

Academic integrity is a commitment considered by all researchers to be a matter of basic ethics.

## **Section 1**

### **Good research practice**

- (1) Research work is underpinned by basic principles that apply equally to all academic disciplines. The highest principle is being honest with oneself and others. This also serves as the ethical standard and basis for the rules of professionalism in research (which differ from discipline to discipline), that is, good research practice.
- (2) Key aspects of good research practice include:
  - general principles of research work, in particular
    - o documenting results and sources of data and knowledge carefully and, wherever possible, making them accessible to other researchers;
    - o consistently questioning one's own findings;
    - o being absolutely honest about the contributions of third parties;
  - cooperation and assumption of leadership responsibility in working groups;
  - provision of support to early-career researchers;
  - compliance with the rules for personal data collection laid down in the General Data Protection Regulation of the European Union (European Union, 2016);
  - protection and storage of primary data in accordance with legislative requirements;
  - use of research publications as a means for researchers to provide accountability regarding their work;
  - observance of third-party intellectual property rights;
  - clarification of rights of use at the earliest possible opportunity in agreements;
  - compliance with ethical standards when carrying out data collection.
- (3) Good research practice can only be established if all IDOS staff members work together. Responsibility for complying with and communicating the relevant rules rests first and foremost with each individual member of research staff, including project managers, heads of working groups, supervisors of masters or PhD theses and holders of other leadership positions. The Institute's research programmes and their heads carry out the tasks assigned to them in regard to training, the promotion of early-career researchers and the organisation of research and academic activities. The Service Facilities assist research staff with shaping the research process, taking account of the aforementioned principles. The Institute's ombudspersons serve as the first port of call for questions about good research practice and the first instance in the event of disputes.

## **Section 2**

### **Research misconduct**

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

1. False information in the form of
    - fabrication of data;
    - falsification of data and sources, for instance by means of
      - o withholding the relevant sources, documents or text,
      - o manipulating sources, figures or images,
      - o selecting desirable results and omitting undesirable results without declaring as such;
    - making incorrect statements in an application letter or in a funding application (including supplying false information about the publisher and publications currently being printed);
    - making incorrect statements about the research output of applicants in selection or expert committees.
  2. Infringement of intellectual property rights in regard to a copyrighted work produced by a third party or significant research findings, hypotheses, teachings or research approaches originating from a third party in the form of
    - unauthorised exploitation under the claim of authorship (plagiarism);
    - exploitation of research approaches and ideas, in particular as an expert in peer review and selection processes and/or in the role of supervisor for early-career researchers (theft of ideas);
    - claims of academic authorship or co-authorship without having made any contribution to the research oneself;
    - falsification of content;
    - unauthorised publication or unauthorised granting of access to third parties prior to publication of the work, the findings, the hypothesis, the teaching content or the research approach;
    - claims of (co-)authorship for another person without their consent;
  3. Interference in third-party research in the form of
    - sabotage, including
      - o deceitful relocation or theft of books, archives, manuscripts or data sets,
      - o intentionally rendering research information media unusable;
    - disposal of primary data insofar as this violates legislative requirements or generally accepted principles of academic practice in a particular discipline;
    - unauthorised destruction or unauthorised sharing of research material;
- (3) An individual may share responsibility for misconduct as a result of actively participating in third-party misconduct, having knowledge of third-party falsification, co-authoring falsified publications, or committing gross negligence in regard to their supervisory duty.

### **Section 3**

#### **Preventing research misconduct**

- (1) In order to safeguard good research practice and prevent research misconduct, the following rules must be observed at IDOS:
  1. All staff members must be made aware of the principles of research work and good research practice, with appropriate emphasis placed on the particular importance of due diligence, honesty and ownership in academic work. The different manifestations and sources of research misconduct must also be addressed in order to raise sufficient awareness of the issue among staff members.
  2. It is necessary to inform all staff members of the existence and role of the ombudspersons (see Section 4) at the Institute and to make them aware that these ombudspersons serve as the first point of contact in the case of doubt or disputes.
  3. Cooperation within working groups must be designed in such a way that the results achieved through the specialised division of tasks can be shared on a mutual basis, subjected to critical discourse, and integrated into a common body of knowledge. When it comes to joint research products, all co-authors share responsibility for observing the guidelines.
  4. Steps must be taken to ensure the provision of support to early-career researchers.
  5. Primary data used as the basis for publications must be stored for a period of 10 years on durable and secure data media at the institution holding the rights to this data or archived for the long term in a repository and, wherever possible, made accessible to the public.
  6. Absolute honesty is required concerning the contributions of other researchers. Those who have made a significant contribution to the research must be named as co-authors. Those who have not made any significant contributions cannot be listed as co-authors.
  7. The Institute shall make suitable anti-plagiarism software available and draw staff members' attention to this software on a regular basis. Use of the software is voluntary. Authors of IDOS publication series confirm with their signature that they are aware of this option and have intentionally chosen not to utilise the software.

### **Section 4**

#### **Ombudspersons**

- (1) The Directorate appoints an ombudsperson and a deputy ombudsperson for a period of five years. These individuals should be members of research staff on a permanent contract of employment. They can be reappointed once.
- (2) Ombudspersons serve as trusted individuals and contacts for staff members, receive tip-offs about research misconduct, and are on hand as contacts to deal with all questions that any IDOS staff members have about good research practice.
- (3) Ombudspersons have the following responsibilities:
  - provision of advice on academic integrity;
  - mediation in the event of conflict over suspected research misconduct;
  - informing staff members about procedures and potential conflict situations.

- (4) In the event of suspected research misconduct, the Institute's research staff have the option of contacting IDOS' ombudspersons or the DFG-appointed body, the "German Research Ombudsman".
- (5) The ombudspersons report once a year to the Directorate. Reports must be composed in such a way that the individuals concerned cannot be identified.

## **Section 5**

### **Procedure in the event of tip-offs concerning research misconduct**

- (1) If the ombudspersons are notified about a case of suspected research misconduct on the part of the Institute's staff, they will conduct a summary assessment of the tip-offs in terms of their factual basis and implications, potential motives and options for resolving the allegations or mutually clarifying disputed issues. To this end, the ombudspersons will notify the individual(s) about whom suspicions have been raised in relation to research misconduct that such a tip-off has been provided, inform them of the incriminating facts and, where relevant, the associated evidence, and offer both them and the party providing the tip-off an opportunity to make a written or verbal statement.
- (2) Once the summary assessment has been conducted, the ombudspersons will notify the individuals concerned of the result and the subsequent procedural steps to be taken. The ombudspersons can offer the affected individuals a facilitated meeting or mediation at this stage, along with recommendations for amicably concluding the procedure. If the party providing the tip-off and the individual(s) about whom suspicions of research misconduct have been raised agree to the recommendations in writing and implement any instructions they contain, then the procedure is deemed to have been concluded.
- (3) If the ombudspersons are unable to bring about mutual resolution of the conflict based on the aforementioned requirements or if they believe that there is reasonable suspicion of serious infringement of the rules of good research practice, then they will inform the affected individuals of this. They will also inform the Directorate immediately and ask it to set up a commission to establish whether and in what form research misconduct has been committed. The commission will comprise one programme head and two further members of research staff. The commission members must not belong to the same programmes as the individuals involved in the suspected case of research misconduct.
- (4) The commission is authorised to obtain the information and statements required to establish the facts and, in individual cases, to call upon expert reviewers from the research sector concerned, as well as other experts. The commission will freely appraise the evidence to determine whether research misconduct has been committed. Both the suspected individual(s) and the party providing the tip-off must be afforded a suitable opportunity to make a statement; they must also be given an oral hearing if so requested. The suspected individual(s) and the party providing the tip-off can each call upon a trusted person to offer counsel.
- (5) The ombudspersons can also present relevant facts during the investigation procedure on behalf of the party providing the tip-off without disclosing the identity of that party, unless the party has agreed to their identity being disclosed. If the identity of the party providing the tip-off is not known to the suspected individual(s), then it must only be disclosed if the suspected individual(s) would not otherwise be able to defend themselves appropriately. In this case, the party providing the tip-off is free to retract the allegations prior to their identity being disclosed.

- (6) The commission must present to the Directorate a final report on the outcome of their investigation, along with a recommendation as to the next steps. At the same time, the commission must inform the individuals concerned and the ombudspersons of the outcome of their investigation.
- (7) The Directorate will decide, based on the final report and the commission's recommendation, whether the procedure should be terminated or whether sufficient evidence of research misconduct has been provided. In the latter case, it will also decide upon the measures to be taken, whether under labour, civil or criminal law, or in an academic context.

## **Section 6**

### **General procedural principles**

- (1) As general procedural principles for the procedure in Section 5, it is determined in particular
  - that the party providing the tip-off must make their allegations in good faith. Intentionally bringing wrongful or malicious allegations could in itself constitute research misconduct;
  - that neither the party providing the tip-off nor the suspected individual(s) should become disadvantaged in their own research work or professional career as a result of the allegations before the procedure has been concluded;
  - that the individual(s) suspected of research misconduct should be given the opportunity to make a statement in every phase of the procedure;
  - that an ombudsperson or commission member can recuse themselves or be recused by the parties involved in the procedure from participating in the procedure due to partiality;
  - that all those involved in the procedure and the findings up to that point must be subject to strict confidentiality until culpable misconduct has been proven. In particular, this means that only the individuals listed in Section 5 may be notified of the subject of the procedure, its progress and the identity of those affected, and only to the extent necessary for those individuals to carry out their respective role in the procedure;
  - that the individuals listed in Section 5 will seek a swift conclusion to the procedure in the interests of all involved;
  - that the results of individual procedural phases will be recorded transparently in writing and the affected parties will be notified of the results in a timely manner;
  - that the principle of innocent until proven guilty will apply until the procedure outlined here has been concluded.

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