

**Development Research Methods**  
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**Module No # 02**  
**Lecture No # 06**  
**Ethics in Development Studies & Development Research**

Hello and welcome to the NPTEL MOOC's course on development research methods. This is lesson 3 of week 2. In this lesson we will focus on the much talked about issues of ethics in development studies and development research. Ethics is an important domain of concern when we are following social subjects or when we are following subjects for clinical trials and so on. However, the focus of today's lesson will be on what are the different ethical issues that we encounter when we are investigating a social issue.

Now, anthropologists were one of the first to raise concerns about ethics with regard to their studies, and they were mostly concerned about the ulterior motives for which applied social sciences are undertaken. The very famous anthropologist, Margaret Mead is supposed to have said that if applied anthropology is to become a profession like many other professions then, instead of simply collecting random activities, there is a need for professional ethics, just as in the case of medical and legal profession. Now, among the social sciences, a statement on ethics for the purposes of research was first published by the Society for Applied Anthropology in 1962. And consequently, various other associations pertaining to different disciplines of the social sciences have also come up with similar statements of ethics.

But strictly speaking, statements on ethics were however, first formulated in medical sciences. It has proved difficult for the social sciences to follow the ethical models of other disciplines. For example, biomedical sciences, because of significant differences in scope of work and methodologies. Now, the ethical codes of medicine and biomedicine for example, must reflect controlled experiments involving human beings, which is their primary methodology. A central principle in biomedical codes of ethics is what is referred to as informed consent. And this is something which has been borrowed by the social sciences from biomedical research. Now, what is informed consent in the case of biomedical research is that when subjects should be aware of the fact and accept that they are being studied or investigated, and the potential subject must also understand the intention of research and sign an informed consent form, which incidentally must

specify that the subject also has the right to withdraw from the investigation at any point of time, if she so needs to.

However, if we have to stick on to these principles of informed consent with regard to withdrawal of the subject from the research investigation process, then it is possible that it may lead to a ban of covert research in social sciences entirely and abolish a great deal of participant observation research. Now, both the medical sciences and social sciences bear witness to numerous cases where ethical codes of conduct have been violated. For example, in the case of dumping of medicines in the developing countries by the Western countries, which have been banned in the Western countries or trials of medicines undertaken in the developing countries for the purpose of family planning and so on. And there are numerous such cases where there have been violations of ethical codes of conduct.

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### Question of ethics in research for development

- Medical sciences origin of statements of ethics
- Central principle of biomedical codes of ethics
- Ethical principles for social sciences
  - First formulated in 1942- CUDOS
  - Communalism- research results are public property
  - Universalism- independence of gender, race, colour or creed
  - Disinterestedness- results should not be manipulated to serve personal profit or ideology
  - Organised Scepticism- criticism and self-criticism of research process and results
- Regulations and codes of conduct – Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth(ASA), British Sociological Association (BSA), Social Research Association (SRA), American Sociological Association

However, if we have to look in terms of the norms of ethical principles for social sciences, the norms of ethical principles for social sciences was first formulated in 1952, as is shown on your slide, and are habitually used as a reference point under the acronym CUDOS, which is formed by putting together the initial letters from the 4 norms that constituted sociologist Robert Merton's 'original ethos of science', they are as follows. The first one is Communalism alternatively also referred to as communism in most literature, which basically says that research results are public property. In other words, all scientists should have equal access to scientific goods which is intellectual property, and there should be a sense of common ownership in order

to promote collective collaboration. Secrecy is the opposite of this norm. The second is Universalism, which basically says that all scientists can contribute to science regardless of race, nationality, culture or gender. The third is that of Disinterestedness, according to which scientists are supposed to act for the benefit of a common scientific enterprise rather than for personal gain. And Organized Skepticism, which means that scientific claims must be exposed to critical scrutiny before being accepted.

And in this context, it is also important to mention that the professional associations for different types of research, including the Social Research Association, the Association of Social Anthropologists of the Commonwealth, the British Sociological Association, and the British Psychological Association have produced a variety of statements of ethical practice, which govern their professions.

Now, with this background with regard to ethics, let us see what we are going to cover in today's lecture. We will first look at the questions of ethics in the process of research for development. We will look at some of the codes of ethics that are widely used in development research, which is also applicable to the various other social science disciplines.

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## What we will cover in today's lecture

1. Questions of ethics in the process of research for development
2. Codes of ethics
3. Responsibilities to respondents
4. Responsibilities to colleagues
5. Wider accountability

There are certain responsibilities to the respondents or the participants of research, responsibilities towards colleagues as researchers and the responsibilities to the society at large or what is the wider accountability mechanisms that exist. This will be the content of our lesson today.

Let us have a look at how do we think through ethical issues in design, data collection and analysis. Researchers such as Michael Quinn Patton have come up with checklists as a starting point in thinking through ethical issues and design data collection and analysis. Let us begin with explaining purpose. Now, how will you explain the purpose of the inquiry and methods to be used in ways that are accurate and understandable? What language will make sense to participants in the study? What details are critical to share and what can be left out? And what is the expected value of your work to society and to the greater good? These are certain questions that through which you explain the purpose of research to the participants as well as the society at large. So, this is one of the checklists with regard to the ethical issues in design, data collection and analysis.

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The second is that of promises and reciprocity. Now in this we ask questions with regard to what is in it for the interviewee, the respondent or the participant or the subject who is the subject matter of your inquiry? What is in it for the interviewee? Often when we go for survey research or field work, we often get questions from the respondents regarding 'what do we get out of this research'. And that is a primarily ethical question with regard to what is to be told to the subject with regard to the purpose and intent of the research that we are carrying out. And this is something that we will take up in detail when we are looking at survey research methods. How to deal with the questions of the respondents or the interviewees keeping in mind the ethical question.

So, what is in it for the interviewee is why should the interviewee participate in the interview. One should not make promises lightly such as promising a copy of the audio tape or the videotape that we record on the field. And because if we cannot respect that commitment of sharing our research findings with the participants, it is best not to commit to the participants regarding the sharing of results. But if we share, we must go back to the participants and share the results with them. And this is something action research formats of doing research has been increasingly applying to its research methodologies- going back to the field and sharing the results of the study with the participants, because that is true collaboration and that enables the participants to also bring about some kind of a transformation within the locality that the research is being done.

The third checklist is with regard to risk assessment. So, the questions that we ask here are- in what ways if any, will conducting the interview put people at risk? Will there be psychological stress? Will there be legal liabilities? In evaluation studies will there be continued program participation if certain things become known? For example, when we are doing an evaluation study with regard to a certain government program, let us say receiving of benefits out of a social welfare program. And suppose there is an inclusion error, meaning that a beneficiary who should not be included has been included in the program, then the obvious next question by the respondent may be that if I am reported as being a beneficiary, although I should not have been a beneficiary, will I receive the continuing benefits that I am currently receiving? So how do we deal with these kinds of questions when we are doing research? Will the interviewees face ostracism by peers, program staff or others for talking? Will there be political repercussions? And how will you describe these potential risks to the interviewees is how will you handle them if they arise? These are certain issues with regard to risk assessment that must be kept in mind before going to the field for carrying out development research.

The fourth checklist is with regard to confidentiality and this is an important one. Now the questions that need to be asked here is what are the reasonable promises of confidentiality that can be fully honored? Now, one must know here the difference between confidentiality and anonymity, because confidentiality means, you know, but you would not tell. And this is something we usually carry out in clinical trials when you are negotiating consent with the patients or when you are negotiating consent with participants of social science research. So, you know, but you would not tell.

Anonymity means you do not know. So as in a survey, which is returned anonymously, suppose when we are carrying out surveys, through telephonic interviews or through emails, often the responses which we receive as part of a questionnaire that has been administered are anonymously returned to us. So, we do not know our participants, we are only concerned about the sample responses that we are getting from our respondents. So, anonymity means you do not know as in a survey returned anonymously. So what thing can you not promise confidentiality about that is also something which is very important. For example, there are illegal activities or evidences of child abuse or neglect. Will names locations and other details be changed? Or do participants have the options of being identified? Where will data be stored and how long will data be maintained? These are important issues with regard to confidentiality.

Informed consent- what kind of informed consent, if any, is necessary for mutual protection, politically sensitive situations, example party affiliation, private issues such as income data, health data, family affairs, tax avoidance, etc., they may require avoidance of these issues in public. Therefore, the researchers may consider a public or a private place for interview and a possible agreement with the respondent before going ahead with the interviews. Also, a possible agreement on the duration of interview before going ahead with the interviews.

The next checklist is with regard to data access and ownership. So, the most obvious questions here are, who will have access to the data, for what purposes, who owns the data and this is particularly important when we have video and audio recordings of the participants from the field. Who will benefit economically from published data? So, one needs to be very clear about this in the contract of funding and clarify to the respondents if we so wish. So, who has the right of review before publication? When we go out with the results for publications, whether it is in peer reviewed journals, or whether it is in the form of a government report, or in the media, then who has the right for review? Do we take it back to the participants to review the findings that we have as a part of our study?

There is also interviewer need for debriefing. So how are you and other interviewers likely to be affected by conducting the interviews? If interviews are conducted by an assistant and not the researcher personally, then debriefing by the assistant must be a routine for sharing of data. When we send out field assistants or research assistants to the field while we are directing the research questions or the project that is being undertaken, then there is a routine need for the

assistant on the field to debrief to the interviewer so that informed actions can be taken if the need so arises.

There is also a need for a confidant and an advisor who will be the researcher's confidant and counselor on matters of ethics during the study. And not all issues can be anticipated in advance. One may think of some kind an agreement with a confidant or a supervisor in advance. There are issues with regard to data collection boundaries, how hard will you push for data? What lengths will you go to in trying to gain access to data you want? What would not you do? And how hard will you push interviewees to respond to questions about which they show some discomfort? And these are issues that we regularly face when taking up studies with regard to the sensitive issues. For example, gender discrimination issues, or even sensitive information with regard to health information, sensitive information with regard to HIV AIDS, with regard to child abuse, and child neglect, sex trafficking and so on.

There is also a clear distinction that needs to be made between the ethical versus the legal. What ethical framework and philosophy informs your work and ensures respect and sensitivity for those you study beyond whatever may be required by law. So, what are the disciplinary or professional code of ethical conduct that will guide you? These are important things to keep in mind. And to all of these points, we must also add a checklist on permission to undertake research. Often, the entrance to the field is as important as the exit from the field. And in most countries, there are regulations for obtaining permission to conduct research. And a breach of these has resulted in researchers being expelled from the field and also from the country and procedures differ from country to country and over time, and sometimes it may require many months to be able to get the permission to conduct research.

So, these are a preliminary list of issues that need to be kept in mind. Guided by the questions that I have just discussed, which will enable us to think through the ethical issues in design, data collection and analysis. So, issues with regard to ethics must be kept in mind not just during data collection, but right from the beginning of research design and designing of the study up till the end of the analysis and dissemination of the results of the study.

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## Relations With and Responsibilities Towards Research Participants

- Ethics and Methods
  - Method of inquiry and ethics
  - Ethical dilemmas of interviewing
- Ethical Issues of Field Studies
  - Protecting research participants and honouring trust
  - Avoiding undue intrusion
  - Negotiating informed consent
  - Rights to confidentiality and anonymity
  - Fair return for assistance
  - Participants' intellectual property rights
  - Participants' involvement in research

Now, let us look at some of the things that needs to be kept in mind with regard to relations with and responsibilities towards research participants. Often the close and lengthy association of development researchers with people among whom they carry out research entails personal and moral relationships, trust and reciprocity between the research and research participants. It also entails a recognition of power differentials between them, and such issues can be highlighted under two heads. One is ethics and methods, and second is ethical issues and field studies. Now let us have a look at some specific issues.

### Protecting research participants and honoring trust

- Physical, social and psychological well being of participants
- Most anthropologists for example, would maintain that their paramount obligation is to research participants
- Sometimes, it may not be possible to fully guarantee research participants' interests. In such cases development researchers may consider in advance whether they should pursue that particular piece of research or not

Let us look at protecting research participants and honoring trust. Development researchers should endeavor to protect the physical, social and psychological wellbeing of those whom they study and to respect their rights, interest sensitivities and privacy. Most anthropologists, for



example, would maintain that their paramount obligation is to their research participants, and that when there is conflict, the interests and rights of those studied should come first. Under some research conditions, particularly those involving contract research, it may not be possible to fully guarantee research participants' interests. In such cases, development researchers would be well advised to consider in advance whether they should pursue that particular piece of research or not.

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## Negotiating informed consent

- Necessary information- *Purpose, consequences, identity of funders and sponsors, use of data, possible harm, data security, degree of anonymity and confidentiality*
- Conditions which constitute an absence of consent
- Consent in research is a process
- Use of technical data gathering devices
- Collecting information from proxies
- Future use of data collected

There are important things to keep in mind when negotiating informed consent. I began this lesson talking about informed consent in cases of medical and biomedical trials. But the cases of informed, consent in the field of social science research or development research also needs to be constantly negotiated and some of the important issues needs to be kept in mind. Now the principle of informed consent expresses the belief in the need for truthful and respectful exchanges between social researchers and the people whom the study. So negotiating consent entails communicating information likely to be material to a person's willingness to participate, such as the purpose of the study, the anticipated consequences of research, identity of funders and sponsors, anticipated uses of data, possible benefits and harm arising out of the study, degree of anonymity and confidentiality which may be afforded by informants and subjects.

Now, consent made after the research is completed is not meaningful at all. So because mostly, it will qualify as absence of consent. We cannot think of taking consent after the research has been completed. Further, the persons studied must have the legal capacity to give consent, where

subjects are legally compelled, for example, by their employer or government to participate in a piece of research, consent cannot be said to have been meaningfully given by the subjects. So, the subjects need to voluntarily participate in the research where questions are being investigated with respect to their issues.

Now, consent in research is a process and it is not a one-off event and may require renegotiation over time. When technical data gathering devices such as audio visual recorders and photographic records are being used, those studies should be made aware of the capacities of such devices and be free to reject their use. So often, suppose we go for collection of data with regard to certain HIV patients, and we have audio-video recording of their interviews, then the interviewees must be made aware of their capacities of being able to discard or the unusability of these devices as well.

Also, when information is being collected from proxies. By proxies, we mean, when the respondent who needs to be interviewed by the interviewer is absent for some reason or the other, and her space is filled by someone else who is answering on behalf of the respondent who should have been interviewed in the first place. So, when information is being collected from proxies, we must take care not to infringe on the private space of the original subject or the relationship between subject and the proxy. And if there are indications that the person concerned would object to certain information being disclosed, such information should not be sought by the proxy. This usually happens when we are conducting and there can be numerous examples of proxies standing up for information to be provided by the respondents.

Suppose we are going to the field to conduct a research on migration issues and the concerned respondent has migrated to some location for conducting research work, then the proxy takes the place of the migrant worker. However, the interviewer might have questions regard to incomes or assets of the respondent, then in that case, it may not be possible for the proxy to be able to answer these questions, and the respondent himself or herself might also request privacy with regard to giving away of such confidential information to the interviewer. And therefore, this privacy should be maintained by the interviewer.

Similarly the long period over which development researchers make use of their data and the possibility that unforeseen uses or theoretical interests may arise in the future may need to be conveyed to participants as should any likelihood that the data may be shared in some form or

the other with other colleagues or be made available to sponsors, funders or other interested parties or deposited in archives. So therefore, that amount of ethical consideration must enter into the collection of data, where the data collected has been shared for future use in the form of providing information to other colleagues or to funders and interested parties or deposited in archives.

Now, let us look at what are the rights to confidentiality and anonymity. Informants and other participants should have the right to remain anonymous and to have their rights to privacy and confidentiality respected. However, this can also pose problems for a development researcher given the cultural and legal variations between societies and the various ways in which the real interest of the researcher may not be realized due to the invisibility of the participant over time. Often it is important that the participant come out into the open and have a face to face discussion with the interviewer so that the significant amount of information and crucial information can be recorded and brought out into the public. However, these anonymity issues can create hurdles for the development researcher in question.

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### Rights to confidentiality and anonymity

- Right to remain anonymous
- Respecting the 'private space'
- Anticipating potential threats to anonymity and confidentiality
- Unintentional compromises of anonymity
- Honouring guarantees made of confidentiality
- Respecting measures taken by other researchers

However, care should be taken not to infringe uninvited upon the private space, the private space as locally defined or locally contextualized by the subjects themselves. As far as possible, researchers should anticipate potential threats to confidentiality and anonymity, and researchers should also strain to anticipate problems likely to compromise anonymity, but they may make

clear to participants that it may not be possible in field notes and other records that are being maintained by the interviewers to maintain this kind of secrecy or anonymity.

However, the point is that if guarantees of privacy and confidentiality are made, they must be honored, unless they clear and there are overriding ethical reasons not to do so. And similarly, development researchers may respect the measures taken by other researchers to maintain the anonymity of the research field and participants. The following slides give you an example of consent and confidentiality

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**An example – consent and confidentiality**

Studying the problems girls face in Surkhet, Nepal

A study of the difficulties girls face in Ramghat and Ghusra villages of Surkhet district, Nepal, produced a video documentary of girls' voices and a 'safe environment for girls project' in Ramghat. How were ethical issues addressed?

*functionaries*

*the group's expectations*

Informed consent was obtained from village development committees, school teachers, and NGOs before undertaking any fieldwork. Before starting the discussion with the various groups, the objectives of the research were outlined. The individual interviews with adolescent girls were kept confidential and not disclosed in their village. The names of the informants were not given in the report and pseudonyms were used. The individual girls for case study were chosen by the girls themselves and reasons were explained in the group before choosing the individual girls, to reduce the group's expectations.

This example is taken from a case study which studied the problems that girls face in Surkhet in Nepal. I will just read out the case to you to make sense of what do we mean by consent, confidentiality, and anonymity in case research. So, a study of the difficulties girls face in Ramghat and Ghusra villages of Surkhet district Nepal produced a video documentary of girls' voices and a safe environment for girls project in Ramghat. Now the issue is how were ethical issues addressed. First informed consent was obtained from village development committees, school teachers and NGOs before undertaking any field work. Before starting the discussion with the various groups, the objectives of the research were outlined, the individual interviews with adolescent girls were kept confidential and not disclosed in their village.

So, look at the thing with 'regarding to informed consent was obtained from village development committees.' So basically, a consent from the functionaries within the village was first taken school teachers and NGOs. Before starting the discussion with the various groups, the objectives

of the research were outlined to these various groups, and the individual interviews with adolescent girls were kept confidential and not disclosed in their village, which means the individual interviews of these adolescent girls were not disclosed to the village development committees, and NGOs and other various groups that existed within the village. And the names of the informants were not given in the report and pseudonyms were used. So, these informants are basically the adolescent girls. The individual girls for case study were chosen by the girls themselves. So, the girls' case studies were chosen by the girls themselves, which means that the girls had some agency with respect to choosing who becomes the informant. And the reasons were explained in the group before choosing the individual girls to reduce the group's expectations.

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To protect the girls, the draft video for girls' voices was shown to the children whose ideas were documented in filming. Once it was shown to the children, they requested and were excited to show the video to their parents too. The researchers again returned to the village and filmed the parents talking about the girls' difficulties and then showed them the film of girls' voices. In the video, lots of views were against the parents' behaviour towards daughters. Surprisingly their brothers and parents were convinced by the girls' ideas and agreed that what they said was happening in their village. Then the parents agreed to the video being shown to any audience.

*No each finding discussed with the respondents*

*Informed consent*  
*Confidentiality*  
*Anonymity*  
*diversification of findings*

To protect the girls, the draft video for girls' voices was shown to the children whose ideas were documented in the filming. So, this is where the research is taken back to the respondents in the form of showing the film, where research findings are discussed with the respondents and once it was shown to the children, they requested and were excited to show the video to the parents too. So, the children after ensuring that the video documentation was up to the mark, they wanted to take it back to their parents.

And the researchers again returned to the village and filmed the parents talking about the girls' difficulties and then showed them the film of girls' voices. So, in the video, lots of views were against the parent's behavior towards daughters, and surprisingly, their brothers and parents were

convinced by the girls' ideas and agreed that what they said was happening in that village, and then the parents agreed to the video being shown to any audience. So, this is a very clear example of informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and, therefore smooth dissemination of findings. This is how research findings when following the rules of confidentiality and anonymity can lead to better outcomes.

Now, there is also a responsibility of the interviewer towards the research community or the colleagues that the researchers are dealing with themselves. Now, development researchers derive their status and privileges of access to research participants not only by virtue of their personal standing, but also by virtue of their professional citizenship, and this is what we refer to as research community. Therefore, we owe obligations to the research community who largely are our colleagues and development researchers bear responsibility to the good reputation of the discipline and its practitioners.

So for example, if I am a development economist, which I am, and I go to the field for carrying out investigations with regard to a certain problem, let us say women's incomes or household incomes or out of pocket expenses on health, and there is a certain discipline and respect that my profession of being in development economics carries. And therefore, I carry the responsibility of that on my shoulders when I am going to the field. And therefore, I must respect the ethics that the profession of development economics carries, and conduct my research in such a manner such that I do not that violate the respect that the profession carries itself. So, in considering methods, procedures, content and reporting of inquiries, behavior in the field, and relations with research participants and field assistants, when should try to ensure that our activities does not jeopardize others' future.

And this is an immense responsibility that we carry when we go to the field. And we are interviewing participants, there is an immense responsibility on our shoulders of not corrupting, our participants of research, because that poses serious problems for future researchers in the field and this is an important area of concern, given the changing landscape of research particularly in the field of development practice and development economics, where we often come across with examples where participants are bribed to give responses to the questions, or participants are promised various kinds of benefits to be able to come and answer the questions. And these are concerns that really distort the research landscape in these areas of social science

research. And therefore, the responsibility that individual researchers bear with regard to the research community is huge.

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## Responsibilities towards colleagues

- Individual responsibility
- Conflicts of interest and consideration for colleagues
- Sharing research materials
- Collaborative and team research
- Researcher safety
- Responsibilities towards research students and field assistants
- Responsibilities towards women field researchers and field assistants
- Supporting southern researchers

Now, there may be conflicts of interest, which is professional and political between research colleagues, particularly in case of cross-national research and this must be recognized. In such cases the vulnerability of long-term research projects to inclusion may be recognized. Often when we are entering into cross-national research or research across countries, wherein we are collaborating with researchers from different countries, there may arise situations of conflict of interest. However, these conflicts of interest may jeopardize the research project that is being pursued. And therefore, there is a need to tread with caution when we are dealing with conflicts of interest with regard to cross-national research. And development researchers should give consideration to ways in which research data and findings can be shared with colleagues and research participants.

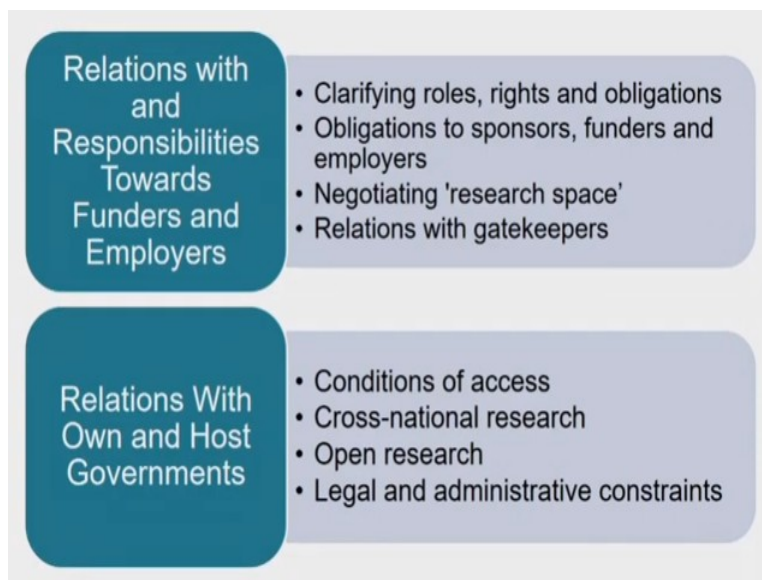
In some cases, for example, researchers will need to collaborate with researchers in other disciplines, as well as with researchers and field assistants, clerical staff, students, etc. And in such cases, they should make clear their own ethical and professional obligations, and similarly take account of the ethical principles of their collaborators. Often when we employ research staff with respect to field assistants and research assistants on the field, the people who are primarily involved in collection of the data and cleaning of the data, we might want to collaborate with the field assistants and research assistants and the clerical staff who are involved in the data cleaning



processes for the final publications of the research materials, and there must be a proper agreement that the researchers themselves need to carry out with the support staff to be able to ensure that the data is handled properly and scientifically. Academic supervisors and project directors should ensure that students and assistants are aware of the ethical guidelines and should discuss with them potential as well as actual problems which may arise during the fieldwork and writing up of the research. And these are a few things that needs to be kept in mind when we are talking about responsibilities towards the larger research community, which includes the whole set of co-researchers, colleagues, students, research students, field assistants, technical assistants, and so on.

Now, similarly, there are obligations to sponsors, funders and employers on the one hand, and relations with own and host governments on the other.

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Researchers should recognize their general and specific obligations to sponsors, funders and employers, whether these are contractually defined or are only the subject of informal and often unwritten agreements. Researchers should particularly be honest about their qualifications and expertise, the limitations, advantages and disadvantages of their methods and data, and they should acknowledge the necessity for discretion with confidential information provided by sponsors and employers. In negotiating research space, researchers are entitled to expect respect for professional expertise and integrity of data from a sponsor or funder irrespective of whether or not these obligations are incorporated in formal contracts. Even when contractual obligations



may necessitate the guarding of privileged information, the methods and procedures that have been utilized to produce the published data should not be kept confidential.

Now, often, where access to subjects is controlled by national or local gatekeepers, so by gatekeepers here we mean regulators who appear in various contexts while we are doing research. So researchers should not devolve their responsibilities on to the gatekeeper. While respecting great gatekeepers' legitimate interest, researchers should adhere to the principle of obtaining informed consent directly from the participants themselves. So, for example, when a researcher is working within an institutional setup, and there are agents within the institutional setup who act as gatekeepers for smoothening the research activities for the researchers themselves, it should not so be the case that the researchers depend upon these regulators for taking consent from the participants. The responsibility of taking consent from the participants for participating in research primarily lies with the researchers themselves.

Similarly, relations with own and host governments with respect to conditions of access, cross-national research, and legal and administrative constraints must also be born in mind. Moving on, there are responsibilities, there are larger responsibilities to the society as well.

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## Responsibilities to the Society

- Widening the scope of social research
- Considering conflicting interests
- Maintaining professional and scholarly integrity

Development researchers and practitioners depend upon the confidence of the public, and they should in their work attempt to promote and preserve such confidence. Practitioners should use the possibilities open to them to extend the scope of social inquiry and communicate their findings for benefit of the widest possible community. So, suppose as practitioners of research

we are conducting a study on complimentary feeding practices of children in the age group of 0 to 2 years in a certain community, let us say the tea garden communities of Assam. And we have some information with us with regard to specific feeding practices that go on to determine morbidity and mortality conditions among children. Then it is our ethical responsibility to ensure that the information with regard to this feeding practices are disseminated to the larger public and it is made known to the government functionaries, and to the bureaucratic apparatus at large so that interventions can be made at the right places to deal with these kinds of feeding practices. And this is what we mean by the responsibility of the researcher. The ethical issues of the researcher bearing responsibilities to the larger society. So, practitioners should use the possibilities open to them to extend the scope of social inquiry, and communicate their findings for the benefit of the widest possible community. And social inquiry is predicated on the belief that greater access to well-founded information will serve rather than threaten the interests of society. We can have many more examples with regard to this, however, will come to the specifics of examples when we take up the methods of research in the subsequent weeks.

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## Wider accountability of research

### *Structures to assist in making the researchers accountable*

- An advisory group for the research
  - At national level
    - National laws, administrative regulations, reference groups
- Research ethics committees
  - At community level
- Making information available

Now, there is also a wider accountability of research. When we are talking about responsibility, with responsibility comes accountability. So how accountable are the researchers themselves, keeping the research landscape in mind? Now, consider this, that if our aim is to study powerful people, such as the CEOs of multinational corporations or companies, then we cannot not be accountable in a certain way. But we can be sure that we will be made accountable in a certain

way because when we are publishing the results or findings with regard to powerful people within companies, then there will be direct questions with regard to hampering of public image of the CEOs. But the same does not happen when we are conducting studies on vulnerable sections of the population or poorer sections of the population who do not have that agency of challenging the researchers with regard to their research findings.

So, what do we do in such cases? So therefore, researchers need to set up structures to assist in making themselves accountable for their actions. An advisory group for research involving key stakeholders can be a good start, where there are constant checks and balances with regard to what is being published, what is being disseminated, and how aware are the respondents or the participants themselves with regard to the research that is being conducted.

We should also remember that in most cases, social science research data are not privileged under law. And there may be legal implications for the kind of study that we are undertaking. Now because of the particular risks of medical research, there is a well-developed approach within healthcare to scrutinize research proposals for ethical implications. Even institutions have ethical committees, that look after the proposals that are provided to them as to whether this research should be carried out on humans and animals and so on. In many countries, including India research proposals in the health field usually need to be submitted to a research ethics committee for approval before health service staff will be able to assist in contracting service users or staff. However, this does not seem to be in place for social sciences researchers, or development practitioners and development researchers. Because we are also dealing with as development practitioners and researchers, we are also dealing with people's lives, when we are conducting research on the field. And it is important that such kinds of advisory committees are in place to inform the researchers regarding the legal, extra legal and ethical complications of taking up questions for investigating the subjects.

Now researchers' relationship with the community cannot be over emphasized. Development work aims to empower communities and research needs to work in the same direction. If anyone is to learn from our work, it is essential that findings and information about methodology be published or otherwise made available to others. So therefore, the researchers bear a larger responsibility to the community that we are studying and primarily because we are dealing with community at large, our unit of analysis begin with the community moving on to the households and families and so on.

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### Ethical issues checklist in development research

- Is the research necessary?
- Is the research well planned as a project, and integrated into a programme of practical work?
- Have you considered the specific ethical issues raised by the project and how to address them?
- How will informed consent be obtained from the respondents?
- Are you providing accessible information about your project?
- What level of confidentiality and anonymity can you offer to participants? And how can they be effectively informed about this?
- Is there appropriate stakeholder participation in the project?

Lastly, let us look at some ethical issues, checklist in development research, which can be a starting point for early researchers in the field of development. The questions that need to be kept in mind are as follows. Is the research necessary? Is the research that we have embarked upon necessary to be carried out? Is the research well planned as a project and integrated into a program of practical work? Have you considered the specific ethical issues raised by the project and how to address them? How well-informed consent be obtained from the respondents? Are you providing accessible information about your project? What levels of confidentiality and anonymity can you offer to participants? And how can they be effectively informed about this? Is there appropriate stakeholder participation in the project?

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### Ethical issues checklist in development research- Contd

- Are you offering appropriate return for assistance?
- Are respondents able to see your version of the information they have given you?
- How will you ensure that the information is appropriately fed back to those who were researched?
- What systems are in place to ensure that you learn from your experience?
- How are respondents to be informed of, or consulted on, the results of the research?
- Assess any risks to field researchers and work out ways to minimize them

Are you offering appropriate return for assistants? So, assistants meaning the field assistants and technical assistants. Are respondents able to see your version of the information they have given you? As in are you sharing the research findings with the respondents who have given the information to you? How will you ensure that the information is appropriately fed back to those who are researched? What systems are in place to ensure that you learn from your experience? How are respondents to be informed of or consulted on the results of the research? Now, this is an important question. Often when the research project ends, and most research projects are based upon of funding or sponsorship. And when the sponsorship or funding of the project ends, it often becomes difficult to go back to the field to share the results with the respondents as that involves a cost aspect as well. Therefore, it is important that while designing of the research, these aspects are kept in mind. Taking the results back to the respondents should also be budgeted when the research design is being carried out. And lastly, assess any risks to field researchers and work out ways to minimize them.

Let me end this lesson on ethics by saying that in the final run, development researchers need to be honest in their intent and accountable in their actions. Honesty in intent and accountability in actions is very important with regard to the way the research has been designed, data has been collected, the analysis of the data and finally communication of that research for not just for research publications or to the funders, but also getting the results back to the participants who are the subjects of the study.

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## References used for this lecture

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- "Ethical Guidelines for good research practice", Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth (ASA), 2011
- Vandana Desai and Robert B. Potter, *Doing Development Research*, 2006, Sage Publications.
- Andrew Sumner and Michael Tribe, *International Development Studies: Theories and Methods in Research and Practice*, 2008, Sage Publications.
- Alan Thomas and Giles Mohan (eds.) *Research Skills for Policy and Development: How to find out fast*, 2007, Sage

For a comprehensive literature on the topics covered in this lecture it is also suggested that students go through the reference list of the above cited papers.

These are a list of references that I have used for this lecture. The first three references I have extensively used for this lesson and it is advised that those who are interested in looking up ethical issues surrounding research, look up these references in detail.

Thank you very much. I will see you in the next class.