Moving Towards Meaningful Engagement of Indigenous Peoples in Governance of UNESCO Global Geoparks

*Putting Principles into Practice*

This document summarizes key principles of meaningful engagement of Indigenous Peoples for the governance of UNESCO Global Geoparks, as identified by a review of literature on Indigenous engagement and interviews conducted with Indigenous Peoples and communities from organizations including the Canadian Commission for UNESCO; UNESCO Global Geoparks in Canada, Chile, Mexico and Nicaragua; International Indian Treaty Council; Government of Alberta Environmental Monitoring & Science, Indigenous Knowledge Division; and the Native Studies department at Dalhousie University. This work was part of a Master’s research project at the School of Environment and Sustainability at the University of Saskatchewan, carried out in partnership with the Canadian Commission for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations (CCUNESCO).

The resulting research report* identified seven principles that can guide organizations such as UNESCO to actively involve Indigenous communities in the governance of its global initiatives. For engagement to be meaningful, strategies designed to achieve any outcome should be guided by these principles, which are rooted in ethical conduct, measures of morality, and base values such as respect, honesty, humility, empathy, patience, and commitment. The process of engagement should, therefore, work towards emulating ethics, morality, and values in principles that can be operationalized in day-to-day practices. Each principle is accompanied by a set of practices that can guide the process of meaningful engagement. However, the process of meaningful engagement must not end at outcomes, but also incorporate monitoring, accountability, and adaptive learning mechanisms.

These principles and associated practices are laid out below:

* Available upon request.
**PRINCIPLE 1: CONSTRUCT AN ETHICAL SPACE OF ENGAGEMENT**

Meaningful engagement begins by constructing an ethical space to allow for on-going constructive dialogue founded on good faith, mutual trust and transparency.

*In practice:*

- Acknowledge distinct histories of Indigenous communities, and question pre-existing assumptions based on limited knowledge or information.
- Conduct should be guided by values of respect, empathy, reciprocity, trust and transparency.
- Indigenous worldviews, customs, culture and protocols of engagement must be respected.
- Dialogue must be longstanding, frequent, on-going, and aimed at long-term relationship building.
- When knowledge-sharing occurs, proper guidelines and protocols should be set in place for knowledge-ownership and opportunities arising from it.

**PRINCIPLE 2: RE-LEARN INDIGENOUS HISTORIES**

Meaningful engagement requires questioning preconceived assumptions and re-learning histories of Indigenous communities before beginning the process of engagement.

*In practice:*

- Time should be spent getting to know and research a community before engaging with its members. This includes learning about their history, culture, customs, and protocols.
- However, this should not be considered adequate knowledge, and must not lead to assumptions being made about the community in question.
- Community members and elders must always be given adequate opportunities to offer their perspectives and teachings.

**PRINCIPLE 3: RESPECT INDIGENOUS PATHWAYS TO SELF-DETERMINATION & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Meaningful engagement processes must respect Indigenous communities’ own self-determination and sustainable development goals.

*In practice:*

- Avoid making assumptions about Indigenous Peoples’ needs, capacities, and goals.
- Affirm whether the needs of Indigenous communities align with institutional goals of UNESCO regarding Indigenous Peoples at a global level.
- Respect communities’ visions of what sustainable development means to and for them.
### Principle 4: Prioritize Process Over Outcome

Meaningful engagement prioritizes the process of building relationships and establishing mutual trust over goals of meeting objectives and achieving outcomes.

**In practice:**
- Institutional processes should be adjusted to have flexibility in timeframes; relationship-building and establishing trust are open-ended processes that may take much longer than expected. Engagement cannot be rushed.
- Engaging a community with a goal of achieving certain outcomes without first considering that community’s needs, interests and capacities must be avoided.

### Principle 5: View Indigenous Peoples as Rights-holders, Not Stakeholders

Meaningful engagement addresses social injustice by acknowledging Indigenous Peoples as rights-holders, not passive stakeholders.

**In practice:**
- Respect Indigenous sovereignty over customary lands and territories.
- Work with Indigenous governance systems to strengthen their role in knowledge co-production, decision-making, power-sharing, and collaborative governance.

### Principle 6: Foster Engagement at All Levels of Decision-Making

Meaningful engagement builds capacity for Indigenous involvement at all levels of decision-making.

**In practice:**
- Acknowledge the diversity of Indigenous capacities, interests and needs.
- Indigenous involvement should be on-going through all phases of work.
- Actively communicate with Indigenous peoples throughout design and decision-making processes.
- Seek local Indigenous experts to join management teams.
- Develop and strengthen mechanisms that provide training and opportunities for Indigenous leadership.

### Principle 7: Build Conflict-Resolution & Consensus-Building Mechanisms

Meaningful engagement ensures that conflict-resolution and consensus-building processes are in place.

**In practice:**
- Build joint-coordination mechanisms with the aim of harmonizing conflicting objectives.
- Ensure that there is room for flexibility in timeframes and standard operating procedures.
- Understand the value of Indigenous governance systems and traditional knowledge in facilitating conflict-resolution and consensus-building processes.