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Lessons towards rights-responsive REDD+ safeguards from a literature review

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Contents

Acknowledgments	v
Executive Summary	vi
1 Introduction	1
2 Methods	3
3 Background	4
4 Safeguard typologies	6
5 Key themes	10
5.1 Rights	10
5.2 Tenure security	11
5.3 Justice and equity	11
5.4 Participation	12
5.5 Implementation and monitoring	13
6 Factors supporting the role of social safeguards in respecting, protecting, and fulfilling the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities and other marginalized groups	15
6.1 Marginalized groups and gender	17
6.2 Rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities under international law	17
6.3 Formal benefit-sharing mechanism	18
6.4 Formal grievance mechanism	18
6.5 Monitoring, reporting and verification of social and rights-related concerns	18
7 Conclusion	19
References	20

List of tables

1	Types of safeguards by institution (Roe et al. 2013)	6
2	Comparative typologies for REDD+ operationalization (McDermott et al. 2012)	7
3	REDD+ safeguards spectrum (Arhin 2014)	8
4	Social safeguards and standards in initiatives outside REDD+ (FCMC 2012)	9
5	REDD+ safeguards standards and guidelines (Sarmiento Barletti et al. 2021)	16

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Executive Summary

Safeguards for REDD+ arose in response to serious concerns voiced by forest-dependent Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) over its potential to infringe upon their rights and territories. To address some of these concerns, the Cancun safeguards were adopted in 2010 under the auspices of the UNFCCC to ensure that REDD+, at a minimum, does not harm forest-dependent communities or the environment. Several institutions have also developed voluntary standards for REDD+, in addition to safeguards guidelines adopted by multilateral funding institutions. Across these standards and guidelines, safeguards have been conceptualized and articulated in different ways: as bulwarks against the most harmful impacts of REDD+ interventions (“do no harm”); as means to achieve sustainable development outcomes (“do good”); or as mechanisms to catalyse the transformation of forest-dependent communities (“do better”). Yet the need to clarify and understand the role of safeguards and their effectiveness has gained new urgency given the growing interest by countries and corporations in nature-based solutions, including REDD+ and other initiatives to protect and restore natural ecosystems. While an influx of new investments in tropical forests can bolster sustainable development goals, it also poses risks to the rights and social inclusion concerns of forest-dependent IPLCs.

This literature review examines safeguards experiences in REDD+ and other natural resource management initiatives to understand when safeguards work, for whom, and why. It seeks to extract lessons for rights-responsive safeguards standards and guidelines to protect and support the rights of IPLCs, and the women and more marginalized groups within those groups. Part 1 introduces the key issues that frame the review, and Part 2 gives a brief overview of the methods used in this literature review. Part 3 provides background to the adoption and establishment of safeguards for REDD+ under the UNFCCC, while Part 4 engages with safeguard standards relevant to REDD+ and natural resource management more generally, examining some of the typologies employed in the literature to classify and understand safeguards. Part 5 presents an analysis of the major themes emerging from the literature, while Part 6 extrapolates factors supporting the role of social safeguards in respecting, protecting, and fulfilling the rights of IPLCs and women and more marginalized groups within those communities. Finally, Part 7 concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the social safeguards model and a reflection on gaps in the literature.

We synthesized the following lessons for rights-responsive safeguards standards and guidelines:

1. In the absence of more profound, structural transformations in relation to the governance of territories by IPLCs, social safeguards assume subjects who require ‘safeguarding’ rather than active agents and participants.
2. Rights-responsive safeguards must be aligned with the rights and norms related to IPLCs under international law – but not limited to those international legal instruments that a state has ratified – and should include clear rights-related criteria, indicators, and monitoring.
3. They must ensure that IPLCs – and the women and more marginalized groups within those communities – are involved throughout the process of REDD+ design, implementation, and monitoring, with concrete indicators to measure and monitor progress.
4. They require the recognition of, and respect for, the land and resource rights of IPLCs, regardless of whether these rights are formally recognized under law.
5. The strongest safeguards concerning benefit sharing include requirements for a formal mechanism that is equitable, transparent, and legally-binding, and that is participatory in its design.
6. The most rights-responsive safeguards require the establishment of a formal grievance mechanism covering the entire project’s life, including design, implementation, and evaluation, as well as reporting on grievances received and how they were addressed.
7. Safeguards must be subjected to rigorous monitoring, reporting and verification requirements to ensure compliance, with clear thresholds and indicators, and consequences for non-compliance (e.g., disbursements contingent on meeting performance requirements).

1 Introduction

REDD+ – the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC) framework to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and enhance forest carbon stocks – was first proposed in 2005 as a means to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions by paying forest owners and users to cut fewer trees and more sustainably manage their forests. Since then, it has evolved and meant different things to different actors (Angelsen et al. 2009; Den Besten, Arts and Verkooijen 2014; McDermott et al. 2012; Turnhout et al. 2017). REDD+ functions “as a dynamic and contested instrument of governance, where rules are designed and interpreted at multiple scales involving state, private sector and civil society actors who interact within a yet broader network of actors and interests concerned with forest conservation, development and trade” (McDermott et al. 2012, 65).

Within this shifting web of meanings, social and environmental safeguards have become an essential yet equivocal component of REDD+ (Arhin 2014; McDermott et al. 2012; Pistorius 2012; Ros-Tonen et al. 2013). REDD+ safeguards arose in response to serious concerns voiced by forest-dependent IPLCs, as well as by national and international environmental and Indigenous rights organizations, over the potential impact of REDD+ on their rights and territories (Howell 2014; Suseeya 2017). Indeed, there is evidence that forest carbon and conservation initiatives have impacted the rights and justice concerns of IPLCs in the areas of the Global South where those initiatives have been implemented. These impacts include rights violations, as well as deficiencies related to the fact that such initiatives have not been designed to address the experiences of deep inequality, structural discrimination, and historical exclusion experienced by IPLCs (Sarmiento Barletti and Larson 2017). Moreover, different stakeholders have different access to power (e.g., technical knowledge, funds, political influence), including within communities themselves (e.g., gendered disparities in access to decision-making). In this complex context, forest carbon initiatives have the potential to exacerbate existing injustices and power imbalances (Sarmiento Barletti and Larson 2020).

To address some of these concerns, the Cancun safeguards were agreed at the sixteenth Conference of the Parties (COP 16) with the aim of ensuring that REDD+, at a minimum, does not harm communities or the environment (Decision 1/CP.16, Appendix 1). A number of organizations have developed voluntary standards that “[set] out rules and procedures for accounting of [greenhouse gas] emissions and removals (and co-benefits)” from REDD+ or other forest carbon activities, “and which can lead to a validation/certification of these activities” (Schmidt and Gerber 2016, 10). Safeguards guidelines have also been adopted by multilateral funding institutions operating in the REDD+ arena.

As with REDD+ itself, safeguards have been conceptualized and articulated in different ways by different actors (Arhin 2014) – as bulwarks against the most harmful impacts of REDD+ interventions (“do no harm”), as means to achieve sustainable development outcomes (“do good”), or as mechanisms to catalyse the transformation of IPLCs rights and livelihoods (“do better”; Arhin 2014; Bee and Sijapati Basnett 2017; Ribot and Larson 2012; Roe et al. 2013; Wong et al. 2019). Still other analysts view safeguards as a bureaucratic or neocolonial burden imposed on countries of the Global South by those in the Global North, as industrialized countries commodify Southern forests as carbon sinks, rather than reducing their own greenhouse gas emissions (Christen et al. 2020; Collins 2019; WRM 2013).

The need to clarify and understand the role of safeguards and their effectiveness has gained new urgency, as intensifying ecological crises prompt growing interest on the part of countries and corporations in ‘nature-based solutions’ – including REDD+ and other initiatives for the protection and restoration of natural ecosystems – to help meet their emissions reduction targets and commitments to biodiversity (Lofts et al. 2021; Makower 2020; Seddon et al. 2019; Seddon et al. 2020; Seymour

2020). While an influx of new investments in tropical forests can bolster sustainable development objectives, it also poses risks to forest-dependent communities, including the creation of perverse incentives and the deepening of existing social and economic inequities (Jacob and Brockington 2017; Kane et al. 2018; Lofts et al. 2021; Sarmiento Barletti and Larson 2017).

This literature review examines safeguards experiences in REDD+ and other natural resource management initiatives, with an aim to understanding when safeguards work, for whom, and why. It also seeks to extract lessons for protecting and supporting the rights of IPLCs and the women and more marginalized groups within those communities. Part 2 gives a brief overview of the methods used in this literature review. Part 3 provides background to the adoption and establishment of safeguards for REDD+ under the UNFCCC, while Part 4 surveys safeguard standards relevant to REDD+ and natural resource management more generally, examining some of the typologies employed in the literature to classify and understand safeguards. Part 5 presents an analysis of the major themes emerging from the literature, while Part 6 extrapolates factors supporting the role of social safeguards in respecting, protecting, and fulfilling the rights of IPLCs and women and more marginalized groups within those communities. Finally, Part 7 concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the social safeguards model and a reflection on gaps in the literature.

2 Methods

A literature search was conducted using the Web of Science database and the Google Scholar search engine to find relevant scholarly and grey literature. Initial searches were carried out using the term “safeguards” in combination with the terms “REDD+”, “forests”, “natural resources”, and “Indigenous Peoples”. The snowball method was used to add further search terms and to identify additional references. Additional literature was also found by searching the repositories for key NGOs (e.g., Forest Peoples Programme, Rights and Resources Initiative) and research centres (e.g., CIFOR-ICRAF, World Resources Institute) operating in the areas of forestry, natural resource management, and the rights of IPLCs.

The search focused on literature on social safeguards from the last 10 years (2011–present). While the primary focus was on safeguards in relation to REDD+ and forest carbon initiatives, literature concerning safeguards in other natural resource and agricultural sectors was considered where relevant. Notably, although one of the objectives of the present study was to review the successes and failures of safeguards in practice, the achievement of this objective was limited by a lack of literature in this respect.

3 Background

Safeguards can be defined as “a set of principles, rules and procedures put in place to achieve social and environmental goals” (Roe et al. 2013). The concept of safeguards first arose in the context of multilateral development banks aiming to avoid, mitigate, and minimize adverse impacts from investment and development activities (Duchelle et al. 2017; Ituarte-Lima et al. 2018; McDermott et al. 2012). Safeguards have since “proliferat[ed] within international discourse as a means to address the environmental and social risks of international intervention at local scales, and to ensure sustainable outcomes” (McDermott and Ituarte-Lima 2016). They have been developed and implemented across a number of industries and sectors by a variety of actors, with differing objectives and modes of operation (Peskest and Todd 2013).

The concept of REDD+ (then referred to as RED – Reducing Emissions from Deforestation) was first introduced at the UNFCCC’s COP 11 in Montreal in 2005 (Turnhout et al. 2017). Initial discussions focused on its potential as a tool for climate change mitigation, alongside opportunities (so-called “co-benefits”) to improve the livelihoods of forest-dependent IPLCs and foster sustainable development (Turnhout et al 2017). However, concern also arose over its potential to produce unintended negative consequences; these risks have been well-examined (Dehm 2016; Kelly 2010; Seymour 2010). Many REDD+ countries face significant governance challenges that pose risks to communities living in and around forests, including corruption, insecure or unresolved land tenure and resource rights, and weak rule of law (Lofts et al. 2021). These challenges may intensify with the influx of REDD+ funds (McDermott et al. 2012). Drawing in part on past experiences with conservation initiatives, researchers have also pointed to the potential for a range of adverse social impacts on IPLCs and women within those groups in relation to REDD+, including restriction or loss of access to land and natural resources, risk of dispossession or displacement, lack of equitable benefit sharing from REDD+ activities, sociocultural impacts (including loss of traditional knowledge), and the exclusion of IPLCs from the design, implementation, and monitoring of REDD+ measures (Bayrak and Mohammed Marafa 2016; Savaresi 2013). These initiatives are often carried out in, and may exacerbate, complex contexts that include historical or ongoing rights violations and structural inequalities (Sarmiento Barletti and Larson 2017).

At the UNFCCC’s COP 16 in Cancun in 2010, Parties adopted a set of broad safeguard principles for the implementation of REDD+. The Cancun Agreement (Decision 1/CP.16) includes seven safeguards encouraging REDD+ programmes to: (a) complement national forest programmes and international conventions and agreements; (b) maintain transparent governance; (c) respect the knowledge and rights of IPLCs; (d) obtain effective participation in REDD+ design and implementation; (e) promote forest conservation and other environmental and social co-benefits; (f) address risks of reversals; and (g) reduce leakage (Decision 1/CP.16, Appendix 1). Parties in Cancun also requested that developing countries establish a system for providing information on how these safeguards are addressed and respected throughout the implementation of REDD+ activities (Decision 1/CP.16, Paragraph 71 (d)).

In 2011, the COP reached a further agreement that parties undertaking REDD+ activities should provide a Safeguards Information System on how the Cancun safeguards are being addressed and respected (UNFCCC Decision 12/CP.17). The system must: (1) provide transparent and consistent information that is accessible by all relevant stakeholders and updated on a regular basis; (2) be transparent and flexible to allow for improvements over time; (3) provide information on how all of the safeguards are being addressed and respected; (4) be country-driven and implemented at the national level; and (5) build upon existing systems, as appropriate (UNFCCC Decision 12/CP.17,

paragraph 2). While the system refers to international agreements and outline each country's national interpretation of these agreements and how they fit within existing legal systems, it does not expand the recognition of rights in and of themselves.

Following these developments in the UNFCCC, "a plethora of guidelines, standards and frameworks" have sprung up "in the context of the ongoing pilot schemes on REDD+ to enable governments and project developers to achieve better protection for local communities" (Arhin 2014, 25). This literature review therefore considers a variety of standards, principles, certification schemes, and guidelines as falling within the ambit of safeguards.

4 Safeguard typologies

There are different typologies for thinking about and categorizing safeguards in the context of REDD+ and related fields; this section surveys some of those typologies.

In conducting their systematic review of safeguards standards for REDD+ and forest carbon initiatives, Roe et al. (2013) organize safeguards by the level at which they operate (e.g., subnational and project scales) and by the type of institutions to which they correspond (multilateral, bilateral, national/sub-national, or private). They further break down their assessment of safeguards standards into substantive (social and environmental) and procedural components. Table 1 provides an overview of safeguards types.

Other typologies provide a conceptual framework for understanding safeguards and highlight the need for clarity and transparency in terms of safeguard objectives and corresponding modes of implementation. These frameworks interrogate the proper role of safeguards, including those that aim to “do no harm” versus those that aim to “do better” (Bayrak and Marafa 2016). McDermott et al. (2012) developed three safeguard typologies to assess the operationalization of REDD+ social safeguards and benefits: organizational, substantive, and conceptual. Similar to Roe et al.’s (2013) classification above, their organizational typology classifies REDD+ safeguards by organizational type (global multilateral funding programmes, hybrid approaches, and private certification schemes), in addition to governance structure (specifically, who is given representation in decision making), scale, scope, and the existence of enforcement and verification mechanisms (McDermott et al. 2012). The substantive typology assesses REDD+ safeguards against a set of criteria (consistency with international agreements; transparent and effective governance; respect for the knowledge and rights of IPLCs; stakeholder participation; enhancement of social benefits; additionality; and equity) to analyse their content. Finally, the conceptual typology compares the differences in the substantive typology, setting out a continuum of safeguard priorities, from a focus on carbon to one on human rights.

Table 1. Types of safeguards by institution (Roe et al. 2013)

Safeguard type	Examples	Level of operation
Multilateral institutions and organizations	Safeguards under the UNFCCC (Cancun safeguards); Forest Carbon Partnership Facility and Green Climate Fund guidelines; complementary social and environmental mechanisms (e.g., decisions taken by the Convention on Biological Diversity)	National, subnational and project
Bilateral safeguards	Conditions included in agreements between REDD+ countries or public entities (e.g., Norway’s bilateral agreements; the Indonesia–Australia Forest Carbon Partnership)	National and subnational
National/subnational safeguards	Standards for forest carbon offsets under national or sub-national emission trading systems (e.g., domestic forest offsets under California AB 32 Global Warming Solutions Act)	Project
Private standards	Standards developed by NGOs, private sector, or associations (e.g., voluntary social and environmental standards) and complementary social and environmental mechanisms (e.g., Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, Forest Stewardship Council, Fairtrade)	National, subnational and project

Table 2. Comparative typologies for REDD+ operationalization (McDermott et al. 2012)

Type	Comparison	Characteristics
Organizational	Balance of actors, scale of focus and enforcement or verification mechanisms of REDD+ organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representation in decision-making (government, donors, NGOs) • Scale (national, projects) • Scope (carbon, safeguards) • Enforcement/verification
Substantive	Content of safeguards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistency with international agreements • Transparent and effective governance • IPLCs • Stakeholder participation • Social benefits • Additionality • Equity
Conceptual	Paradigms between different approaches to REDD+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carbon pure • Risk based • Co-benefits • Rights based • No REDD

Based on the application of these typologies, McDermott et al. (2012) posit that the involvement of investors and/or donor governments in decision making correlates to a conception of REDD+ as focused primarily on carbon, while the involvement of NGOs is correlated with a greater focus on non-carbon values, and UN agency involvement is linked to greater focus on international agreements. They propose that “organizational actors and interests may apply [...] legitimating ideas in distinct ways”, which in turn reveals the power dynamics within REDD+ “and the ways in which these might shift depending on the types of organizations involved in REDD+ design, funding and the certification and verification of REDD+ activities” (McDermott et al. 2012, 70).

Arhin (2014) also developed a REDD+ safeguards spectrum to disaggregate the ideas and objectives that underpin safeguards and assess potential outcomes for IPLCs. Arhin’s spectrum has four categories in order of increasing protection and benefits for forest-dependent communities: preventive, mitigative, promotive, and transformative. At one end of the spectrum, preventive safeguards “are those principles, standards, criteria and propositions which seek to do no harm to local communities”, while at the other end, transformative safeguards “focus on the broader political economy” and “aim to radically alter narratives and power relations in a way that give greater control to communities to make decisions and benefit from the REDD+ scheme” (Arhin 2014, 26–28). The transformative pole of this spectrum aligns with Ribot and Larson’s suggestion that the aim of forestry and REDD+ should be “emancipatory” and should “empower local people to shape the political economy” that in turn shapes their lives (2012, 240). Between these two poles are mitigative safeguards, which “seek to mitigate and/or minimize the negative distributional impact of REDD+ on local communities and their livelihoods”, and promotive safeguards, which emphasize the assertion of “rights and responsibilities rather than making changes in the prevailing sociopolitical regime that affect marginalization and exclusion” (Arhin 2014, 26–27).

Arhin’s framework aims to highlight REDD+ safeguards “as a multi-layered process which can potentially conceal or deny opportunities for pathways that could address the fundamental factors contributing to marginalization of local communities from benefiting from the REDD+ scheme” (2014, 29). This understanding may in turn allow for the assessment of how safeguards are operating in practice, and whether they align with the stated goals of REDD+ project proponents, developers, and national governments.

Table 3. REDD+ safeguards spectrum (Arhin 2014)

Safeguard type	Examples
Preventive	Designing specific strategies for REDD+ to prevent negative outcomes including forced eviction, displacement, and the exclusion of IPLCs from access to and use of resources.
Mitigative	Resettlement of displaced communities, compensation for affected individuals and communities, and granting of partial user rights for forest products.
Promotive	Increased participation in policy making, promotion of accountability and transparency in forest management, institution or promotion of practices that reduce elite capture, and promotion of free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC).
Transformative	Changing land tenure laws to give communities greater land security, developing benefit-sharing schemes that give communities greater control, empowering communities to manage natural resources, institutionalizing greater involvement of communities in planning and decisions on forests at all levels, and investing in the expansion of local communities' assets.

The proliferation of voluntary safeguards relating to REDD+ has several practical implications. Some authors note that the various safeguards instruments may be viewed as complementary, providing support to countries on the development of different aspects of their own safeguards approaches (Peskett and Todd 2013). To this end, some commentators highlight the importance of exploring and identifying synergies within countries between REDD+ safeguards and other related safeguard systems (Tegegne et al. 2017). The “complex web of safeguards” (McDermott and Ituarte-Lima 2016, 8) and their differing objectives, scope, and structure have also caused confusion at the project and subnational levels (Peskett and Todd 2013). Countries may have difficulty navigating the range of criteria, indicators, and rules, and integrating them into their national implementation frameworks and reporting processes, creating a “costly administrative burden” (Roe et al. 2013, 20). Moreover, the different standards may not align (Poudyal et al. 2016), including on crucial issues such as FPIC (Arhin 2014; Savaresi 2013), or in relation to their objectives (Arhin 2014; Poudyal et al. 2016; Roe et al. 2013). This misalignment can lead to incoherence in the operationalization of safeguards. For example, Savaresi observes that “[t]he divergence in safeguards adopted under the [Forest Carbon Partnership Facility] and the UN-REDD Programme has resulted in the fact that the same activities in the same countries may be subjected to different standards, depending on which institution is handling the funding” (2013, 6).

Finally, initiatives outside REDD+ have also developed social safeguards and standards that may offer valuable lessons. These include the Forest Stewardship Council Standards, Fairtrade certification for small producers, the Convention on Biological Diversity’s Akwé: Kon Voluntary Guidelines for the Conduct of Cultural, Environmental and Social Impact Assessments, the World Wildlife Fund Carbon Standard Assessment, and the UNFCCC’s Clean Development Mechanism. In their *REDD+ Social Safeguards and Standards Review*, the Forest Carbon, Markets and Communities (FCMC) Programme extracts key lessons from these initiatives, adapted into Table 4, below.

The typologies surveyed above provide different conceptual and organizational frameworks for thinking through safeguard standards, principles, and guidelines relating to REDD+. The following section builds on this analysis to draw out some of the salient themes in the literature.

Table 4. Social safeguards and standards in initiatives outside REDD+ (FCMC 2012)

Safeguard/Standard	Description	Key features
Forest Stewardship Council Standards	Certification scheme for sustainable forest management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopts a principles, criteria, and indicators approach; principles and criteria are international, while indicators are nationally adapted. • Offers graduated incentives and a phased approach to compliance with best practices, recognizing the challenge of implementing sustainable forest management standards.
Fairtrade certification	Fairtrade standards for small producers' organizations, addressing social development, socioeconomic development, environment, and labour.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizes the importance of internal capacity development and group governance issues (including inclusive participation, equity, and transparent financial management). • Provides support to producer groups to improve in these areas.
CBD's Akwé: Kon Voluntary Guidelines	Voluntary guidelines, complement existing national impact assessment procedures by providing a collaborative framework for stakeholders to address key issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prescribe local multi-stakeholder platforms for addressing Indigenous issues.
WWF Carbon Standard Assessment	A "meta-standard" providing a list of attributes to assist carbon project proponents in identifying which standard to use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes "drop out" criteria that, if not met, would effectively trigger the cancellation of a project.
UNFCCC's Clean Development Mechanism	Modalities for afforestation reforestation projects under the Clean Development Mechanism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes social and environmental criteria for project validation and verification that must be met before projects can proceed.

5 Key themes

Several key themes emerge from our review of the safeguards literature.

5.1 Rights

The extent to which safeguards standards are aligned with international human rights discourse is a subject that arises frequently in the literature on REDD+ safeguards, particularly in relation to the rights of IPLCs, including tenure, resource, and participatory rights (Lyster 2010; Savaresi 2013; Wallbott 2014). For example, Savaresi (2013) asserted the importance of promoting stronger linkages with international human rights instruments to address the social impacts of REDD+, while Godden and Tehan (2016) examined the degree to which human rights objectives have been realized through the implementation of REDD+ safeguards. In general, concerns relating to rights in the context of safeguards relate either to the need to expand the scope of the rights recognized or the need to bridge gaps in access to those rights that are already recognized.

These considerations are viewed as particularly pressing given that safeguards for REDD+ under the UNFCCC are country-driven, permitting countries to “identify their own specific approaches to addressing injustices that may arise from REDD+ readiness and implementation, thus allowing them to decide what is just and what is not” (Sarmiento Barletti and Larson 2020, 4). Indeed, as Sarmiento Barletti and Larson note, “the national-level implementation of safeguards is affected by country-specific political, economic and social priorities [...] and by existing legal interpretations of relevant rights” (2020, 2). According to Jodoin, variations in how human rights standards are understood and applied by various actors in the field of REDD+ have had important and diverse implications for the experience of IPLCs, mostly notably with respect to FPIC and “the distinctive status held by Indigenous Peoples across international and transnational sites of law” (2017, 83–84). As Jodoin asserts:

While the UN-REDD Programme Social and Environmental Principles and Criteria, the REDD+ SES, and the third edition of the CCB Standards offer strong support for the right to FPIC, the UNFCCC Cancun Agreements and the World Bank’s Operational Policy on Indigenous Peoples do not. At the same time, the UNFCCC Cancun Agreements, the World Bank’s Operational Policies, and the UN-REDD Programme Social and Environmental Principles and Criteria maintain a clear distinction between the obligations owed to Indigenous Peoples and non-indigenous local communities, whereas the REDD+ SES and the third edition of the CCB Standards appear to do away with this distinction altogether. (2017, 84)

For Jodoin, these variations reflect “different balances that have been struck between the effectiveness of REDD+ and its implications for justice and equity” (2017, 84).

This situation has led to divergent concerns. On one hand, authors express concern that the customization of safeguards at the national level will result in lesser protections for IPLCs and other marginalized groups (Shankland and Hasenclever 2011; Wallbott and Florian-Rivero 2018). In these accounts, the integration into REDD+ interventions of human rights norms rooted in international instruments such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and International Labour Organization Convention 169 is critical to ensuring the protection and empowerment of IPLCs and other marginalized groups (Schroeder and McDermott 2014). This current of thought in the literature is countered by concern over the subjugation of local knowledge and practices to international

discourse, and a privileging of “external actors over local communities” (Schroeder and McDermott 2014, 2). The preoccupation in the literature with the application of international human rights norms in the context of the country-driven approach to safeguards under the UNFCCC points to the need to anchor international rights obligations in diverse local contexts.

Yet while the recognition of rights is largely viewed as a prerequisite for the protection of marginalized groups in the context of REDD+ (Larson et al. 2013; Wallbott and Recio 2019), some authors stress that rights themselves are insufficient to safeguard the interests and well-being of communities and marginalized groups. Rather, they must have the ability to actually benefit from those rights (Ribot and Larson 2012) – something Ribot and Peluso (2003) refer to as “access”. This access paradigm focuses on the “bundle of powers” (Ribot and Peluso 2003, 153) that enable individuals and communities to benefit from the realization of rights, providing “a way to explain empirically ‘who benefits’ from things, and show[ing] that rights are only one aspect of this ability” (Ribot and Larson 2012, 240–241). Thus, while rights must be protected, established, strengthened, and secured, attention must also be paid to what Ribot and Peluso call “structural and relational mechanisms of access” (2003, 164).

5.2 Tenure security

Tenure security is another key topic that illustrates the important distinction between the clarification of rights and rights recognition. It is widely recognized that tenure arrangements should be addressed before REDD+ schemes are implemented (Sunderlin et al. 2018). Commentators point out that unclear tenure may undermine the efficiency, effectiveness, and equity of REDD+ (Awono et al. 2014). In particular, tenure arrangements play a critical role in determining equity with respect to benefit distribution. However, authors also caution that tenure clarity and security in and of themselves do not guarantee equitable outcomes when underlying inequalities such as elite capture have not been addressed (Chomba et al. 2016) or when legal regulations over resource use force communities into informal markets (Sarmiento Barletti et al. 2021).

As Chhatre et al. (2012) emphasize, focus on the clarification of rights in the context of tenure arrangements is a technical process that fails to address the question of who should be entitled to such rights. In other words, clarifying tenure will not lead to equitable outcomes if land is not equitably distributed in the first place (Chomba et al. 2016). By contrast, a more holistic examination and recognition of rights “focuses on justice, more clearly advancing social co-benefits and emphasizing the comparative strengths of local communities” (Chhatre et al. 2012, 656).

Other authors also point out that tenure arrangements in the context of REDD+ can be complex and layered. Godden and Tehan emphasize that a “constellation of ‘rights’ may exist in relation to the land, the forest and the carbon sequestered” (2016, 105), including a mix of customary and statutory law. In this context, “the emphasis in REDD+ policy and guidance on the need for ‘secure and clear’ tenure” may militate in favour of “securing rights premised on current possession of land by indigenous and local communities” (Godden and Tehan 2016, 106). This objective may in turn result in a failure to adequately or accurately address the overlapping land and resource rights of IPLCs.

5.3 Justice and equity

The literature on human rights and “access” is set within a broader discussion of justice and equity in the conceptualization and implementation of REDD+ (Sarmiento Barletti and Larson 2020; Schroeder and McDermott 2014). As Schroeder and McDermott note, REDD+ has “become inextricably entangled in fundamental debates about justice and equity from local to global levels” (2014, 1). In particular, a number of authors focus on the need to address the power relations and structural

inequalities that underpin REDD+ and other interventions at the local level (Larson et al. 2021) citing concerns that safeguards will serve as “simple checklist exercises for participation without a strategy for addressing power and gendered relations that influence how information is shared and decisions are made” (Wong et al. 2019, 1046). More meaningful implementation of safeguards requires recognition and understanding of the power dynamics of different organizational actors and interests in relation to safeguards standards and institutions, in addition to how these dynamics might impact trade-offs between carbon and non-carbon values.

One of the key insights to emerge in this regard is the extent to which REDD+ interventions, including the application of safeguards, are shaped in part by the political and historical contexts in which they occur, including “entrenched rural inequalities embedded in disabling social, political-economic, and legal hierarchies” (Ribot and Larson 2012, 236). As Sarmiento Barletti and Larson point out, national REDD+ safeguards may in fact reproduce structures of discrimination against IPLCs, addressing “only the injustices that are recognized by current legal systems, in spite of international conventions” (2020, 4). In this way, seemingly neutral policies or programmes may actually exacerbate the historical marginalization of certain groups – and of people within those groups (e.g., women) – and entrench structural inequalities (Chomba et al. 2016; Ribot and Larson 2012). Many of the true shifts in power relations needed to effectively safeguard communities and hold state and non-state actors to account in case of violations have not yet been observed (Wong et al. 2019).

A related insight concerns the tendency of REDD+ – like other development and conservation initiatives implemented in the Global South – to decontextualize and depoliticize the landscape to which it is applied, thus obscuring inequities. For example, in relation to gender considerations, Bee and Sijapati Basnett observe a tendency in REDD+ to “reduc[e] gender to a means to improve programme efficiency” (2017, 795). This tendency aligns with a process described in critical development studies literature as “rendering technical” (Bee and Sijapati Basnett 2017), which involves three elements:

- (1) expertise: established by identifying a problem that is in need of a solution, which then requires development expertise (see also Li 2007);
- (2) non-political solutions: excludes the structure of political-economic relations from the diagnosis and solutions, e.g., focusing more on the capacities of the poor than on the practices through which one social group marginalizes the other (see also Scott 1999);
- (3) anti-political design: solutions contain and deflect any challenge to the status quo (see also Ferguson 1990).

Bee and Sijapati Basnett note that the emphasis in REDD+ on monitoring, reporting and verification “lends itself to the process of rendering technical” (2017, 796). For example, in relation to gender, while countries must collect and provide information on how safeguards are being addressed and respected, a lack of “clear guidance on how to go about doing this has seemingly meant that gender is addressed in very reductionist ways”, with gender being “reduced to a bureaucratic obligation” (Bee and Sijapati Basnett 2017, 796).

5.4 Participation

A related theme to emerge from the literature concerns participation and representation (see Larson et al. 2018 for a review). The full and effective participation of affected communities is now largely recognized as a prerequisite for REDD+ activities and a key to the success of safeguards (Ribot and Larson 2012). However, there is a need to ensure that such participation does not simply reproduce

pre-existing hierarchies and power asymmetries. As Ribot and Larson emphasize in their case study on Senegal, it is necessary to “[shift] binding decision-making powers to accountable local representatives in ways that challenge the power of elites and transform ‘business as usual’” (2012, 236).

This kind of transformative participation must go beyond mere representation. For example, in relation to gender, some authors note that in spite of the application of safeguards for inclusivity, women continue to be marginalized in consultations and other participatory processes and do not receive an equitable distribution of benefits from conservation initiatives (Sarmiento Barletti and Larson 2020; Wong et al. 2019). Moreover, the “numerical strength of women” in participatory processes does not guarantee “voice and influence” (Larson et al. 2015, 45). A comparative study of 20 REDD+ sites across six countries found that women have been less involved in decisions and processes concerning the design of REDD+ initiatives than men, with participation largely limited to attending meetings and trainings, rather than taking part in decision-making, monitoring, and enforcement (Larson et al. 2015; see also Evans et al. 2021). These findings align with the observation that current REDD+ safeguards fall into nominal or instrumental modes of participation, with participants “constructed as passive objects and means to an end” (Bee and Sijapati Basnett 2017, 790) rather than as agents involved in more transformative ways.

In addition, some of the key dimensions of meaningful participation remain in dispute, including the role of consent in participatory processes. For example, Ribot and Larson point out that rather than being a general requirement for activities impacting the lives of forest-dependent communities, FPIC is required only for Indigenous Peoples, while the details – including who provides consent and who determines the validity of consent – remain largely undefined (Ribot and Larson 2012). This restrictive application of FPIC contrasts with an at times overly expansive conception of stakeholders, in which “citizen voices are represented as one vote among multiple ‘stakeholders’ [...] giv[ing] license to whoever organizes a stakeholder process to decide who participates” (Ribot and Larson 2012, 235; see also Sarmiento Barletti et al. 2020).

5.5 Implementation and monitoring

The challenges involved with safeguard implementation and enforcement are also highlighted in the literature, along with the disconnect between safeguard discourse and practice. Both the Cancun and Durban agreements concerning safeguards are broad, and leave “considerable flexibility for parties to interpret what they mean in practice” (Peskest and Todd 2013, 2). As Christen et al. (2020) point out, a high level of country customization is required for REDD+ implementation to be consistent with the Cancun safeguards, national capacities, and national sovereignty. Yet the lack of formal guidelines or binding policies with respect to social safeguards, and the ability of individual countries to “interpret and formulate” the governance, livelihoods, and sociocultural aspects of REDD+, means that REDD+ may “have different impacts on forest-dependent communities depending on how social safeguards are defined and implemented” (Bayrak and Marafa 2016: 5). Indeed, authors have noted the extent to which the application and operationalization of REDD+ safeguards varies from country to country in the absence of proper guidelines (Sarmiento Barletti and Larson 2020).

Other authors emphasize the importance of monitoring, reporting and verifying safeguards, including the development of effective indicators to monitor safeguards progress (Wong et al. 2019). As Saeed et al. (2017) point out, monitoring should extend to socioeconomic outcomes and safeguard performance if the effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of REDD+ is to be established. Although clear rules and guidelines exist for the measurement, reporting, and verification of carbon emissions, these do not exist for the assessment of the social aspects of REDD+ (Duchelle et al. 2017). Rigorous safeguard monitoring has either not occurred in on-going REDD+ projects or is not a requirement for many safeguard standards (Saeed et al. 2017). Nor does the Durban decision on REDD+ include performance indicators with respect to safeguard reporting, only requiring countries to submit

“qualitative information” on safeguards implementation, and leaving “the national application of safeguards discretionary rather than mandatory” (Chhatre et al. 2012, 654).

Yet, as Hjort argues, the discourse surrounding safeguards, in the absence of rigorous, mandatory monitoring, reporting and verification, may actually “provide an illusion of assurance for those keen to see forest dwellers’ rights and customary normative systems protected” (2021, 71). Others also identify this disconnect between discourse and practice. For example, Saeed et al.’s (2017) systematic reviews found that although REDD+ discourse places great emphasis on rights recognition and on tenure clarity and security, this is not reflected in practice. Similarly, many REDD+ projects have failed to apply FPIC and have not met their obligations with respect to consultation and information sharing (Sarmiento Barletti and Larson 2020). The effective implementation and proper enforcement of legal safeguards is thus vital to addressing REDD+ risks (Ribot and Larson 2012).

This review revealed themes in the literature that point to some of the key challenges in the conceptualization and implementation of safeguards. The following section synthesizes factors supporting the role of social safeguards in respecting, protecting, and fulfilling the rights of IPLCs and women within those groups.

6 Factors supporting the role of social safeguards in respecting, protecting, and fulfilling the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities and other marginalized groups

Evaluating success in the development and implementation of social safeguards and principles can be difficult, given that such success is defined and measured differently by various actors. The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) provides one example of a certification scheme that has received different evaluations of its performance. A “transnational non-profit organization, which runs a globally recognized timber and forest products certification and eco-labelling scheme”, the FSC has been held out, both by itself and by scholars, as an “exemplary institution” (Moog et al. 2015, 470), and has been commended for improving a range of substantive social sustainability goals (Boström 2012), providing a “blueprint for corporate social responsibility and corporate citizenship” (Aras and Crowther 2010, 246). Yet, this praise seems to be largely premised on interest in the FSC’s role as a multistakeholder initiative engaged in non-state or private transnational rulemaking (Dingwerth 2008). By contrast, other commentators, including a number of NGOs, have questioned the integrity of the standard and its enforcement practices (Coniff 2018; Moog et al. 2015; The Rainforest Foundation 2002; Vyawahare 2021). Notably, the Rainforest Foundation (2002) has worked with organizations and individuals around the world to document a wide range of concerns about the FSC’s activities on the ground, linking these issues to more fundamental structural critiques of the FSC itself.

This example underscores the idea that the success of REDD+ social safeguards should be judged from the perspective of the well-being of the IPLCs in the areas of implementation since safeguards are designed to protect those communities. To this end, adopting a rights-based approach grounded in the obligations that states have already undertaken vis-à-vis the protection of IPLCs and other marginalized groups can provide a useful way of gauging the extent to which safeguards achieve the social goals for which they are formulated (Savaresi 2013). These obligations on the part of states range from not infringing upon the rights of IPLCs and other marginalized groups, to taking positive measures “to fulfil rights and protect subjects within their jurisdiction against violations carried out by third parties” (Savaresi 2013, 1). To the extent that safeguards align with these obligations, they fulfil their role as measures to protect or avoid risks, while promoting benefits (e.g., fulfilling economic, social, and cultural rights). To the extent that they go beyond mere rights recognition and fulfilment to alter power relations more radically in favour of communities and more marginalized groups within those communities, safeguards may approach the more transformative pole proposed by Arhin (2014). Based on an analysis of leading safeguards standards (Sarmiento Barletti et al. 2021), Table 5 provides a summary of how safeguards standards and guidelines address key rights indicators, showing the characteristics of those safeguards that are the most closely aligned with a rights-based approach. Several of these characteristics are fleshed out in greater detail below.

Table 5. REDD+ safeguards standards and guidelines (Sarmiento Barletti et al. 2021)

	MULTILATERAL FUNDING INSTITUTIONS						INDEPENDENT VOLUNTARY STANDARDS				
	African Development Bank (AfDB) ^a	Asian Development Bank (ADB) ^a	Green Climate Fund (GCF)	Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) ¹	Forest Carbon Partnership Facility Carbon Fund	The REDD+ Environmental Excellence Standard (TREES)	Climate, Community and Biodiversity (CCB) Standards	Land Rights Standard ^b	The Plan Vivo Standard	Verified Carbon Standard (VCS)	VCS Jurisdictional & Nested REDD+ (JNR)
(a) Level	Project	Project	National (subnational interim)	Project	Subnational & programmatic	Subnational & national	Project	Project	Project	Project	Subnational
(b) Groups	Vulnerable groups & IPLCs	IPLCs	IPLCs	Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendants & traditional peoples	IPLCs & other relevant communities	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
(c) Cancun safeguards	N/A	N/A	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	No (not explicitly)	No	No (not explicitly)	Yes
(d) Gender	Yes (mainstreamed)	Yes (gender & women)	Yes (GCF Gender Policy)	Yes (gender & women)	Yes (benefit sharing; WB standards)	No	Yes (procedural, benefits, well-being)	Yes	Yes (procedural)	Yes (procedural)	Yes (benefit-sharing)
(e) IPLC 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)	Limited (no uniform standard; no indicators for rights)	Yes (per UNFCCC; addresses FPIC & rights to land & resources)	Yes (recognized under applicable law)	No	No	Limited (per UNFCCC & local law; no explicit acknowledgement or monitoring)
(f) Land & resource rights	No	Limited (no mandated recognition of rights)	Limited (no specific provisions)	Yes	Yes (recognized or not)	Limited (no uniform standard)	Yes (with indicators; recognized or not)	Yes (recognized or not)	Limited (only where recognized)	Limited (only where recognized)	Limited (only where recognized)
(g) Community carbon rights	N/A	N/A	No	N/A	Limited (carbon rights assessment; no recognition of community rights)	No	No	No	No	No	No
(h) FPIC	No (consultation rather than consent)	Limited (consultation)	Yes (incl. description of how stakeholders were identified, involved & consulted)	Yes (requirements for 'meaningful' consultation)	Limited (monitoring & reporting; limited other circumstances)	Limited (no procedural guidance)	Yes (with indicators)	Yes (protocol for consultations)	Yes (incl. design & implementation)	Limited (no procedural guidance)	Limited (no procedural guidance)
(i) Formal benefit-sharing mechanism	No	No	No (optional)	No	Yes (transparent & participatory design; guidelines)	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)
(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)	No	Yes (detailed)	Yes (entire project life)	Yes (& reported)	Yes (planning, implementation; benefit-sharing)	Yes (design, implementation, evaluation)
(k) MRV of social/ rights concerns	Yes (with procedure & guidance)	Yes (due diligence & review)	Limited (disbursements not contingent on safeguards performance)	Yes (project reports, bank also monitors)	Yes (indicators; includes 'default' events)	Limited (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)	Limited (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)

a Safeguards guidelines reviewed were not only for REDD+ but the institutions fund REDD+ activities in their portfolios

b The standard is not limited to REDD+

6.1 Marginalized groups and gender

The most rights-responsive safeguards recognize, address, and support the rights of all marginalized groups, including women, youth, minorities, persons with disabilities, and the very poor (FCMC 2012). For example, the REDD+ Social and Environmental Standards (REDD+ SES)¹ refers extensively to “marginalized and/or vulnerable social groups” within IPLCs, including the consideration of the rights of these groups within several specific indicators (REDD+ SES 2012). The REDD+ SES defines marginalized people or groups as “those who have little or no influence over decision-making processes” and notes that “[i]n many situations marginalization exacerbates vulnerability” (REDD+ SES 2012).

To be inclusive of marginalized and vulnerable social groups, safeguards standards must therefore consider the specificity of, and variation in, group dynamics across project sites, subnational jurisdictions, and countries. The development of appropriate policies and interventions that avoid unwanted outcomes requires research on “people in nested and overlapping constituencies that reflect the multiple roles, identities and interests of men and women across class, location, occupation and other points of difference and affinity” (Rocheleau and Edmunds 1997, 1368). The need for research into the specificity of local group dynamics and multiple, overlapping identities in the context of REDD+ has been most thoroughly examined in relation to gender. For example, Larson et al. (2015; see also Larson et al. 2018) describe the wide range of factors that may impact women’s participation in REDD+, noting that their participation alone is insufficient to ensure that gender inequities are addressed. Rather, the effective engagement of women requires a nuanced understanding of sociocultural norms, power inequalities, and capacity gaps “as well as an “understanding of gendered forest uses and community and household relations that may be affected by interventions” (Larson et al. 2015, 61; see also Evans et al. 2021). To this end, the most rights-responsive safeguards would ensure that women are involved “in all aspects of REDD+ design, decisions, capacity building and benefits” (Larson et al. 2015, 61) and require data, analysis, and concrete indicators to measure and monitor progress.

6.2 Rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities under international law

The most rights-responsive safeguards are aligned with the rights and legal norms relating to IPLCs as established under international law (but not limited to those international legal instruments that a state has ratified), and include clear criteria, indicators, and monitoring. These rights include the rights to participation and FPIC, and to land and resources.

While many safeguards standards require FPIC under certain circumstances, “they vary considerably in the extent to which they elaborate on this requirement” (FCMC 2012, 12). For example, the REDD+ SES “includes the right to self-determination for Indigenous Peoples, and the requirement for FPIC in relation to the adoption of legislative or administrative measures as well as other relevant decision-making processes that may affect them” (REDD+ SES 2012). It also requires FPIC for activities affecting rights to lands, territories and resources, and includes other specific FPIC requirements throughout the standard. By contrast, under the Verified Carbon Standard (VCS 2021), FPIC is only required if a project will affect property rights and no concrete guidance is provided regarding the procedural requirements for effective consultation or processes related to FPIC.

The application of FPIC in the context of REDD+ has also been controversial because it is conceived as a collective right for Indigenous Peoples and therefore has, in many cases, excluded non-Indigenous

¹ Voluntary best-practice standards aimed at supporting effective implementation and credible reporting on the social and environmental performance of government-led REDD+ programmes and related low-emissions land use.

forest-dependent people (FCMC 2012). This conception of FPIC tends to assume “single cultural groups occupying discrete and exclusive territories” (FCMC 2012), when the situation on the ground is often more complex. Therefore, in contexts in which “representative democratic governance processes generally are weak or non-existent”, such as many of the countries in which REDD+ is being implemented, some note the practical value of extending the right to FPIC to local communities (FCMC 2012). Indeed, certain safeguards systems refer to both IPLCs in relation to FPIC.

With respect to land and resource rights, the most rights-responsive standards would require the recognition of and respect for communities’ land and resource rights, whether or not these rights have been formally recognized under statutory law. To this end, careful attention to local context is important. As Lyster notes in relation to resource rights, these “rights cannot be simply asserted without undertaking a detailed legal analysis of transparency norms, legal standing and transparent access to decision making in each tropical rainforest country” (2010, 126).

6.3 Formal benefit-sharing mechanism

The strongest safeguards concerning benefit sharing include requirements for a formal mechanism that is equitable, transparent, legally binding, and participatory in its design. For example, under the Verified Carbon Standard Jurisdictional and Nested REDD+ standard, jurisdictional proponents must put in place an equitable, transparent and legally-binding benefit-sharing system that considers stakeholders’ carbon rights, including rights to land, forests, forest resources, as well as their contribution to ecosystem services that resulted or will result in greenhouse gas emission reductions (VCS Jurisdictional and Nested REDD+ Scenario 3 Requirements v. 4.0). Benefit-sharing systems are to be developed through a transparent and participatory process in which stakeholder participation is representative, with a special emphasis on IPLCs, women, and the most marginalized and/or vulnerable (VCS Jurisdictional and Nested REDD+ Scenario 3 Requirements v. 4.0).

The experience of benefit-sharing mechanisms in Vietnam also demonstrate that a wide range of types of capital – including natural, physical, financial, human, social and cultural – should be taken into account when considering safeguards concerning REDD+ benefits and their contribution to individual and community well-being (Bayrak et al. 2014). Indeed, case studies reveal that the direct financial aspects of benefit-sharing arrangements may be less important than other co-benefits, such as the ability collect and sell non-timber forest products, or to access loans, materials, and training (Bayrak et al. 2014).

6.4 Formal grievance mechanism

While the majority of REDD+ safeguard standards require the creation of a formal grievance redress mechanism, the attributes of this mechanism vary. The most rights-responsive safeguards require the establishment of a formal mechanism covering the entire project life, including design, implementation, and evaluation, as well as reporting on grievances received and the way they were addressed.

6.5 Monitoring, reporting and verification of social and rights-related concerns

Social and rights-related safeguards must be subjected to rigorous monitoring, reporting and verification requirements to ensure compliance. To this end, standards should require monitoring, clear thresholds and indicators, and consequences for non-compliance, e.g., disbursements contingent on meeting performance requirements (FCMC 2012).

7 Conclusion

While safeguards have become a mainstay of REDD+ discourse and practice, the literature reveals considerable variation in their underlying objectives, the ways in which they are formulated, and the extent and effectiveness of their implementation. While Part 6 draws on the literature to provide a spectrum of safeguard success grounded in international human rights norms, even the strongest end of this spectrum reveals the limitations of the safeguards model.

In the absence of more profound, structural transformations in relation to the governance of territories by IPLCs, social safeguards offer a paternalistic worldview, assuming subjects who require safeguarding rather than active agents and participants in the design, implementation and monitoring of initiatives. Given this framing, safeguards stop short of allowing for the participation of IPLCs as full, self-determined partners in projects and programmes concerning their lands. Safeguards may also obscure conflicts and underlying power relations in ways that may ultimately disempower IPLCs and other marginalized groups by insisting on engaging them as project beneficiaries rather than partners and change-makers.

Seen in this light, the idea of transformative safeguards posited by Arhin (2014) – and the idea of REDD+ as a transformative pathway away from the climate emergency – may perhaps be a contradiction in terms, with such transformative measures and the reconfiguration of power relations that they imply lying beyond the realm of safeguards as they are currently understood. REDD+ itself has been described “as a form of neo-colonialism, in that it co-opts the traditional forest and savanna places occupied by [forest-dependent Indigenous Peoples and local] communities into schemes that are designed to provide outcomes of global benefit” (Godden and Tehan 2016, 103–104). REDD+ safeguard standards and guidelines may struggle to truly overcome this foundational inequity and “the spatial and locational inequalities” it implies (Godden and Tehan 2016, 103). That the areas of the Global South where REDD+ is being implemented are framed by historical conflicts between IPLCs and more powerful actors with interests on their territories and resources confirms the need for rights-responsive approaches to safeguards that support REDD+’s transformational potential.

This review also revealed gaps in the literature concerning safeguards. Broadly speaking, there is a need for greater empirical research on the operationalization of REDD+ social safeguards (Duchelle et al. 2017). This includes a need for empirical research on the ability of historically marginalized groups to meaningfully participate and share in the benefits of REDD+ initiatives (Schroeder and McDermott 2014), in addition to a need to better understand how participants’ multiple, intersecting identities relate to the effectiveness and equity of social safeguards (Sarmiento Barletti and Larson 2020). A related gap is the need for more information on the ability of communities and marginalized groups to enforce their rights on the ground, for example, through feedback and grievance redress mechanisms (Sarmiento Barletti and Larson 2020). Research is also needed on whether results-based payments have been challenged based on a failure to adequately employ and enforce safeguards. Finally, more research and reflection are needed on the potential for REDD+ and related land use projects and programmes to go beyond the safeguarding paradigm to catalyse more transformational change.

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Safeguards for REDD+ arose in response to serious concerns voiced by forest-dependent Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and non-governmental organizations, over its potential to infringe upon their rights and territories. Several institutions have also developed voluntary standards for REDD+, in addition to safeguards guidelines adopted by multilateral funding institutions. This working paper examines safeguards experiences in REDD+ and other natural resource management initiatives to understand when safeguards work, for whom, and why. It seeks to extract lessons for rights-responsive safeguards standards and guidelines to protect and support the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and the women within those groups. This work, carried out under CIFOR's Global Comparative Study on REDD+, is part of a series on REDD+ safeguards, focusing on the rights and social inclusion concerns of the women and men of the Indigenous Peoples and local communities that steward the forests where climate solutions are implemented.



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