

POLICY STATEMENT AND APPROACH TO THE ENGAGEMENT OF RIGHTSHOLDERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

ASESORAMIENTO AMBIENTAL ESTRATÉGICO

Introduction

As an environmental consultancy company, Asesoramiento Ambiental Estratégico (AAE) implements projects involving different actors. Throughout our projects we support the engagement of rightsholders and stakeholders to reflect their views and address their concerns, as well as to ensure the sustainability of activities beyond the runtime of the projects. In addition, we strive for gender inclusiveness and responsiveness throughout project planning and implementation.

The present policy statement reflects AAE's ambition to apply best practices in our operations, which includes the engagement of rightsholders and stakeholders. It should be considered a working document that gets updated as we keep learning from our work, and it is a commitment that extends to our associated consultants.

Definitions

With “engagement”, we refer to any form of interaction between AAE and partners on the one side and rightsholders and stakeholders of the project on the other side. This can include virtual meetings, workshops, interviews, consultations¹ and training sessions as well as in-presence events, such as conferences and field visits. Special emphasis is placed upon any form of interaction with Indigenous Peoples (IPs), local communities, women and “vulnerable groups or individuals” among rightsholders and stakeholders.

According to IUCN², “rightsholders” are defined as “actors socially endowed with legal or customary rights with respect to land, water and natural resources”, while “stakeholders” are defined as “actors possessing direct or indirect interests and concerns about those, but do not necessarily enjoy a legally or socially recognised entitlement to them.”

For this statement, “vulnerable groups or individuals” can include any type of rightsholders and stakeholder who:

- May be adversely or disproportionately affected by a project AAE is engaged with (e.g. through evaluation, assessment or actual implementation); and/or
- May be more limited than others to access, partake in or benefit from the project AAE is engaged with (e.g. through evaluation, assessment or actual implementation); and/or

¹ We are aware that the term “consultations” has different meanings in different contexts. For the purpose of the present policy statement it is not necessarily understood as part of an FPIC process, unless specifically stated.

² IUCN (2013) Governance of Protected Areas. From understanding to action. Available from <https://www.iucn.org/content/governance-protected-areas-understanding-action>

- Is struggling or unable to fully claim their human, customary as well as legal rights, or influence decision-making over matters concerning such rights.

This can include people or groups who experience discrimination or disadvantage due to their gender, race, age, culture, ethnicity, religion, literacy, sickness, disability, poverty and/or dependency on specific natural resources.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy statement is to specify AAE's understanding of and practices towards meaningful, responsible and culturally appropriate engagement of rightsholders and stakeholders, including vulnerable groups and individuals, with the aim of:

- a. Embracing a diversity of people, cultures, habits and traditions.
- b. Applying a learning attitude, listening to views, opinions and concerns without prejudice or judgement.
- c. Establishing respectful relationships with rightsholders and stakeholders, including respect for their governance structures and preferences to communicate and interact;
- d. Capturing insights provided by rightsholders and stakeholders and considering them in analyses and outputs.
- e. Respecting and promoting the right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) in line with applicable legal frameworks, standards and practices.

Scope

AAE is committed to applying and promoting good practice and guidance throughout all rightsholder and stakeholder engagement activities planned, organised and carried out by anyone working on behalf of or in direct partnership with AAE. This includes:

1. AAE's permanent staff;
2. AAE associated consultants joining individual projects; and
3. Team members of partner organisations in joint ventures.

These three categories of people will subsequently be termed "AAE and partners".

Engagement Principles

AAE applies the following engagement principles consistently throughout its work:

- 1. Early start and consistency:** We aim to engage with rightsholders and stakeholders from early on and consistently throughout assignments. In some assignments, e.g. where "only" one field trip is planned to engage with rightsholders and stakeholders at the local level, we promote the continuation of engagement with actors at this level through our outputs.

2. **Transparency:** Whenever AAE and partners interact with rightsholders and stakeholders, we aim to communicate clearly and in appropriate language at different stages of the process, in advance to clarify the purpose and scope of engagement, during the actual engagement event, and to the extent possible³, also following the engagement event.
3. **Responsibility:** AAE and partners interact responsibly and respectfully with everyone they interact with, i.e. clients, partners, rightsholders and stakeholders, including vulnerable groups and individuals, in line with [AAE's Code of Ethics](#). This includes designing and implementing engagement activities in a culturally appropriate way, respecting existing communication channels, procedures for the coordination of logistics and preferences regarding locations, languages and engagement methods.
4. **Meaningfulness:** AAE aims for inclusive engagement, encouraging gender-balanced representation of participants, as well as equal opportunity for everyone to speak up during engagement events. To the extent possible, AAE includes local consultants in the project teams to ensure familiarity with culture, context, and appropriate communication, who are well placed to conduct meaningful engagement. Where it is felt that certain participants feel uncomfortable to speak up in an engagement event, options are explored to create separate spaces for such participants to contribute their views, such as women-only focus groups during field visits, led by a gender expert.
5. **Gender Mainstreaming:** AAE aims to create equal opportunities to participate in engagement events for people of all genders and collects information in a gender-disaggregated manner to be able to analyse and consider views, concerns, and preferences in a gender-sensitive way and understand possible differences and their origins. Our outputs reflect our approach to gender mainstreaming, e.g., by building gender-specific mitigation measures to address safeguards issues, supported by gender-specific indicators and reporting requirements, using inclusive language, adequate planning of meetings to ensure equal participation, etc.
6. **Do no harm - do good:** Several of AAE's projects take place in, or focus on, areas with complex socio-economic and socio-cultural settings where historic tensions may exist between rightsholders and stakeholders. In such settings it is of particular importance to ensure that engagement does not aggravate existing tensions, but instead aims to contribute to alleviation, de-escalation, and reconciliation. Awareness of existing power dynamics and balanced engagement of all parties in a culturally appropriate manner are crucial, as well as providing a space for people to bring forward their own suggestions of how the situation could be improved in the future.

Common Steps as part of Engagement

In many projects, especially those with elements of field work, there is a common sequence of steps that AAE applies. These include:

³ These words of caution are added here because not every project that includes engagement at local level allows for a feedback loop to socialise final outputs with the local level participants of engagement events.

1. Rightsholder and stakeholder **identification**: This refers to an initial listing of all known groups of rightsholders and stakeholders based on available information that often gets further updated and extended following revision and exchange with select project partners.
2. Rightsholder and stakeholder **mapping**: In this step, rights, and interests of each group of rightsholders and stakeholders gets analysed, as well as impacts the activity in focus may have on them. This step then also allows the identification of groups that should be considered as vulnerable and may need specific attention during engagement.
3. Engagement **planning and preparation**: Based on previous steps, appropriate ways to engage with different rightsholders and stakeholders are identified (e.g. participatory rural appraisal, focus groups, workshops, bilateral interviews etc.), including contact points, procedures in place that should be respected, requirements in terms of material (e.g. interview guidance, presentations), translators, etc. The step also includes the logistics of planning for engagement, which aims to achieve balanced coverage across the landscape in focus and the actors present. Ideally, the result of this step is a comprehensive engagement plan that details the way forward for engagement as part of an assignment. Where field visits are envisaged, a short assessment of the security situation is conducted and, as determined necessary, a security plan included in the engagement plan.
4. **Implementation of engagement plan**: This step refers to carrying out the actual engagement, potentially involving field visits. Before AAE team members start such visits, they need to confirm that they have familiarised themselves with and adhere to AAE's Code of Ethics and, as applicable, the security plan for the field visit.
5. Engagement **documentation**: Careful documentation of engagement findings is important to accurately capture statements made, but ideally such documentation goes beyond noting down what was said and instead also captures observations regarding the location where engagement takes place, noticeable power dynamics and tensions, the role of women in society, etc. To ensure that important observations are captured, we try to work with templates, and have a photographic record (upon request for consent), which also promotes consistency in engagement documentation. Participants lists with information disaggregated by gender are also a standard part of such documentation.
6. Engagement **analysis**: In analysing information gathered during engagement events, AAE takes an inclusive approach, not ruling out any views or concerns expressed on the grounds of a subjective understanding of "relevance". The only reasons why a view or concern may not be considered further are if a) the statement at hand is completely unrelated to the assignment or clearly erroneous, or b) there is a complete lack of clarity on what is meant (this happens in very few cases where after the engagement and upon reviewing documentation it is impossible to reconstruct jointly with the staff who conducted the field work the context in which a statement was made). All other findings from engagement events feed equally into our analyses.
7. **Socialisation** (where projects allow): Socialising the products of our work forms part of implementing the transparency and responsibility principles mentioned earlier. It is not merely good practice, but also allows for a final feedback loop and helps to

enhance the quality, acceptance, and support of the final products by different rightsholders and stakeholders. Whether or not socialisation of final products is part of our assignments is a decision that must be taken by the client. Where an assignment included complex field work, it is often not feasible to repeat the same trip again to present products. In some cases, socialisation is therefore done with a smaller group of rightsholders and stakeholders. However, there are also cases where the client undertakes such socialisation as part of using our products after the final handover.

Link with other policies and procedures

The present policy statement is directly linked with [AAE Code of Ethics and the separate Policy Statement on Gender Mainstreaming](#).

Good practice guidance

Good practice guidance we are using may differ from one project to another, depending on the circumstances. For example, there is specific guidance we apply in REDD+ readiness work and GCF-specific guidance we use in developing GCF concept notes or full proposals. Examples include:

- IUCN (2021) Stakeholder Engagement in IUCN Projects. Guidance Note, Environmental and Social Management System (ESMS), Version 2.1, May 2021. Available from <https://www.iucn.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/esms-stakeholder-engagement-guidance-note.pdf>
- FCPF and UN-REDD 2012. Guidelines on Stakeholder Engagement in REDD+ Readiness with a Focus on the Participation of Indigenous Peoples and Other Forest-Dependent Communities.
Available from:
[https://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org/sites/fcp/files/2013/May2013/Guidelines on Stakeholder Engagement April 20%2C 2012 %28revision of March 25th version%29.pdf](https://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org/sites/fcp/files/2013/May2013/Guidelines%20on%20Stakeholder%20Engagement%20April%202012%20revision%20of%20March%2025th%20version%29.pdf).
- UN Human Rights Council 2011. Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations 'Protect, Respect and Remedy' Framework. Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the Issue of Human Rights and Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises, John Ruggie, 7 April 2008, A/HRC/8/5. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/720245?ln=es>
- FSC 2021. FSC Guidance for Stakeholder Engagement. Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Bonn, Germany. Available from https://r.search.yahoo.com/_ylt=AwrkPbNZfOhk274Iz1nc5oIQ;_ylu=Y29sbwNpcjIEcG9zAzUEdnRpZAMEc2VjA3Ny/RV=2/RE=1692986585/RO=10/RU=https%3a%2f%2ffsc.org%2fen%2fdocument-centre%2fdocuments%2fretrieve%2f5801dd0c-2ab0-439d-9bbc-2a4b07f1c7ea/RK=2/RS=0.icmV4EKPVJazSvqKzgg572Aqs-

We are constantly looking out for recent developments regarding best practices in rightsholder and stakeholder engagement and may update the present document accordingly. Should you have any complaint about engagement planned and undertaken by AAE and partners, please register this complaint in [AAE's Grievance Redress Mechanism](#).



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