

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT THE BUSINESS CASE FOR COMMUNITY CONSULTATION



Herder, Khushuut District, Western Mongolia. Credit: Pippa Howard/FFI

Background

An understanding of the social and cultural context in which companies are operating is vital to the success of the integrated, ecosystem-level approach that Fauna & Flora International (FFI) is encouraging businesses to adopt as they strive to minimise the impact of their activities on biodiversity and local communities.

An ecosystem approach

An ecosystem approach is a science-based strategy for managing land, water and living resources that considers people, nature and their interactions as part of a single system. Any such approach needs to take full account of the social and cultural needs and traditions of local communities, indigenous or otherwise, and ensure that they are consulted at all stages of the development and implementation of a project. It is crucial that communities whose natural heritage and cultural values may be at stake are actively involved in the decision-making process.

The importance of consultation

FFI works to ensure that projects are developed using the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), a key requirement in international law and jurisprudence related to indigenous people, the framework of which is equally applicable to other, non-indigenous local communities. FPIC enshrines communities' right to give or withhold consent to proposed activities that may affect the lands they customarily own, occupy or otherwise use. Respect for community rights requires that local people be given sufficient information to enable them to make decisions and voice their opinions on proposed developments. Issues of concern are likely to include: land use and rights, ownership, livelihoods, welfare and wellbeing, identity and culture.

Community engagement is a process

Building trust takes time, meaningful engagement and transparency. It is important to bear in mind that community engagement is a process rather than a one-off activity, which requires ongoing dialogue and regular, interactive consultation throughout the lifetime of a project, including opportunities to air grievances. Consultation during the initial design phase of a project is especially important. Community members should feed into the design process, to ensure that genuine needs are addressed in ways that are appropriate for the individuals, households, and communities involved.



Wayuu fisherman, La Guajira, Colombia.
Credit: Pippa Howard/FFI



Local community fishers, Palma Bay, Mozambique.
Credit: Pippa Howard/FFI



Herder family, Hovh Aimag, Western Mongolia.
Credit: Pippa Howard/FFI

One size does not fit all

Given that livelihood activities and traditional cultural practices may vary widely within and between communities, the impact of proposed developments may not be uniformly felt. It is vital, therefore, that they are differentiated into (stakeholder) groups during the consultation process. This is particularly crucial when engaging with marginalised and impoverished ethnic minority communities. Similarly, it is important to establish suitable governance structures that guarantee equitable participation for all members of the community.

Genuine dialogue is crucial

Full community participation in project design is a critical success factor in ensuring sustainable results, and has long been a cornerstone of FFI's approach to working in partnership with local communities. Establishing a genuine dialogue with those likely to be directly affected by their activities enables companies to understand the wider consequences of their actions. In turn, this allows them to manage the socio-cultural, as well as the environmental, impacts of their operations, thereby avoiding potential conflict with the land users who rely on a healthy, functioning ecosystem.

Best practice makes perfect

Failure to accommodate the livelihood needs and cultural traditions of local communities within the project planning process can have serious operational, financial and reputational consequences for business. Conversely, taking full account of these socio-cultural factors will enable companies to mitigate the impact of their activities, serve as a model of best practice for their industry sector, and improve their standing in the eyes of investors, customers, and potential new partners, as well as the local communities on whose continued co-operation they depend.

If you have any questions or would like further information please contact

**Pippa Howard on 01223 579 493
or email pippa.howard@fauna-flora.org**



Fauna & Flora International, 4th Floor, Jupiter House, Station Road, Cambridge, CB1 2JD UK
Telephone +44 (0) 1223 571000 Fax +44 (0) 1223 46148 Email info@fauna-flora.org