Scope 3 Standard

A VERRA STANDARD

S3S Program Stakeholder Engagement and Safeguards Requirements

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1 INTRODUCTION

Background on the S3S Program

Verra's Scope 3 Standard (S3S) Program establishes requirements for developing value chain emissions abatement projects and quantifying their emissions and emissions impacts. These requirements are informed by *ISO 14064-2* and are designed to be flexible and transparent to enable conformance to developing corporate emissions accounting, reporting, and target-setting standards.[1] The S3S Program sets out requirements for projects that reduce or remove any of the seven Kyoto Protocol greenhouse gases (GHGs)[2] or ozone-depleting substances (ODS). Participation is voluntary and the program's scope does not extend to carbon footprint assessments or corporate emissions claims.

Independent validation/verification bodies (VVBs) assess whether a project conforms to S3S Program rules in accordance with *ISO/IEC 17029*, *ISO 14065*, *ISO 14064-3*, and VVB requirements set out in the S3S Program documents. After successful validation and verification of a project, Verra registers the project and issues units representing the GHG outcomes achieved by the project.

Document Organization and Formatting

Standardized formatting and terminology is used to enhance clarity, as set out below:

- Each requirement begins with a **bold heading** to label content and aid readability.
- Defined terms are identified using a dotted underline. The term's definition can be found in the *S3S Program Definitions*, and requirements are to be understood in the context of these defined terms.
- Italicized document titles are underlined when hyperlinked.
- The following terms are used in requirements:
    - "Shall" indicates a requirement.
    - "Should" indicates a recommendation.
    - "May" indicates a permission.
- Sections organize the document by topic or theme.
- Sub-sections (i.e., #.#) include the following:

[1] Such as the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) Corporate Net-Zero Standard (CNZS) v2, the Greenhouse Gas Protocol (GHGP) Corporate Accounting and Reporting Standard, the Greenhouse Gas Protocol (GHGP) Actions and Market Instruments (AMI) Framework, the Advanced and Indirect Mitigation (AIM) Platform, the Task Force for Corporate Action Transparency (TCAT)

[2] Carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons, sulfur hexafluoride, and nitrogen trifluoride

- **Context,** which explains the reasons for inclusion of the requirements in that section (e.g., why the rules exist) and the objectives the section aims to fulfill
- **Requirements** (#.#.#), which set out specific, prescriptive criteria that apply to project proponents, projects, and VVBs, as indicated in each requirement. Where a requirement establishes an expectation for a project, the project proponent is responsible for ensuring and demonstrating conformance, and the VVB is responsible for validating or verifying conformance against the applicable criteria. Each requirement is uniquely numbered for clear reference.

2 REQUIREMENTS

2.1 Land or Resource Rights Analysis

Concept

This section outlines requirements for analyzing land or resource rights where project activities may affect rights holders. The analysis supports identification of customary rights, overlapping claims, competing claims, and conflicts relevant to the project, and helps determine whether additional measures are necessary to establish and maintain a valid and non-conflicting basis for the right to operate and the right to GHG outcomes. Together, these requirements help reduce the risk that unresolved land or resource rights issues could undermine project implementation or claims to GHG outcomes.

Requirements

2.1.1 **Rights analysis:** Where the analysis described in Section 2.2.1 of the *S3S Standard, v1.0* determines that a project is likely to affect land or resource rights, the project proponent shall conduct a land or resource rights analysis:

1) before initial validation.
2) informed by input received through stakeholder engagement.
3) following guidance in the applicable version of the *S3S Project Description Template*.

2.1.2 **Experience of analysis team:** The project proponent shall conduct the land or resource rights analysis with a team that collectively has knowledge and experience in the jurisdiction in the following topics, as appropriate and justified for the project context:

1) Land tenure regulation
2) Customary rights and related social and gender dynamics
3) Decision-making systems
4) International human rights law
5) Existing and potential conflicts

2.1.3 **Experienced support:** Where the project proponent does not have the expertise specified in Section 2.1.2, they shall partner with external organizations (e.g., local non-governmental organizations, NGOs) that have the required knowledge and experience.

2.1.4 **Content of analysis:** The land or resource rights analysis shall identify and analyze any claims to land or resource rights relevant to the project as follows, and conclude whether additional measures[3] are necessary to establish such rights:

1) Existing land tenure categorization (i.e., private, state, communal, open access)
2) Any existing customary rights, including a list of community lands and territories, associated customary rights, and their location
3) The presence or absence of overlapping claims to land or resource rights, competing claims to land or resource rights, and violent conflicts
4) Where competing claims to land or resource rights are identified, the location of the land or resource rights subject to such claims, associated claimants, process and estimated timeline to secure the rights or resolve disputes, and how the project's grievance redress mechanism facilitates reporting of any such claims

2.1.5 **Updates to analysis:** Before each validation, the project proponent shall update the land or resource rights analysis to account for any new circumstances (e.g., newly identified customary rights or competing claims identified through the project's grievance redress mechanism) and determine whether the project proponent retains the right to operate and the right to GHG outcomes (See S3S Standard, Section 2.2).

[3] For example, a project implementation agreement signed by customary rights holders through a free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) process

2.2 Stakeholder Engagement

Concept

This section outlines the requirements for identifying and engaging stakeholders effectively to maintain meaningful, transparent, and ongoing communication and resolve any project grievances in a timely manner.

Effective stakeholder engagement is essential to project design and implementation. It enables strong, constructive, and responsive relationships that support successful and sustainable outcomes. It is tailored to the project activity type, scale, context, and environmental and social risks. For example, where a project supports changes in agricultural management practices, the project proponent must consult any other stakeholders who may be affected by the changes, such as participating farm workers, neighboring communities, or resource users.

Initiating stakeholder engagement in the early stages of project development helps guide decision-making and supports comprehensive assessment, mitigation, and monitoring of a project's environmental, social, and governance risks.

Requirements

Stakeholder Identification

2.2.1 **Identification and classification:** Before initial validation, the project proponent shall, using the S3S *Stakeholder Engagement Plan Template* and associated guidance:

1) identify stakeholders in partnership with any Indigenous Peoples (IPs) or local communities (LCs) present in the project area with special attention to identifying women, marginalized people, and vulnerable people.
2) record the methods and processes used for stakeholder identification.
3) assign all identified stakeholders to at least one stakeholder group and describe the characteristics of each group.
4) determine the appropriate level of engagement for each stakeholder group using the classifications in Table 1.

Table 1. Levels of engagement for stakeholder groups

Stakeholder group classification	Level of engagement[4]	Requirements
Customary rights holders and IPs	Empower to co-design, obtain free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC), and maintain ongoing consent.	2.2.3–2.2.23

[4] Adapted from UNDP. 2017. *Guidance on Social and Environmental Standards on Stakeholder Engagement* and Initiative for Climate Action Transparency (ICAT). 2020. *Stakeholder Participation Guide*.

Stakeholder group classification	Level of engagement[4]	Requirements
Directly affected stakeholders Stakeholders other than customary rights holders and IPs whose rights, health, livelihoods, access to or use of resources, or daily lives are likely to be materially affected by the project	Enable influence in decision-making on matters that affect them.	2.2.3–2.2.10 2.2.22–2.2.23
Key enabling stakeholders Stakeholders whose endorsement, support, or participation is essential for the project's implementation or success	Collaborate to align the project with policies, frameworks, and processes affecting the project.	
Secondary enabling stakeholders Stakeholders whose support helps facilitate or enhance project implementation, but whose involvement is not essential to the project	Involve and consider their suggestions or concerns about the project.	
Interested stakeholders Stakeholders that show or are known to have an interest in the project, but that will not be materially affected by project activities	Inform about the project's objectives, outcomes, and risks.	

Stakeholder Engagement Plan

2.2.2 **Engagement planning:** Before initial validation, the project proponent shall prepare a stakeholder engagement plan:

1) using the S3S *Stakeholder Engagement Plan Template* and associated guidance.
2) in accordance with the stakeholder engagement requirements in this section.
3) to be implemented throughout the project lifetime and updated before each validation.

Stakeholder Engagement and FPIC Processes

2.2.3 **Use of engagement plan:** Before initial validation and throughout each issuing period, the project proponent shall consult stakeholders according to the stakeholder engagement plan.

2.2.4 **Engagement process:** Throughout the stakeholder engagement and FPIC processes, the project proponent shall:

1) ensure that stakeholders are free from pressure, intimidation, manipulation, and coercion by the project proponent, state actors, and third parties.
2) use inclusive, locally and culturally appropriate, and gender-sensitive methods.
3) provide information in simple, understandable terms in the local language. Where stakeholders do not speak the local language, provide translations in a language and format understandable to them.

4) be timely[5] in information-sharing and scheduling meetings and hold in-person meetings in community-approved locations.

5) give all stakeholders the opportunity to provide input, raise concerns, and express desires, consistent with the levels of engagement for stakeholder groups set out in the stakeholder engagement plan.

6) respect stakeholders and their autonomy, customs, values, and institutions, including their governance structures and legitimate representation where these exist.

7) facilitate free expression of women, marginalized people, and vulnerable people and provide them with targeted opportunities to influence project design and implementation.

8) take due account of all input received through stakeholder engagement and FPIC during project design and implementation, and incorporate the input into decisions, analysis, or actions.

9) prevent and prohibit retaliation, threats, and harassment against any stakeholder for withholding consent, submitting project grievances, speaking publicly about the project, or engaging in related actions.

10) provide all stakeholders access to the project's grievance redress mechanism (see Sections 2.2.22–2.2.23) and Verra's Grievance Redress Policy at the earliest interactions with stakeholders.

11) enable direct communication between the VVB and all stakeholders during validation and verification processes, including site visits.

2.2.5 **Distributed information:** The following information shall be provided to stakeholders, as appropriate for their respective groups:

1) An introduction to value chain projects, the S3S registration and issuance process, the scope and process of validation and verification, and carbon accounting relevant to the project activity

2) General information about the project including proposed project activities, location, duration, and how customary rights holders, IPs, stakeholders, and land or resource rights would be affected

3) Stakeholders identified to date and the stakeholder engagement plan

4) Risks identified and mitigation measures established in the environmental, social, and governance risk assessment (see Section 2.3.1)

5) Status of project design and implementation, including the results of any monitoring

[5] For example, allow 30-day periods for all stakeholders to analyze complex changes like project delays or scope adjustments, 15–30 days for minor changes like schedule adjustments, and 7–14 days for minor changes like administrative updates.

6) All relevant international laws on stakeholders' human, labor, IPs, LCs, or any other rights, and any relevant national and local laws

7) A copy of the stakeholder input tracker, including any existing entries

8) Before a site visit for validation or verification, the most recent version of the project description and/or monitoring report that has been submitted to Verra

9) Where FPIC is required for the project, the status of the FPIC process and project implementation agreement

2.2.6 **Input tracker:** The project proponent shall maintain a stakeholder input tracker that:

1) records all input received through stakeholder engagement and FPIC processes, categorized by input source and date.

2) ensures any stakeholder private and confidential information is kept private.

3) describes how input influenced project design or implementation (e.g., what actions were taken and when) or explains why no action was necessary.

4) is made publicly available to all stakeholders, excluding any identified stakeholder private and confidential information.

2.2.7 **Consultation of stakeholder subsets:** Consultations may be held with a subset of stakeholders from a stakeholder group, provided the subset:

1) consists of stakeholders authorized by the respective group (via express authorization or their governance system).

2) is sufficiently representative of the diversity within the stakeholder group.

2.2.8 **Documentation and conduct:** The project proponent shall conform to the following regarding in-person consultations:

1) Document each consultation meeting, capturing key discussion topics, decisions, action items, attendees, and signatures of stakeholder group representatives.

2) Where unfeasible to conduct consultations in-person due to conditions outside the project proponent's control (e.g., weather, sociopolitical conditions, safety concerns for project workers), consultations may be conducted through alternative arrangements provided these allow for free and open dialogue between the project proponent and stakeholders.[6]

2.2.9 **Notice of changes:** Where major changes to the conditions initially consulted on are expected or occur, the project proponent shall inform stakeholders as early as possible and consult on the changes where required by the stakeholder engagement plan.

Ongoing Communication

[6] For example, virtual meetings, distribution and collection of written material, employing a local mediator

2.2.10 **Communication with stakeholder groups:** Before initial validation and throughout each issuing period, the project proponent shall communicate on an ongoing basis with all stakeholder groups to:

1) provide information about the project's design and implementation progress.
2) inform of changes to any of the following:
    a) Land or resource rights analysis (where required by Section 2.1.1)
    b) Environmental, social, and governance risk assessment[7] and observed impacts, if any (see Sections 2.3.1–2.3.3)
    c) Ongoing FPIC process and the benefit-sharing mechanism, where applicable
    d) Relevant laws and regulations governing stakeholder groups

Free, Prior, and Informed Consent

Conditions under which FPIC Applies

2.2.11 **FPIC applicability:** Before initial validation, free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) shall be obtained from customary rights holders and IPs, consistent with their right to self-determination, where any of the following apply:

1) Customary rights holders and IPs are identified as stakeholders present in the project area.
2) Competing claims to land or resource rights involving customary rights are identified in accordance with Section 2.1.4.
3) Risks to the cultural heritage[8] or traditional livelihoods of customary rights holders and IPs are identified in accordance with Section 2.3.1.

Benefit-Sharing Mechanism

2.2.12 **Mechanism establishment and implementation:** Where a project affects land or resource rights holders or there are customary rights holders or IPs present in the project area, the project proponent shall:

1) design a benefit-sharing mechanism jointly with such rights holders before initial validation.
2) implement the benefit-sharing mechanism throughout the project lifetime.

2.2.13 **Timing of disclosure:** The project proponent shall provide benefit-sharing mechanism participants with:

[7] For example, new risks, updated risk levels, new or enhanced mitigation measures

[8] Examples of cultural heritage include the use of traditional knowledge, practices, and methods.

1) projected project revenues and expected costs when designing the mechanism.

2) project operating costs, and gross or projected revenues (as relevant) annually, once the mechanism is implemented.

2.2.14 **Mechanism requirements:** The benefit-sharing mechanism shall:

1) specify the benefits for benefit-sharing mechanism participants, which may be monetary, in-kind, or a combination of both, and the timeline for distribution of each benefit.

2) be appropriate to the local context and shared using culturally appropriate methods.

3) be consistent with applicable national rules and regulations. Where such regulations conflict, the framework that provides greater protection for benefit-sharing mechanism participants takes precedence.

4) be accessible (in a written or other format as appropriate) to all benefit-sharing mechanism participants during initial design and implementation of the mechanism.

5) account for potential changes in benefits.

6) establish a schedule for reporting on implementation of the mechanism to benefit-sharing mechanism participants.[9]

2.2.15 **Excluded benefits:** The project proponent shall not consider the following as benefits under the benefit-sharing mechanism:

1) Implemented project activities (e.g., in an afforestation, reforestation, and revegetation (ARR) project, the planted trees), unless such activities generate additional benefits (e.g., harvesting of non-timber forest products resulting from planted trees in an ARR project) that are provided entirely to benefit-sharing mechanism participants

2) Infrastructure necessary to implement the project (e.g., roads to access the project area)

3) Measures designed to mitigate safeguards-related risks (e.g., not adversely impacting habitats for rare, threatened, or endangered species adjacent to the project)

4) Project workers' salaries

2.2.16 **In-kind non-project infrastructure:** The project proponent shall develop a plan with benefit-sharing mechanism participants for the continued functioning of any in-kind benefits that involve infrastructure unrelated to project activities, including an agreed-upon duration for the plan (e.g., provisions for ongoing operational needs, such as staffing or supplies for schools, clinics, or other facilities).

Project Implementation Agreement

2.2.17 **Content of project implementation agreement:** As an outcome of the FPIC process, the project

[9] An example of such reporting includes indicators to evaluate the delivery of in-kind benefits.

proponent, customary rights holders, and IPs shall agree on and sign a written project implementation agreement that:

1) indicates whether free, prior, and informed consent is granted, conditioned, or withheld.
2) complies with legal requirements under national laws.
3) is in English and in a language understood by the customary rights holders and IPs.
4) includes all of the following:
    a) A description of the project activities and project area
    b) Responsibilities of all parties, including any project management roles and responsibilities assumed by customary rights holders and IPs, and the role of the project proponent in respect of registration of the project with the S3S Program
    c) The project's initial issuing period start and end date
    d) Frequency with which the project proponent will update customary rights holders and IPs on project implementation and activities to maintain ongoing consent
    e) The terms and expected outcomes of the benefit-sharing mechanism, where such mechanism is required
    f) Land or resource use rights that customary rights holders and IPs continue to hold, where relevant
    g) Indication of any information in the agreement that is classified as stakeholder private and confidential information
5) is signed by representatives to whom valid and sufficient powers have been granted by the customary rights holders and IPs, in accordance with their governance framework and the FPIC process.
6) is made publicly available, unless the customary rights holders and IPs want it kept private.

Ongoing Consent

2.2.18 **Maintaining consent:** The project proponent shall update customary rights holders and IPs on project implementation according to the frequency specified in the project implementation agreement (see Section 2.2.17(4)(d)).

2.2.19 **Consent changes:** Where major changes to the conditions upon which consent was granted are expected or occur,[10] the project proponent shall:

1) obtain consent from customary rights holders and IPs, as early as possible.

[10] For example, the project proponent is released from the project, or baseline reassessment impacts reduction and removal volumes and therefore benefits available to benefit-sharing mechanism participants

2) amend the project implementation agreement to reflect the revised terms of consent, where necessary.

Public Comments

2.2.20 **Accounting for public comments:** The project proponent shall take due account of all comments received from Verra (as further described in the *S3S Registration and Issuance Process*) within the following timelines:

1) For comments received within the 30-day public comment period, before the validation process is finalized
2) For comments received outside the 30-day public comment period, no later than 12 months after receipt

2.2.21 **Document requests:** Stakeholders may submit comments at any time to request required project documents where these are missing from the Verra Registry. The Verra Registry will coordinate with the project proponent to provide any such documents on the Verra Registry and notify the stakeholder once the document is posted.

Grievance Redress Mechanism

2.2.22 **Mechanism establishment:** The project proponent shall:

1) before listing, establish and make publicly available a grievance redress mechanism to address concerns from stakeholders that may arise during project design and implementation.
2) cooperate with governments, stakeholders, and any other parties in resolving project grievances.

2.2.23 **Mechanism requirements:** The grievance redress mechanism shall:

1) be translated to a language understandable to all stakeholders, where necessary.
2) specify processes to:
   a) receive, through various channels including anonymous submissions, and acknowledge project grievances within 21 days.
   b) resolve project grievances through culturally appropriate, gender-sensitive, and traditional conflict resolution methods.
   c) attempt to resolve project grievances within a reasonable time period.
   d) track the progress of project grievances through their resolution, maintaining confidentiality of the information that stakeholders submit as stakeholder private and confidential information, including where the complainant chooses to remain anonymous.

e) prevent and prohibit retaliation, and ensure accountability for any retaliation, intimidation, or harassment against stakeholders who submit project grievances or their supporters.

f) appeal project grievance resolutions.

3) have three stages:

a) Stage 1: Attempt to resolve the project grievance amicably or in good faith.

b) Stage 2: If unresolved, refer the matter to mediation by a neutral third party.

c) Stage 3: If still unresolved, refer the matter to either arbitration, as allowed for by the laws of the relevant jurisdiction, or competent courts in the relevant jurisdiction. Regardless of the method of dispute resolution used, stakeholders should retain the ability to submit a dispute in relation to the project grievance to a competent supranational adjudicatory body, as applicable.

2.3 Environmental, Social, and Governance Safeguards

Concept

Projects might negatively impact stakeholders or the environment. The risk of this varies in severity and likelihood depending on a project's activity type and context. Therefore, risk assessment, implementation of mitigation measures, monitoring, and adaptive management are critical to maintaining integrity and trust, protecting the rights and livelihoods of stakeholders, preserving biodiversity, and enhancing the durability of carbon benefits.

This section sets out requirements to:

- conduct an environmental, social, and governance risk assessment before initial validation, to identify risks and design commensurate mitigation measures that meet or exceed the safeguards requirements set out in this section, and to avoid, minimize, or mitigate such risks.
- implement mitigation measures throughout the project lifetime and continually monitor their effectiveness.
- apply adaptive management to integrate stakeholder input and lessons learned from project implementation to enhance protections for stakeholders and the environment.

Requirements

Risk Assessment and Adaptive Management

2.3.1 **Risk assessment:** Before initial validation, the project proponent shall conduct and document a risk assessment, using the S3S *Environmental, Social, and Governance Risk Assessment Template* and associated guidance, to:

1) assess the risks of negative environmental, social, and governance impacts resulting from the project, considering the project's scope and scale, with particular attention to impacts

on women, children, marginalized people, and vulnerable people, where such stakeholders are identified in Section 2.2.1.

2) design mitigation measures commensurate with the respective risk levels that address the safeguards requirements set out in Sections 2.3.4–2.3.38 and any other risks identified in the assessment.

2.3.2 **Risk monitoring, mitigation, and remedying:** Before initial validation and throughout each issuing period, the project proponent shall:

1) implement the mitigation measures specified in the risk assessment.
2) continually monitor project risks and the effectiveness of mitigation measures, to determine whether the risk assessment needs to be updated to reflect newly identified risks, adjust risk levels or mitigation measures, or design new mitigation measures.
3) mitigate potential, or remedy actual, negative environmental, social, and governance impacts identified, that occurred prior to the initial issuing period start date or thereafter (e.g., human rights violations, restrictions to cultural heritage sites of Indigenous Peoples).
4) to the extent feasible, incorporate improvements in best practices or technologies that enhance or support mitigation measures.
5) adapt project design to address changes in local circumstances, regulatory frameworks related to safeguards and stakeholder engagement, and ecological conditions that affect the project.

2.3.3 **Risk monitoring:** Before each validation, the project proponent shall update the risk assessment to report on:

1) changes to project risks, including new risks identified.
2) implementation of mitigation measures, including those adjusted during the monitoring period, and any actual negative environmental, social, or governance impacts.

Environmental Safeguards

Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Management of Living Natural Resources

2.3.4 **Biodiversity impacts:** The project proponent shall ensure that project activities avoid or minimize negative impacts on biodiversity and ecosystems.

2.3.5 **Habitat protection:** Where a project is in or adjacent to habitats for rare, threatened, or endangered species[11] or areas needed for habitat connectivity, the project shall protect such habitats.

2.3.6 **Species introduction:** Where project activities include planting or introduction of species, the project proponent shall:

[11] See The IUCN Red List of Endangered Species for classifications of threatened and endangered species.

1) identify invasive species using, in order of priority, local or regional invasive species registries, other locally applicable information sources, or global invasive species registries.

2) not introduce invasive species or allow invasive species to thrive.

3) not use any species that threaten the existence of endangered species.

2.3.7 **Soil and water impacts:** The project proponent shall minimize soil degradation, soil erosion, water consumption, and water stress in the project area.

Ecosystem Conversion

2.3.8 **Conversion restrictions:** Ecosystem conversion to an intensive land use ecosystem (classified under T7 in IUCN's Global Ecosystem Typology)[12] is not permitted, except in agricultural land management (ALM), ARR, or wetland restoration and conservation (WRC) projects where either of the following applies:

1) The ecosystem has exhibited high ecosystem degradation for at least 10 years prior to the initial issuing period start date.

2) High ecosystem degradation has occurred within the 10 years prior to the initial issuing period start date and is:

   a) due to natural or anthropogenic disturbances unrelated to the project (e.g., wildlife, storm, flood, earthquake, slash and burn shifting agriculture).

   b) not carried out or encouraged by the project proponent or any related parties with a material interest in the project, excluding subsistence practices of identified IPs, LCs, marginalized people, and vulnerable people.

2.3.9 **Evidence of degradation:** High levels of ecosystem degradation prior to the initial issuing period start date shall be substantiated, using evidence listed in Table 2, for at least one indicator under each of the following criteria:

1) Significant historical or current drivers of ecosystem degradation

2) The ecosystem's inability to sustain its biotic or abiotic characteristics compared to an ecosystem with high ecosystem integrity

The project proponent may select indicators not listed in Table 2 where the chosen indicators are better suited to the project activities, scale, or context, and are scientifically sound.

[12] International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). *IUCN Global Ecosystem Typology*.

Table 2. Indicators and evidence to demonstrate high levels of ecosystem degradation

Criterion	Indicator	Evidence
Significant historical or current drivers of ecosystem degradation	Correlation of ecosystem degradation with underlying drivers[13]	• Policy • National or local official records • Peer-reviewed published literature • NGO-led publications
	Historical deforestation, land clearing, or significant land-use changes	• Remote sensing imagery
	Historical use of land for agriculture, resource extraction, or traditional land-use practices associated with degradation	• Official land titles • Land use designations • Historical reports
	Degradation drivers, their scale or severity, timing, and any other causal linkages to degradation	• Community surveys with: ○ a defined and appropriate target audience ○ clear and relevant questions ○ a representative and sufficient sample size ○ accurate data analysis
Inability of ecosystem to sustain its biotic or abiotic characteristics compared to an ecosystem with high integrity	Invasive species dominance	• Ecological studies, surveys, or peer-reviewed literature that justifies dominance: ○ according to a suitable threshold ○ in alignment with the Global Invasive Species Database
	Dependence on inputs that indicate the ecosystem's altered function	• Agricultural input records • Soil nutrient management plans • Other records showing regular use of fertilizers, pesticides, irrigation, or other inputs

[13] For example, economic or population growth, urbanization, agricultural intensification, cattle ranching expansion, fuel wood collection, overfishing, climate change

Criterion	Indicator	Evidence
	Soil compaction	• Soil studies demonstrating metrics such as bulk density, water infiltration rates, or resistance to root penetration
	Erosion	• Visible signs (e.g., rill or gully erosion) • Sedimentation in nearby water bodies • Studies quantifying erosion rates
	Alteration of soil chemistry	• Soil tests (e.g., laboratory soil analysis) showing significant deviations in soil pH, salinity, or loss of organic matter compared to conditions that are indicative of ecosystem integrity
	Hydrological regime outside of expected range of variation	• Water surface elevation • Volume of water flow • Ground water recharge • Nutrient transformation
	Alteration of water quality	• Parameters of water quality showing significant deviations compared to conditions indicative of ecosystem integrity: ○ Physical (e.g., temperature, turbidity) ○ Chemical (e.g., dissolved oxygen, pH, nutrient concentration) ○ Biological (e.g., microbial indicators)

Ecosystem Restoration

2.3.10 **Restoration intent:** Where an ARR or WRC project includes ecosystem restoration, the project activity shall improve ecosystem integrity toward one of the following:

1) A pre-disturbance, ecologically suitable, and appropriate reference state that is justified for the project's activities, scale, and context
2) An adapted state that is based on or consistent with scientific evidence and justified for the project's activities, scale, and context

2.3.11 **Ecosystem integrity demonstration:** A project activity that improves ecosystem integrity shall be demonstrated by:

1) selecting and monitoring at least one indicator that:
   a) represents structure, function, and/or composition attributes directly linked to the project's ecosystem restoration objectives and ecosystem integrity.

b) is sufficiently sensitive to detect progress or setbacks within the monitoring period, and over the project lifetime.

2) using remote sensing, aerial imagery, modeling, or peer-reviewed published literature to justify the reference condition or adapted state.

Resource Efficiency and Pollution Prevention

2.3.12 **Pollution and environmental impacts:** The project proponent shall identify, avoid, and to the extent possible, mitigate any impacts caused by pollutant emissions to air, discharges to water or soil, noise and vibration, waste generation, and the release of hazardous materials, chemical pesticides, and fertilizers resulting from project activities.

Social Safeguards

Human Rights

2.3.13 **Upholding rights:** The project proponent shall uphold and respect human rights in accordance with the International Bill of Human Rights[14] and universal instruments relating to human rights.

2.3.14 **Standard of protection:** The project proponent shall apply the law or standard that provides greatest protection for stakeholders' human rights among international, national, and local laws, regulations, and conventions, and the S3S Program rules.

2.3.15 **Prevention measures:** The project proponent shall implement preventive and protective measures (e.g., policies, trainings) against discrimination, bullying, intimidation, harassment, sexual harassment, and exploitation, with special attention to marginalized people and vulnerable people.

2.3.16 **No retaliation:** The project proponent and any other individuals or entities involved in project design or implementation shall not engage in any form of direct or indirect, formal or informal pressure or retaliation against individuals or groups who are exercising their rights in relation to the project activity.

Land or Resource Rights

2.3.17 **Prohibited impacts:** Projects shall not:

1) encroach on private, stakeholder, or government property.

2) force eviction or relocate people off their lands, including through access restrictions to land or resources, without prior consent, appropriate compensation, and compliance with all applicable international, national, and local regulations.

3) lead to forced physical or economic displacement.

[14] General Assembly of the United Nations. 1948. *Universal Declaration on Human Rights*.

4) undertake any activity that could exacerbate violent conflict or negatively influence the outcome of an unresolved competing claim to land or resource rights.

Customary Rights, Indigenous Peoples, and Cultural Heritage

2.3.18 **Upholding and preserving rights:** Where customary rights exist or IPs are present in or adjacent to a project area, the project proponent shall, in project design and implementation:

1) uphold and protect the rights of customary rights holders and IPs, including land or resource rights, in line with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, and any other relevant treaty and local law.

2) to the extent possible, take measures to secure land or resource rights for customary rights holders and IPs.

3) preserve and protect the cultural heritage of IPs and customary rights holders, consistent with their practices and traditional livelihoods, and in accordance with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Cultural Heritage conventions.[15]

Gender Equality

2.3.19 **Gender responsiveness:** The project proponent shall, in project design and implementation:

1) provide equal opportunities and fair treatment for all genders, and where relevant and feasible, contribute to improving the condition or situation of women and girls.

2) protect the safety of women and girls, including against gender-based violence or discrimination, and appropriately respond to any related incidents.

Labor Rights and Safe Employment Conditions

2.3.20 **Workers rights:** The project proponent shall, in project design and implementation:

1) respect rights set out in the International Labour Organization's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

2) meet all laws and regulations governing workers' rights in the country.

3) inform project workers about their rights.

2.3.21 **Fair employment:** The project proponent shall provide, in project design and implementation:

[15] UNESCO's core cultural heritage conventions are the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, the 1972 World Heritage Convention, the 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

1) a regionally prevailing industry wage and, to the extent possible, a fair living wage for all project workers.
2) recognition of legal working hours.
3) equal employment opportunities and fair treatment of all project workers, avoiding discrimination.
4) equal pay for equal work, basing any wage differences on expertise, experience, and justified geographic cost-of-living differences.
5) where relevant for the project context, training for project workers on conflict awareness and de-escalation related to armed interactions.

2.3.22 **Prohibited labor:** The project proponent shall ensure no use of forced labor, child labor, slavery, or trafficked persons.

2.3.23 **Contractor protections:** The project proponent shall protect contracted workers employed by third parties in project design and implementation.

2.3.24 **Worker safety:** The project proponent shall:

1) provide healthy and safe working conditions for all project workers.
2) inform project workers of risks related to their health and safety.
3) not penalize project workers for abandoning their responsibilities or not completing assigned work due to safety concerns.

2.3.25 **Training:** The project proponent shall provide orientation and training to project workers including on:

1) giving special attention to the differentiated needs of marginalized people and vulnerable people.
2) prioritizing orientation and training to build locally useful skills and knowledge that increase local participation in project implementation. Such capacity-building efforts should target a wide range of stakeholders.
3) training new project workers.
4) use of project equipment, where relevant.

Armed Personnel

2.3.26 **Due diligence for armed personnel:** Where project activities involve armed personnel, the project proponent shall:

1) in the hiring process, conduct background checks and ensure candidates have appropriate experience.

2) define the rules of engagement for armed personnel, including when and how force may be used, to ensure actions are justified and necessary to protect communities and project workers.

3) train armed personnel in the responsible use of force, including techniques for de-escalating potentially violent situations.

4) produce incident reports where weapons are discharged.

5) disclose the presence of armed personnel to stakeholders with access rights to patrolled areas, providing sufficient detail for identification of armed personnel (e.g., identifying features of uniforms or vehicle insignias).

Governance Safeguards

Operational Expertise

2.3.27 **Operational competency:** The project proponent's management team shall have adequate experience and expertise to implement the project, as indicated by one or more of the following:

1) Experience and expertise in implementing similar project activities at a similar scale and in the local context

2) Partnership with other organizations (e.g., local NGOs) that have experience and expertise relevant to the project

3) A recruitment strategy to fill any identified gaps in experience or expertise

2.3.28 **Informed workers:** The project proponent shall inform project workers, consultants, and advisors of the requirements in Sections 2.3.29–2.3.37, and where policies are implemented to conform to those requirements:

1) provide project workers access to and training on such policies.

2) obtain an annual acknowledgement of compliance with such policies from each project worker.

Illegal Activities

2.3.29 **Reporting illegal activities:** The project proponent shall:

1) document impacts resulting from any illegal activities occurring in the project area that could affect the project's outcomes and, where appropriate, any measures taken to mitigate the impacts.

2) to the extent permitted by law, where receiving a subpoena, summons, demand, inquiry, or other official request related to the project from any court of competent jurisdiction, governmental or regulatory authority, including federal, state, or municipal, notify Verra via email (Legal@verra.org) within five calendar days.

Anti-Corruption

2.3.30 **Corruption prohibition:** The project proponent shall not engage in any form of corruption, including bribery, embezzlement, fraud, abuse of power, and influence peddling.

2.3.31 **Anti-corruption worker conduct:** The project proponent shall take measures to ensure that project workers do not engage in any form of corruption, including bribery, embezzlement, fraud, abuse of power, and influence peddling.

2.3.32 **Anti-corruption due diligence:** The project proponent shall:

1) take measures appropriate to the project and national context to support parties working under its direction in complying with international, national, and local anti-bribery and anti-corruption laws, regulations, and conventions.
2) conduct due diligence on any parties involved in project implementation, including legal counsel, financial, and management service firms.
3) have in place policies and procedures aligned with best practices to prevent, detect, and remediate corruption related to the project.

Anti-Money Laundering

2.3.33 **Prohibited sources of finance:** Project financing shall not be sourced from the proceeds of crime or otherwise constitute an offense under any applicable anti-money laundering law, including recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).[16]

2.3.34 **Anti-money laundering compliance:** The project proponent shall not violate nor facilitate the violation of any applicable international, national, or local money laundering laws, regulations, and conventions.

2.3.35 **Anti-money laundering worker compliance:** The project proponent shall take measures to ensure that project workers do not violate nor facilitate the violation of any applicable international, national, or local money laundering laws, regulations, and conventions.

2.3.36 **Transaction monitoring:** The project proponent shall put in place policies and procedures aligned with best practices to prevent, detect, and monitor transactions that could facilitate money laundering and unlawful financial practices.

2.3.37 **Signal response:** Where a project proponent identifies or is notified of money laundering warning signals,[17] such signals shall be addressed without delay to ensure compliance with laws, regulations, and conventions.

[16] FATF recommendations available at: https://www.fatf-gafi.org/en/topics/fatf-recommendations.html

[17] Warning signals generally relate to and involve a combination of unusual or unconnected sources and recipients of funds, unusual or nontransparent transactions and instructions, unusual and suspicious behaviors and counterparties, and transactions associated with higher-risk jurisdictions, including jurisdictions subject to US, EU, or UK sanctions.

Emergency Preparedness and Response

2.3.38 **Emergency management system:** The project proponent shall:

1) implement plans to prevent and respond to emergencies that could impact the project, project workers, and stakeholders.
2) make emergency prevention and response plans available to affected workers and stakeholders.
3) provide periodic training on emergency prevention and response plans as appropriate.

DOCUMENT HISTORY AND EFFECTIVE DATES

Version	Date	Comment
v1.0	15 September 2026	Initial version released under S3S Program Version 1

VERRA

Standards for a
Sustainable Future

Verified Carbon
Standard

Jurisdictional and Nested
REDD+ Framework

Scope 3
Standard

Climate, Community
& Biodiversity Standards

Sustainable Development
Verified Impact Standard

Plastic Waste
Reduction Standard