



December 2021

Safeguards at a glance

Supporting the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in REDD+ and other forest-based initiatives

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Key messages

- Pledges for new investment in tropical forests may support sustainable development objectives, but also pose risks to forest-dependent communities.
- This flyer summarises voluntary safeguard standards relevant to REDD+, as well as the guidelines of regional and international multilateral funding institutions.
- We compared nine criteria to understand differences across standards and guidelines, focusing on their engagement with the rights of the IPLCs that steward the forests where REDD+ is implemented.
- There is considerable variation in how safeguard standards and guidelines engage with the rights of IPLCs.
- Voluntary standards can support a transition from 'doing no harm' to 'doing better' by catalysing a rights-based transformation to re-engage with the women and men of IPLCs as rights-holders and partners rather than beneficiaries.

This flyer is the first in a series on social safeguards standards and guidelines for REDD+ and other forest-based initiatives.

The series explores standards and guidelines regarding the rights and social inclusion concerns of the women and men of the Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) that steward the forests where climate solutions are implemented. Flyers provide lessons for application in different contexts, enable standards proponents to compare their safeguards provisions, present evidence for decision makers and practitioners to consider the implications and benefits of supporting the rights of IPLCs, and contributes to the participation of IPLC representatives in discussions on and monitoring of safeguards.

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Introduction

The need to clarify and understand the role of safeguards standards has gained new urgency, as the climate crisis prompts growing interest from countries and corporations in forest-based solutions such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) framework for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and enhancing forest carbon stocks (REDD+). Defined as “a set of principles, rules and procedures put in place to achieve social and environmental goals” (Roe et al. 2013), safeguards have been conceptualised and articulated in ways ranging from barriers against the most harmful impacts of REDD+ (‘do no harm’) to mechanisms to catalyse improved well-being and livelihoods for IPLCs and their territories (‘do better’). This flyer presents a table summarising important characteristics of 11 safeguards standards for REDD+ and of safeguards guidelines set by multilateral institutions that fund REDD+ (see Table 1).

There have been rights concerns regarding REDD+ from early on (Sarmiento Barletti and Larson 2017). When forest-based initiatives have attempted to foster inclusion, they have often addressed the symptoms of injustice rather than its structural causes (Larson et al. 2021). Thus, although development and conservation initiatives are not necessarily driving exclusion and rights transgressions, research shows that the failure to address exclusion likely reinforces or exacerbates it. Given that

IPLCs manage territories storing almost 300,000 million metric tons of carbon (RRI 2018), their rights, interests, and well-being cannot be ignored by any truly transformative climate solution. These groups have done little to cause climate change yet suffer many of its effects (Brockhaus et al. 2021).

The Standards

At the 2010 Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC in Cancun, Parties adopted seven safeguard principles for the implementation of REDD+. Two directly address the rights of forest-based communities, namely: “(c) respect the knowledge and rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities” and “(d) obtain effective participation in REDD+ design and implementation” (UNFCCC Decision 1/CP.16, Appendix 1). Countries are required to establish a safeguards information system to report on how the safeguards are addressed and respected throughout the implementation of REDD+ activities (UNFCCC Decision 12/CP.17). However, the Cancun safeguards mandate countries to design their own approaches to applying these principles, deferring to national law and policy in deciding what counts as ‘respect’ or ‘participation’ – in other words, what is just and what is not.

The table presents a snapshot of safeguards standards and guidelines. The snapshot sets a baseline for understanding – at a glance – what safeguards aim to do, what they do not aim to

Table 1. Comparative summary of safeguards standards and guidelines

	Multilateral funding institutions				
	African Development Bank (AfDB) ¹	Asian Development Bank (ADB) ¹	Green Climate Fund (GCF)	Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) ¹	Forest Carbon Partnership Facility Carbon Fund (FCPF)
(a) Level	Project	Project	National (subnational interim)	Project	Subnational & programmatic
(b) Groups	Vulnerable groups & IPLCs	IPLCs	IPLCs	Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendants & traditional peoples	IPLCs & other relevant communities
(c) Cancun safeguards	N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A	Yes
(d) Gender	Yes (mainstreamed)	Yes (gender & women)	Yes (GCF Gender Policy)	Yes (gender & women)	Yes (benefit sharing; WB standards)
(e) IPLCs' rights under international law	No (human rights in general)	Yes	Yes (GCF IP Policy)	Yes (includes Afro-descendants & traditional peoples)	Yes (per UNFCCC & WB standards; criteria & indicators)
(f) Land & resource rights	No	Partial (no mandated recognition of rights)	Partial (no specific provisions)	Yes	Yes (recognized or not)
(g) Community carbon rights	N/A	N/A	No	N/A	Partial (carbon rights assessment; no recognition of community rights)
(h) FPIC	No (consultation rather than consent)	Partial (consultation)	Yes (incl. description of how stakeholders were identified, involved & consulted)	Yes (requirements for ‘meaningful’ consultation)	Partial (monitoring & reporting; limited other circumstances)
(i) Formal benefit-sharing mechanism	No	No	No (optional)	No	Yes (transparent & participatory design; guidelines)
(j) Formal grievance mechanisms	Yes (project cycle)	Yes (ADB's own mechanism)	Yes (must report how complaints were received & resolved)	Yes (project's own; IDB also has one)	Yes (guidelines & standards)
(k) MRV of social/ rights concerns	Yes (with procedure & guidance)	Yes (due diligence & review)	Partial (disbursements not contingent on safeguards performance)	Yes (project reports, bank also monitors)	Yes (indicators; includes ‘default’ events)

Notes: 1 Safeguards guidelines reviewed were not only for REDD+ but the institutions fund REDD+ activities in their portfolios; 2 The standard is not limited to REDD+

do, which ones are more rigorous, and what might be possible in terms of their support for the rights of IPLCs. Many standards focus on the project level and almost all apply to IPLCs (although these terms are still open to definition), but two do not mention Indigenous Peoples specifically. Most of the REDD+ standards align with the Cancun safeguards but two do not. Gender (or women) is addressed in some way in all but one standard. Just over half specifically recognize the rights of Indigenous Peoples under international law, and some extend those rights to local communities. Only four broadly recognize the rights of IPLCs to land and resources; none recognize community carbon rights. Only five have strong protocols for free, prior and informed consent, only four require attention to benefit sharing mechanisms, and all but one require grievance mechanisms. Although most of the standards from multilateral funding institutions require robust monitoring, reporting, and verification, only two of the voluntary standards do so.

More ambitious safeguards tie results-based payments to evidence of ‘doing better’ rather than the much lower bar of ‘doing no harm’ (Lofts et al., forthcoming). They can thus support a transition to ‘doing better’ by catalysing a rights-based transformation and re-engaging with the women and men of IPLCs as rights-holders and partners rather than beneficiaries. Further analysis by CIFOR-ICRAF and its partners will delve into these issues through research on safeguards documents and on their implementation, which we will examine through fieldwork in 2022–2023.

What is in the table?

The table lists 11 standards and guidelines that vary in their support for the rights of IPLCs. For each, we noted (a) the level of application and (b) to whom it applies. Based on a review of documents published by each standard or institution, we determined the extent to which each guideline aligned with nine criteria relating to the respect for, and the recognition, protection, and fulfilment of, the rights of IPLCs and other marginalised groups. The nine criteria are: (c) aligns with the Cancun safeguards; (d) recognizes gender and/or women’s concerns; (e) recognizes the rights of IPLCs under international law; (f) recognizes land and resource rights for IPLCs; (g) recognizes community carbon rights; (h) recognizes the right of IPLCs to free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC); (i) requires formal benefit sharing mechanisms; (j) requires formal grievance mechanisms; and (k) includes provisions for monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) for rights and social inclusion concerns. Safeguards guidelines were rated as fully aligning with the criterion (yes), aligning in a limited way (partial – for those that only met some aspects of the criterion), or not aligning (no).

Independent voluntary standards					
The REDD+ Environmental Excellence Standard (TREES)	Climate, Community and Biodiversity (CCB) Standards	Land Rights Standard ²	The Plan Vivo Standard	Verified Carbon Standard (VCS)	VCS Jurisdictional & Nested REDD+ (JNR)
Subnational & national	Project	Project	Project	Project	Subnational
IPLCs & ‘equivalent’	IPLCs & communities with values / livelihoods derived from the area	IPLCs and Afro-descendants	Rural smallholders & communities	Local stakeholders & communities	IPLCs & relevant carbon rights holders
Yes	Yes	No (not explicitly)	No	No (not explicitly)	Yes
No	Yes (procedural, benefits, well-being)	Yes	Yes (procedural)	Yes (procedural)	Yes (benefit-sharing)
Partial (no uniform standard; no indicators for rights)	Yes (per UNFCCC; addresses FPIC & rights to land & resources)	Yes (recognized under applicable law)	No	No	Partial (per UNFCCC & local law; no explicit acknowledgement or monitoring)
Partial (no uniform standard)	Yes (with indicators; recognized or not)	Yes (recognized or not)	Partial (only where recognized)	Partial (only where recognized)	Partial (only where recognized)
No	No	No	No	No	No
Partial (no procedural guidance)	Yes (with indicators)	Yes (protocol for consultations)	Yes (incl. design & implementation)	Partial (no procedural guidance)	Partial (no procedural guidance)
No (distribution follows international conventions & national/subnational legal frameworks)	No (but optional)	Yes (mutually agreed & equitable arrangement)	Yes (agreed with communities; awareness of change over time)	No	Yes (equitable, transparent & legally binding)
No	Yes (detailed)	Yes (entire project life)	Yes (reported)	Yes (planning, implementation; benefit-sharing)	Yes (design, implementation, evaluation)
Partial (demonstration of procedural requirements; no awareness of change over time)	Yes (indicators; independent validation/verification bodies)	Yes (failure to report annually results in de-certification; incl. statement on grievance mechanism)	Partial (socioeconomic baselines; impacts to be reported)	No (initial information on how safeguards were addressed, no monitoring)	No (initial information on how safeguards were addressed, no monitoring)

Acknowledgements

This work, carried out as part of the Center for International Forestry Research's Global Comparative Study on REDD+ (www.cifor.org/gcs), builds on a prior study by the Rights and Resources Initiative (Lofts, Frechette and Kumar 2021). The funding partners that have supported this research include the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad, Grant No. QZA-21/0124), International Climate Initiative (IKI) of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, and Nuclear Safety (BMU, Grant No. 20_III_108), and CGIAR Research Programme on Forests, Trees and Agroforestry (CRP-FTA) with financial support from CGIAR Fund Donors.

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Safeguards documents reviewed (in order of presentation in the table)



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FTA's work is supported by the CGIAR Trust Fund: cgiar.org/funders/



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