

# Indigenous Peoples: Enriching our understanding and engagement



The success of APRIL’s implementation of the FSC Remedy Framework hinges on the meaningful engagement and collaboration of local communities and Indigenous Peoples among other stakeholders. Part of the remedy implementation experience for APRIL is continuous learning and improving our understanding of and our approach to the engagement of the local communities and indigenous peoples.

Key to this improved understanding is the need to anchor our community and indigenous peoples engagement on respect, listening and trust-building with the view to nurturing long-lasting relationships.

Following APRIL’s participation in the recently held [FSC Remedy Forum](#) in Jakarta, where a diverse group of stakeholders and rightsholders called for scaled up and accelerated delivery of remedy outcomes, APRIL acknowledged the opportunity to bring some of the learnings from the Forum, particularly from the session on indigenous peoples, to the broader organization.



APRIL recently organized an internal webinar with [Minnie Degawan](#), the newly appointed Managing Director of the [FSC Indigenous Foundation](#), a global organisation dedicated to advancing Indigenous Peoples’ rights, values, and leadership within the FSC framework.

Minnie is a passionate advocate for indigenous peoples’ rights and integrating indigenous knowledge into global forest management. She brings over thirty years of experience working with Indigenous Peoples in the global forest conservation effort, including roles at The Nature Conservancy and Conservation International. In her sharing session with relevant APRIL staff in Jakarta, Riau and Kalimantan, Minnie shared valuable lessons from over 30 years of working with Indigenous Peoples, including in global conservation NGOs such as The Nature Conservancy and Conservation International, and some of her insights are shared below:

## Integrating Indigenous Knowledge

A fundamental motivation for meaningful engagement and relationship building with Indigenous Peoples and local communities, as highlighted by Minnie, is that it leads to the sustainable and efficient use of resources, grounding actions in shared values, and building trust with rightsholders. Integrating Indigenous knowledge into global forest management is beneficial as traditional practices and deep-rooted understanding of ecosystems, accumulated over generations, can significantly contribute to more holistic and effective forest stewardship. As Minnie shared, we need to acknowledge the perspective that through our presence on the landscape, “we are entering someone’s home.”

## Cultivating Authentic Engagement

Prior to engaging with Indigenous Peoples and local communities, it is good practice to carry out comprehensive stakeholder mapping and an in-depth analysis of their social, cultural, legal and political dynamics, including their economic conditions. This groundwork will inform the engagement strategy.

It is important to validate these findings directly with the communities themselves, and to build upon that understanding over time, continually tracking any changes in community dynamics that might affect engagement. Companies should always approach engagement as a relationship and trust-building process, not as a one-off activity. Building trusted relationships demands continuous validation with communities and a great deal of flexibility.

A common misconception is that Indigenous Peoples need to be represented by intermediaries to help them understand processes. Minnie pointed out that they are, in fact, fully capable of negotiating and deciding for themselves if the process is designed in a fair and culturally sensitive way. She shared an example: a signed document, while legally binding, might not always convey the same depth of agreement as sharing a meal together – which can be a powerful gesture of consent and shared commitment in many indigenous cultures. This highlights the need for companies and their representatives to go beyond conventional practices, dedicating time to learn about diverse traditions, governance structures, and communication styles.



## Empowerment through Consent

Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is widely recognized to be a fundamental principle that guides interactions with local communities and Indigenous Peoples. Minnie stressed that there is no one-size-fits-all template and companies should not approach it as a checklist or a one-way exercise. Rather, the principles of FPIC are inherently context-specific, requiring continuous engagement and relationship building. It is important to work alongside communities, being sensitive to their timelines and their preferred terms of engagement.

The nuanced nature of consent was also discussed, explaining that it can be seen as a ‘spectrum’ ranging from "No" to "Maybe," "Yes if," and "Yes,.". It is crucial to clearly understand the nature of the consent given and to confirm (and reconfirm) that understanding. This iterative process, Minnie explained, builds trust and ensures that company actions align with community aspirations.

Speaking as an indigenous person herself, Minnie cited that many of indigenous communities realize that their traditional knowledge is no longer sufficient and that they, too, could benefit from new technologies and inputs from external experts. In relation to the FSC remedy process, Minnie also noted that it is important to understand what land rights truly mean for the communities as this could also be the right to use, access or co-manage the resource. If compensation is considered as a form of social remedy, “cash would be the last option as many indigenous peoples prefer other means”.

## Our Ongoing Commitment

The session with Minnie was helpful in dispelling common misconceptions about engaging with indigenous peoples and a powerful reminder that continuous learning and adapting our approach are essential for effective remedy implementation.