THE BODMANDO CODE OF RESEARCH ETHICS

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1.0. Introduction

Research is the precursor for knowledge building and innovation in any industry and it is through this undertaking that mankind has realized breakthroughs beyond the expectations of human ability. When institutions exploit the frontiers of research, they are certainly able to advance in policy, practice and strategy on the basis of evidence-based design and implementation. The ultimate benefit of research lies not only in the generation of a new body of knowledge but in the translation of this knowledge into strategies, technologies and interventions and to achieve this objective, it is incumbent that the entirety of the research process be pursued within the domains of contemporary knowledge, effective policy, good ethics, adequate resources and collaborative effort. It necessitates the use of multi-disciplinary and multi-level approaches that support the adventure of appropriate disciplinary perspectives and methodologies.

This research policy provides a set of norms and standards to guide all research processes that Bodmando shall undertake. It is built to ensure adherence to international codes of conduct pertaining to research processes to ensure that research participants have their safety and welfare protected.

1.1. Policy Scope

This Policy applies to all Bodmando staff, contractors, partners and any other stakeholders who carry out research involving Bodmando Consulting Group. Therefore, all stakeholders who engage in any form of research collaboration with Bodmando must take due cognizance of the provisions of this policy. This group to whom this Policy takes effect are herein referred to as 'Researchers'.

1.2 What is Research?

Research is defined as a systematic, reductive and methodical inquiry into a defined problem. Through research, we are able to solve problems and adopt new and more sustainable ways of packaging and refining service delivery to communities.

2.0 Purpose of the Research Policy

The purpose of this Research Policy is to standardise the research operational process and ensure that it is in tandem with internationally recognised ethical practices.

2.1. Policy Objectives

i. To create an empowered, transparent, and adherent atmosphere for research
ii. To standardize the research operational process in line with internationally accepted ethical codes of conduct.
iii. To strengthen organizational research management and coordination
iv. To protect the safety and welfare of research participants

2.2. Below is the research governance structure of Bodmando Consulting Group. It consists of a range of values and guidelines that regulate the research process. They thus provide oversight in research management including research participant protection, investigation into allegations of research misconduct, health, safety, ethical review, financial management, and coordination, management and confidentiality of data, intellectual property amongst others. Research conducted by or on behalf of Bodmando must be undertaken within the recommended standards set herein.

3.0. Bodmando Research Values

The following 6 values underpin the research culture of Bodmando and all Researchers must abide by them. They are the vein through which technical and operational excellence is realized:

- **Integrity** – Researchers must ensure adherence to the principles of; non-maleficence, beneficence, respect for autonomy, and proportionality. They thus have to declare any conflicts of interest that may compromise compliance with the aforementioned code.

- **Scientific Rigour –** The researcher must conduct the study in total compliance with the standards of research philosophy. This can be through the use of relevant and justifiable scientific methods.

- **Transparency-** One must follow the recommended steps of protocol review, allow open scrutiny of research methods, data and results.

- **Fairness**– The research must be conducted within the precincts of justice.

- **Accountability** – All researchers must act within the limits of the IRB approval. There has to be total conformity of the process to the rules and regulations of Ethical Review Boards and other conventional ratifications such as the Belmont report, and the Declaration of Helsinki.

- **Researcher Competence**– The Researchers must ensure they possess the requisite competence in design and implementation of the prospective study prior to initiation.

3.2 The elements of good research practice are set out in the remainder of this document.

4.0. Research Participants

Research involving human participants

4.1 Bodmando and all researchers hold absolute responsibility in ensuring the rights, safety and well-being of human research participants. All research involving human participants must be conducted in compliance with this Research Policy and related legal, ethical, and good practice documents pertaining to research.

4.2 All research proposals involving human participants must be reviewed and approved by the relevant Ethical Review Boards and regulatory bodies where appropriate. Peer/scientific review should also be sought as a good practice, where appropriate.

4.3 Failure to obtain full permission prior to initiation of a study will be considered as research misconduct.

4.4 All participants in research should expect researchers to act within this Policy and the other aspects of Bodmando's Research Governance framework.

5.0 Child Protection Policy

As research studies will certainly include children herein referred to as individuals below the age of 18, all researchers are called upon to uphold the requirements that govern engagement of minors as a section of vulnerable populations. All researchers need to seek assent for research involving children above 7 years but below 18 years of age. In addition, consent should be sought from parents/guardians to permit the involvement of such minors in all aspects of the research process.

5.1. Informed Consent by Mature and Emancipated Minors

Mature minors are individuals 14-17 years of age who have drug or alcohol dependency or a sexually transmitted infection; while emancipated minors are those who have been judicially emancipated from their parents, or have reached the age of majority and are therefore free from the custody and control of their parents. Such individuals are expected to support and care for themselves. Mature and emancipated minors may independently provide informed consent to participate in research if:

i. In the view of the REC, the research is not objectionable to parents or guardians (established by the REC with evidence from the community);
ii. The research protocols include clear justification for targeting mature and emancipated minors as participants; and a clear justification for not involving parents or guardians in the consent process.

6.0. Compliance

6.1 Research must be approved and conducted in accordance with:

- Requirements including contractual requirements of the relevant funding bodies, and
- Standards and guidelines of the relevant funding bodies.
- Bodmando's Research Governance Framework and the principles
- Bodmando's policies and procedures;
- Ethical, legal, professional and policy requirements which regulate work
- Standards of research practice set out by professional bodies, and scientific and learned societies;

6.2 Researchers are expected to take due cognizance and adhere to all regulations and standards of good research practice. This includes, but is not limited to: the Belmont report, Data Protection and Privacy Acts, and all other legislation relevant to the country where the study is to be conducted.

6.3 There shall be a Bodmando Research Ethics Committee (Bodmando-REC). This committee will review research protocols to ensure that the safety and welfare of research participants is not put at risk. It can request protocol amendments or other documentation to promote conformity of the study to the expected ethical standards.

7. Research misconduct

7.1 Researchers must not engage in any action which may constitute research misconduct.

7.2 Research misconduct can constitute the following (list not exhaustive):

- Fabrication – distortion of data or other outputs to appear genuine
- Falsification–manipulation of the research process, or changing/omitting data
- Plagiarism – Use of other researchers work without giving recognition or credit
- Failure to meet legal, ethical, and professional obligations
- Failure to follow approved protocols/procedures for research, including:
    - Failure to obtain permissions from the ethical review boards and any other regulatory authorities.
    - Failure to exercise due care to prevent unreasonable risk or harm to humans or the environment.
- Misrepresentation/mismanagement in the form of:
    - suppression of study results or data and/or primary materials.
    - inappropriate claims of attribution of work and denial of authorship/attribution to people who actually made the contribution.
    - Failure to declare conflict of interests
    - Self-plagiarism in the form of publication history
- Mishandling of allegations of misconduct, including failure to address possible infringements.

Research misconduct includes acts of commission as well as omission. Misconduct does not include honest errors and differences in interpretation of data, methodology or results.

7.3 Researchers have a responsibility to report suspected cases of research misconduct and these will be investigated by Bodmando's Research Ethics Committee.

7.4 Concerns about malpractice or impropriety of research may be raised and can include:

- Dangers to health and safety or the environment;
- Financial malpractice or fraud;
- Improper conduct or unethical behaviour;
- Serious conflict of interest without disclosure;
- Miscarriage of justice;
- Criminal activity (not covered by the above), and
- Attempts to conceal any of the above.

7.5 Researchers found to have engaged in any form of misconduct will face penalties commensurate to the type and level of the committed offence. This may include sanctions, fines, and submission of a report to statutory and regulatory bodies, research participants, funders or other professional bodies as circumstances, contractual obligations and statutory requirements dictate.

7.6 The Research Ethics Committee will manage all incidents of research misconduct and propose relevant disciplinary actions to the guilty Researcher.

8.0. Conflicts of Interest

8.1 Conflicts of interest can be defined as circumstances characterized by competing intentions that can compromise transparency in decision making e.g., the conducting of research may be unduly influenced by a secondary interest e.g., financial gain. Conflicts of interest can arise due to financial, personal, political, legal, religious, ethical, moral or other personal interests. Attention should be given to potential as well as actual conflicts of interest.

8.2 Researchers must fully disclose any personal interests that could lead to a conflict of interest at the earliest possible time and in accordance with Bodmando, funder or any policies and regulations of another associated party. If a Researcher is unsure over whether a personal interest could lead to potential or an actual conflict of interest, immediate guidance should be sought from the Research Ethics Committee.

8.3 It may warrant disapproval of a particular project of a Researcher or to exert limits or discontinuity to such a research project or the involvement of the Researcher where there is a potential or actual conflict of interest which could undermine or discredit the Researcher, Bodmando and its reputation, or research outcomes, or could in any other way be in breach of relevant Bodmando, funder or any other policies or regulations of an external party in regards to conflicts of interest.

9.0. Confidentiality

9.1 Researchers must promote absolute privacy and confidentiality of personal information relating to research participants, and that the research fulfils all legal requirements, such as the Data Protection and Privacy Acts amongst others.

9.2 Prior to publication or entry of data in a central depository, it should be fully masked/anonymised, unless with the full informed consent of the research participant and where this is provided, access must be fully restricted to permitted individuals. This process of data masking includes: removal of all personal identifiers (name, date of birth, initials, name of organisation etc).

10.0. Management of Research Data/Samples and Records

10.1 The following principles apply to the management of physical and digital research-related data, samples and records:

- Data must be mined, stored and used in accordance with the approved protocol and in compliance with ethical, legal, regulatory, funding body and Bodmando's requirements;

- A Data Management Plan must be generated for all projects that create or capture new data or samples.
- Researchers must keep clear and accurate records to allow other researchers or parties to understand, verify and replicate their research. Relevant documentation can include information on approvals granted, procedures followed, sources used and results obtained;
- Data must be stored in a secure manner that guarantees privacy and confidentiality of information with protection against data loss and corruption;
- Data or samples must be stored in such a manner as to permit prospective and retrospective audit if necessary;
- Data and records collected as part of studies conducted overseas or through collaborating sites must be maintained in accordance with relevant policies and procedures and research agreements;
- Research data must be retained for a minimum of 10 years after research project completion or the publication date, whichever is longest, unless requested to delete data for a specific reason. Longer retention periods may be specified by funding, professional, or other bodies;
- Data and records collected and stored by staff for studies originating from Bodmando are the property of Bodmando. Staff are not permitted to remove the primary copy when leaving Bodmando. Secondary copies may be taken with appropriate written permission;
- Research data that substantiates research findings should be made available for access and use in a timely manner, within the boundaries of conditions established by contractual, legislative, ethical, or other requirements

11.0. Financial Management and Accountability

11.1 All research must be conducted within the confines of Bodmando's Financial Regulations including the guidelines of the associated research funders. Research should abide by contractual terms set out in client agreements in relation to financial management and accountability.

12.0. Intellectual Property

12.1 Intellectual property ('IP') refers to intangible assets with the broadest scope covering all types of knowledge, but are generally focussed on patents, copyright, brand names, trademarks, designs & secrets. IP has become increasingly important in recent decades, in particular as a means of income generation and of exerting control over how the IP is used. Most forms of IP can be protected legally and the resulting proprietary rights are referred to as IP rights ('IPRs').

Therefore, all Researchers must forth with, seek due cognizance and adhere to the laws and regulations pertaining to IP in the conduct of research to prevent legal liability associated with infringement on the IPRs.

13.0. Decision Making

13.1 For purposes of transparency, audit and good record-keeping, all formal discussion/decision making meetings including those concerning budget and publication should be minuted. A record of other important decisions made outside formal meetings should also be well stored.

14.0. Research Collaborations

14.1 Bodmando conducts research in collaboration with other organisations both local and foreign. These partnerships are prioritized in all research engagements. Bodmando makes every effort to ensure that collaborative research projects are conducted reasonably and equitably, including through fair contractual arrangements. Collaborators will be expected to undertake research involving Bodmando in a manner consistent with this Policy.

Where collaborators also have relevant research policies and procedures for their researchers, Bodmando will follow such collaborator polices and procedures in addition to this Research Policy, as required by the collaborator, and to the extent ethically and legally acceptable according to the restrictions and permissions of research philosophy.

15.0. Training

15.1 Bodmando is committed to ensuring that all staff undertake appropriate training to enable them carry out research activities in a competent manner. Researchers are expected to undergo appropriate training including refreshers to ensure they are updated with relevant skills and knowledge in the design and implementation of research.

15.2 No research activity should be carried out by any individual who does not have the necessary skills and experience to do so. It is the responsibility of the Management, supervisors, and researchers themselves to identify particular training needs which may be realised through formal mechanisms, such as Training Needs Assessments or appraisals.

16.0. Management and Supervision

19.1 Bodmando has arrangements in place for the management and supervision of research, which provides for particular roles and responsibilities. The Executive Director provides direction and leadership for research activities and through doing so is responsible for promoting and supporting a culture of good research practice in accordance with this Policy.

17.0. Dissemination

17.1 This Research Policy will be provided to all new Bodmando staff and partners as part of induction packs and addressed as part of induction arrangements. Staff and partner awareness of this Policy will be encouraged through email and other communication channels from time to time.

References

Adapted from Good Research Practice Policy by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM)