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Ethical Communication and Participant Consent Guidelines

Document History

Version	Date	Description	Next Review
1	11/05/2024	Created and updated as per ACFID requirements	Before annual board meeting

If you require further information regarding this document, please contact:
info@fairaction.ngo

Ethical Oversight

FAIRACTION International follows the research and community engagement ethical guidelines of local laws in the countries where we work, combined with the guidelines set by the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) as our Research Industry Partner. Currently, this framework ensures that all activities involving data gathering, interviews, and community engagement in Nigeria, where we provide international aid, protect participants' rights and well-being. All field research and community engagement activities are meticulously planned to align with both Australian and Nigerian ethical standards. This framework will be expanded to other countries as we extend our reach, guaranteeing practices that uphold the highest levels of integrity, safety, and respect.

Free, Prior, and Informed Consent:

- **Initial Community Engagement:** Community leaders are approached first to explain the research objectives, FAIRACTION's role, and the rights of the community members involved. Their cooperation is crucial for

gaining trust and facilitating the individual consent process.

- **Consent Process:** Participants receive a Participant Information Sheet (PIS), providing comprehensive answers to key questions:
 - **Who Is Conducting This Research/Engagement?**
The document specifies the organization's name and the names of the researchers or staff involved in the activity.
 - **What Is the Research/Engagement About?**
A clear explanation of the project, its purpose, and the expected outcomes is included.
 - **Why Have Participants Been Invited?**
The document clarifies the rationale for involving specific individuals or communities.
 - **What Does Participation Involve?**
Participants are informed about what is expected from them, the time commitment, and the nature of the questions or activities involved.
 - **Are There Any Risks/Inconveniences?**
Any potential risks, discomforts, or inconveniences are detailed, allowing participants to make informed choices.
 - **Do I Have to Take Part in This Research Project/Engagement?**
It is emphasized that participation is voluntary and refusal to participate will not result in any consequences.
 - **What If I Withdraw from This Research Project/Engagement/Interview?**
Participants are informed that they can withdraw at any point without needing to justify their decision, and all data related to them will be securely removed.
 - **What Will Happen to Information About Me?**
Clear information is provided about how personal data will be handled, stored, and used, ensuring privacy and confidentiality.

- **What If I Can't Communicate in English?**
Participants are assured that translation services or culturally appropriate communication methods will be provided.
- **What If I Have Any Queries or Concerns?**
The document provides contact information for the project team and relevant ethical review bodies.
- **Verbal Consent Script:** A verbal consent script is used alongside the PIS to guide the dialogue and ensure participants fully understand their involvement, their rights, and the expected outcomes. The script covers all key aspects of participation, including data collection, consent withdrawal, and data usage.
- **Photography Consent:**
 - **Permission:**
Photographs are only taken with the explicit consent of participants, obtained through a clearly worded consent form.
 - **Retention:**
Participants decide whether their photographs will be retained with or without face blurring.
 - **Usage:**
Participants specify how their images can be used, including media releases, reports, and other public forums.

Data Collection and Use of Images:

- **Accurate and Respectful Communication (ACFID 6.2.1):**

FAIRACTION ensures that all communications are accurate, respectful, and align with our organizational values. Images and stories collected portray participants with dignity and respect, considering their history, culture, and privacy.
- **Organizational Requirements for Information Collection (ACFID 6.2.2):**

- All data, including images and personal information, is collected only after receiving explicit consent.
- Identifiable data is stored separately and is accessible only to authorized personnel.
- Consent forms outline the terms of usage, ensuring that collected images meet ethical standards before publication.

Ensuring No Harm:

- **Cultural and Environmental Sensitivity:** All interactions are designed to be culturally sensitive and environmentally considerate.
- **Participant Welfare:** FAIRACTION ensures that participants are not harmed emotionally or physically, with careful attention given to privacy rights.

Compliance and Monitoring:

- **Respect for Other ACFID Members (ACFID 6.2.3):** FAIRACTION's policy explicitly prohibits statements or actions that could damage the reputation of other organizations, including ACFID Members. Collaboration and fair competition are emphasized.
- **Policy Updates:** FAIRACTION regularly reviews and updates its policies to align with UTS HREC standards and ACFID guidelines.

Documentation and Reporting:

- **Records and Transparency:** Detailed records of consents, community engagements, and ethical considerations are maintained.
- **Compliance Reporting:**
Regular reports ensure transparency and adherence to ethical standards, with updates provided to UTS HREC and other relevant bodies.

Sample Participant Information Sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET SAMPLE

Sustainable Solution to Target 6.1 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria

WHO IS CONDUCTING THIS RESEARCH?

My name is Oluwagbemi Samuel Adeoti and I am a researcher at UTS and Director of Research at FAIRACTION. FAIRACTION is registered as a charity in Australia and Nigeria and operates according to Australian and Nigerian charity and not-for-profit legislation.

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

The purpose of this research is to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the water supply infrastructure in rural Nigerian communities, with a particular emphasis on boreholes. The research aims to assess the status of the boreholes, identify the causes of failure, determine challenges faced by both the local residents and water management agencies, and provide recommendations for future developments that promote sustainable water service delivery in rural communities in Nigeria.

WHY HAVE I BEEN INVITED?

Our team has identified your community as experiencing severe water poverty, and as a result, you have been invited to participate in this research.

FUNDING

This project has been funded by Fairaction International (FAIRACTION).

WHAT DOES MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire that is expected to take 40-50 minutes. Additionally, we may require certain personal information such as your name, gender, and age.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS/INCONVENIENCE?

After a thorough evaluation of potential risks associated with the proposed research project, we have identified a risk of aggression due to researchers being misperceived as government agents instead of non-governmental

organisation representatives. To mitigate this risk, we have implemented measures such as clearly displaying our FAIRACTION affiliation.

The question-and-answer session will take place outside your doorstep to respect your home's privacy. If at any point you feel uncomfortable answering a question, you have the right to decline without any consequences. Additionally, you have the option to withdraw from the questionnaire at any time and request that the research team leave your premises.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT?

Participation in this study is voluntary. It is completely up to you whether or not you decide to take part.

If you decide not to participate, or to withdraw from the study, it will not affect your relationship with the researchers, FAIRACTION or the University of Technology, Sydney.

WHAT IF I WITHDRAW FROM THIS RESEARCH PROJECT?

If you wish to withdraw from the study once it has started, you can do so at any time without having to give a reason, by simply telling the researcher that you no longer wish to proceed with the research questionnaire.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO INFORMATION ABOUT ME?

By signing the consent form, you agree to the research team collecting and using your personal information for the research project. All personal information will be treated confidentially and kept securely to prevent unauthorised access, use, or disclosure. If identifiable, personal information will be stored separately from any research data to ensure confidentiality. Access to personal information and research data will be restricted to the research team and any authorised personnel involved in the study.

Information such as audio, video recordings, and/or photographs obtained during the study may be used for media purposes. All personal data, such as name and age collected, will be de-identified to protect your privacy before any media use, publication, or presentation of the research results. Please note that once the data has been anonymised, where necessary, and transferred to the Australian research team, it may not be possible to withdraw an individual's data.

As per relevant privacy laws, you have the right to request access to the information collected and stored about you by the research team, and to request correction of any information that you believe is inaccurate.

All data will be stored on FAIRACTION's one drive, which is a UTS-provided collaboration space for data storage. The data will also be stored in the FAIRACTION data management system.

WHAT IF I CAN'T COMMUNICATE IN ENGLISH?

We kindly request your consent to participate in this study only if you are comfortable communicating in English. This is because the study's details, purpose, and process will be explained in English, and it is important that you fully understand all aspects of the research to provide informed consent. We truly appreciate your interest in our study, and if you are not confident in English, we regret to inform you that you are not eligible to participate in this research.

WHAT IF I HAVE ANY QUERIES OR CONCERNS?

If you have queries or concerns about the research please contact FAIRACTION's research director at samuel@fairaction.ngo, +61431610479 or the research manager at Tosin.kayode@fairaction.ngo, +234 706 101 8474.

NOTE: This study has been approved in line with the University of Technology Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee [UTS HREC] guidelines. If you have any concerns or complaints about any aspect of the conduct of this research that you wish to raise independently of the research team, please contact the Ethics Secretariat on ph.:+61295142478 or email: Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au], and quote the UTS HREC reference number. Any matter raised will be treated confidentially, investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

CONSENT FORM

Sustainable Solution to Target 6.1 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria

I _____ agree to participate in the research project being conducted by FAIRACTION, UTS Industry Partner, +234 706 101 8474, +61431610479. I understand that funding for this research has been provided by FAIRACTION.

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, or someone has read it to me in language that I understand. I understand the purposes, procedures and risks of the research as described in the Participant Information Sheet.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and I am satisfied with the answers I have received.

I freely agree to participate in this research project as described and understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without affecting my relationship with the researchers, FAIRACTION or the University of Technology Sydney.

I consent to having my photograph/video taken during this research process. I understand that I have the right to refuse or withdraw my consent at any time.

I understand and consent that the photographs/videos taken may be used in various ways to showcase the work of FAIRACTION, including but not limited to media releases and reports. I acknowledge that these photographs/videos may be used to visually represent the research efforts and to provide insight into the process and challenges of visiting and mapping households within local communities in Nigeria.

I consent to photographs/videos of me being retained as follows:

- ☐ I would prefer my face to be blurred/non-identifiable.
- ☐ I consent to my face being visible/identifiable.

I understand that I will be given a signed copy of this document to keep.

I am aware that I can contact FAIRACTION's Research Director (samuel@fairaction.ngo, +61 431610479 if I have any concerns about the research)

Name and Signature [participant]

____/____/____
Date

Name and Signature [researcher or delegate]

____/____/____
Date

Name and Signature [witness*]

____/____/____
Date

Sample Verbal Consent Script

VERBAL CONSENT SCRIPT

Sustainable Solution to Target 6.1 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria

Interview no:	
Date:	
Time:	
Interviewer:	

I appreciate your willingness to talk to me today regarding this research survey, which I understand you were informed about by the community leader. My name is _____ and I am a researcher at the University of Technology Sydney and FAIRACTION. FAIRACTION is an Australian charity with a branch in Nigeria. Their mission is to develop sustainable solutions for the high rate of water supply infrastructure failure in Nigeria.

The aim of this research is to gather information about your household and its water supply infrastructure, which will help us determine the best approach to providing a sustainable water solution for your home.

The questions that will be asked might include sensitive questions so if you are feeling distressed or need to take a break we can stop at any time. The interview will take approximately 40 50 50 mins. If you feel that you would rather not go on with the interview that is fine too.

[Wait for participant to confirm they are happy to continue, otherwise thank them for their time.]

Thank you. Now I just need to confirm some information about you, and I'm going to start audio or video recording, which do you prefer? This will help us to accurately record your answer, but all this information will remain completely confidential. Is that OK?

First, I will ask you some questions to confirm your consent to participate in this study. Please remember that you have the right to withdraw your consent at

any point during the interview. However, it is essential to understand that withdrawing your data from the study results may not be possible once your identifying information has been removed. As the interview data will be recorded anonymously and transferred to the Australian research team, it might not be feasible to withdraw an individual's data once the anonymisation process has been completed and the data has been shared with the team in Australia.

The consent questions are:

Question	Yes	No
Have you read the information contained in the participant information sheet or had it read to you in a language that you understand?		
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and are you satisfied with the answers you have received?		
Do you understand that there may be risks, such as the sensitivity of certain questions that might cause discomfort? If you ever feel uneasy discussing your water sources, the difficulties in obtaining clean water, or expressing concerns about water quality, please remember that you can choose not to answer those specific questions.		
Do you understand that the research will produce reports, academic work, articles, publish journals.		
Do you freely agree to participate in this activity, with the understanding that you may withdraw at any time?		
Do you agree to having this interview audio recorded and transcribed?		
Do you agree to having your photograph/video taken during this research process? You can refuse or withdraw your consent at any time.		
<i>[If the participant agrees to having their photograph/video taken]</i>	☐ I would like my face to be blurred	☐ I consent to my face being

We would like to seek your preference regarding the potential usage of your photograph or video in media releases and reports. Please clarify which of these options you would prefer:	/ non-identifiable.	visible / identifiable.
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(If answered NO to any of these – clarify and/or discontinue interview)

If you have queries or concerns about the research please contact FAIRACTION's research director at samuel@fairaction.ngo, +61 431610479 or the research manager at Tosin.kayode@fairaction.com.au, +234 706 101 8474.

If you would like to talk to someone who is not connected with the research, you may contact the Research Ethics Officer on 02 9514 9772 or Research.ethics@uts.edu.au and quote this number [UTS HREC Approval Number]

If the participant agrees to provide verbal consent:
Interview no. _____ read the verbal consent script (or had it read to them) and agreed to participate on date: _____ time: _____ .

Conclusion:

FAIRACTION International remains committed to maintaining the highest ethical standards in all aspects of our work. By adhering to comprehensive guidelines for free, prior, and informed consent, as well as the responsible collection of information, images, and stories, we ensure that our practices respect the rights, privacy, and dignity of all participants. Our Sample Participant Information Sheet and Verbal Consent Script serve as practical tools to guide our engagements, safeguarding people and the environment. We consistently strive to align our processes with industry standards, local laws, and international best practices. In doing so, we uphold our mission of fostering transparency, trust, and positive relationships with the communities we serve. These principles are crucial to creating lasting, meaningful change while safeguarding the integrity of FAIRACTION International and our partnerships.