

Empowering Communities through Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC): COPACSO's Initiatives in Karamoja



Figure 1: Participants from Kaabong and Rupa in Moroto during exchange learning organized by COPACSO at Rupa subcounty

Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) is a cornerstone of Indigenous Peoples' rights, ensuring their authority to approve or reject projects that affect their territories. This right, enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), enables communities to participate actively in decision-making processes, preserving their cultures and traditional practices while fostering self-determined development (FAOHome) (Academic Commons).

Challenges and Opportunities of FPIC

FPIC faces various challenges, primarily due to the discrepancy between theoretical frameworks and their practical application. Political realities, power dynamics, and vested interests significantly influence FPIC processes. In Latin America, for instance, the effectiveness of FPIC is shaped by the interactions between governments, companies, and indigenous communities. Addressing these political challenges is crucial for improving outcomes for Indigenous Peoples (Academic Commons).

Despite these hurdles, FPIC presents numerous opportunities. It empowers communities to negotiate beneficial terms, ensures their involvement in project planning and implementation, and can lead to more equitable and sustainable development outcomes. Successful FPIC implementation can build trust and collaboration among stakeholders, reducing conflicts and enhancing project legitimacy (FAOHome) (Academic Commons).

COPACSO's Work in Karamoja

In the Karamoja sub region of Uganda, the Coalition of Pastoralist Civil Society Organizations (COPACSO) is at the forefront of promoting and implementing FPIC among the Karamojong

people. COPACSO is a membership organization comprising 20 groups dedicated to recognizing pastoralism as a viable way of life. Their initiatives in the districts of Moroto, Kaabong, and Kotido are aimed at building the capacity of local communities to understand and assert their rights under FPIC.

During a recent exchange learning day between the Rupa Community Development Trust (RUCODET) and Kaabong Community Land Trusts, COPACSO highlighted the critical role of community organization and unity. RUCODET's journey, beginning in 2017, serves as a pioneering example. They successfully negotiated with the Sunbelt Marble Mine and Factory, ensuring that the community benefited from local mining activities through compensation and other advantages (FAOHome).

Key Lessons from RUCODET's Experience

Community Unity and Leadership: The collective effort of the Rupa sub-county clans and strong leadership were crucial to their success.

Negotiation and Legal Knowledge: Understanding and utilizing Ugandan land laws enabled RUCODET to formalize land rights and secure better deals.

Resilience in the Face of Challenges: Despite internal disputes and external pressures, RUCODET remained committed to the community's interests.

Community Benefits and Development: Compensation was used to support educational scholarships and community development, though ensuring transparent and equitable distribution remains essential (FAOHome).



Figure 2: A beneficiary speaking during the learning exchange event organised by COPACSO

Building Capacity in Karamoja

COPACSO's initiatives are empowering the Karamojong people to form and strengthen Communal Land Associations (CLAs) and Land Trusts, equipping them with the knowledge and tools needed to protect their lands and rights. This involves:

Training and Workshops: Providing comprehensive training on land rights, negotiation skills, and FPIC processes to community leaders and members.

Legal Support: Assisting communities in understanding and navigating legal frameworks to assert their land rights effectively.

Advocacy and Awareness: Raising awareness about the importance of FPIC and advocating for its implementation in all development projects affecting indigenous territories (FAOHome) (Academic Commons).

Success Stories and Continued Efforts

RUCODET serves as a beacon of hope and inspiration for other communities in Rupa subcounty in Moroto. By combining customary land tenure systems with formal legal provisions, they have showcased a unique blend of tradition and modernity. This approach has not only secured tangible benefits for the community but also strengthened their capacity to negotiate and advocate for their rights in future dealings (FAOHome) (Academic Commons).

COPACSO continues to build on these successes by:

Fostering Community Solidarity: Encouraging unity and collaboration among different clans and communities to present a united front in negotiations and advocacy efforts.

Enhancing Leadership Skills: Identifying and training potential leaders who can guide their communities through complex negotiations and legal processes.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Implementing robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that FPIC processes are followed and that communities benefit equitably from development projects (FAOHome) (Academic Commons).

Conclusion

COPACSO's work in Karamoja exemplifies the transformative potential of FPIC when communities are united, informed, and empowered. By learning from successful examples like RUCODET, the Karamojong people are building a stronger foundation for their future, ensuring that development projects respect their rights and contribute to their well-being. Through these efforts, COPACSO is making significant strides in promoting justice, development, and self-determination for Indigenous communities in Uganda.

In conclusion, the ongoing initiatives by COPACSO in Karamoja are a testament to the power of community organization, legal knowledge, and resilience. By embracing FPIC and building strong Community Land Trusts, the Karamojong people are taking control of their future, ensuring that

their voices are heard, and their rights are respected. This journey, though challenging, is paving the way for more equitable and sustainable development, fostering a brighter future for the communities of Karamoja.