



# NATURE FRAMEWORK INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES CONSULTATION

Summary of Input

May 16, 2024

## Purpose

This document summarizes the sentiments of Indigenous Peoples who participated in Verra’s Sustainable Development Verified Impact Standard (SD VISta) Nature Framework, v0.1 (Nature Framework) [public consultation](#) focused on learning from and engaging with Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

## Background

Indigenous Peoples and local communities possess centuries-old traditional knowledge and practices that are invaluable for biodiversity conservation. Verra, in partnership with Conservation International, initiated a dialogue where they could voice their concerns and provide input on the design of the Nature Framework’s first draft. Verra and Conservation International are thankful to all the participants who joined us to share their feedback.

To accommodate different languages and support cross-cultural engagement, Verra and Conservation International provided participants with the Nature Framework, its summary, and the presentations in English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish.

The public consultation consisted of nine sessions with 67 attendees. Five regional virtual workshops, most with live translation, three in-person events, and one on-demand engagement.

### Summary of consultation events

Session format	Region/event
<b>Regional webinars</b> <i>Session title: Nature Framework Consultation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Africa</li> <li>Asia and the Pacific</li> <li>Europe and Russia</li> <li>Latin America</li> <li>North America and the Arctic</li> </ul>
<b>In-person events</b> <i>Session title: Exploring Nature Credits and the vital role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2023 Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD SBSTTA)</li> <li>2023 National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Annual Convention</li> <li>28th United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties (UNFCCC COP28)</li> </ul>

The input from the public consultation highlights a range of essential themes and priorities that Verra will consider in the next draft of the Nature Framework.

### Key Takeaways

- **Barriers to entry**
  - Indigenous Peoples fear exclusion from decision-making processes regarding projects on their lands, are uncertain about 40-year project longevity requirements, and often have limited access to technology (e.g., electricity and internet).
  - Indigenous Peoples' suggestions to overcome these challenges include:
    - Uphold their rights enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), emphasizing free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC).
    - Develop flexible project longevity requirements.
    - Offer in-person meetings to include them in decision-making processes for projects on their lands, especially those with limited technology access.
- Suggestions related to **benefit sharing** include using a rights-based approach built on the UNDRIP and other relevant instruments to:
  - Implement accompanying mechanisms and effective procedures.
  - Securing the terms and conditions for Indigenous Peoples and their territories.
- **Capacity-building** suggestions include incorporating local innovations and adaptive practices using Indigenous knowledge and science to strengthen the effectiveness of the Nature Framework's Nature Credit development and foster restorative justice.
- **Safeguards**
  - Indigenous Peoples fear that projects might serve as a pretext for land grabbing or displacing them from their ancestral territories.
  - Participants' suggestions to overcome this challenge include:
    - Incorporate the Ancestral Lands Decolonization, Monitoring, and Enforcement Mechanism (ALDMEM) to enforce FPIC and safeguard projects.
    - Uphold Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDS), the CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance (i.e., collective benefit, authority to control, responsibility, ethics), and Indigenous Peoples' Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) to ensure adequate data use.
- Suggestions to integrate traditional knowledge in **biodiversity quantification** include incorporating an Indigenous knowledge lens, from traditional knowledge specialists and researchers to the Western-science-based biodiversity metrics.
- **Significance attributes** signaling Indigenous Peoples' stewardship and cultural values include the safe and free exercise of their rights to exist, practice their traditions, access their territories unencumbered by harm, practice bodily autonomy, and hold unrestricted access to social, cultural, spiritual, and political institutions.
- Indigenous Peoples supported pursuing the **nature stewardship credit or certificate pathway** and suggested planning, implementing, and leading solutions, partnerships, and cooperative efforts across jurisdictions to uphold sovereignty, self-determination, and human rights.

## Barriers to Entry

Participants shared the following critical factors that could inhibit Indigenous Peoples and local communities from meaningfully participating in and benefiting from the Nature Framework:

- **Fear of exclusion from decision-making processes** regarding projects on their lands. For instance, in the Amazon, project proponents are perceived to be dividing tribes and violating FPIC.
- **The minimum 40-year project longevity requirement**, mainly due to legal constraints (e.g., land tenure rights in certain countries).

Participants provided Verra with suggestions to overcome these challenges:

- **Uphold FPIC as enshrined in international agreements like the UNDRIP**, along with including more robust safeguards and implementation guidelines to put them at the center of decision-making.
- **Facilitate member participation through transparent and inclusive communication structures** that empower communities to be at the center of decision-making processes affecting their lands and livelihoods, which would increase engagement and ownership, even if members have limited access to electricity and the internet.
- **Offer alternatives to the minimum 40-year project longevity requirement**, such as rolling terms and ongoing periodic renewals to influence community buy-in and uptake.

For example, Australian communities host to Indigenous-led carbon projects have been reluctant to agree to 25-year permanence periods. These projects have been comfortable initiating emissions avoidance activities with 25-year permanence only while no obligation is present.

## Safeguards

Safeguards help protect Indigenous Peoples' fundamental human rights, including the rights to self-determination, land ownership, cultural identity, and participation in decision-making processes that impact their livelihoods.

Participants raised that **Indigenous communities fear that projects might serve as a pretext for land grabbing or displacing them from their ancestral territories.**

To overcome that concern, participants suggested Verra to:

- **Incorporate the ALDMEM mechanism**, developed by the Center for World Indigenous Studies, into the Nature Framework to enforce FPIC. The mechanism was developed to protect Indigenous territories from harmful resource extraction.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Center for World Indigenous Studies (CWIS). "What is ALDMEM?" 2024, <https://www.cwis.org/fpic/what-is-aldmem/>.



## Sustainable Development Verified Impact Standard

- **Incorporate the CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance<sup>2</sup>** developed by the Global Indigenous Data Alliance to safeguard Indigenous Peoples when negotiating agreements and contracts, supporting collective benefit, retaining authority to control, and requiring responsibility and ethical implementation of data use.
- **Develop more tools to safeguard Indigenous Peoples' customary laws and protocols for protecting their Intellectual Property Rights**, for example, by utilizing an Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDS) agreement to strengthen and enhance their control of Indigenous data.<sup>3</sup> The IDS agreement could be negotiated with the Indigenous Peoples of the region to identify the risks, benefits, and parameters for the protection and sharing of Indigenous knowledge before projects are implemented.
- **Develop an internal body to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) of Indigenous Peoples** and oversee the implementation of the parameters, guidelines, and tribe-determined protocols for all project regions. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Convention for the Safeguarding of the ICH identified 46 risks to ICH and 12 Ethical Principles for Safeguarding ICH.<sup>4,5</sup>
- **Provide Indigenous Peoples-led guidance to project proponents and validation and verification bodies (VVBs) aiming to seek restorative justice**, considering UNDRIP (with a focus on FPIC), ALDMEM, the Seventh Generation Principle, and the Precautionary Principle as foundational parameters.<sup>6</sup>

### Benefit Sharing

The equitable distribution of benefits ensures that communities are fairly recognized and rewarded for their role in stewarding nature.

Participants provided suggestions to strengthen the Nature Framework's benefit sharing requirements in a way that is auditable, adaptable to local contexts, and ensures Indigenous Peoples and local communities actively participate in the design, use, and allocation of benefits:

- **Implement mechanisms to protect the exercise of Indigenous Peoples' human rights as outlined in the UNDRIP** through effective procedures that accompany the benefit sharing model in cases

---

<sup>2</sup> "CARE Principles of Indigenous Data Governance." *Global Indigenous Data Alliance*. <https://www.gida-global.org/care>.

<sup>3</sup> "Indigenous Data Sovereignty." *Local Contexts*. <https://localcontexts.org/indigenous-data-sovereignty/>.

<sup>4</sup> Chiweshe, Manase Kudzai and Southern African Intangible Cultural Heritage Platform. "Ethics in the Context of Intangible Cultural Heritage Safeguarding." *Chinhoyi University of Technology*, May 2019. [https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/Ethics\\_\\_.pdf](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/Ethics__.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> "Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage," *UNESCO*. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention#part4>.

<sup>6</sup> "Protecting Indigenous Intellectual Property Rights: Tools That Work | Cultural Survival." 2010. [https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/protecting-indigenous-intellectual-property-rights-tools?gclid=Cj0KCQiA3uGqBhDdARIsAFeJ5r3-OewANqONcXMLKzaUCkOL3gAlzM1Irzrb4ydidgvdCtwOAvfD7jEaAuhdEALw\\_wcB](https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/protecting-indigenous-intellectual-property-rights-tools?gclid=Cj0KCQiA3uGqBhDdARIsAFeJ5r3-OewANqONcXMLKzaUCkOL3gAlzM1Irzrb4ydidgvdCtwOAvfD7jEaAuhdEALw_wcB).



## Sustainable Development Verified Impact Standard

of conflict to encourage governments, institutions, and the nature market to be accountable and transparent in sharing information.

- **Support projects originating from local communities, including those in the Global South,** to facilitate their independence and support their access to financial benefits.
- **Allow self-management through community involvement in technical, political, and legal sectors** instead of hiring external bodies to manage their lands and resources.
- **Secure the terms and conditions for Indigenous Peoples and their territories through formal agreements** negotiated within the parameters and under the guidelines of UNDRIP (highlighting FPIC as critical), ALDMEM, and the Seventh Generation Principle. This Principle emphasizes planning for long-term future generations (i.e., 70+ years) and identifying how today's decisions may best serve descendants of today's decision-makers.<sup>7</sup>
- **Follow Indigenous-determined protocols for entering and working within Indigenous lands** for biodiversity protection, and climate mitigation and adaptation by governments, corporations, and non-governmental organizations.<sup>8</sup>

### Capacity Building

Capacity building supports knowledge exchange and technology transfer, enabling communities to enhance their resilience to climate change, natural disasters, and other threats.

Indigenous Peoples suggested the following regarding capacity building:

- **Incorporate local innovations and adaptive practices using Indigenous knowledge, priorities, and perspectives** to strengthen the effectiveness of Nature Credit development. Capacity building can be fostered when local communities allocate project benefits based on their decision-making power.

For example, in Tanzania, carbon finance has been used to provide hunter-and-gatherer communities with land to be freely used, to construct schools, and to pay university fees.

- **Use local knowledge of adaptation and biodiversity metrics,** for example, by conducting socioeconomic impact analyses to help projects measure the role of Indigenous communities, assess a community's relationship to an area of interest, or foster restorative justice.

---

<sup>7</sup> "This Indigenous Principle Could Transform Nature Investing." 2022. World Economic Forum, (2022). <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/09/indigenous-principle-invest-in-nature/>.

<sup>8</sup> "Indigenous Peoples Earth Charter." Conference of Churches in Aotearoa New Zealand (1992). <https://www.trc.org.nz/digital-library/indigenous-peoples-earth-charter/>.



## Quantification

Robust quantification of biodiversity outcomes is crucial to the Nature Framework’s integrity. However, flexible approaches and requirements can facilitate the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples’ knowledge in the project design (e.g., selection of culturally relevant indicators) and monitoring of biodiversity (e.g., traditional measuring techniques).

Participants shared the sentiment that the Nature Framework is developed through a Western science lens. To include traditional knowledge in biodiversity quantification, participants suggested the following:

- **Integrate the CARE Principles and the five perspective shifts to transform academic ecological practice:** 1) decolonize your mind, 2) know your histories, 3) decolonize access, 4) decolonize expertise, and 5) practice ethical ecology in inclusive teams.<sup>9</sup>
- **Seek traditional knowledge specialists and researchers for consultation,** potentially even as VVBs, and compensate their time and expertise equal to Western equivalents to incorporate Indigenous knowledge and science in biodiversity quantification.

## Significance

The Nature Framework defines Significance as “The importance of the biodiversity present for achieving defined conservation aims (e.g., contribution to the GBF goals and targets).” Significance attributes are assigned according to project location and improve credit seller transparency.

Participants in the consultation suggested **Indigenous Peoples’ stewardship and cultural values could be signaled in the Nature Framework as Significance attributes** by:

- The free exercise of customary laws, rules, and cultural protocols established by Indigenous Peoples.
- The retention and intergenerational transmission of Indigenous ancestral languages and Indigenous knowledge.
- The safe and free exercise of Indigenous Peoples’ right to exist, practice their traditions, and access their territories unencumbered by harm or threats of harm.
- The safe and free exercise of Indigenous women and girls’ bodily autonomy and experience of full and unrestricted access to social, cultural, spiritual, and political institutions.

---

<sup>9</sup> Trisos, Christopher H., Jess Auerbach, and Madhusudan Katti. 2021. “Decoloniality and Anti-Oppressive Practices for a More Ethical Ecology.” *Nature Ecology & Evolution* 5 (9): 1205–12. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-021-01460-w>.

## Nature Stewardship Credits or Certificates

The Nature Framework's first draft contained Verra's high-level, exploratory proposal to develop a different credit type from Nature Credits, seeking to increase the financial viability of historically well-managed areas by traditional stewards. This potential credit type, referred to as a nature stewardship credit or certificate, would reward successful, verified nature conservation and management outcomes based on the stability and resilience of ecosystems.

Participants broadly supported the development of nature stewardship credits or certificates yet called Verra to exercise extreme caution on relevant topics, such as sovereignty, governance, respect for their rights enshrined in UNDRIP, and access to benefit sharing.

To ensure that Indigenous Peoples and local communities are adequately considered in their development, participants shared the following suggestions:

- **Uphold human rights and the rights of Indigenous Peoples established in UNDRIP (sovereignty, self-determination, and FPIC)** by supporting Indigenous Peoples in implementing and leading planning and solutions, partnerships, and cooperative efforts across jurisdictions. For instance, communities could lead equitable negotiations and mutual power-sharing for their and the ecosystem's benefit.<sup>10</sup>
- **Integrate the Seventh Generation Principle** in nature stewardship projects to enable profile transparency for different levels of biodiversity maintenance.

---

<sup>10</sup> Status of Tribes and Climate Change Working Group. Status of Tribes and Climate Change Report, Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals, Northern Arizona University, (2021).  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1M0HSRD2avCvF4WeQwZHhwNi3sZQ2N0uv/view>.