

THE WETLANDS ALLIANCE

BUILDING LOCAL CAPACITY FOR SUSTAINABLE WETLANDS MANAGEMENT

Doing it the Wetlands Alliance way: A Code of Conduct for Development and Poverty Alleviation Research

AIT contributes to the Wetlands Alliance through custom tailored academic offerings that emphasize sustainable development and poverty alleviation. Research and education become tools to reach out to poor, disadvantaged communities and other off-campus audiences. Experiences and results of such outreach engagement are integrated into the curricula and the design of new research strategies. This cross-fertilization between the academe and off-campus audiences fosters a distinctive “AIT way of doing things” that ensures access to AIT’s academic services among a wide range of development stakeholders outside the traditional academic audiences of a University.

Identifying research issues with communities



Through its Aqua Outreach Program (AOP) AIT is pursuing a unique research approach that is guided by a set of principles which are inspired by an ethos of cooperation between researchers

and the communities the research aims to benefit. At the heart of this approach lies a research ethic, that respects and acknowledges the importance of

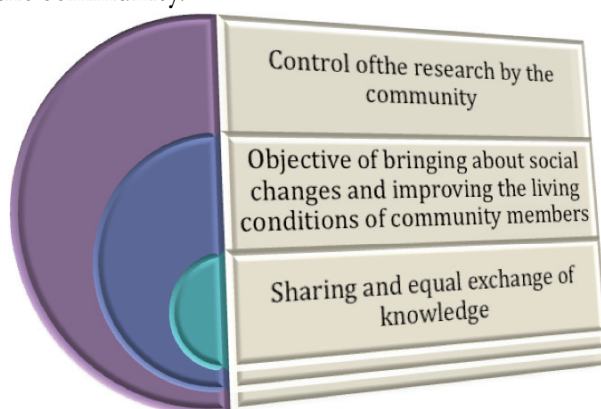
Defining research objectives, questions and methodologies



local knowledge and the capacities of local communities to contribute to the design and implementation of the research.

In the past, academic research limited communities to providing data, seeing them as study subjects, rather than study partners. Conventionally, researchers would approach their subjects with the intention to extract information and knowledge for the advancement of their respective academic fields. Researchers would approach communities “armed” with a “shopping list” for data and information, that is deemed necessary by the researcher and its academic peers.

The Alliance research approach is, however, fundamentally different: it is of a dialogical character which also accounts for the information needs of the community.



Towards a Code of Conduct for Participatory Development Research

The WA's engagement in and support for research through AIT's remains committed to the advancement of science. At the same time AOP supported research stimulates the development of tools, that empower communities to become agents of their own development and take charge of the transformation processes needed to ensure sustainable development and improved local livelihoods.

A set of basic principles provide the framework of a "Code of Conduct for Responsible Development Research" (CoC), which ensures that research is beneficial to local communities and contributes to poverty alleviation. It also safeguards the validity of the work in a scientific context by applying rigorous scholarly standards.

They ensure that the communities have and retain the ownership of information, they have control over the research process, always have access to the data generated and keep possession of the data.

Each step of the research process is characterized by a dialogue between the researcher and the community.

Data collection and information generation



This continuous dialogue

- Defines modalities of field work, data gathering, sampling and field experiments
- Builds research capacities within the local communities by training of co-researchers
- Establishes procedures for information exchange during the research
- Clarifies the mechanisms for research follow-up
- Ensures ownership and confidentiality of the research results,
- Regulates access to the research results, and
- Makes sure that the results are used in the best interest of the communities.

These elements ensure that all participants in the research project fully understand their respective

commitments and responsibilities.

Respecting the rights of communities for self-determination, community participation in research will always be voluntary. Researchers must respect the right of communities and community members to decline a request to participate in the research. This includes the rights of communities and their members to withhold information and data they do not want to be published.

With these guiding principles, the CoC provides a set of standards, that turn the research process into a mutual learning experience from the outset to the end.



Following these standards during the research contributes to the establishment of empowered learning communities. It creates communities that are able to better understand the transformational processes of development and are capable of translating this understanding into development action.

The impact of such research will be measured not just through conventional academic processes of publication. **Participatory assessment mechanisms, in which the community takes part in the peer-review process, will assist in judging its relevance for both science and sustainable local development.**

