Indigenous Peoples (IPs) and local communities (LCs) often have a critical stake in decisions about land and resource governance. Historically, however, they have frequently been excluded from decision-making processes about the landscapes in which they live, including from discussions over the future and wellbeing of their ancestral territories and the resources located there (Palacios Llaque and Sarmiento Barletti, 2021; Rodriguez and Sarmiento Barletti, 2021).

In recent years, multi-stakeholder platforms (MSPs) have grown in popularity as a means to make land-use decisions more equitably and inclusively. But inviting IPs and LCs to participate in such platforms is not enough (Sarmiento Barletti et al., 2021). These groups often lose out on meaningful representation in MSPs (Larson et al., 2022), for a range of reasons – including:

- **Travel and access**: Lack of financial support for travel keeps IPs and LCs at home, particularly because they tend to be more geographically isolated. Lack of internet access has exacerbated the situation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Rights not recognized, not known or not enforced**: Governments may not recognize rights (or respect recognised rights), and Indigenous Peoples and local communities may not know their own rights or have the power/influence to hold duty-bearers accountable (Rodriguez and Sarmiento Barletti, 2021).

- **Cross-cultural differences**: IPs and LCs often have different norms and processes for decision making and discussion. There can be stigmatization when other groups expect IPs and LCs to behave in a certain way. Lack of local language translation can result in significant barriers. These communities are also not homogenous – there are differences both within and among different IP and LC communities.
Resistance to Indigenous knowledge:
Scientific biases often sideline Indigenous and local knowledge, knowledge systems and perspectives.

Governments exclude Indigenous Peoples and local communities: IPs and LCs may not be included in official delegations or guaranteed a seat at the table, and there may be no guidelines or policies for involving them or recognizing their rights (Evans et al., 2021).

To boost the participation of IP and LC representatives, MSP organizers need to engage strategically with these groups to foster ‘counter power’—and in doing so to ensure that the process is worth their time and effort, and accountable to their needs and interests. This requires careful and ongoing efforts to ‘level the playing field’ and mitigate dominate power relations, which usually bend away from IPs and towards state and private sector interests (Larson et al., 2022).

Below are some ways to do this:
• Identify and invite IP and LC leaders who represent a constituency and are considered legitimate by other members of these social groups
• Meet with these representatives to strategize about how the MSP can better serve their interests and needs
• Invite a critical mass of IPs and LCs – both women and men, as well as youth – to form a constituency in the MSP
• Provide separate spaces for that constituency to meet, discuss and identify collective needs, including capacity building needs to participate more effectively in the forum (Gonzales Tovar et al., 2021a and 2021b)
Facilitate networking between these constituencies and other participants in the forum who can serve as strategic allies.

Provide resources for IP and LC representatives to report back to their constituencies.

Consider holding meetings closer to the residence of these actors, such as rotating the location to facilitate participation (Evans et al., 2021).

It’s also crucial to build accountability structures into your MSP, and monitor – on an ongoing basis – how the process measures up to IPs’ and LCs’ needs and interests (Larson et al., 2022). See ‘How are we doing?’ (Sarmiento Barletti et al., 2020) for ideas on how to carry out effective participatory monitoring processes.

Members of the Alto Mayo Protected Forest MSP (San Martin, Peru) vote during the implementation of How are we doing? Photo by Marlon del Aguila/CIFOR

References


