

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH¹

IIED, JULY 2001.

Introduction

This Code of Conduct outlines for IIED staff, partners and donors the values we hope to uphold in the conduct of our work, and the procedures we will follow in our collaborative relations with others. We see strong advantages in specifying these values and procedures clearly, to ensure greater accountability and understanding amongst all parties.

IIED works with a wide range of organisations, in many parts of the world, and on many different issues. These include:

- Short-term consultancy contracts comprising time-bound, output-driven activities (including cases where IIED is the supplier and others where we are the purchaser);
- Open-ended advisory services to governments, corporations and NGOs; and
- Long-term collaborative partnerships involving research, mutual capacity strengthening, and joint advocacy/information activities.

Every relationship generates useful outcomes. We do not assume that short-term cooperation will or necessarily should lead to long-term partnership. At the same time, we recognise a need to strengthen our performance in the third category of *collaborative research*. Lacking core resources of our own, IIED must rely on funds raised from various sources of funding, a dependence that imposes particular constraints. Nevertheless, we aim to uphold similar principles in all of our work.

Standards of governance

IIED is governed by an independent Board of Trustees drawn from the countries in which we work. We encourage our partners to establish similar systems of governance that allow for rigorous oversight and guidance of their work, while also safeguarding intellectual freedom.

Developing partnerships

IIED aims to develop in-depth and long-standing relations with a limited number of key partners with whom multiple activities can be developed. Such collaboration should seek to go beyond the often highly personalised nature of many contracts towards an institute-wide understanding, within which to promote a broad exchange of experience, perspectives and proposals for future work.

While recognizing that our partners have very different access to resources and may not always share our views, IIED seeks in all cases to uphold a relationship of mutual respect and equality. This includes respecting the independence of all parties to initiate or terminate links with other organisations, or to advocate certain positions. IIED will not assume consensus, nor will we implicate partners in new activities without prior consent, and we expect the same in return.

¹ Previous drafts of this document were shared and discussed among IIED staff and with selected partners and IIED Board members during 2000/01. Complementary codes of practice are being developed to guide our work with donor agencies and with the private (for-profit) sector.

Joint planning, monitoring and evaluation

IIED aims to identify together with its partners a division of labour, responsibility, and funding that builds squarely on our respective strengths and weaknesses. In the best of cases, IIED is able to bring valuable comparative perspectives from elsewhere, a range of conceptual approaches, access to new thinking and ideas, capacity building and training opportunities, knowledge of funding sources and brokerage roles with funders. We are committed to spend time with our partners at the beginning and during the course of any collaborative project to ensure that our respective expectations are properly discussed. We also wish to follow working practices that are transparent and self-critical. Hence, jointly with our partners, we commit ourselves to review and evaluate our performance at the end of each major activity in the light of earlier commitments. This will normally take the form of a written report to the directors of each organisation.

The importance of written agreements

IIED believes that the preparation and agreement of a written contract (Terms of Reference or Memorandum of Understanding) with partners is an essential process during which to clarify expectations and to confirm the specific roles and responsibilities of individuals involved. While formal agreements can never cover all eventualities, writing them can help to reveal possible divergence between the expectations of different parties, providing an opening for discussion of how to reconcile conflicting agendas and interests at an early stage. Procedures for avoiding and resolving disputes should be spelled out clearly.

IIED believes that the process of drawing up a formal agreement is as important as the specific clauses themselves, since this process provides the opportunity to specify clearly how each side wishes to take forward the work in hand. During contract negotiations, IIED needs to make clear to partners its responsibility to its donors, which obliges us to follow certain guidelines regarding contractual forms and financial reporting. However, IIED needs to maintain flexibility regarding contract models, to suit differing circumstances. Equally, our partners will have responsibilities to their own constituents and towards IIED that must be respected.

Financial flexibility and transparency

IIED operates within a funding environment that is often uncertain. As a result, we must seize opportunities when they arise. Nevertheless, we aim to institute an interim period with all projects during which we can establish a proper discussion of priorities and activities, and to revise activities to suit the interests of all parties.

IIED upholds the principle of transparency regarding budgets and financial arrangements between partners. Hence, we would wish to open our books and ways of doing business to partners in similar fashion to the openness that we expect of them in return.

Information sharing

IIED is well placed to maintain contact with the donor and intellectual community that drives much of the debate and priorities expressed by international agencies. We are committed to sharing our knowledge, contacts, and documents as a means to provide easier access to funding opportunities for others. We recognise the difficulties of access to debate and information faced by NGOs and researchers based in many developing nations and we pledge ourselves to improve access to sources of information to enable them to master the funding scene more effectively.

Intellectual property

Published outputs constitute a central part of most of our activities. We would wish to establish at the outset of all projects the arrangements for publishing results stemming from this work, to

include editorial responsibility and intellectual property rights. It is clearly essential for both sides to demonstrate to their various publics an ability to generate work of publishable quality. IIED is happy to help partners identify places where their work might find an outlet. Equally, we commit ourselves to encourage partners to write up the results of joint activities for a variety of different audiences. In projects involving close work with indigenous knowledge, IIED must also address with partners how best to protect local rights and cultural integrity.²

Developing capacity to collaborate

IIED is committed to strengthening the capacity of southern organisations working in similar ways on issues of environment and development. However, IIED has limited ability to respond to requests for assistance. We therefore aim to develop links with UK and other organisations capable of providing the advice and training required by our partners during the course of collaborative activities. This includes access to independent ‘peer’ review of partners’ proposals or draft publications, where IIED lacks sufficient in-house expertise, as well as facilitating the identification of appropriate training programmes or publication outlets.

We recognise the need to address capacity issues within IIED, to ensure that our staff have the skills needed to develop and maintain effective collaboration. This is achieved partly through our recruitment policies and partly through support for training and development of IIED staff. An additional mechanism that can provide mutual benefit and capacity strengthening is the exchange of staff with partner organisations for extended periods.

The importance of diversity

IIED recognises the importance of diversity amongst its staff. Over the next five years we aim to achieve a broad representation of origins and background amongst our staff, and to ensure wide adherence to the key values set out here. We expect a similar commitment to diversity and equal opportunity amongst our partners.

Defining mutually supportive roles

The environment in which IIED and our partners operate is undergoing rapid change. It is essential that IIED regularly review with its partners how best to achieve our respective objectives. IIED should consider paying more attention in future to those institutions and structures that have major consequences for global trade, aid, and finance relationships, while recognising the strengths that our partners bring to more focused, national level activities. Another important role that IIED can play is to facilitate the exchange of information and other linkages between southern organisations working on similar issues in complementary ways.

From aspiration to action

This code of conduct sets out some of the key values and principles that IIED seeks to uphold in developing long-term, mutually beneficial and equitable partnerships with organisations working on similar issues. Turning this statement of values into operational guidelines that are supportive without being overly bureaucratic, and that lead to measurable improvements in our collaborative relations, will be a significant challenge over the coming years. IIED’s Monitoring and Evaluation Group will play a major role in turning this code of practice into a workable system of indicators for staff and managers.

² The Code of Ethics developed by the International Society of Ethno-biology provides guidance for such cases.