



GUIDELINES FOR FREE, PRIOR AND INFORMED CONSENT FOR REDD+

Anyone who is involved in REDD+ at all will be well aware that the subject prompts strong emotions. Many are excited about the prospects of an innovative mechanism that will reduce deforestation and degradation, and ensure conservation and sustainable management of enormous areas of forest. At the same time, many others fear that the large amounts of funding expected for REDD+ will lead to increased corruption in the forest sector and abuse of rights, especially of those groups who have been traditionally marginalized.

If the hopes of the optimists are to be met and the fears of the pessimists allayed, it is important that REDD+ is developed following a “rights-based approach”. This means that the rights (and obligations) of all stakeholders are acknowledged and respected. The Cancun Agreement included a set of safeguards for REDD+. Several deal with stakeholder rights, such as the need for “*full and effective participation*” and “*respect for knowledge and rights of indigenous peoples and members of local communities*”. One of the most critical rights that needs to be respected for REDD+ is the right to provide or withhold “Free, Prior and Informed Consent” (FPIC). For Indigenous Peoples this right is enshrined in the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP; specifically mentioned in the Cancun Agreement); and for other forest owners and users it is implied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The UN-REDD Programme has developed guidelines for FPIC through a long, exhaustive, and on-going consultation process. The guidelines have been developed specifically for UN-REDD programmes, but they provide valuable insights into FPIC for REDD+, in general, since the issues are the same. What is interesting about the guidelines is that while the principles of FPIC are well-established, converting the theory into practice encounters any number of tricky issues.

For example, the UNDRIP notes that FPIC is required for any project or activity “affecting” Indigenous Peoples’ land, territories or resources – but in practice it is often difficult to define what this means. One solution, adopted by UN-REDD, is therefore to list the types of activities that may or may not require FPIC. Similarly, resolving who should be making decisions and how those decisions should be documented are tricky issues that will vary from country to country, and even within a country. Therefore, the UN-REDD guidelines call for the preparation of an FPIC methodology document in consultation with rights-holders so that there is clarity on, and broad ownership of how these issues will be addressed.

No matter how comprehensive and careful the planning for FPIC is, there will inevitably be disputes or complaints raised about the process. Consequently, the UN-REDD Programme is establishing a global accountability process and requires appropriate and effective grievance mechanism to be established at the national level.

FPIC may seem simple and intuitive in principle, but is surprisingly complex in practice, and can therefore seem a daunting task for those involved in REDD+ readiness processes. This, in turn, can potentially lead to “short-cuts” being adopted that could undermine the whole process and reduce the credibility of REDD+. The UN-REDD guidelines are valuable in helping to demystify the practice of FPIC, providing a structured approach to designing a viable FPIC process. You can download the draft guidelines from the following webpage: http://www.un-redd.org/Stakeholder_Engagement/tabid/55630/Default.aspx. For those not previously familiar with FPIC, the guidelines provide a ready source of reference as well as specific guidance, and are therefore well worth the read! Note also that the guidelines are open for public review and that the UN-REDD Programme welcomes your comments until 15 January 2012.

Go-REDD+ is an e-mail listserv managed by the UN-REDD Programme team in Asia-Pacific, based in Bangkok. The main objective of **Go-REDD+** is to distribute information, synopses of research results and activities related to REDD+ in Asia-Pacific, to assist countries in their REDD+ readiness efforts. Old messages will be archived on the Regional Activities pages of the UN-REDD Programme web-site http://www.un-redd.org/AboutUNREDDProgramme/NationalProgrammes/Regional_Activities/tabid/4624/language/en-US/Default.aspx. The team welcomes feedback, suggestions or inquiries to goredd.th@undp.org.