Thryve
.Earth

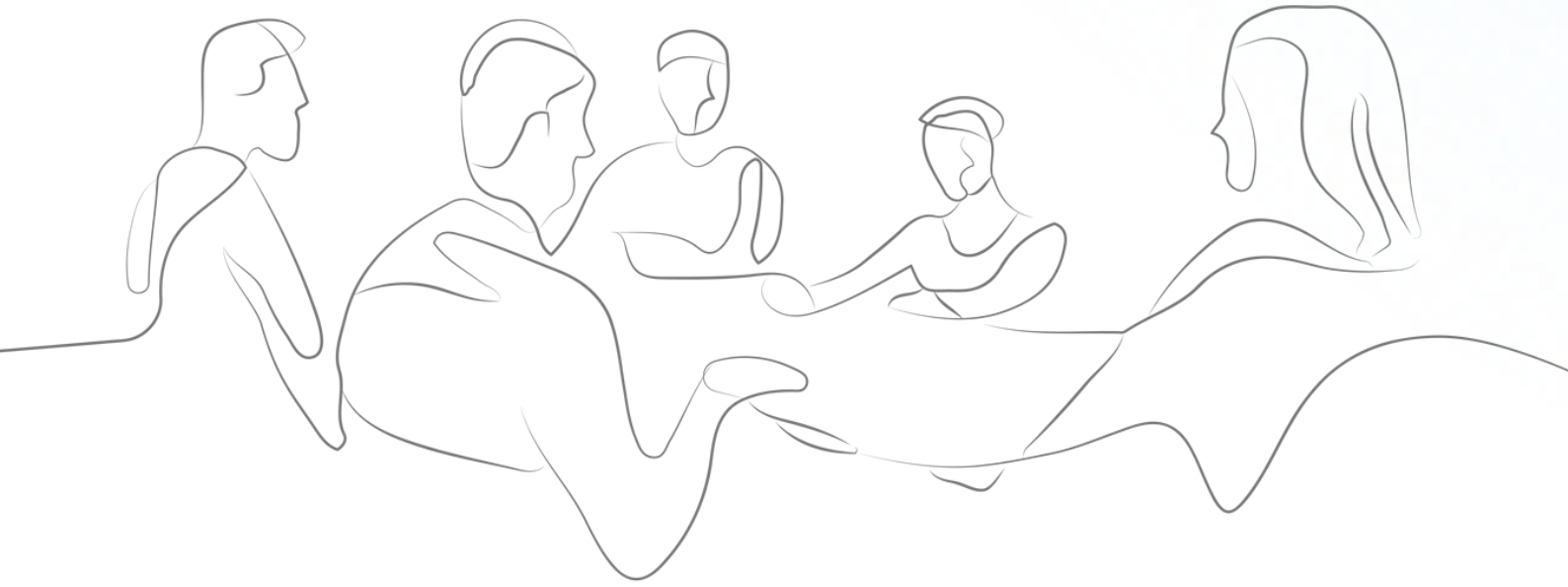
Free, Prior, and Informed Consent in Nature-Based Carbon Projects:

Lessons from the Field

2026

As climate action accelerates, nature-based carbon projects are increasingly implemented across landscapes inhabited by Indigenous peoples and rural communities. Ensuring these communities can meaningfully participate in decisions affecting their lands is essential. One widely recognized framework for this is Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC).

FPIC is not just a procedural step; it is rooted in respecting community rights and ensuring meaningful participation. For carbon projects, getting this right is essential to delivering lasting climate and social outcomes.



What is Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)?

FPIC gives Indigenous peoples and local communities the right to approve or reject projects affecting their lands, resources, or livelihoods*. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) requires that consultation happen in good faith, and that consent be obtained before any measures affecting communities are implemented.

The four components define how that consent must be obtained:

Free

Consent must be voluntary, without pressure from project developers, government authorities, or any external actor.

Prior

Consent must be sought well before project approval or implementation, leaving enough time for internal consultation and decision-making.

Informed

Communities must receive clear, accessible information: project scope, duration, affected areas, potential impacts and risks, and the obligations involved. This allows them to assess what participation genuinely means.

Consent

The decision is collective, made through customary processes. Communities must be able to approve, negotiate, or withhold participation.

* FAO, Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), Indigenous Peoples Unit, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

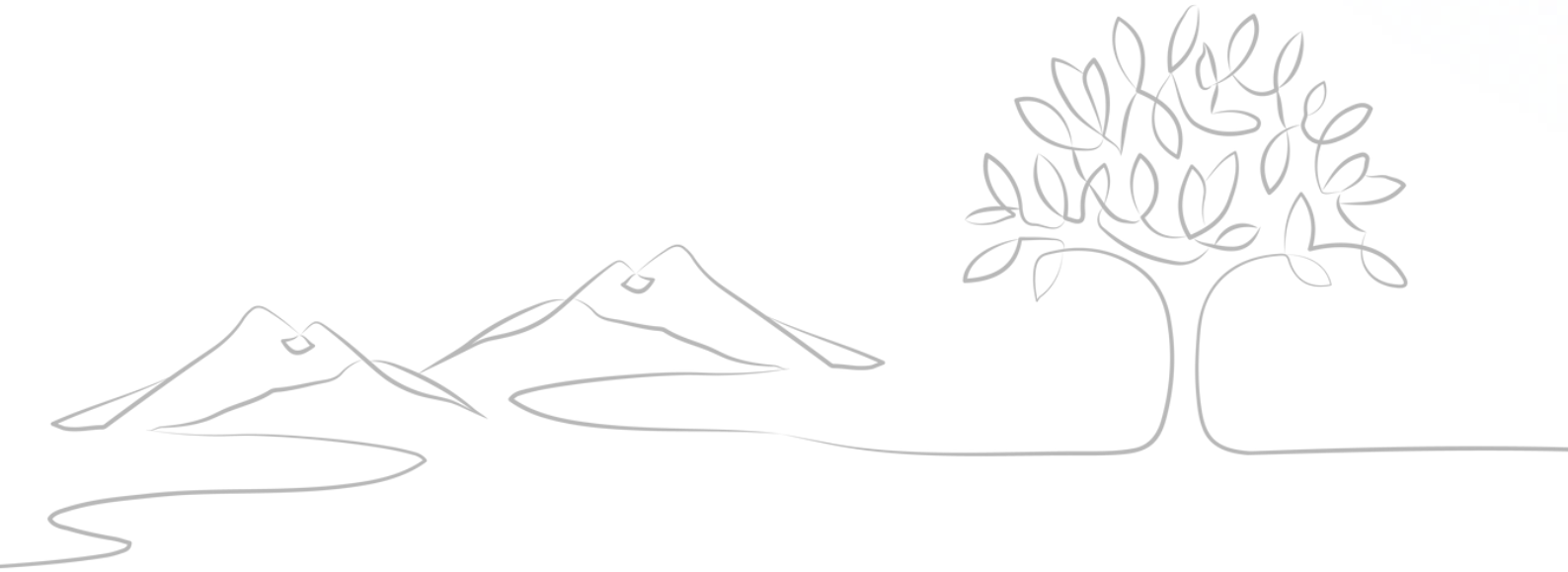
Why FPIC Matters

FPIC protects the rights and dignity of Indigenous peoples and local communities by enabling them to shape their development pathways. Through participatory assessments and inclusive engagement, it ensures diverse perspectives are reflected in decision-making. Nature-based carbon projects such as afforestation, reforestation, and agroforestry often operate in landscapes with complex land rights and resource-dependent livelihoods.

Without FPIC, projects risk:

- Disrupting traditional land use
- Restricting resource access
- Creating inequitable benefit-sharing
- Causing social conflict

These risks can lead to delays or project failure. Carbon standards increasingly require FPIC as a safeguard. Meaningful consent improves project design, incorporates local knowledge, and ensures shared benefits. For investors and buyers, lack of FPIC also creates reputational, legal, and operational risks. It is therefore essential for long-term project credibility.



How Consent is Built

While adapted to local contexts, FPIC typically includes the following steps:

Preparation

01 **Identify communities**
Map rights-holders, validate land boundaries

02 **Engage decision-making institutions**
Work with community-chosen representatives

03 **Collaborate support organisations**
Enable independent advice via NGOs

Consultation

04 **Define a local FPIC process**
Agree on decisions, timelines, formats

05 **Provide clear project information**
Share in stages, local language and format

06 **Facilitate dialogue**
Two-way discussion, allow deliberation time

07 **Document consent agreements**
Formalise in mutually accepted format

Ongoing

08 **Support and monitor implementation**
Involve communities in ongoing monitoring

09 **Establish grievance mechanisms**
Clear processes to raise and resolve concerns

10 **Verify consent**
Third-party verification of FPIC compliance

11 **Ensure continuous engagement**
Maintain consent informed and relevant

Where it Gets Difficult

Power Imbalance:

Communities and project developers often operate with very different levels of knowledge, resources, and negotiating power, making it harder for communities to fully understand agreements or negotiate fair terms.

Complex Markets:

Carbon markets are complex, and explaining how revenues are generated, shared, and verified, especially over long timeframes, is not always straightforward for communities.

Representation Gaps:

Identifying who truly represents the community can be difficult, particularly where governance is informal or multiple groups have overlapping claims and different interests.

Token Consultation:

In some cases, consultation is treated as a formality, with limited information sharing or time for discussion, which can lead to confusion, mistrust, or resistance later.

Long-Term Commitments:

The long-term nature of carbon projects means communities are being asked to commit to agreements that may affect land use and livelihoods for decades, often with uncertainty about future conditions.

Regulatory Uncertainty:

Carbon markets and regulations are still evolving, and this uncertainty can make it harder for communities to fully assess what participation means over the long term.

FPIC in Practice:

Agroforestry initiatives in North Sulawesi, Indonesia

Snippet 1 - Starting where trust already exists

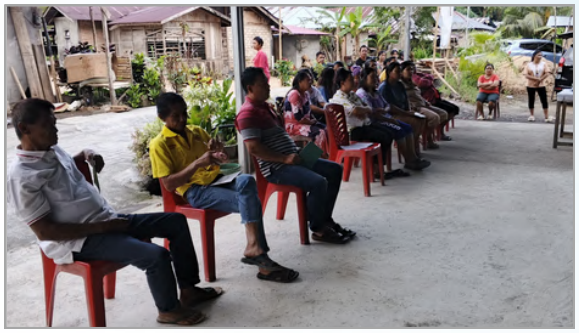
Sharing project information as a brochure with farmers

We didn't walk in with a consent form and a timeline. The process started the way most good fieldwork does, quietly, through people who already trusted the room. Our project team, along with the implementation partner on the ground, first held discussions with the village head to explain the purpose and objectives of the project. Once alignment was reached and permission was granted to carry out activities, we then moved to broader village-level meetings, conversations with farmers, and distributing booklets in Bahasa Indonesia. Alongside this, our team ran a socio-economic survey to understand farmer interest, species preferences, market concerns, and willingness.

Word travelled fast - a conversation with 4 farmers often drew more, and that curiosity expanded our reach across the village. Through this process, we also observed that information often travels more effectively through trusted local figures and existing community channels. They clarified the project's intent, kept communication grounded, and reduced the risk of misinformation.

Snippet 2 - From conversations to formal consent

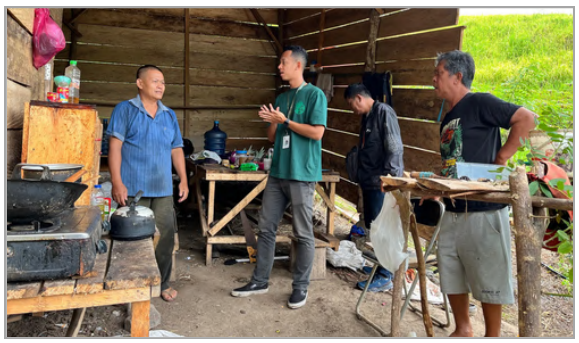
Once we had enough interest, we moved into smaller, more focused follow-up sessions with farmers who had expressed willingness to participate. These conversations were detailed and iterative - conducted in the local language, covering the project, agroforestry basics, eligibility, project period, species choices, roles, and onboarding. We also asked each farmer about their level of interest, preferred level of involvement, and land conditions, so participation was informed and aligned with their expectations. With those who were ready, discussions moved naturally into agreements and participation terms.



Interaction with farmers in Mahembang Village

Snippet 3 - When the hard questions came

The real work happened after that meeting. The 40-year period drew the most questions - understandably, since farmers were being asked to commit their land for decades. We walked them through what that period actually meant: the environmental benefits building over time, the value-chain opportunities from the agroforestry species, and the carbon benefits that would flow to landowners across the entire project duration. Land ownership and species selection needed their own conversations. Some species weren't immediately accepted. We went through each one - neem for pest control, nitrogen-fixers for soil health, and reducing fertilizer costs over time. The reasoning took time, but it landed.



Follow-up visit with farmers after the consultation meeting

Snippet 4 - How the agroforestry models took shape

Then came the conversations that shaped the models through continuous feedback from farmers. Market considerations also played a key role. Some of the initially proposed species were not well received due to limited local demand, prompting farmers to suggest alternatives better aligned with existing market conditions. Preferences for crop species like corn and chillies were often driven directly by farmers. Fruit tree selection also emerged through these discussions, with farmers suggesting species like durian and banana. As a result, the agroforestry models evolved iteratively, reflecting on-the-ground realities, local market dynamics, and farmer priorities.

That's what a genuine FPIC process looks like: not a meeting, a signature, and a move forward, but a back-and-forth that keeps reshaping the work until it fits the land and the people on it.

The path forward: Centering communities in climate solutions

FPIC doesn't stop when a farmer signs an expression of interest. At Thryve, it runs for as long as the project does, and that's deliberate. Regular engagement with communities isn't something we do only when there's news to share. It's how we make sure participants stay informed, can raise concerns at any point, and can reaffirm or step back from their commitment if things change.

Our on-ground staff and implementation partners are part of that they stay current on FPIC requirements so the engagement stays consistent across every project we run.

Thryve develops high-quality Nature-based Solutions (NbS) carbon projects that regenerate ecology.

By combining a locally grounded and tech-enabled approach with rigorous project management and strong governance, we create resilient returns and lasting value for capital partners, landowners, and communities.

Interested in learning more?

info@thryve.earth

www.thryve.earth

thryve-earth

thryveearth