



ISEJ EXPLAINER SERIES

Nothing About Us Without Us

Free, prior and informed consent in climate projects

Climate action arrives in communities as projects: dams, irrigation schemes, plantations, carbon-offset forests, mines for transition minerals, resettlement plans. Each promises the greater good; each can dispossess the people in its path. Free, prior and informed consent FPIC is the principle that stands between the two. Developed in international law to protect Indigenous peoples, it belongs in every climate decision that lands on someone's home, field or water source.

Four words, each doing work

- **Free:** no coercion, intimidation or manipulation including the soft coercion of consulting people after the decision is already made.
- **Prior:** before approval, before financing, before the machines arrive. Consent sought at the end is not consent; it is notification.
- **Informed:** full information about the project, its risks and its alternatives, in language and formats people can actually use not a technical summary deposited at a district office.
- **Consent:** a real decision, which includes the right to say no, to attach conditions, and to withdraw. It is ongoing, not a signature extracted once.

FPIC is not a box to tick. It redistributes voice and power. It counters the narrative that treats affected communities and the women in them as victims to be managed rather than agents with authority over their own territory and future. That is why weak versions of it are so popular, and real versions so resisted.

The gender dimension

Community consent processes inherit community power structures. If consultation happens through channels dominated by men chiefs' councils, landowner meetings, project liaison committees then 'the community consented' can mean 'the women were never asked', even where women bear the project's heaviest costs in lost water sources, fields and care burdens. Genuine FPIC requires deliberate inclusion of women, youth and persons with disabilities, resourced to participate, with their consent counted.

What ISEJ asked of Zimbabwe's climate law

In its submission on the Climate Change Management Bill (HB 05, 2025), ISEJ urged Parliament to codify FPIC in the permitting of climate-related projects; to require social and gender impact assessments before approval; and to enforce accessible grievance mechanisms for women and marginalised groups when safeguards fail. Consent written into statute with consequences is the difference between a principle and a poster.

Where ISEJ stands

FPIC is epistemic justice applied to land and climate: it says communities are the authors of decisions about their territory, not the audience. A climate transition built without consent will reproduce the injustices it claims to solve and be resisted accordingly. The one built on consent will hold.

About ISEJ

The Institute for Sustainable Empowerment and Justice (ISEJ) is a Zimbabwe-registered Private Voluntary Organisation working at the intersection of law, public policy, gender equality, climate justice, public health and narrative change. ISEJ translates complex legal and policy frameworks into knowledge communities can use because access to the law should not depend on access to a lawyer.

Dignity · Rights · Transformation

ISEJ submission on the Climate Change Management Bill HB 05 (2025); UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; Maputo Protocol, Arts 18–19. General information, not legal advice.