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## N2Africa – Guidelines for Co-authorship of Publications<sup>1</sup>

N2Africa is producing many types of publications in the form of training materials, milestone reports, other internal reports and of course, articles for publication in peer-reviewed journals. The guidelines are developed particularly with journal articles and book chapters in mind, but may be useful when thinking of other types of publications. Our aim is to ensure that credit is duly given to those who have contributed to particular pieces of work.

Please regard these guidelines as opportunities rather than restrictions. If somebody is to be a coauthor of your paper, then it is appropriate to expect and ask for substantial help in preparing it.

### Who can be an author?

The starting point should be that all authors of a paper:

1. have contributed *substantially* to the paper;
2. have reviewed the final version of the manuscript;
3. approve it for publication;
4. take public responsibility for the content of the paper.

Someone's contribution is *substantial* if he/she contributed to at least two of the following four aspects:

- Problem definition, design of the experiment or research project, planning. This may include, writing of the project or research proposal, designing the experimental setup.
- Practical execution of the lab or field work. Production of data. In case of trial managers when the paper is to a great extent based on data from a certain trial, they should be invited to contribute to the paper writing.
- Analyses and interpretation of the results.
- Writing of the manuscript.

The contribution to two of these four aspects must really have made a difference. This does not necessarily mean that the contribution took much time. However, just saying that you agree with the contents of the draft manuscript is not a substantial contribution!

Consequently, someone who supplies data can only be a coauthor if he/she also contributes to one of the other three aspects (provided that the data supplier was asked to be involved in the paper writing). It may help to be clear about this in an early stage, for instance when you ask someone for data.

There may be circumstances when it is appropriate to include others as author. For instance, if a person leads field activities under very difficult conditions and is key to success of the work. It could also be the case that people with less formal education, including farmers, might have provided one of the central compelling ideas for the paper. In this case, he/she might be strongly involved only in one criterion but could qualify as co-author.

Essentially some subjective judgement is needed, and guidelines can only be guidelines! If authorship designation veers significantly from these guidelines, we request that the lead author writes a justification for the modification(s).

### Order of authors

The first author contributed most, and takes the lead in writing. The order of the subsequent authors is largely based on the measure of their contribution. The first one contributed most, the last one contributed least. This is true, with one exception: the final author is usually the leader of the research project (provided that he or she contributed substantially as defined above). In practice the authors that will be credited most by the outside world will be the first, the second and the last.

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<sup>1</sup> This document was modified from the Publication Etiquette of projects led by the Soil Quality Department, Wageningen University.



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## Who decides?

The list of authors should be a result of consensus. The first author makes a proposal and takes the final decision, unless the first author is a PhD or MSc student. In that case, the decision is made by the student together with his/her supervisor. If no consensus can be reached, a colleague (an “outsider”) may be asked to check if the criteria given above are correctly applied.

## Sharing ideas and publication plans

We will create a page on the intranet where N2Africa staff can post ideas and manuscripts in preparation. If you doubt who should be involved in a paper, please contact colleagues and seek their input. It is better to err on the side of inclusion, but all should contribute substantially as indicated above.

## Acknowledgements

People who contributed to a paper, but whose contribution does not meet the above-mentioned criteria to qualify as a coauthor should be acknowledged at the end of the paper.

## Some useful references

Christian R, Davies K, De Chazal J, Krebs E and Melbourne B 1997 PhD Supervision. A Guide for Students and Supervisors. The Australian National University. Canberra, CPN Publications.

Koelmans B 2002 ‘*Publicatie-etiquette*’, Wageningen University, Aquatic Ecology and Water Quality Management Group.

Malmfors B, Garnsworthy P and Grossman M 2000 Writing and Presenting Scientific Papers. Nottingham University Press, Nottingham, UK.

International Committee of Medical Journal Editors 1997 Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals (5th ed), *JAMA*, 227:927-934.  
<http://www.eatright.org/journal/guidelines.html>

Marrus MR 1999 Intellectual property guidelines for graduate students and supervisors at the University of Toronto. U of T School of Graduate Studies.  
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Fine MA and Kurdek LA. Reflections on determining authorship credit and authorship order on faculty-student collaborations. *Am. Psychol.* Pp14 <http://www.apa.org/journals/amp/kurdek.html>

Sherwood T and Peters K 1998 Publication and Promotion. The value of discrimination. Assigning authorship to medical research articles. *Lancet* 353 (9131): 896-897.