APPLYING INDIGENOUS PEOPLE’S RIGHT TO FREE, PRIOR AND INFORMED CONSENT IN THE AMAZON REGION

Project duration: August 2017 to June 2018

Consumer and industry concerns demand that Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is given from indigenous communities whose land is affected by corporate activities. But it is not always clear what the rules are and how they should be applied. A new project led by Equitable Origin, and funded by the ISEAL Innovations Fund, aims to improve FPIC implementation in the Amazon region. Soledad Mills, Executive Director of Equitable Origin, explains how the project aims to do that.

Why did you decide to launch this project?

Equitable Origin (EO) saw an opportunity for innovation and collaboration among ISEAL members on a particularly challenging and complex issue that many companies, especially those in the natural resources sector, are struggling to deal with: indigenous people’s rights to FPIC.

Many international standards, including almost 50% of ISEAL member standards, have incorporated indigenous people’s rights to FPIC as a requirement for certification. But there is a lack of experience and guidance on how FPIC can and should be implemented. What does successful FPIC look like? How can assurance providers verify whether FPIC has been achieved?

How will the project work?

EO has a history of engagement in the Amazon region and we look forward to work with our indigenous partners to understand what FPIC means from a rightsholder’s perspective. We are partnering with our long–time partner
Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon River Basin (COICA), and also with the Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials (RSB), a fellow ISEAL member.

The project will:

- Work with communities in the Amazon region to develop practical FPIC guidance.
- Establish a set of common principles and clear articulation of FPIC.
- Record the process of developing this guidance to determine its replication potential.
- Develop and make widely available guidance on FPIC for standard-setting bodies, assurance providers, local communities and producers.

Once we have achieved this, we aim to create a comprehensive training manual, develop an M&E framework, train local communities, pilot the guidance with producers in the field, and establish a website to share all the findings and information.

**How will communities be involved?**

We are seeking to create a mechanism for communities to participate proactively in the implementation, assurance and monitoring of voluntary standards. This could not only provide valuable and possibly near real-time information to standards systems and assurance providers about conformance, but also potentially revolutionise the way companies interact with communities, by enabling their participation in project-level decision-making processes that directly impact those communities.

**What lessons have you learned so far?**

The most important first step is to understand what has already been done in this space so that we don’t reinvent the wheel. Also, having clear roles and responsibilities established early on is important for setting expectations and for enabling a collaborative environment.

“The ISEAL Innovations Fund provides support for collaborating with other ISEAL members on topics and issues that we have long seen as important, but have not had the internal resources or capacity to explore.”

Soledad Mills, Executive Director, Equitable Origin

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