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The people who worked together to adapt the protocol to the situation of contemporary Panamanian indigenous peoples follow in alphabetical order. We hope that this guide will prove to be a real and effective contribution to our communities in Panama.

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Introduction

Interest in conducting research in indigenous areas is growing. Local and international interest comes from governmental and non-governmental organizations and from academic institutions (environmental and cultural studies), primarily in developed countries. This interest is based, to a great extent, on the value of indigenous areas from the standpoint of both their cultural and biological diversity.

In Panama, we certainly can cite as examples: the Kuna who inhabit coastal areas impressively rich in marine life, the Embera-Wounaan who live in Panama's largest forested area, recognized internationally for its high biological diversity and the Ngäbe-Buglé, who inhabit an area that is extremely interesting in terms of its geology. But despite the fact that we live in such fascinating environments, indigenous groups have received very few benefits from their study, use and exploitation. Panamanian indigneous peoples must adopt administrative and control measures: new strategies for our interaction with researchers are necessary in order to remediate the imbalances in the use of results and the benefits of research in our communities.

We present this "Protocol for Research in Panama's Indigenous Communities" in which we compile essential criteria for the elaboration of policies for research. We hope that this document will also provide researchers with an instrument for the design of effective resesearch projects in indignous areas. Researchers who adopt this protocol will learn more about the traditional structure of indigenous governance and their own research processes should prove to be more efficient. The idea is to promote trust between the researcher and the communities where they work. The principal points are aimed at building the spirit of cooperation and mutual respect so as to guarantee the development of good field research practicies and to promote indigenous knowledge. In addition, the Protocol stipulates precise ethical standards and use of the resulting information, which will facilitate knowledge of and respect for the desires of the communities under study.

The sprit of this document requires researchers to keep indigenous communities informed of the peogress of their projects, thus allowing communities to identify their needs, set limits and understand the implications of each project. By using these guidelines, indigenous authorities will be able to maintain their autonomy in the face of scientific advances and will be able to directly participate in research processes, from their inception through the diffusion of their results.

By participating in the definintion of research interests and needs, establishing alliances, developing methodology in conjunction with researchers, issuing permits, the benefits and reseach in our territories will become much more real to us. For the good of humanity, we all have the obligation to care for the places where we live.

1. Basic guidelines

The following three elements foster improved understanding between the community and the researcher.

- ***Power:*** this is a question of sharing the power inherent in knowledge and information. Each participant must feel that his/her needs are being heard, that he/she is respected, as are his/her ideas. Power should be shared between the community, the researcher and the institution he/she represents.

- ***Equity:*** the financial aspects or remuneration of a project represents only one facet of equity; a community's and a researcher's knowledge, networks, personal, political and social powers constitute other facets in which we must try to reach a level of equity profitable for both parties. It is also important to review the terms of equity throughout the duration of the agreement and as the research process evolves.

- ***Respect:*** the result will be an understanding of the social, political and cultural structures of the other party. Communication must work both ways. Definitions, postulates and other assumptions must be clarified and questioned by both parties. Customs, traditions, habits, rules and regulations of the community must be respected. The culture, language, jurisdictions as well as the community's formal and informal standards must also be respected and followed to the extent that this is possible.

2. Rights and Ownership

These principles embody the expression of self-determination in the realm of research. They are a political answer to a tenacious colonial trend with regard to research and information management. The main notions these principles transmit are:

- Collective ownership of information by a group.
- Control of research and information by indigenous peoples.
- Access to data and its management.
- Physical possession of data.

Panamanian indigenous communities may apply the norms and rules stipulated in Law 20, 26 June, 2000. This law protects the collective rights and intellectual property and the traditional knowledge of indigenous people for their creations including: inventions, models, drawings and designs, innovations contained in images, figures, graphic symbols, petroglyphs, etc. It also protects cultural elements of our history, music, art and traditional artistic expressions that are subject to commercial use, according to a special system for the registration, promotion and commercialization of rights that emphasizes sociocultural values of national indigenous cultures seeking social justice.

The advantages of Rights and Ownership principles are numerous: rebuilding trust, improving research quality and relevance, decreasing bias, efficient capacity building and learning.

- *Ownership:* This principle expresses the idea that a community or group own information collectively in the same way individuals own their personal information.

From the very first consultation steps, who will own the results must be clearly identified; if this ownership is to be shared, the modalities must seem equitable to all partners and they must be clearly established before data gathering.

- *Control:* This principle advocates that Indigenous peoples, their communities and the groups that represent them are entitled to obtain control over all aspects of research management and of the information that will have impacts on them.

Indigenous groups' inherent right to autonomy implies that they have authority in the management of their business, territories and resources, consequently, a right of control and decision-making over all steps of proposed research projects, of the methodology, of the elaboration of interview protocols to the dissemination of results.

- Access: Wherever they are kept, Indigenous peoples must have access to the information and data that concern them and their communities. This principle also refers to the right of Aboriginal communities and organizations to manage said information and make decisions with regard to its access.

- *Possession:* Even if possession is not a condition of ownership of data per se it nevertheless constitutes a mechanism through which ownership can be asserted and protected. This means to make copies of the data available to the community or in a specified location.

3. Main aspects to be considered during the first meeting

Researchers must work with the members of the community from the very first planning steps of their research proposals. They must also give the members of the community enough time to review and understand perfectly all aspects of the study, ask questions and solve problems if need be.

Initial contact should be made through a letter of intent setting out the ideas, objectives and goals of the research, which will be sent to the authorities of the Indigenous Peoples involved. It must include:

• Presentation of the project, of the objectives of the research, of the methodology proposed and of the results expected.
• Presentation of research expectations towards the host community.
• Setting up of participation modalities of the community.

The following elements, among others, will be discussed at the first meeting:

• Methods for data collection.

• Commitment and training of co-researchers by integrating into the project a component aiming at capacity building for indigenous co-investigators. It is of the utmost importance to foster the acquisition of research know-how within the communities while insuring knowledge transfer.
• Information mechanisms during the course of the research.
• Research follow-up mechanisms.
• Intellectual property, confidentiality and access to research products.

People responsible for the research must state clearly the way they intend to ensure the confidentiality of the data gathered from individuals or groups in the community, and present documents as supporting evidence (approach, method and consent forms).

4. Consultations

It is important to hold, at every step of the research project, appropriate consultations among the Indigenous People involved. Indigenous People must participate fully, right from the very beginning, in the establishment of the criteria and consultation methodology to be adopted. They must also be actively involved in each step of the consultative process. The latter will contribute to:

• Avoid the impacts of dual consultations; those responsible for the research thus make sure that their questions will take into consideration prior results, the approaches and methodologies used to produce them as well as their strengths and weaknesses;
• Prevent potential obstacles by identifying the problems likely occur in the course of the research and that may adversely affect the community.

The negotiation of the community's agreement to a research project does not constitute a single, static event; it inserts itself in the whole cycle of the survey, where each step must be discussed, understood and undertaken jointly with all the partners. The investigation cycle thus comprises, as community-based research, a learning process from beginning to end.

5. Informed consent and confidentiality

• Informed consent is an imperative prerequisite to the launching of a project. The authorities of the community must give their authorization so that the project may begin;
• No research activity involving individuals or their entourage should start before obtained the informed consent of those who participate in it.

The objective of informed consent is to ensure that the participants in the research project fully understand what their commitment and their participation involve.

In the process of obtaining consent, researchers must clearly identify the objectives of the research, the methodology chosen, the funding sources as well as the eventual positive and negative impacts that the research can cause to the persons involved, the community

and its environment. Generally speaking, a letter of information written in a simple, direct and understandable language.

It's also necessary to obtain authorization and consent to make audio-video recordings, to take photos, physiological measures or to take blood, skin or hair samples.

Any person or any Indigenous People has the right to say « No » to a request to participate in a research project or to withdraw from it at any time.

6. Consent form

• Consent forms must be written in an understandable, simple and direct style and in the language the subjects speak at home.
• Parents must authorize and approve, and provide a signature as supporting evidence, the participation of their children under 18 in a study.

Researchers must make sure respondents agree to the publication of the information they have given; indeed, according to the nature of said information, they can and do have the right to withdraw their consent, or to require that their names appear if they have been quoted or if they want to appear on the list of informants.

An individual may refuse to sign a document, and to give his consent orally. Even if the latter remains more difficult to prove or to verify than a written consent, it is as valid and as legal and is recognized legally.

7. Aboriginal knowledge

• Indigenous Peoples have their own ways of generating knowledge and handing it down, distinct from western scientific methods. They deserve respect and recognition of their intrinsic value for research in an Aboriginal environment.
• Researchers must not only recognize the objective value of Aboriginal knowledge but must also understand and document it so as to make a harmonious and complementary cohabitation of the systems of knowledge possible.
• The communities must define the parameters that can enable them to protect their knowledge while ensuring the recognition of their contribution to the advancement of knowledge.

8. Data processing, analysis and validation

It is essential that the community, its representatives and/or its respondents proceed to a validation of the data, especially when it is obtained through interviews.
Beyond respect and equity, this exercise may prove to be essential to guarantee the validity of the results and of the cultural context, as much for the participants as for the researchers.

Participants must pay attention to the words used in reports and point out which statements they find incoherent, prejudicial or expressing half-truths. First to receive the results of the research, the collectivity will also be the first to make suggestions and give its reactions, thus helping to avoid mistakes and misunderstandings. Consensus on observations, comments or conclusions by several individuals also legitimizes the interpretations and analyses.

Research data, reports and results, their summaries and potential articles must be entirely available to Indigenous Peoples in the language of their choice, and this must be done before they are distributed or communicated to the scientific community, governmental authorities or to the general public.

9. Right of opposition and inclusion of divergent views

A community can dissociate itself from the interpretation of the data and results of a research in which it is involved. It can also refuse to participate in a research in progress if it thinks that the terms of the agreement are not respected or that it will provoke unacceptable perturbations within the community. If no agreement can be entered, the community could wish that the diverging viewpoints be included in the report.

10. Translation and interpretation

Projects must often seek the services of community members to act as interpreters or translators. Right from the planning stage of the project, the selection of qualified resource persons to fulfill these duties must be discussed. It remains wise and prudent to make provisions for substitutes or replacements. In the case of interviews, in order to ensure that the interpretation and the translation of the questions are the same for each respondent concerned, a version of the questionnaire must be elaborated in the required language; uniformity and homogeneity prove to be essential in research.

11. Management of time-research

Communities do not have to follow a schedule that is imposed from outside. Right from the first joint planning sessions, the cultural schedule of the community must be respected by establishing jointly with the researchers a time frame and a work rhythm for the steps of the research that respect the community's requirements, capacities and needs.

12. Assessment

Assessment of research, analysis of its process, come back on the difficulties, good moves and successful ones will contribute to lead to the planning and management of future projects, adjust research policies, and judge the relevance of the creation/abolition of research advisory, and to ensure participation in and control of the research.

13. Conclusion

This document has gathered several essential points, which should be carefully considered when performing research with indigenous communities.

- participative focus
- respect
- consultation
- consent
- protection and respect for first hand knowledge
- reciprocity and sharing of costs and benefits
- co-responsibility
- the right to information
- access to the results of investigations
- signed agreement between the scientist(s) and the authorities of the indigenous communities involved

Rights and ownership principles equally constitute the ideal norms and practices to be respected in the context of community investigations in indigenous populations as the above elements describe.