



BIODIVERSITY
CHALLENGE FUNDS



Exploring Best Practice in Carbon Credits within Biodiversity Challenge Funds projects

Biodiversity Challenge Funds: Building and Applying Evidence

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)

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Acronyms

AFOLU	Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use
ARR	Afforestation, Reforestation and Revegetation
BCFs	Biodiversity Challenge Funds
CCB	Climate, Community & Biodiversity (Standards)
CCP	Core Carbon Principles
CCRO	Certificate of Customary Rights of Occupancy
CDR	Carbon Dioxide Removal
CFMA	Community Forest Management Agreement
CFMG	Community Forest Management Group
CLB	Community-Led Body
CO_{2e}	Carbon Dioxide Equivalent
CRB	Community Resource Board
DAC	Direct Air Capture
Defra	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DNPW	Department of National Parks and Wildlife
FPIC	Free, Prior and Informed Consent
GELOSE	Gestion Locale Sécurisée (Secure Local Management)
GESI	Gender, Equity and Social Inclusion
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GS	Gold Standard
HCV	High Conservation Value
ICVCM	Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market
ILK	Indigenous and Local Knowledge

IPLCs	Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities
LMMA	Locally Managed Marine Area
MISA	Maasai Solidarity Alliance
MRV	Measurement, Reporting and Verification
NDCs	Nationally Determined Contributions
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRMC	Natural Resource Management Committee
NPRT	Non-Permanence Risk Tool
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PES	Payments for Ecosystem Services
REDD+	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (plus conservation, sustainable management of forests, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks)
RMI	Rocky Mountain Institute
SBTi	Science Based Targets initiative
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SOC	Soil Organic Carbon
TNFD	Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures
tCO_{2e}	Tonnes of Carbon Dioxide Equivalent
VCM	Voluntary Carbon Market
VCS	Verified Carbon Standard
VCU	Verified Carbon Unit
VICOPA	Village Community Bank
VM	Verra Methodology
VSLA	Village Savings and Loans Association

WRC	Wetland Restoration and Conservation
VVB	Validation and Verification Body
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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Disclaimer

NIRAS is the fund administrator for the [Biodiversity Challenge Funds](#) and commissioned this work on behalf of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) under Workstream 5 of the Biodiversity Challenge Funds.

NIRAS works with a range of specialists and consultants to carry out studies and reviews on the Biodiversity Challenge Funds. The views expressed in the report are entirely those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views or policies of Defra, NIRAS, or the Biodiversity Challenge Funds. Defra and NIRAS, in consultation with wider stakeholders as relevant, are considering all findings and recommendations emerging from this study in how they manage the Biodiversity Challenge Funds.

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1. Executive Summary

This report explores emerging best practice in the design and implementation of carbon credit activities linked to projects funded by the Biodiversity Challenge Funds (BCFs). While the BCFs do not typically finance carbon credit issuance directly, an increasing number of funded projects interact with voluntary carbon markets by creating the enabling conditions for carbon finance to function, such as strengthening tenure security, governance systems, safeguards, institutional capacity, and technical readiness.

Carbon finance can offer a potentially significant and durable source of funding for biodiversity conservation and livelihoods, but it also introduces material risks relating to environmental integrity, social safeguards, equity, and reputational exposure, particularly in contexts involving Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs). These risks are not hypothetical. Recent experience in voluntary carbon markets highlights several live integrity challenges of direct relevance to the BCFs portfolio. These include weak or inadequately maintained Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), particularly in soil carbon initiatives affecting pastoralist systems¹; over-crediting and inflated baselines in some nature-based projects, especially early-generation Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD)+ projects²; inconsistent benefit-sharing arrangements; social inclusion gaps masked by aggregate “community-level” reporting; biodiversity outcomes that are weaker than carbon claims; and persistent risks of social and ecological leakage. While market-wide integrity initiatives, including the emergence of carbon rating agencies and the Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market (ICVCM), have strengthened scrutiny and improved standards, these issues remain salient in practice.

This analysis combines a targeted literature review with in-depth case studies of BCFs-funded projects that have engaged with, or sought to enable, forest, soil, or blue carbon crediting. See Table 1 below.

Table 1: Summary of projects featured in this report

BCFs Project title and reference	Associated carbon project	Type of carbon project	Relationship between BCFs project and carbon project
‘Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD’ in Sierra Leone	Gola REDD Project	Verra REDD project	Gola REDD project was already operational when the BCFs project began; the BCFs “bolt-on” project strengthened institutional, livelihood, and community-engagement enabling conditions that supported the long-term

¹ **Maasai International Solidarity Alliance (MISA)** Soil Carbon Credits: Another Wave of Land Alienation in Northern Tanzania https://www.misereor.org/fileadmin/user_upload_misereororg/publication/en/climatechange_energy/soil-carbon-credits-research-report-maasai-international-solidarity-alliance.pdf

² **The Guardian (2023)**, Revealed: more than 90% of rainforest carbon offsets by biggest certifier are worthless, analysis shows <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jan/18/revealed-forest-carbon-offsets-biggest-provider-worthless-verra-aoe>

*Note this article is disputed (see Verra response here: <https://verra.org/verra-response-guardian-rainforest-carbon-offsets/>)

BCFs Project title and reference	Associated carbon project	Type of carbon project	Relationship between BCFs project and carbon project
26-004			viability and social performance of the REDD+ project.
'Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem Landscape' in Tanzania DAREX004	The Resilient Tarangire Ecosystem Project	Verra Soil Carbon project (under development)	BCFs project preceded carbon activities; Soil carbon was included in the original project design as a potential long-term sustainable financing mechanism for rangeland management. During implementation, its progression was deliberately adaptive and slower than initially anticipated, reflecting community feedback, evolving understanding of soil carbon risks, and the complexity of pastoralist systems.
'Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+' in Zambia 26-016	Luangwa Community Forests Project	Verra REDD project	Carbon project was operational prior to BCFs / Darwin Initiative support; BCFs funding strengthened governance, community institutions, biodiversity monitoring, and safeguards that underpin long-term REDD+ performance, but did not generate credits itself.
'Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar' in Madagascar 19-016	No carbon project yet	Planned Blue Carbon project under Plan Vivo	The BCFs project was originally intended to support a future Plan Vivo blue carbon project, but this did not materialise. Nonetheless, the project built several pre-conditions relevant to potential future blue carbon development (e.g. community organisation, mangrove management capacity, and safeguards).
'Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia's Andean foothills' in Bolivia	None at present	Potential future jurisdictional REDD+	No carbon project to date. The BCFs project does not develop carbon credits directly but focuses on establishing jurisdictional-level enabling conditions for potential future forest carbon finance (e.g. REDD+), including legal frameworks, institutional capacity,

BCFs Project title and reference	Associated carbon project	Type of carbon project	Relationship between BCFs project and carbon project
DAREX015			governance arrangements, FPIC processes, benefit-sharing systems, and technical readiness.

Across the case studies, there is a consistent set of cross-cutting findings relating to how and why carbon projects linked to BCFs funded interventions have been effective or otherwise. These findings underline that carbon finance outcomes are shaped heavily by the social, institutional, and sequencing conditions within which carbon is introduced.

First, the way carbon projects were framed at design stage strongly influenced outcomes. Projects that positioned carbon finance as a potential future benefit of conservation and livelihood objectives, rather than as a primary goal, were better able to maintain social legitimacy and manage expectations.

Second, sequencing and implementation capacity determined whether cautious carbon design translated into credible delivery. Where timeframes, institutional depth, or local capacity were constrained, there was an increased risk of advancing carbon components ahead of governance and community readiness.

Third, the quality and depth of stakeholder engagement mattered. Projects that prioritised sustained, locally legitimate engagement with communities, using recognised decision-making institutions and repeated dialogue, were better able to support meaningful participation, FPIC-like processes, and inclusion.

Fourth, timeframes emerged as a binding constraint. The analysis shows that the social, governance, and institutional foundations required for credible carbon finance typically extend beyond standard BCFs grant cycles. Interview evidence highlighted that grant funding plays a critical role in covering early-stage technical, legal, and engagement costs that communities cannot reasonably be expected to repay through future carbon revenues, particularly where projects aim to establish community-owned carbon entities. Expecting projects to reach validation-ready or credit-issuing stages within these timeframes risks incentivising premature carbon project development, weak consent processes, or overly optimistic assumptions about community readiness. By contrast, BCFs funding was most effective where it was used to lay durable groundwork for future carbon finance rather than to accelerate issuance.

Overall, the analysis points to the need for the BCFs to engage with carbon markets in a risk-aware and integrity-led manner. While carbon finance has the potential to provide a durable source of funding for biodiversity conservation and livelihoods, the findings show that it also introduces material risks where social readiness, governance arrangements, or delivery capacity are weak. These risks are not limited to technical carbon integrity, but extend to community trust, equity outcomes, and reputational exposure for both implementing organisations and the BCFs portfolio as a whole.

For Defra and BCFs programme managers, this implies a more explicit and differentiated approach to carbon

engagement is required. Clearer guidance is needed on when and how carbon finance is appropriate within BCFs-funded projects, including where carbon should be treated as a longer-term pathway rather than an expected project outcome. Stronger expectations around FPIC, equity, and gender outcomes are central to this approach, alongside realistic assumptions about the time and resources required to establish credible governance, consent, and benefit-sharing systems. The analysis also highlights the importance of recognising and actively managing reputational risks associated with REDD+ and other carbon project types, particularly in IPLC contexts where scrutiny of carbon markets remains high.

For applicants and grantees, the findings reinforce that credible engagement with carbon markets depends less on early technical readiness, although this is important, than on the quality of underlying social and institutional foundations. Community-led governance, tenure clarity, adaptive sequencing, and sustained investment in participation, learning, and local capacity emerged as consistent determinants of whether carbon pathways remained viable and legitimate over time. Across the portfolio, projects were most effective where carbon finance was approached as a potential long-term outcome of high-quality conservation and livelihood work, rather than as a primary driver of project design or delivery.

2. Summary of Literature Review

2.1. Introduction to Literature Review

The Biodiversity Challenge Funds (BCFs) are increasingly supporting projects that engage with voluntary carbon markets, often by providing the enabling conditions required for these projects to succeed. While carbon finance can offer an important source of long-term funding for conservation and livelihoods, it also introduces material risks relating to environmental integrity, land tenure, community rights, and equitable benefit sharing. These risks are particularly salient in contexts involving Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs), where poorly designed or weakly governed carbon projects have, in some cases, been associated with conflict, exclusion, and allegations of land grabbing.

This literature review provides the conceptual and evidence base for subsequent analysis of BCFs case studies and stakeholder consultations. Its purpose is not to compare or score individual carbon standards, but to identify what constitutes best practice in carbon credit projects that are relevant to the BCFs context, with a particular focus on safeguarding IPLC rights, promoting gender equity and social inclusion, and ensuring overall carbon and biodiversity integrity.

The review draws on a wide range of sources, including established carbon and biodiversity standards (such as Gold Standard and Verra's Climate, Community & Biodiversity Standards), business-led quality curation approaches, peer-reviewed literature, and industry and policy reports.

The summary tables and analysis in this section are based on a targeted review of key carbon market standards, integrity frameworks, guidance documents, and peer-reviewed and grey literature. A consolidated bibliography of the core documents reviewed is provided in Annex 4: Bibliography of key documents reviewed in Literature Review.

2.2. What makes a high-quality carbon credit?

There are many factors that determine whether a carbon credit is 'high-quality', as stated by certification bodies such as Verra and Gold Standard, Carbon Rating Agencies such as BeZero and Sylvera, and carbon market integrity initiatives, such as the Integrity Council for Voluntary Carbon Markets (ICVCM). These are summarised in the table below:

Table 2: General overview of what makes a high-quality carbon credit

Quality criteria	Notes on quality criteria
Whether each credit genuinely represents the physical removal of one metric tonne of CO₂	The overestimation of credits happens when a project claims to have created an amount of carbon removals, but this figure is inflated above the true amount due to factors such as inaccurate baseline assessments, the use of outdated methodologies, and poor monitoring and verification.
Additionality	Verra's Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) Standard v4.7 gives the following guidance on additionality³: "A project activity is additional if it can be demonstrated that the activity results in reductions or removals that are in excess of what would be achieved under a "business as usual" scenario and the activity would not have occurred in the absence of the incentive provided by carbon markets. Additionality is an important characteristic of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) credits, including Verified Carbon Unit (VCUs), because it indicates that they represent a net environmental benefit and a real reduction of GHG emissions, and can thus be used to offset emissions." Additionality is a fundamental requirement of a carbon project. It is arguably the biggest make-or-break test of the quality of a carbon credit. Here is why it sits at the top of buyers' check lists: • Integrity frameworks: It is Principle #5 in the Integrity Council's Core Carbon Principles (CCP)⁴ and is baked into every emerging "high integrity" label. • Market pricing signals: Ecosystem Marketplace's 2025 data⁵ show low additionality renewable energy credits trading 30 % cheaper and losing 23 % in volume, while CCP eligible waste gas or improved forest management credits. (perceived as highly additional) gained share and price. • Buyer guidance: RMI's 2024 Buyer's Guide to Carbon Credit Data Quality⁶ lists additionality as one of the three "non negotiables" every purchaser should verify."
Double counting	The same emission reduction must not be claimed more than once (e.g. by multiple buyers, host countries, or towards both voluntary claims and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)). Article 6 readiness and corresponding adjustments are increasingly important signals of mitigation integrity.

³ Verra (2024), VCS Standard V4.7 <https://verra.org/documents/vcs-standard-v4-7/>

⁴ ICVCM (2024), The Core Carbon Principles <https://icvcm.org/core-carbon-principles/>

⁵ Ecosystem Marketplace (2025), State of the Voluntary Carbon Market 2025 <https://3298623.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/3298623/SOVCM%202025/Ecosystem%20Marketplace%20State%20of%20the%20Voluntary%20Carbon%20Market%202025.pdf>

⁶ RMI (2024), A buyers guide to carbon credit data quality <https://rmi.org/a-buyers-guide-to-carbon-credit-data-quality/>

Quality criteria	Notes on quality criteria
Non-permanence risk	Verra's VCS Standard v4.7 gives the following guidance on permanence⁷: "Non-permanence risk in Agriculture, Forestry, and Other Land Use (AFOLU) and Geologic Carbon Storage (GCS) projects is addressed through the use of a project risk analysis, using the <i>AFOLU Non-Permanence Risk Tool (NPRT)</i> and the <i>GCS NPRT</i>, respectively. These tools determine the number of credits to be deposited in the AFOLU pooled buffer account or the GCS pooled buffer account, respectively. The pooled buffer accounts hold non-tradable buffer credits to cover the non-permanence risk associated with AFOLU and GCS projects. Buffer credits are cancelled to cover carbon known or believed to be lost. As such, the VCU already issued to projects that subsequently fail are not cancelled and do not have to be "paid back." All VCUs issued to AFOLU and GCS projects (as with all projects) are permanent." Permanence is a front-line quality filter for carbon credits. ICVCM's Core Carbon Principles includes permanence as its principle #6 and the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) Net-Zero Standard draft V2⁸ says only permanent removals can neutralise residual emissions. Higher prices can be achieved from more permanent carbon credits (e.g. Carbon Dioxide Removals (CDRs) from Direct Air Capture (DAC) can fetch £500-£850 per tonne vs less permanent nature based Afforestation, Reforestation and Revegetation (ARR) credits, which can sell for around £14.50 per tonne).
Leakage	Verra's VCS Methodology Requirements v4.4 gives the following guidance on leakage⁹: "Leakage is the net change of anthropogenic GHG emissions that occurs outside the project boundary and is attributable to project activities. Methodologies must establish procedures to quantify leakage, where the potential for leakage is identified, as projects may otherwise overestimate their net emission reductions and/or removals. AFOLU methodology shall establish procedures to quantify all significant sources of leakage. The three types of leakage are:

⁷ Verra (2024), VCS Standard V4.7 <https://verra.org/documents/vcs-standard-v4-7/>

⁸ SBTi (2025), Draft Corporate Net Zero Standard v2 Explained <https://sciencebasedtargets.org/blog/draft-corporate-net-zero-standard-v2-explained-environmental-attribute-certificates>

⁹ Verra (2024), VCS Methodology Requirements v4.4 <https://verra.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/VCS-Methodology-Requirements-v4.4.pdf>

Quality criteria	Notes on quality criteria
	1) Market leakage. This occurs when projects significantly reduce the production of a commodity causing a change in the supply and market demand equilibrium that results in a shift of production elsewhere to make up for the lost supply. 2) Activity-shifting leakage. This occurs when the actual agent of deforestation and/or forest or wetland degradation moves to an area outside of the project boundary and continues its deforestation or degradation activities elsewhere. 3) Ecological leakage. This occurs in Wetland Restoration and Conservation (WRC) projects where a project activity causes changes in GHG emissions or fluxes of GHG emissions from ecosystems that are hydrologically connected to the project area.”
Programme Governance	Governance refers to the systems, policies, and processes that ensure a carbon project is managed with transparency, accountability, and integrity throughout its lifecycle. This includes oversight mechanisms, conflict-of-interest checks, and responsible stakeholder engagement. Strong governance is foundational to the credibility of a carbon project. It reduces the risk of fraud, ensures compliance with standards, and improves the reliability of reported outcomes. Investors and buyers increasingly look for governance signals as a proxy for long-term project viability and ethical integrity.
Registry robustness	A reliable registry prevents double issuance, enables transparent tracking of issuance, transfers, and retirements, and supports public scrutiny. Registry credibility is a growing buyer due-diligence criterion.
VVB performance	Validation and Verification Bodies (VVBs) must be independent, competent, and subject to oversight.
Vintage considerations	Older vintages (i.e. credits issued in earlier years) may reflect outdated methodologies, weaker baselines, or pre-integrity reforms. Many buyers now apply vintage cut-offs or discounts to manage integrity and reputational risk.
Community, biodiversity, and wider environmental impacts	High-quality credits should deliver net-positive or at least no-harm outcomes for local livelihoods, ecosystems, and biodiversity, consistent with safeguards embedded in standards such as Climate, Community & Biodiversity (CCB), and Gold Standard.
Corruption exposure, forced-labour, or human-rights issues	Projects operating in high-risk contexts require enhanced due diligence. Any association with forced labour, coercion, or rights abuses fundamentally undermines credit legitimacy.

Quality criteria	Notes on quality criteria
Stakeholder entities	Clear identification of project developers, landowners, community representatives, intermediaries, and buyers reduces opacity and accountability gaps, especially in complex land-tenure settings.
ICVCM Core Carbon Principles (CCP) label status	CCP eligibility signals alignment with emerging global integrity benchmarks, though CCP approval is increasingly seen as a baseline rather than a guarantee of overall project quality.
Paris Agreement Article 6 readiness	Projects capable of applying corresponding adjustments and host-country authorisation reduce future regulatory and reputational risk as voluntary and compliance markets converge.
FPIC robustness	Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) must be demonstrable, ongoing, and culturally appropriate. Weak FPIC processes are a key driver of conflict, reputational damage, and allegations of land grabbing. See more on FPIC in the section below.
Biodiversity and TNFD alignment	Projects that align with emerging biodiversity disclosure frameworks (e.g. the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD)) provide stronger evidence of nature-positive outcomes beyond carbon alone.
Equitable revenue distribution	Fair, transparent benefit-sharing arrangements with IPLCs are central to social legitimacy. Tokenistic or opaque revenue flows remain a live integrity concern.
Long term stewardship funds / insurance – rather than generic buffer pools	Dedicated stewardship or insurance mechanisms can be more credible than generic buffer pools in addressing long-term management, reversal risk, and community engagement beyond the crediting period.
Financial risk	Illiquid project types and long delivery timelines expose buyers to mark-to-market and delivery risk. Integrity and transparency tend to correlate with stronger secondary market demand.

2.3. Social integrity as a core component of carbon credit quality

Evidence from biodiversity and land-use funding programmes demonstrates that social and governance failures, particularly around land rights, participation, and gender equity, can undermine conservation outcomes even where environmental objectives are well-intentioned. A UK-government-commissioned synthesis of Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) across the Biodiversity Challenge Funds¹⁰ highlights that poorly designed interventions may unintentionally exacerbate inequality, trigger conflict, or erode local legitimacy, especially in contexts involving

¹⁰ **Biodiversity Challenge Funds (2023)**, Gender Equity and Social Inclusion. Accessible on all three of the BCFs websites. Access via the Darwin Initiative website here: <https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/resources/learning-and-evidence/>

IPLCs. These findings reinforce the growing consensus in voluntary carbon markets that social safeguards are not peripheral co-benefits, but core integrity considerations alongside additionality, permanence, and governance.

2.3.1. Free, Prior, and Informed Consent

The GESI evidence base emphasises that participation alone is insufficient where affected groups lack real influence over decision-making, or where consent processes fail to account for power asymmetries, language barriers, or customary governance systems. This distinction is critical for carbon projects. Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) — the right of Indigenous Peoples, and other affected communities, to give or withhold consent to activities that may affect their lands, territories, resources or rights, based on full information, without coercion, and in advance of project approval or implementation — has functioned as a one-off validation requirement, rather than an ongoing process, has been a recurring source of conflict and reputational risk.

2.3.2. Gender and differentiated impacts

Gendered access to land, resources, and decision-making authority shapes who benefits from carbon revenues and who bears restrictions on land use. Evidence from biodiversity programmes shows that gender-blind benefit sharing can reinforce existing inequalities even where projects deliver aggregate community benefits, underscoring why leading carbon standards increasingly require gender-responsive impact analysis rather than assuming neutrality.

This review does not assess development effectiveness per se; rather, GESI evidence is drawn on only where it directly informs the integrity risks and safeguards relevant to carbon credit projects operating in IPLC contexts.

2.4. How leading standards operationalise social integrity: Deep dive on Gender, Equity and Social Inclusion quality criteria

A rigorous analysis was undertaken of how each of the main standards (Gold Standard¹¹, Verra's Climate, Community and Biodiversity label¹², and Plan Vivo¹³) and business initiatives (Earthly¹⁴) deals with Gender, Equity and Social Inclusion quality criteria and approaches that safeguard IPLC. Below is a summary of the best practices across the standards, based on this analysis. The full analysis can be seen in Annex 1.

Box 1: Key social integrity terms

Gender: Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, responsibilities, and expectations associated with women, men, and people of diverse gender identities. Unlike biological sex, gender norms vary across cultures and over time, and they shape access to resources, decision-making power, labour burdens, income opportunities, and exposure to risk. In conservation and carbon contexts, gender dynamics influence who participates, who benefits, and who bears costs.

Equity: Equity refers to fairness in both process and outcomes. It recognises that different groups start from different positions of power, access, and vulnerability, and therefore may require differentiated support to achieve comparable outcomes. In practice, equity goes beyond equal participation to ensure that benefits, risks, and responsibilities are distributed fairly, and that no group is made worse off as a result of project interventions.

Social Inclusion: Social inclusion refers to the intentional process of ensuring that marginalised, less powerful, or historically excluded groups (e.g. Indigenous Peoples, ethnic minorities, women, youth, people with disabilities, or land-poor households) are able to participate meaningfully in decision-making and benefit from project activities. Inclusion requires removing structural, cultural, linguistic, and institutional barriers to participation.

Gender-blind: A gender-blind approach fails to recognise existing gender roles, inequalities, and power relations. It assumes that interventions affect all people in the same way and does not analyse or address differential impacts. In carbon and conservation projects, gender-blind design can inadvertently reinforce existing inequalities, for example, by directing payments or land rights recognition to male household heads without considering women's tenure, labour contributions, or decision-making roles.

Sex: refers to the biology and physical characteristics of individuals. This differs from gender in that sex is not a social construction.

Intersectionality: describes the complex ways in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect and attempts to recognise the impact of these effects on the experiences of individuals and groups. [Definition from IUCN Gender Analysis Guide, Spring 2021]

¹¹ **Gold Standard**, General Information <https://globalgoals.goldstandard.org/>

¹² **Verra**, CCB Program Details <https://verra.org/programs/ccbs/ccbs-program-details/> <https://verra.org/programs/ccbs/ccbs-program-details/>

¹³ **Plan Vivo** <https://www.planvivo.org/>

¹⁴ **Earthly** <https://earthly.org/>

Table 3: Summary of best practice for Gender, Equity, Social Inclusion and IPLCs in leading Carbon Standards

Area	Best Practice
Gender	Explicit gender equality objectives aligned to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 ¹⁵ , treating gender as a <i>core design and safeguard issue</i> , not a co-benefit (strongest in Gold Standard).
	Mandatory identification of women as a distinct stakeholder group , with analysis of gender-differentiated impacts (income, labour, access to resources, decision-making).
	Gender-disaggregated indicators where gender impacts are material, with monitoring and verification tied to credit issuance.
	Gender-responsive benefit sharing , ensuring women can access benefits directly (best operationalised in Plan Vivo).
	Gold Standard provides the most detailed and formally verified requirements for social and environmental safeguards, while Plan Vivo places the strongest emphasis on practical implementation and direct delivery at household level.
Equity	Identification of differentiated groups within communities (by gender, tenure, livelihood, poverty, marginalisation).
	Distributional equity analysis showing <i>who benefits and who bears costs</i> , not just net community gains.
	Transparent and equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms , agreed with participants and monitored to prevent elite capture (strongest in Plan Vivo).
	Procedural equity , ensuring marginalised groups can influence decisions, not just be consulted.
	Measured and verified equity outcomes where equity claims are made (strongest in Gold Standard).
	Best practice rejects “average community benefit” narratives and requires evidence of fair distribution.
Social inclusion	Inclusive and culturally appropriate participation throughout design, governance, monitoring, and benefit distribution.
	Identification and engagement of marginalised or less powerful groups , with measures to overcome participation barriers (poverty, literacy, gender norms).

¹⁵ The Global Goals, SDG 5 <https://globalgoals.org/goals/5-gender-equality/>

Area	Best Practice
	Community-led project structures , rather than developer-led models (strongest in Plan Vivo).
	Monitoring of inclusion outcomes , not just consultation processes (strongest where Gold Standard -style indicators are applied).
	Social inclusion is strongest where communities shape decisions and outcomes, not merely validate pre-designed projects.
Safeguarding Indigenous Peoples & Local Communities (IPLCs)	Explicit recognition of customary and statutory land and resource rights , including collective and informal tenure.
	Protection against dispossession and “land grabs” through: • Do-no-harm requirements • Transparent land-use change rules • Community-defined participation boundaries
	Accessible grievance mechanisms with protection against retaliation.
	Ongoing monitoring of social and livelihood impacts , not just ex-ante safeguards.
	Safeguards are strongest where communities retain control over land-use decisions and benefit flows.
FPIC	FPIC applies to both Indigenous Peoples <i>and</i> local communities
	Free: voluntary participation with no coercion or conditionality.
	Prior: consent obtained <i>before</i> validation, registration, and land-use change.
	Informed: information provided in appropriate languages and formats , with time for deliberation.
	Consent: expressed through legitimate, community-recognised decision-making institutions, not proxy signatures.
	Ongoing: consent revisited if project scope, impacts, or benefit arrangements change.
	Verified: failure to maintain FPIC can delay or block credit issuance.
	Gold Standard is most explicit and enforceable (see Box 1 below); Plan Vivo embeds FPIC most deeply through community ownership; CCB provides a strong but narrower Indigenous-specific trigger.

2.5. Biodiversity

Biodiversity should also be considered but only Verra's CCB label covers this.

Best practice from CCB includes the following:

- Projects should have a net positive impact on biodiversity relative to a credible baseline (at a minimum no net harm where net gains cannot be robustly quantified)
- High Conservation Value (HCV) areas and threatened species should be protected
- Safeguards against biodiversity leakage

The Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) Global Biodiversity Standard may be an opportunity for strengthening how biodiversity outcomes are defined, evidenced, and monitored within carbon-linked conservation projects. This standard certifies sites that have created positive impacts on biodiversity, and the methodology has been tested to work for carbon credit projects. The standard can work in conjunction with the voluntary carbon market by providing assurance that carbon credits are associated with additional positive impacts on biodiversity. The Global Biodiversity Standard is designed to provide recognition for sites that have improved biodiversity and is not designed to be used as a compensatory or tradeable product.

3. Summary of findings of BCFs carbon projects and consultations

3.1. Introduction

This analysis focuses on BCFs-funded projects with a clear and demonstrable linkage to carbon credit development. Projects were selected to reflect diversity in geography, carbon type (forest, soil, blue), and stage of carbon engagement (operational crediting, under development, or preparatory / enabling conditions). The intention was not to provide an exhaustive review of all BCFs projects, but to examine illustrative cases that offer learning on different carbon pathways and risk profiles.

The assessment draws on a combination of project documentation (applications and annual reports), publicly available registry information where relevant, and targeted follow-up discussions with implementing partners to clarify sequencing decisions, governance arrangements, and implementation challenges. Each case was reviewed against a structured analytical framework derived from the literature review, with particular emphasis on GESI, IPLC safeguards, FPIC processes, governance arrangements, and wider carbon integrity considerations.

The performance review is intended as a structured comparative analysis to support learning and reflection, rather than as a formal evaluation of project effectiveness or compliance with specific carbon standards.

Box 2: Approach to GESI and IPLC Assessment

How the assessment criteria were determined:

The GESI and IPLC assessment framework used in this review was developed through a synthesis of:

- International human rights principles relating to participation, equity and FPIC;
- Recognised social integrity elements within voluntary carbon market standards;

From these sources, a set of qualitative criteria was derived covering participation, influence in decision-making, benefit sharing, identification of marginalised groups, FPIC processes, governance arrangements, and monitoring of equity outcomes. The intention was to assess the strength of design features and safeguards described in project documentation, rather than to evaluate implementation outcomes at this stage.

What “Strong”, “Good”, and “Partial” mean

The ratings are qualitative and indicative:

- **Strong** – The criterion is explicitly addressed, clearly operationalised in project design, and embedded in governance, monitoring, and implementation structures. Outcome-level indicators are included where relevant, and there is evidence of proactive measures rather than reliance on general commitments.
- **Good** – The criterion is clearly addressed in project design and supported by identifiable activities or safeguards. However, outcome-level indicators, monitoring mechanisms, or accountability structures may be limited or not fully developed. Commitments are present and credible, but not deeply embedded across all stages of implementation.
- **Partial** – The criterion is referenced in principle, but lacks operational detail, measurable indicators, or clear accountability mechanisms. Risks of uneven implementation remain.

These ratings reflect the strength of documentary evidence available at proposal or design stage and do not constitute a judgment on actual field performance.

Important caveat

This analytical assessment is distinct from, and does not replace, the formal GESI scoring applied during the project application and approval process. The latter follows established programme-level scoring methodologies and criteria. The ratings presented here are used solely for comparative analytical purposes within this review and should not be interpreted as revisions to, or substitutes for, official GESI scores assigned through programme procedures.

3.2. Successful project funded by BCFs: 26-004: “Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+” project in Sierra Leone

3.2.1. Project summary

Table 4: Summary of project 26-004

BCFs Project	Associated Carbon Credit project	Link between the BCFs and Carbon Credit project
<i>Project ref and title:</i> 26-004: Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD¹⁶ <i>Country:</i> Sierra Leone <i>Project activities:</i> This grant-funded project worked with forest-edge communities around Gola Rainforest National Park in Sierra Leone to reduce pressure on forests while improving food security and livelihoods. <i>Funding:</i> £347,758 <i>Years active:</i> 2019-2022	<i>Project name:</i> Gola REDD Project (ID 1201)¹⁷ <i>Status:</i> Registered carbon project under Verra, which has achieved CCB Double Gold status under the Climate Community & Biodiversity Standards. Issuing credits. <i>Project activities:</i> The Gola REDD project aims to conserve the forested areas of the Gola Rainforest National Park (GRNP). The area contains 60 threatened species, including 8 Endangered and 1 Critically Endangered species. Conservation actions as a direct result of the Gola REDD project will protect these species, preserve 68,515 ha of tropical forest and conserve 4,394,315 tonnes of CO₂-e during the first 10 years of the project. <i>Crediting period:</i> 2012-2042	BCFs funding strengthened or enhanced the Verra project during its operational phase, for example by: • Improving food security and livelihood activities that reduce pressure on forests • Strengthening community engagement BCFs funding also supported pilot research to inform more targeted livelihood interventions by identifying additional High Conservation Value (HCV) areas (e.g. pygmy hippopotamus habitat). Limited resources within the Gola REDD+ project constrained the scope for new research activities, which is why BCFs support was sought.¹⁸

¹⁶ **Biodiversity Challenge Fund**, Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+ <https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/project/DAR26004>

¹⁷ **Verra Registry**, Gola REDD project <https://registry.verra.org/app/projectDetail/VCS/1201>

¹⁸ **RSPB (2025)**, Personal communication with Richard Dixon, Felicity Edwards, and Alade Adeleke on 19th January 2025

This grant-funded project¹⁹ worked with forest-edge communities around GRNP in Sierra Leone to reduce pressure on forests while improving food security and livelihoods. It supported communities to identify and protect high-value community forest areas, develop local by-laws and land-use plans, and strengthen community governance through locally-led committees. In parallel, the project prioritised practical agricultural and livelihood interventions, such as cocoa shade growing, improved rice and cassava production, small business training, savings and loan groups, and cash-for-work schemes, to increase household incomes and productivity, thereby reducing reliance on forest clearance as a livelihood strategy²⁰.

Box 3: Explainer: What are REDD+ projects?

REDD+ projects and programmes are designed to make it economically worthwhile to keep forests standing, by linking forest conservation to performance-based climate finance. In practical terms, this involves estimating how much deforestation would be expected to occur in the absence of the project, then putting in place measures to reduce that loss. These measures typically include strengthening forest governance, supporting alternative livelihoods for forest-dependent communities, improving land-use planning, and increasing monitoring and enforcement.

If deforestation is reduced relative to the baseline, the resulting emissions reductions can be measured, reported, and independently verified. These results may then be rewarded through the voluntary carbon market in the form of carbon credits. REDD+ credits have generally traded at the lower end of the price range for nature-based solutions, with recent average prices typically under USD 5 per tonne of CO₂e, although prices vary widely depending on quality, scale, and buyer demand.

The project placed strong emphasis on inclusive participation, particularly the involvement of women, and on community-led decision-making. The activities supported by the grant align with, and contribute to, a registered carbon project under Verra, which has achieved CCB Double Gold status under the Climate Community & Biodiversity Standards²¹.

3.2.2. GESI and IPLC specific analysis

Below is a summary of the performance of this project against select best practice areas. See Annex 2 and 3 for full analysis.

Table 5: Performance of 26-004 “Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+” project in Sierra Leone across best practice areas

Best Practice Area	Performance
Gender	Overall rating: Good (with partial outcome evidence)
Equity	Overall rating: Good (procedural), Partial (distributional outcomes)
Social Inclusion	Overall rating: Strong
IPLCs	Overall rating: Good (with safeguarding gaps)

¹⁹ Darwin Initiative, Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+ <https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/project/DAR26004>

²⁰ RSPB (2025), Personal communication with Richard Dixon, Felicity Edwards, and Alade Adeleke on 19th January 2025

²¹ Verra Registry, Gola REDD project <https://registry.terra.org/app/projectDetail/VCS/1201>

Best Practice Area	Performance
FPIC	Overall rating: Partial to Good

3.2.3. Light touch wider analysis

Table 6: Wider analysis of 26-004 "Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+" project in Sierra Leone

Criteria	Performance
Environmental integrity	
Credible representation of 1 tCO₂	Moderate. Registered under Verra with CCB Double Gold, but subject to wider REDD+ concerns on baselines and over-crediting typical of the vintage ²² .
Additionality	Moderate–Good. Livelihood-linked REDD+ support plausibly additional, though hard to fully evidence at credit level.
Leakage management	Moderate. Addressed through landscape-level planning, but not fully eliminated.
Permanence / reversal risk	Moderate. AFOLU buffer mechanisms apply; reliance on continued community incentives.
Double counting risk	Moderate. Registry controls in place; Article 6 alignment not explicit.
Governance, standards, and market infrastructure	
Registry robustness	Good. Verra registry provides transparency and tracking.
VVB performance exposure	Moderate. Dependent on Verra-accredited auditors; no major red flags noted.
Vintage risk	Moderate–High. Earlier REDD+ vintages face increasing buyer scepticism.
ICVCM CCP alignment	Unclear. No explicit CCP label; some principles met, others (over-crediting risk) debated.

²² **The Guardian (2023)**, Revealed: more than 90% of rainforest carbon offsets by biggest certifier are worthless, analysis shows <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jan/18/revealed-forest-carbon-offsets-biggest-provider-worthless-verra-aoe>

*Note this article is disputed (see Verra response here: <https://verra.org/verra-response-guardian-rainforest-carbon-offsets/>)

Criteria	Performance
Article 6 readiness	Low / unclear.
Biodiversity	
Net biodiversity benefit	Strong. Core conservation objective with CCB certification and CCB Gold for Biodiversity.
Leakage to biodiversity outcomes	Moderate.

Additional qualitative insights from follow-up discussions with the implementing partner further contextualise the findings above:

While the project performed strongly across the assessed criteria, implementation was not without challenges. In particular, grievances relating to community boundaries, land-use demarcation, and the identification of High Conservation Value areas, especially where camera-based surveys were introduced, required sustained engagement and careful explanation to address initial mistrust. Boundary-related disputes could take significant time to resolve, reflecting the complexity of customary land arrangements and local dispute-resolution processes. In addition, both behavioural change and ecological outcomes were subject to inherent time lags, meaning that conservation impacts were not always immediately visible within the project timeframe²³. These insights, which did not align neatly with the table headings, reinforce the importance of patient implementation, credible grievance-handling arrangements, and long-term engagement even in comparatively strong livelihood-first REDD+ support projects.

3.3. Successful project funded by BCFs: DAREX004 “Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem Landscape” project in Tanzania

3.3.1. Project summary

Table 7: Summary of project DAREX004

BCFs Project	Associated Carbon Credit project	Link between the BCFs and Carbon Credit project
<i>Project ref and title:</i> DAREX004: Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous, and	<i>Project name:</i> The Resilient Tarangire Ecosystem Project (ID 4742) ²⁵	BCFs funding supported the enabling conditions for the Resilient Tarangire Ecosystem carbon project, for example by:

²³ RSPB (2025), Personal communication with Richard Dixon, Felicity Edwards, and Alade Adeleke on 19th January 2025

²⁵ Verra Registry, The Resilient Tarangire Ecosystem Project <https://registry.verra.org/app/projectDetail/VCS/4742>

BCFs Project	Associated Carbon Credit project	Link between the BCFs and Carbon Credit project
resilient Tarangire Ecosystem Landscape²⁴ <i>Country:</i> Tanzania <i>Project activities:</i> This project works with pastoralist communities in northern Tanzania's Tarangire Ecosystem to protect wildlife habitats while strengthening local livelihoods. Because much of the land critical for wildlife lies outside formally protected areas, the project supports communities to manage communal grazing lands more sustainably through locally agreed grazing plans, restoration of degraded rangelands, and the control of invasive species. <i>Funding:</i> £4,659,153 <i>Years active:</i> 2022-2026	<i>Status:</i> VCS Project under development <i>Project activities:</i> This is a large-scale soil carbon and sustainable rangeland management initiative in northern Tanzania covering around 830,000 ha across Longido, Monduli, and Simanjiro districts. Using the Verra VM0042 methodology, the project aims to enhance soil carbon sequestration by improving rangeland management, promote sustainable grazing practices, strengthen community governance through participatory land-use planning, and support biodiversity and ecosystem resilience while simultaneously generating carbon credits. <i>Crediting period:</i> Proposed crediting period: 2020-2040 (expected to be revised)	• Supporting pastoralist livelihoods and rangeland management practices that reduce degradation pressures • Strengthening community governance, participation, and land-use planning Enhancing biodiversity, social safeguards, and wider co-benefits (such as wildlife corridor protection and ecosystem resilience)

²⁴ **Darwin Initiative**, Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem Landscape
<https://www.biodiversitychallengefunds.org.uk/project/DAREX004>

This project²⁶ works with pastoralist communities in northern Tanzania's Tarangire Ecosystem to protect wildlife habitats while strengthening local livelihoods. Because much of the land critical for wildlife lies outside formally protected areas, the project supports communities to manage communal grazing lands more sustainably through locally agreed grazing plans, restoration of degraded rangelands, and the control of invasive species. In parallel, it supports households to develop more reliable and diversified income sources, including improved livestock management, beekeeping, and eco-tourism, with a strong emphasis on women's participation and leadership.

The project places particular focus on strengthening local governance, securing communal land rights, and linking conservation outcomes to tangible economic benefits at household and community level. These activities are designed to help maintain key wildlife corridors, reduce land degradation, and increase the resilience of pastoral livelihoods to climate change. As part of the wider programme, a soil carbon component is under development as a carbon project under the Verra Verified Carbon Standard (VCS)²⁷; however, this component has not yet been validated or verified and is not currently issuing carbon credits. Verra's Climate, Community and Biodiversity co-benefits label will be sought for this project.

Note: Reference to Box 4 found here²⁸.

3.3.2. GESI and IPLC specific analysis

Below is a summary of the performance of this project against select best practice areas. See Annex 2 and 3 for full analysis.

Box 4: Criticism of Soil Carbon projects in Tanzania

Soil Carbon projects in Tanzania have been subject to criticism in recent years, with the Maasai Solidarity Alliance (MISA) calling for a 5-year Moratorium on all Soil Carbon Deals in Pastoralists' Rangelands in Northern Tanzania.

The underlying logic of soil carbon projects is that traditional grazing practices have degraded the levels of carbon stored in the soil, and that carbon levels can be increased again by implementing new forms of rapid rotational grazing, with intensively managed blocks and associated rest periods. The claim is that moving away from "continuous and extensive grazing" will increase vegetation cover and diversity and facilitate the recovery of grasses.

The main concerns and fears raised by Maasai pastoralist communities about carbon credit contracts are that i) carbon projects will severely restrict land use and mobility and disrupt traditional grazing practices, ii) carbon projects will prevent communities from responding to climate variability in a flexible way and iii) carbon projects will prevent Maasai pastoralists from sharing grazing areas with other Maasai, which could lead to intra- and inter-community conflicts and tensions.

Given these concerns, obtaining Free, Prior and Informed Consent is essential, but this has been subject to some criticism in Northern Tanzania.

Project partners noted that while the concerns raised by the Maasai Solidarity Alliance reflect legitimate risks observed in some soil carbon initiatives in northern Tanzania, they do not accurately characterise the Resilient Tarangire Ecosystem Project. The BCFs-funded programme supported cross-village, cross-district, and cross-regional grazing agreements prior to carbon development, explicitly to safeguard mobility and reduce conflict. The soil carbon component overlays these negotiated mobility arrangements rather than restricting them. The MISA report examined a broader set of projects, most of which fall outside the TNC project area.

²⁶ **Darwin Initiative**, Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+ <https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/project/DAR26004>

²⁷ **Verra Registry**, The Resilient Tarangire Ecosystem Project <https://registry.verra.org/app/projectDetail/VCS/4742>

²⁸ **Maasai International Solidarity Alliance (MISA)** Soil Carbon Credits: Another Wave of Land Alienation in Northern Tanzania https://www.misereor.org/fileadmin/user_upload_misereororg/publication/en/climatechange_energy/soil-carbon-credits-research-report-maasai-international-solidarity-alliance.pdf

Table 8: Performance of DAREX004 "Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem Landscape" project in Tanzania across best practice areas.

Best Practice Area	Performance
Gender	Overall rating: Strong (with emerging outcome evidence)
Equity	Overall rating: Partial
Social Inclusion	Overall rating: Good to Strong
IPLCs	Overall rating: Partial (with carbon related safeguards still evolving)
FPIC	Overall rating: Partial to Good

3.3.3. Light touch wider analysis

Table 9: Wider analysis of DAREX004 "Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem Landscape" project in Tanzania

Criteria	Performance
Environmental integrity	
Credible representation of 1 tCO₂	Not yet demonstrated. No validation or issuance; uncertainty over soil carbon measurement and baselines.
Additionality	Unclear / contested. Soil carbon additionality not yet demonstrated; livelihood and grazing improvements may have occurred without carbon incentives.
Leakage management	Moderate / uncertain. Activity-shifting leakage is a recognised theoretical risk in pastoral systems, but in this project, it is actively mitigated through cross-village and cross-district mobility agreements, negotiated grazing access, and adaptive rangeland governance. External critiques highlight risks in the wider context, though these do not fully reflect the design or implementation of this project.
Permanence / reversal risk	Weak / uncertain. Soil carbon permanence and long-term land-use commitments highly uncertain.
Double counting risk	High risk at present. No clarity yet on national accounting or corresponding adjustments.

Criteria	Performance
Governance, standards, and market infrastructure	
Registry robustness	Not applicable yet. Not registered or issuing.
VVB performance exposure	Not applicable yet.
Vintage risk	Not applicable yet.
ICVCM CCP alignment	Not applicable yet.
Article 6 readiness	Low / unclear
Biodiversity	
Net biodiversity benefit	Strong (non-carbon conservation activities) / Uncertain (soil carbon component)
Leakage to biodiversity outcomes	Moderate. Landscape-scale design and negotiated grazing reduce biodiversity leakage risk, though uncertainty remains given system complexity.

Additional qualitative insights from follow-up discussions with the implementing partner further contextualise the findings above:

The soil carbon project is being developed with the intention that the carbon entity will ultimately be owned by participating communities, rather than external developers. Pilot arrangements are underway to test this governance model, which aims to reduce long-term power asymmetries and ensure that carbon revenues, if realised, remain locally controlled.

3.4. Successful project funded by BCFs: 26-016 “Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+” project in Zambia

3.4.1. Project Summary

Table 10: Summary of project 26-016

BCFs Project	Associated Carbon Credit project	Link between the BCFs and Carbon Credit project
<i>Project ref and title:</i> 26-016: Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ ²⁹ <i>Project activities:</i> Lion Carbon is a landscape-scale conservation programme in Zambia that links forest protection and wildlife conservation to long-term community benefits through REDD+ carbon finance. Working across more than one million ha in the Luangwa–Zambezi landscape, the project supports local communities to manage forests and wildlife under long-term Community Forest Management Agreements (CFMAs). <i>Funding:</i> £341,170 <i>Years active:</i> 2019-2021	<i>Project name:</i> Luangwa Community Forests Project³⁰ <i>Status:</i> This is a registered carbon project under the VCS and has achieved CCB Triple Gold certification under the Climate Community & Biodiversity Standards <i>Project activities:</i> The Luangwa Community Forests Project is a large-scale REDD+ project with a total project area 1,236,258 ha. The project will generate emissions reductions through avoided deforestation, using the following mitigation activities: a combination of direct conservation support (forest monitoring and encroachment prevention), engagement and capacity building with key Government and community stakeholders, and conservation incentives for the area protected. <i>Crediting period:</i> 2015-2045	Complementing the carbon project, Darwin Initiative funding has focused on enabling and capacity-building activities, including strengthening community institutions, training, and employing community scouts, improving biodiversity monitoring systems, and reducing key threats such as poaching, deforestation, and uncontrolled burning.

²⁹ **Darwin Initiative**, Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ <https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/project/DAR26016>

³⁰ **Verra Registry**, Luangwa Community Forests Project <https://registry.verra.org/app/projectDetail/VCS/1775>

Lion Carbon³¹ is a landscape-scale conservation programme in Zambia that links forest protection and wildlife conservation to long-term community benefits through REDD+ carbon finance. Working across more than one million ha in the Luangwa–Zambezi landscape, the project supports local communities to manage forests and wildlife under long-term Community Forest Management Agreements, designed to make standing forests and wildlife economically valuable to local people through performance-linked benefit sharing and carbon revenues.

The REDD+ component is a registered carbon project under the Verra Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) and has achieved CCB Triple Gold certification under the Climate, Community & Biodiversity Standards (see Box 4). While the carbon project was already operational and capable of issuing credits, revenues emerged only gradually, reflecting the long lead times typical of REDD+ initiatives.

Box 5: What is CCB Gold?

CCB Gold refers to the Gold Level under Verra's Climate, Community & Biodiversity (CCB) Standards, an independent certification that sits *alongside* a project's carbon accounting (e.g., VCS) and is designed to validate the quality of a project's non-carbon outcomes. A project that achieves CCB Gold has demonstrated that it is expected to deliver exceptional net positive benefits. "Triple CCB Gold" (as with Lion Carbon in Zambia) means the project meets Gold Level criteria across all three pillars: Climate (strong, additional climate mitigation / adaptation value), Community (high, measurable livelihood and wellbeing benefits, often with a focus on vulnerable groups), and Biodiversity (significant, durable biodiversity conservation gains).

Within this context, Darwin Initiative funding functioned as a complementary, time-bound 'bolt-on' rather than a foundational funding source (which came in the form of seed funding from USAID), focusing on enabling and capacity-building activities that would not have been prioritised or delivered at scale through carbon finance alone. These included strengthening community institutions, training and employing community scouts, improving biodiversity monitoring systems, and reducing key threats such as poaching, deforestation, and uncontrolled burning. By supporting these early and deep investments during the revenue ramp-up period, Darwin Initiative funding helped stabilise and strengthen the wider REDD+ programme without itself generating carbon credits or carbon revenue.³²

3.4.2. GESI and IPLC specific analysis

Below is a summary of the performance of this project against select best practice areas. See Annex 2 and 3 for full analysis.

Table 11: Performance of 26-016 "Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+" project in Zambia across best practice areas

Best Practice Area	Performance
Gender	Overall rating: Good
Equity	Overall rating: Good (procedural), Partial (outcomes)

³¹ Darwin Initiative, Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ <https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/project/DAR26016>

³² BioCarbon Partners, Personal communication with Mike Mailloux, Gina Woolley, and Marius Van der Vyver on 19th January

Best Practice Area	Performance
Social Inclusion	Overall rating: Good to Strong
IPLCs	Overall rating: Strong (with safeguard gaps)
FPIC	Overall rating: Good (institutionalised, but weakly verified)

3.4.3. Light touch wider analysis

Table 12: Wider analysis of 26-016 "Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+" project in Zambia

Criteria	Performance
Environmental integrity	
Credible representation of 1 tCO₂	Good. The project is a long-running REDD+ initiative registered under the Verra VCS and has undergone multiple rounds of validation and verification, including more recent scrutiny under tightened baseline and reference area requirements. While the project currently operates under an earlier REDD+ methodology (VM0009), recent verifications required adjustments to baseline assumptions to reflect evolving integrity expectations. Verra has since assumed greater control over baseline-setting, with a shift towards jurisdictional reference levels under newer methodologies (e.g. VM0048), to which the project is expected to transition once Verra issues the relevant activity data required to make the transition. It is important to note that BioCarbon Partners, has offered technical assistance to Verra in order to speed up what is now a delayed activity on the part of Verra. Overall, while the project reflects some legacy methodology risks typical of early REDD+ cohorts, it has been subject to increasingly rigorous oversight, supporting the credibility of issued tonnes to date ³³ .
Additionality	Good. Long-term forest protection and community institutions unlikely without carbon revenue at this scale.
Leakage management	Moderate–Good. Large contiguous landscape and enforcement reduce leakage risk, though not eliminate it.
Permanence / reversal risk	Moderate–Good. 30-year CFMAs and buffer pool reduce reversal risk, but still nature-based.

³³ BioCarbon Partners, Personal communication with Mike Mailloux, Gina Woolley, and Marius Van der Vyver on 19th January

Criteria	Performance
Double counting risk	Moderate. Registry controls exist; Article 6 readiness not yet demonstrated.
Governance, standards, and market infrastructure	
Registry robustness	Good. Verra registry with established issuance history.
VVB performance exposure	Moderate. Long-running project audited multiple times; subject to legacy audit quality debates (a market-level issue).
Vintage risk	Moderate. Older vintages may be discounted despite ongoing issuance
ICVCM CCP alignment	Unclear. No explicit CCP label;
Article 6 readiness	Low / unclear.
Biodiversity	
Net biodiversity benefit	Strong. Biodiversity outcomes central to project rationale.
Leakage to biodiversity outcomes	Moderate

Additional qualitative insights from follow-up discussions with the implementing partner³⁴ highlight areas of pressure and contestation that persist even within a comparatively strong governance model:

Boundary disputes between certain Chiefdoms emerged as a particularly challenging issue, in part because the introduction of carbon finance attached new economic value to forest areas that had previously been weakly defined, contested, or forgotten about. Resolving such disputes has required substantial time, resources, and sustained engagement through customary and formal governance channels.

Isolated incidents of weak governance, including cases of misappropriation of funds by local leaders, have also tested accountability systems. In practice, these risks have been managed through enhanced oversight, investigation, and, where necessary, the withholding of future benefit flows (until the issue has been resolved in a satisfactory manner), reinforcing incentives for compliance and better governance occurs on community monies. BioCarbon Partners makes

³⁴ **BioCarbon Partners**, Personal communication with Mike Mailloux, Gina Woolley, and Marius Van der Vyver on 19th January

every effort possible to resolve governance issues knowing what is at stake even if the required consultative process moves at a pace that is slower than we would like to see. Grievance mechanisms are formally recognised within the REDD+ framework and are subject to external scrutiny through Verra's validation and verification processes, which has helped maintain their resilience even where carbon revenues are at stake.

It is equally important to note that the grievance mechanism is thoroughly free, prior, informed, and consented with communities and partners by the BioCarbon Partners in-field Engagement Teams.

These experiences underline that, in large-scale and long-duration REDD+ programmes, grievance management and conflict resolution are ongoing governance functions rather than one-off safeguards. They also illustrate the importance of strong institutional capacity, transparency, and enforcement mechanisms to maintain legitimacy over time, particularly as carbon revenues increase and associated incentives sharpen.

3.5. Successful project funded by BCFs: 19-016 "Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar"

3.5.1. Project summary

Table 13: Summary of project 19-016

BCFs Project	Associated Carbon Credit project	Link between the BCFs and Carbon Credit project
<i>Project ref and title:</i> 19-016: Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar.³⁵ <i>Project activities:</i> Project led by Blue Ventures that aimed to conserve highly threatened mangrove ecosystems while improving livelihoods in some of Madagascar's poorest coastal communities. Working across multiple sites on the west coast, the project focused on securing community land and management rights, establishing participatory mangrove management and	<i>Project name:</i> N/A <i>Status:</i> Planned as Plan Vivo project, but not registered <i>Project activities:</i> N/A <i>Crediting period:</i> N/A	Even though the Darwin Initiative project did not ultimately become a registered Plan Vivo project, the work it funded built a lot of the pre-conditions you need before you can credibly issue credits: • Clarified who has the right to manage the mangroves and benefit from carbon • Put in place community governance + management plans that are essentially the "operating system" for a blue carbon project • Built a credible Measurement, Reporting

³⁵ **Darwin Initiative**, Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar <https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/project/DAR19016>

BCFs Project	Associated Carbon Credit project	Link between the BCFs and Carbon Credit project
restoration plans, building local capacity for monitoring carbon and biodiversity, and developing sustainable livelihood alternatives to reduce pressure on mangroves. <i>Funding:</i> £226,839 <i>Years active:</i> 2012-2015		and Verification (MRV) foundation (carbon measurement + monitoring approach) • Established social and biodiversity baselines (needed for safeguards, additionality narrative, and benefit tracking) • Ran key “safeguards” processes, including FPIC-type engagement and built partnerships that de-risk later certification • Produced the early-stage commercial documents a carbon project needs to attract finance Created national-level “permission structure” and momentum for mangrove carbon in Madagascar.

Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar was a Darwin Initiative–funded project³⁶ led by Blue Ventures that aimed to conserve highly threatened mangrove ecosystems while improving livelihoods in some of Madagascar’s poorest coastal communities. Working across multiple sites on the west coast, the project focused on securing community land and management rights, establishing participatory mangrove management and restoration plans, building local capacity for monitoring carbon and biodiversity, and developing sustainable livelihood alternatives to reduce pressure on mangroves. A core ambition was to enable future access to voluntary carbon finance by laying the institutional, social, and technical foundations for community-based mangrove carbon projects. In the Bay of Assassins, the project pursued development of a Plan Vivo–aligned mangrove carbon project, with a Project Idea Note reviewed by the Plan Vivo Foundation, but the project was not validated, registered, or issuing carbon credits during the Darwin Initiative funding period; carbon finance was explicitly a longer-term objective beyond the life of the grant.

3.5.2. GESI and IPLC specific analysis

Below is a summary of the performance of this project against select best practice areas. See Annex 2 and 3 for full analysis.

Table 14: Performance of 19-016 “Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar” across best practice areas.

Best Practice Area	Performance
Gender	Overall rating: Good (with partial outcome evidence)
Equity	Overall rating: Good (procedural), Weak to Partial (outcomes)
Social Inclusion	Overall rating: Strong
IPLCs	Overall rating: Strong (with minor gaps)
FPIC	Overall rating: Good to Strong (pre-carbon)

Box 6: Explainer: What are Blue Carbon projects?

Blue Carbon projects focus on protecting and restoring coastal ecosystems such as mangroves, seagrasses, and salt marshes, which store large amounts of carbon in both vegetation and underlying sediments. By preventing degradation or restoring these ecosystems, projects can avoid emissions and enhance long-term carbon storage, while also delivering wider benefits such as coastal protection, biodiversity conservation, and livelihood support for coastal communities.

Where credible baselines, monitoring, and verification systems are in place, the climate benefits from Blue Carbon projects can be recognised through results-based finance or voluntary carbon credits. Because these credits are relatively scarce and often associated with strong biodiversity and social co-benefits, they have tended to attract higher prices than many other nature-based credits, with reported prices commonly in the USD 15–35 per tonne of CO₂e range.

³⁶ **Darwin Initiative**, Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar <https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/project/DAR19016>

3.5.3. Light touch wider analysis

Table 15: Wider analysis of 19-016 "Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar"

Criteria	Performance
Environmental integrity	
Credible representation of 1 tCO₂	Not yet demonstrated. No validated or issuing carbon project during the period with Darwin Initiative funding.
Additionality	Plausible (in the future). The project addresses clear drivers of mangrove loss and establishes new governance and financing pathways, but additionality at credit level remains untested.
Leakage management	Moderate. Landscape-scale management and alternative livelihood strategies reduce leakage risk, but full effects are not yet measurable.
Permanence / reversal risk	Moderate. Long-term permanence depends on sustained community governance and future financing (including carbon revenues).
Double counting risk	Low at present. No credits issued; national accounting and corresponding adjustments not yet relevant.
Governance, standards, and market infrastructure	
Registry robustness	Not applicable yet. Plan Vivo project not validated or registered during the project period.
VVB performance exposure	Not applicable yet.
Vintage risk	Not applicable yet.
ICVCM CCP alignment	Not applicable / unclear. Project predates CCP framework and is not issuing credits.
Article 6 readiness	Low / not applicable.
Biodiversity	
Net biodiversity benefit	Strong. Biodiversity conservation is a core objective, with extensive protection, restoration, and monitoring of mangrove ecosystems.

Criteria	Performance
Leakage to biodiversity outcomes	Moderate. Some risk remains if pressure shifts elsewhere, but landscape-scale planning and alternative livelihoods mitigate this risk.

3.6. New project: DAREX015 Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia's Andean Foothills

3.6.1. Project Summary

Table 16: Summary of project DAREX015

BCFs Project	Associated Carbon Credit project	Link between the BCFs and Carbon Credit project
<i>Project ref and title:</i> DAREX015: Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia's Andean foothills³⁷ <i>Project activities:</i> The Departmental Governments of Santa Cruz, Tarija, and Pando will enhance the conservation status of 4 million hectares of Bolivian protected areas and alleviate poverty and increase resilience in neighbouring communities. This will be done through technical, institutional, and financial capacity building for protected area creation, management, and monitoring. <i>Funding:</i> £4,998,396 <i>Years active:</i> 2025-2030	<i>Project name:</i> N/A <i>Status:</i> Project documentation suggests that carbon projects are planned but no indication of when or which registry would be used. <i>Project activities:</i> N/A <i>Crediting period:</i> N/A	This project is not itself a carbon credit project, but it has a clear and intentional link to the potential future development of REDD+ carbon crediting at sub-national (jurisdictional) level. The project explicitly focuses on creating the legal, institutional, governance, social-safeguard, and technical conditions required for carbon finance to operate credibly, including the development of sub-national legal instruments for carbon sequestration, avoidance and removals, the design of benefit-sharing systems, and the establishment of long-term carbon monitoring, and MRV capacity.

³⁷ **Darwin Initiative**, Sustainable financing for protected area management in Bolivia's Andean foothills <https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/project/DAREX015>

Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia’s Andean foothills is a five-year Darwin Initiative Extra project (2025–2030) led by the Governors’ Climate and Forests Task Force–Bolivia, working with the departmental governments of Santa Cruz, Tarija, and Pando. The project aims to improve the conservation status of approximately 4 million ha of protected areas while reducing poverty and strengthening climate resilience among neighbouring IPLCs.

Rather than implementing a standalone carbon project, the intervention is designed to establish the technical, institutional, governance and financing foundations required for a future jurisdictional REDD+ programme at departmental or multi-departmental level. It focuses on strengthening sub-national capacity for protected area planning, management, and monitoring, alongside the development and institutionalisation of sustainable financing mechanisms. These include conservation agreements, payments for ecosystem services, biodiversity finance, and forest-carbon-related mechanisms, with a strong emphasis on governance arrangements, FPIC, equitable benefit-sharing, and long-term monitoring systems. Collectively, these elements create the enabling conditions necessary for jurisdiction-scale REDD+ readiness and potential future crediting.

As the project commenced in October 2025, the analysis below is based on information available at the design stage.

3.6.2. GESI and IPLC specific analysis

Below is a summary of the performance of this project against select best practice areas. See Annex 2 and 3 for full analysis.

Box 7: Explainer: What is jurisdictional REDD?

Jurisdictional REDD+ is an approach to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation that operates across an entire political or administrative area, such as a country, state, province, or region, rather than at the level of an individual forest project. Under this model, emissions reductions are measured against a jurisdiction-wide forest reference emission level, with performance assessed across all forests within the boundary. This allows governments to address the underlying drivers of deforestation (such as agriculture, infrastructure, land tenure, and enforcement) through coordinated policies, incentives, and land-use planning, rather than relying solely on discrete project interventions.

Compared to project-level REDD+, the jurisdictional approach can reduce risks of leakage (where deforestation is displaced elsewhere), improve environmental integrity, and enable results-based finance at much larger scale.

Jurisdictional REDD+ credits are typically purchased by national governments (as part of results-based climate finance) or multilateral climate funds and fetch a higher price than project level REDD+ credits.

Table 1: Performance of DAREX015 “Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia’s Andean” across best practice areas.

Best Practice Area	Performance
Gender	Overall rating: Partial (design-stage intent)
Equity	Overall rating: Partial (procedural focus)
Social Inclusion	Overall rating: Good (design-stage)
IPLCs	Overall rating: Good (strong intent, untested)

Best Practice Area	Performance
FPIC	Overall rating: Partial to Good (design-stage)

3.6.3. Light touch wider analysis

Tabel 2: Wider analysis of DAREX015 "Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia's Andean Foothills"

Criteria	Performance
Environmental integrity	
Credible representation of 1 tCO₂	Not applicable at present. No validated or registered carbon project exists, and the project does not aim to issue credits during the Darwin Extra period.
Additionality	Unclear / future-dependent. Potential additionality may arise if future jurisdictional or community-based REDD+ projects are developed, but this cannot be assessed at proposal stage.
Leakage management	Unclear. Leakage management would depend on future jurisdictional design and MRV systems; no leakage framework is currently in place.
Permanence / reversal risk	Not yet applicable. No permanence or reversal risk can be assessed at this stage, as the project focuses on jurisdictional readiness rather than carbon credit issuance. Future permanence management would depend on the design of jurisdictional REDD+ frameworks, buffer arrangements, and long-term governance and enforcement mechanisms, none of which are yet defined.
Double counting risk	Not yet applicable. No double counting risk can be assessed at this stage, as the project does not issue carbon credits and makes no mitigation claims. Any future risk would depend on the design of jurisdictional accounting frameworks, host-country authorisation, and alignment with national REDD+ and NDC reporting systems.
Governance, standards, and market infrastructure	
Registry robustness	Not applicable. No carbon registry selected or engaged.
VVB performance exposure	Not applicable. No validation or verification activities proposed during the project period.
Vintage risk	Not applicable.

Criteria	Performance
ICVCM CCP alignment	Not applicable.
Article 6 readiness	Low / early. The project may contribute to long-term readiness by strengthening sub-national governance and MRV capacity, but Article 6 alignment is not an explicit objective.
Biodiversity	
Net biodiversity benefit	Strong (design-stage). Biodiversity conservation is a core objective, with large-scale protected area management and monitoring at the centre of the project rationale.
Leakage to biodiversity outcomes	Moderate risk. Effectiveness will depend on future enforcement capacity, financing sustainability, and integration with wider land-use pressures beyond protected areas.

3.7. Cross-cutting analysis across BCFs carbon credit projects on how and why things worked (or did not)

3.7.1. Project design: what was designed and for whom

It is important to analyse whether carbon was the primary objective of projects and whether livelihoods, governance, and safeguards were designed before carbon, or retrofitted later:

- **26-004: "Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+" in Sierra Leone (herein referred to as "Sierra Leone"):** Designed as a livelihood-first REDD+ support project, where forest protection is explicitly tied to food security and household welfare. Carbon therefore fits local development logic and reinforces existing community incentives.
- **DAREX004: "Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem Landscape" in Tanzania (herein referred to as "Tanzania"):** Conceived as a livelihoods-first pastoral landscape programme with soil carbon envisaged from proposal stage as a potential future financing pathway. During implementation, carbon objectives were deliberately slowed and reframed in response to community engagement and the inherent uncertainties of soil carbon in mobile grazing systems³⁸. This case illustrates not late-stage design misalignment, but the structural tension between pastoralist land-use flexibility and the fixed, long-term commitments implied by carbon markets, underscoring the need for adaptive sequencing and realistic carbon timelines in rangeland contexts.
- **26-016: "Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+" in Zambia (herein referred to as "Zambia"):** Designed as a carbon-

³⁸ **The Nature Conservancy**, Personal communication with Alphonse Mallya, Charles Massawe, and Philip Lukumay on 21st January 2025

financed governance system from the outset, with REDD+ revenues explicitly underpinning long-term CFMAs and associated conservation institutions. Within this already-operational carbon framework, Darwin Initiative funding played a complementary role by enabling deeper and earlier investment in community institutions, enforcement capacity, and biodiversity monitoring, strengthening institutional coherence between carbon finance, conservation outcomes, and community governance without being the primary driver of carbon viability³⁹.

- **19-016: “Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar” (herein referred to as “Madagascar”):** Designed as a community-led conservation and tenure-first project, with carbon finance intentionally deferred until governance, FPIC, and technical readiness were in place. Carbon was treated as a future incentive rather than a driver, resulting in strong safeguard alignment but delayed market outcomes.
- **DAREX015: “Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia’s Andean Foothills” (herein referred to as “Bolivia”):** Designed as a jurisdictional, system-level financing and governance intervention, rather than a site-specific carbon project. The project prioritises legal reform, institutional capacity, Indigenous governance, and sustainable financing mechanisms at departmental scale, with carbon (REDD+-type) positioned as a potential future funding stream rather than a primary delivery objective.

Across the cases reviewed, stronger safeguard alignment and long-term integrity were observed where carbon finance was: embedded within community governance from the outset (e.g. Zambia); intentionally deferred until livelihoods, tenure, and institutional readiness were in place (e.g. Madagascar); or approached through a jurisdictional readiness model rather than near-term credit issuance (e.g. Bolivia). The Tanzania case demonstrates a more adaptive pathway: although soil carbon was included from proposal stage, its progression has been deliberately slower and responsive to community engagement and pastoralist land-use realities, highlighting the importance of flexible sequencing to maintain social legitimacy and manage integrity risks.

3.7.2. Implementation strategies: sequencing and delivery capacity

It is useful to analyse whether implementation was incremental or rushed, if pilots were used before scaling, and whether implementers already had a local presence and trust:

- **Sierra Leone:** Phased implementation (REDD+ first, donor-funded consolidation second)
- **Tanzania:** Multiple complex components were developed in parallel (community engagement, livelihood interventions, and soil carbon methodology development), with the carbon component intentionally slowed and adapted over time as community understanding evolved, rather than being advanced on a fixed or accelerated timeline.
- **Zambia:** Demonstrates strong long-term implementation capacity within an established REDD+ project, with Darwin funding strengthening existing governance and delivery systems. However, this performance is contingent on deep technical, managerial, and

³⁹ **BioCarbon Partners**, Personal communication with Mike Mailloux, Gina Woolley, and Marius Van der Vyver on 19th January

operational capacity across multiple disciplines, highlighting that such models are transferable only where similarly strong implementation capability already exists⁴⁰.

- **Madagascar:** Implemented through a deliberately sequenced, capacity-building approach, prioritising FPIC, tenure security, participatory zoning, and community management plans before advancing carbon project validation.
- **Bolivia:** Proposed implementation follows a front-loaded readiness and capacity-building sequence, focusing first on governance reform, institutional strengthening, FPIC frameworks, and MRV foundations, before any consideration of carbon market engagement. This reflects a deliberate avoidance of premature carbon development but also means delivery of tangible carbon outcomes is contingent on post-project political, legal, and financial follow-through.

Across the cases reviewed, implementation strategies that prioritised deep, sustained community engagement and institution-building (e.g. Sierra Leone, Madagascar, Zambia), or that focused on jurisdictional readiness and governance reform rather than near-term carbon delivery (e.g. Bolivia), were more effective at managing social risks and building legitimacy. The Tanzania case demonstrates that where multiple complex components are developed in parallel, adaptive, and deliberately slowed progression of carbon activities, rather than fixed delivery timelines, can help maintain social legitimacy in pastoralist contexts. The Madagascar case, and more strongly Bolivia, further illustrate the value of slower, process-driven implementation in complex tenure and governance settings, even where this delays or defers carbon issuance altogether.

3.7.3. Stakeholder engagement: depth vs breadth

It is pertinent to analyse who has decision making authority vs who has been consulted, whether engagement was continuous or transactional, and whether engagement differed between conservation activities and carbon contracting:

- **Sierra Leone:** Stakeholder engagement was highly localised and continuous, centred on forest-edge communities, traditional authorities, women's groups, and farmer organisations. Engagement went beyond consultation to include co-design of land-use plans, by-laws, and livelihood activities, helping align REDD+ objectives with everyday community priorities.
- **Tanzania:** Stakeholder engagement was broad and sustained, spanning pastoralist communities, village institutions, district authorities, and carbon partners. Engagement around the soil carbon component was iterative and ongoing rather than discrete, with acknowledged variation in levels of understanding across community members. Project partners recognised uneven awareness and power dynamics within pastoralist governance structures and responded by slowing carbon-related processes, and repeating engagement.
- **Zambia:** Stakeholder engagement was formalised and institutionalised through elected Community Resource Boards and Community Forest Management Groups, supported by long-term government partnerships. This provided clear, recognised channels for

⁴⁰ **BioCarbon Partners**, Personal communication with Mike Mailloux, Gina Woolley, and Marius Van der Vyver on 19th January

representation, negotiation, and accountability between communities, the carbon developer, and the state.

- **Madagascar:** Stakeholder engagement was deliberate, iterative, and time-intensive, with repeated FPIC processes, participatory mapping, and tailored communication materials used to engage communities, women's associations, and local authorities. Engagement prioritised understanding and consent over speed, and carbon project development was paused where communities required further clarification or where technical uncertainties remained.
- **Bolivia:** Stakeholder engagement is designed to be deep and institutionally embedded rather than broad and transactional, centred on departmental governments, Indigenous authorities, and protected-area institutions. Engagement emphasises governance alignment, rights recognition, and long-term participation rather than community-level carbon contracting, which is appropriate for a jurisdictional readiness model but limits short-term visibility of community-level outcomes.

Across the cases reviewed, projects that invested in structured, ongoing, and community-recognised engagement mechanisms (e.g. Sierra Leone, Madagascar, and Zambia), or that embedded engagement within sub-national governance and Indigenous institutional frameworks at jurisdictional scale (e.g. Bolivia), demonstrated stronger legitimacy and lower social risk. The Tanzania case highlights that where engagement is sustained but understanding of carbon markets remains uneven, legitimacy depends less on the volume of consultation and more on adaptive, iterative processes that allow learning, trust-building, and recalibration over time. The Madagascar and Bolivia cases further underline the importance of treating engagement as a long-term social process, particularly in contexts of low literacy, complex governance, and unfamiliarity with carbon finance, even where this slows formal project progression.

3.7.4. Timeframes: what is realistically achievable within BCFs-funded projects

It is important to analyse what outcomes were realistic within grant timeframes and, where expectations exceeded, what could be delivered safely:

- **Sierra Leone:** The project timeframe was broadly realistic for its objectives, focusing on near-term livelihood improvements, governance strengthening, and behavioural change, while treating carbon revenues as a medium- to long-term outcome extending beyond the grant period.
- **Tanzania:** Project timelines initially underestimated the time required to build shared understanding, secure ongoing consent, and work through uncertainties around soil carbon methodologies and long-term commitments. In response, carbon-related activities were deliberately slowed and re-sequenced to align more closely with social learning and institutional readiness, illustrating the importance of flexible timelines in pastoralist contexts.
- **Zambia:** The project operated within long-term (30-year) community forest management and REDD+ frameworks, allowing sufficient time for institutional development, verification cycles, and the gradual translation of carbon revenues into community benefits.
- **Madagascar:** Timeframes were explicitly acknowledged as a constraint, with the project recognising from the outset that full carbon project validation and revenue generation would not be achievable within the Darwin Initiative funding period. The project therefore focused on laying foundations, FPIC,

tenure security, baselines, and capacity, which are inherently long-term and extend well beyond typical donor cycles.

- **Bolivia:** Timeframes explicitly acknowledge that carbon credit issuance is not realistic within the Darwin Initiative Extra funding period, with the project instead targeting long-term enabling conditions such as legal frameworks, benefit-sharing systems, and MRV capacity. This alignment between ambition and timeframe reduces safeguard risk but places significant reliance on sustained political commitment and follow-on finance beyond the grant period.

Across the cases reviewed, greater robustness was observed where projects aligned ambitions with realistic time horizons, including long-term institutional embedding of carbon finance (e.g. Zambia), deliberate deferral of carbon revenues beyond the grant period (e.g. Sierra Leone, Madagascar), or jurisdictional readiness approaches that do not assume near-term credit issuance (e.g. Bolivia). The Tanzania case underscores the importance of adaptive timelines in pastoralist contexts, where slowing and re-sequencing carbon activities can be necessary to build understanding, consent, and social legitimacy.

While this analysis has highlighted material risks associated with carbon engagement, particularly in relation to social safeguards, governance capacity, and expectation management, it also indicates that carbon markets are not inherently incompatible with biodiversity-led conservation. Where projects are grounded in secure tenure, inclusive institutions and credible environmental integrity, carbon finance can provide performance-based revenue that reinforces long-term stewardship and reduces dependence on short funding cycles. For some BCF-funded landscapes, particularly those with strong IPLC governance and clear ecological additionality, carbon may represent a viable sustainability pathway if introduced cautiously and sequenced appropriately. The recommendations below therefore aim not to discourage carbon engagement, but to clarify the conditions under which it is most likely to be credible, equitable and durable.

4. Actionable recommendations

4.1. Recommendations for Defra / BCF Programme Managers

1. Clarify Defra's risk appetite and policy position on voluntary carbon markets within BCFs.

Defra should articulate a clear policy stance on when and how engagement with voluntary carbon markets is appropriate within BCFs-funded projects. This should explicitly recognise that carbon finance can be a legitimate long-term sustainability mechanism for biodiversity and livelihoods, while also acknowledging that poorly sequenced or weakly governed carbon interventions present material social, reputational, and integrity risks. A short policy note or guidance annex would help align expectations across BCFs projects, applicants, and delivery partners.

2. Endorse minimum social integrity expectations for carbon-enabling work.

Defra should define a small set of non-negotiable social integrity expectations for any BCFs-funded project engaging with carbon markets (e.g. FPIC as an ongoing process,

Box 8: Why Grant Funding Is Critical for Early-Stage, Community-Owned Carbon Projects

Interviewees highlighted a clear role for grant funding in covering early-stage costs that communities cannot reasonably repay through future carbon revenues, particularly where projects aim for community-owned carbon entities. This includes upfront technical, legal, and engagement costs that private developers would otherwise recover through deductions from community benefit streams.

transparent benefit-sharing principles, and safeguards against dispossession), while avoiding prescriptive “one-size-fits-all” carbon standards. This would provide clarity without turning BCFs into de facto carbon regulators.

3. Align BCFs carbon engagement with emerging integrity frameworks, without over-claiming.

Defra should signal that alignment with frameworks such as the ICVCM Core Carbon Principles, Article 6 readiness, and leading social safeguard approaches is desirable where relevant, but should avoid positioning the BCFs as guarantors of carbon credit quality. This distinction is important to manage reputational risk as carbon markets continue to evolve.

4. Strengthen expectations around outcome-level equity and gender reporting (also for BCFs programme managers)

Beyond requiring procedural safeguards and participation metrics, Defra and BCFs programme managers should encourage projects engaging with carbon finance to define, track, and report outcome-level indicators on equity and gender, such as changes in income distribution, decision-making power, access to benefits, and exposure to risks over time⁴¹. Where such outcomes are expected to materialise beyond the grant period (e.g. through future carbon revenues), monitoring frameworks should be designed to allow for follow-up or learning beyond project closure.

5. Apply contextual learning from previous soil carbon initiatives in Tanzania and similar pastoralist settings (also a recommendation for BCFs programme managers)

When assessing proposals that include soil carbon or other land-use-linked carbon components, Defra and BCFs programme managers should ensure that lessons from earlier projects in northern Tanzania and comparable pastoralist contexts are explicitly considered. This includes scrutinising assumptions about community understanding, consent over long-term carbon commitments, mobility and land-use flexibility, benefit-sharing clarity, and the time required for trust-building, as well as avoiding replication of design features that have generated social tension or legitimacy concerns in other projects.

6. Allow time and space for community learning and consent in projects engaging with carbon markets (also a recommendation for BCFs programme managers)

Carbon finance involves abstract concepts, long-term commitments, and unfamiliar contractual arrangements that can take significant time for local communities to understand, assess, and consent to, particularly in Indigenous, pastoralist, or low-literacy contexts. Defra and BCFs programme managers should avoid expectations of rapid community readiness for carbon contracting or validation, and recognise that meaningful understanding, trust-building, and ongoing consent may require extended and iterative engagement beyond standard project timeframes.

7. Anticipate and manage reputational risk associated with REDD+ projects

REDD+ and forest carbon projects continue to attract significant public scrutiny and, in some contexts, scepticism due to past controversies, even where current projects demonstrate strong social safeguards, governance, and environmental integrity. Defra and BCFs programme

⁴¹ This is planned to be part of a GESI analysis that will be standard in BCFs projects.

managers should recognise reputational risk as an inherent feature of REDD+ engagement and ensure that projects are supported to communicate transparently, respond constructively to criticism, and clearly document safeguards, consent processes, and benefit-sharing arrangements. Portfolio-level messaging should distinguish between poor-quality historical practices and current best-practice approaches.

8. Introduce an explicit “carbon readiness and safeguards” screening at application stage.

For proposals that include current or future carbon ambitions, the programme manager should require applicants to explain:

- whether carbon is a primary objective, a future incentive, or purely exploratory;
- how FPIC, tenure, and benefit-sharing will be secured before any carbon contracting; and
- whether carbon timelines extend beyond the grant period.

This screening should focus on sequencing and risk, not technical carbon accounting.

9. Encourage realistic timeframes and discourage premature carbon contracting.

Programme guidance should explicitly state that BCFs funding cycles are often incompatible with safe carbon issuance timelines, particularly in complex tenure or IPLC contexts. Projects should be encouraged to treat carbon revenues as medium- to long-term outcomes unless strong institutional arrangements already exist.

10. Build learning loops rather than compliance-heavy reporting.

The programme manager should prioritise reflective learning on what has worked (and not worked) in carbon-related BCFs projects, rather than expanding compliance checklists. Short learning briefs or thematic syntheses on FPIC, benefit-sharing, and sequencing would add more value than additional reporting burdens.

4.2. Recommendations for Expert Groups and technical advisors

1. Require early-stage assessment of social integrity risk

When assessing proposals that include carbon components, Expert Groups should require clear evidence that land tenure complexity, overlapping claims, FPIC feasibility, and internal community power dynamics have been considered at concept stage, not deferred to later feasibility studies. Technically viable carbon pathways that present high social risk should be flagged for redesign, phasing, or conditional approval, to avoid funding projects that may later stall or generate conflict.

2. Scrutinise commercial carbon assumptions embedded in proposals.

Panels should actively interrogate carbon price projections, validation timelines, revenue expectations, and contractual arrangements presented in applications. Where carbon income is treated as near-term or guaranteed, or where optimistic financial assumptions underpin sustainability claims, applicants should be required to provide conservative modelling or sensitivity analysis. This reduces the risk of over-promising in grant-funded biodiversity contexts.

3. Prioritise governance influence and consent durability in Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) frameworks.

In reviewing monitoring plans, Expert Groups should look beyond participation metrics and assess whether proposals include indicators tracking decision-making authority, benefit distribution,

marginalised group influence, and the durability of consent over time. Projects demonstrating meaningful governance power and equitable benefit structures should score higher than those relying primarily on consultation or training outputs.

4.3. Recommendations for applicants and grantees

1. Be explicit about the role of carbon from the outset.

Applicants should clearly state whether carbon finance is:

- a core financing mechanism;
- a future sustainability option; or
- a peripheral or exploratory element.

Ambiguity around carbon intent has repeatedly been associated with safeguard risks and misaligned expectations.

2. Design livelihoods, governance, and safeguards before carbon.

Applicants should demonstrate that tenure security, FPIC processes, grievance mechanisms, and benefit-sharing principles are designed to stand on their own, rather than being contingent on future carbon revenues.

3. Avoid over-promising carbon revenues or timelines.

Applicants should avoid presenting carbon finance as a near-term or guaranteed income stream unless there is strong, evidence-based justification. Over-promising carbon benefits risks undermining trust with communities and donors alike.

4. Demonstrate learning from comparable contexts

Applicants proposing carbon activities in pastoralist or Indigenous landscapes should clearly demonstrate how project design reflects lessons from previous soil carbon initiatives in the region, including how known risks around consent, mobility, power asymmetries, and benefit distribution will be avoided or mitigated. **Also a recommendation for Expert Groups.*

5. Ensure delivery teams match the technical and managerial complexity of REDD+ projects.

REDD+ projects involve long-term contractual commitments, complex carbon accounting, safeguards, governance arrangements, and sustained engagement with IPLCs. Applicants proposing REDD+ or other forest carbon approaches should demonstrate that delivery teams include, or have secured access to, appropriate technical, legal, social, and managerial expertise, and that sufficient capacity and continuity are in place to manage these complexities over time. Where such capacity is not yet established, projects should be explicit about how it will be built or supplemented. **Also a recommendation for Expert Groups.*

6. Treat FPIC as an ongoing governance process, not a one-off milestone.

Grantees should plan for FPIC to be revisited as project scope, carbon assumptions, or benefit-sharing arrangements evolve, particularly where long-term carbon contracts are envisaged.

7. Prioritise transparency and learning over speed.

Where carbon-related uncertainties arise, grantees should be supported, and encouraged, to slow down, adapt, or pause carbon activities rather than pushing ahead to meet perceived timelines.

8. Document and share lessons, including challenges and failures.

Grantees should be encouraged to document not only successes but also tensions, delays, and trade-offs encountered in carbon-related work. These insights are critical to improving future BCFs programming and avoiding repeat mistakes.

9. Move beyond procedural compliance towards outcome-focused equity and gender monitoring.

Applicants and grantees should design projects with clear theories of change for how conservation and carbon-related activities are expected to affect women and different social groups, and invest in monitoring systems that track not only participation but also differentiated outcomes, including who benefits, who bears costs, and how power and influence shift over time.

Annex 1: How each of the main standards deals with Gender, Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) quality criteria and approaches that safeguard Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLC)

Table 17: Full analysis of how each of the main standards deals with Gender, Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) quality criteria and approaches that safeguard Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLC)

Standard	Approach to gender	Approach to equity	Approach to social inclusion	Approaches that safeguard Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities	Specific approach to FPIC
Verra Climate Community and Biodiversity (CCB) ⁴²	Verra's Climate, Community & Biodiversity Standards (CCB Standards) do not have a standalone <i>gender policy</i> in the way some other voluntary carbon market standards (like Gold Standard's SDG-focused requirements) do, but gender considerations are embedded indirectly through their social criteria and optional community impact levels.	Under the Climate, Community & Biodiversity Standards (CCB Standards), equity is addressed implicitly but systematically through social safeguards, rights-based requirements, and differentiated treatment of stakeholders, rather than via a single explicit "equity policy." Here's how equity is built into the CCB framework:	Participation and procedural social inclusion A core mechanism under CCB is procedural fairness: • Full and effective participation in project design, implementation, and monitoring • Engagement must be culturally appropriate, inclusive, and accessible • Stakeholders must have opportunities to influence decisions, not just be informed	• Recognition and protection of customary and statutory land and resource rights, including non-formal and collective tenure systems • Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is required where Indigenous Peoples are present, ensuring consent is obtained before project approval. FPIC renewal is less	Where Indigenous Peoples are present, projects must demonstrate Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) FPIC is triggered only where Indigenous Peoples are present FPIC under CCB is primarily an entry-condition safeguard

⁴² Verra, CCB Program Details <https://verra.org/programs/ccbs/ccbs-program-details/>

Standard	Approach to gender	Approach to equity	Approach to social inclusion	Approaches that safeguard Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities	Specific approach to FPIC
	The optional Community Gold Level within the CCB Standards is where gender-related outcomes are most visible: Projects can earn a Gold Level score for demonstrating exceptional community benefits - which includes the requirement to "demonstrate that the project will generate net positive impacts on the well-being of women and that women participate in or influence decision making."	Equity as "no harm + net positive benefits" At a minimum, CCB requires that projects: • Do no harm to local communities or other stakeholders • Maintain or improve the well-being of communities relative to a credible baseline This establishes a distributional equity floor: no group should be worse off because of the project, even if overall benefits increase. Identification of differentiated stakeholders CCB explicitly requires projects to:	This addresses power imbalances between project developers and communities. Rights based social inclusion CCB embeds social inclusion through strong rights protections, including: • Respect for customary and statutory land and resource rights • Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) where Indigenous Peoples are involved • Transparent and fair grievance redress mechanisms These requirements protect groups that are often structurally disadvantaged.	explicitly required than under Gold Standard. • Culturally appropriate engagement that respects traditional governance structures, knowledge systems, and decision-making processes • Do-no-harm requirements, including demonstration that projects do not undermine community well-being or access to resources relative to baseline conditions • Accessible grievance redress mechanisms that allow Indigenous Peoples and local community members to raise concerns and seek remedy without retaliation	CCB does not prescribe a detailed FPIC process.

Standard	Approach to gender	Approach to equity	Approach to social inclusion	Approaches that safeguard Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities	Specific approach to FPIC
		- Identify all relevant stakeholder groups - Analyse how impacts differ across groups (e.g. by livelihood, land tenure, socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, or marginalisation) This means equity is assessed through <i>who gains and who bears costs</i>, not just aggregate outcomes. Benefit-sharing expectations While CCB does not prescribe a single benefit-sharing model, it requires that: - Benefits are clearly identified, justified, and monitored	Differentiated impact and benefit inclusion - Identification of distinct community and stakeholder groups - Assessment of how project impacts and benefits differ across these groups - Design and monitoring of benefits that are appropriate to differing rights, livelihoods, and vulnerabilities This ensures that social inclusion under CCB goes beyond participation and rights, and addresses who benefits, who bears costs, and whether impacts are equitably distributed.	Ongoing monitoring of social impacts, including impacts on community well-being and resource access, to ensure safeguards remain effective over time	

Standard	Approach to gender	Approach to equity	Approach to social inclusion	Approaches that safeguard Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities	Specific approach to FPIC
		• Distribution is appropriate to stakeholder roles, rights, and vulnerabilities • Trade-offs between groups are disclosed and managed transparently This encourages equitable benefit allocation rather than elite capture. Equity and the optional “Gold Level” Equity becomes most explicit under CCB Gold Levels, especially: Community Gold: requires exceptional benefits for communities, often demonstrated through: • Targeted support to poorer or marginalised groups			

Standard	Approach to gender	Approach to equity	Approach to social inclusion	Approaches that safeguard Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities	Specific approach to FPIC
		• Reductions in inequality or vulnerability • Improved access to assets, services, or decision-making power Gold Level is optional, but it sets a higher equity benchmark.			
Gold Standard ⁴³	The Gold Standard takes a much more explicit and prescriptive approach to gender than most other carbon standards. Gender equality is treated as a core design requirement, not an optional co-benefit. Explicit gender equality objective	The Gold Standard takes an explicit, development-centred approach to equity, treating it as a core design and safeguard issue, not just an outcome to be hoped for. Explicit focus on distributional equity Gold Standard requires projects to demonstrate who benefits and who bears	Explicit inclusion objective (not implicit) Gold Standard requires projects to identify and address the needs of vulnerable, disadvantaged, and marginalised groups as part of its Safeguarding Principles. Social inclusion is therefore: • A mandatory safeguard	Under the Gold Standard, safeguards for Indigenous Peoples and local communities are explicit, mandatory, and verified, and are grounded in rights, inclusion, and differentiated impact analysis. Identification of Indigenous Peoples and	FPIC is an explicit safeguard requirement where Indigenous Peoples are present. FPIC is treated as a process, not a one-off event Free: Projects must demonstrate that participation was voluntary.

⁴³ **Gold Standard**, General Information <https://globalgoals.goldstandard.org/>

Standard	Approach to gender	Approach to equity	Approach to social inclusion	Approaches that safeguard Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities	Specific approach to FPIC
	Gold Standard explicitly aligns projects with SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and treats gender outcomes as a material development impact, not a secondary consideration. Projects must demonstrate how gender considerations are: - Identified - Addressed - Monitored over time Mandatory gender-responsive stakeholder engagement Gold Standard requires gender-responsive consultation, meaning:	costs, not just overall net benefits. Projects must: - Identify distinct stakeholder groups (e.g. women, low-income groups) - Analyse differentiated impacts across these groups This embeds distributional equity at the core of project design. Equity through SDG alignment Gold Standard explicitly aligns projects with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly:	- Explicitly assessed at validation and verification - Linked to project eligibility and credit issuance Inclusive and differentiated stakeholder engagement Projects must carry out stakeholder consultation that is inclusive and responsive, including: - Identification of distinct stakeholder groups, including marginalised or less powerful groups - Measures to ensure meaningful participation, not just representation - Adaptation of consultation processes to overcome barriers related to gender, poverty, disability, language, or social norms	distinct local community groups Gold Standard requires projects to: - Identify all relevant stakeholder groups, including Indigenous Peoples where present - Distinguish between groups within communities, rather than treating the community as homogeneous Analysis of how impacts differ across stakeholder groups Projects must:	Prior: FPIC must occur before validation and registration and before land-use changes. Informed: Projects must show that Indigenous Peoples were provided with information on project activities, risks, benefits, and alternatives. Information must be in appropriate languages and formats. There must be sufficient time and capacity to understand implications. Consent: Consent must be obtained through legitimate, culturally

Standard	Approach to gender	Approach to equity	Approach to social inclusion	Approaches that safeguard Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities	Specific approach to FPIC
	- Women must be explicitly identified as a stakeholder group where relevant - Engagement processes must be accessible to women (timing, location, language, cultural norms) - Barriers to women's participation must be identified and addressed, not simply acknowledged Gender-differentiated impact analysis Projects are required to: - Analyse how project impacts differ for women and men	- SDG 1 (No Poverty) - SDG 5 (Gender Equality) - SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) Procedural equity and inclusive participation Gold Standard requires inclusive, stakeholder-responsive consultation, including: - Identification of marginalised or less powerful groups - Measures to ensure their meaningful participation, not just representation - Adaptation of consultation methods to overcome social, economic, or cultural barriers	This embeds procedural social inclusion and guards against elite capture. Differentiated impact analysis Projects must assess and document: - How impacts differ across stakeholder groups - Whether benefits and risks are distributed fairly - Whether any group is excluded or disproportionately burdened Where exclusion risks are identified, mitigation measures are required. This moves inclusion beyond consultation to distributional outcomes.	- Assess positive and negative impacts for each identified group - Analyse whether impacts, benefits, or risks are unevenly distributed - Identify whether Indigenous Peoples or particular local groups face heightened risks (e.g. loss of access, exclusion, cultural impacts) Critically, aggregate "community benefits" are not sufficient where differentiated groups exist. This requirement is what prevents: - Elite capture - Benefit concentration among landowners or project partners	appropriate decision making structures. There must be accessible Grievance Mechanisms for Indigenous Peoples.

Standard	Approach to gender	Approach to equity	Approach to social inclusion	Approaches that safeguard Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities	Specific approach to FPIC
	- Identify gender-specific risks and opportunities - Avoid reinforcing existing gender inequalities This includes impacts on: - Income and livelihoods - Time use (e.g. unpaid labour burdens) - Health and safety - Access to resources and decision-making Gender-responsive safeguards (“do no harm”) Gold Standard requires projects to demonstrate that they: - Do not exacerbate gender inequality	This guards against elite capture and tokenistic engagement. Measurable and monitored equity outcome Equity under Gold Standard is measured and verified, through: - Disaggregated indicators (by gender, income group, or vulnerability where relevant) - Ongoing monitoring of benefit distribution - Corrective action if inequitable outcomes emerge		- Marginalisation of Indigenous or customary users Rights-based safeguards (including FPIC where applicable) Gold Standard requires projects to: - Respect human rights, including customary land and resource use rights - Avoid involuntary displacement or restriction of access - Apply Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) where Indigenous Peoples are affected FPIC is treated as an ongoing process, not a	

Standard	Approach to gender	Approach to equity	Approach to social inclusion	Approaches that safeguard Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities	Specific approach to FPIC
	- Do not increase women's exposure to risk, unpaid labour, or exclusion - Include mitigation measures where gender-specific risks are identified This makes gender a safeguard issue, not only a benefit issue. Gender-sensitive monitoring and indicators Projects must include gender-disaggregated indicators where relevant, such as: - Participation in decision-making bodies - Access to benefits, income, or services			one-off event, reinforcing Indigenous agency throughout the project lifecycle. Inclusive and culturally appropriate participation Safeguards are reinforced through procedural inclusion, requiring that: - IPLCs participate in decision-making, not just consultation - Engagement is culturally appropriate, using recognised governance structures and languages - Barriers to participation of marginalised groups are identified and addressed	

Standard	Approach to gender	Approach to equity	Approach to social inclusion	Approaches that safeguard Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities	Specific approach to FPIC
	• Employment or leadership roles • Time savings or workload changes Gender outcomes are therefore measured and verified, not assumed.			This ensures that differentiated impacts are identified by affected groups themselves, not assumed by project developers. Monitoring, verification, and corrective action At verification, Gold Standard auditors assess whether: • Differentiated impacts identified at design stage actually materialised • IPLCs received intended benefits • Safeguards and mitigation measures were implemented effectively Where safeguards fail:	

Standard	Approach to gender	Approach to equity	Approach to social inclusion	Approaches that safeguard Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities	Specific approach to FPIC
				• Corrective Action Requests (CARs) are issued • Credit issuance can be delayed or withheld This makes safeguards enforceable, not aspirational.	
Earthly ⁴⁴ (not a standard but an intermediary and quality curator)	Gender is treated as part of social integrity, not a standalone metric. Earthly's project screening and curation emphasise: Benefits reaching marginalised or under-represented groups, including women.	Equity is addressed through reliance on recognised standards. Equity outcomes are not independently measured or verified by Earthly. Equity framed as part of "social integrity" rather than redistribution.	Earthly does not operate a social inclusion standard and does not independently certify social outcomes. Its approach to social inclusion is therefore derivative and curatorial, relying on recognised third-party standards and qualitative due diligence.	Earthly does not operate its own safeguard standard and does not independently certify safeguards for Indigenous Peoples or local communities. Its approach is therefore derivative, standards-aligned, and curatorial, rather than prescriptive or regulatory. As part of project selection and curation, Earthly	No Earthly-specific FPIC or Indigenous safeguard requirements

⁴⁴ Earthly <https://earthly.org/>

Standard	Approach to gender	Approach to equity	Approach to social inclusion	Approaches that safeguard Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities	Specific approach to FPIC
			Earthly's project screening and curation focus on whether projects: • Engage local communities and stakeholders meaningfully • Demonstrate inclusive participation, particularly of under-represented groups • Articulate clear benefit pathways for local communities	applies qualitative due diligence to assess whether projects: • Respect customary and statutory land and resource rights • Demonstrate appropriate consent processes where Indigenous Peoples are involved • Engage local communities in a way that avoids exclusion, elite capture, or reputational risk No Earthly-specific FPIC or Indigenous safeguard requirements	

Standard	Approach to gender	Approach to equity	Approach to social inclusion	Approaches that safeguard Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities	Specific approach to FPIC
Plan Vivo ⁴⁵	Gender treated as a core element of community well-being Plan Vivo is fundamentally a community-based standard, and gender is embedded within its requirements on livelihoods, participation, and benefit sharing, rather than treated as a peripheral co-benefit. Projects must demonstrate that: • Benefits reach households and community members equitably	Equity anchored in community ownership and control At the core of Plan Vivo is the principle that communities are the primary rights-holders and beneficiaries, not passive recipients. Projects must demonstrate that: • Communities define project activities and rules • Decision-making authority sits with community-level institutions • Benefits are structured around participants' needs and rights, not external actors	Community-centred project design Plan Vivo requires projects to be designed with communities, not imposed on them. This means: • 60% of the money from every Plan Vivo carbon credit goes to project participants (e.g. farmers, farming cooperatives, community trust funds) • Communities actively participate in defining project activities • Local priorities, livelihoods, and constraints shape project design	Community ownership and control as a core safeguard Plan Vivo is built on the principle that Indigenous Peoples and local communities are the primary rights-holders. Projects must demonstrate that: • Communities voluntarily choose to participate • Communities define project activities, rules, and benefit-sharing arrangement • Decision-making authority rests with community-level	FPIC is embedded in voluntary participation and community choice FPIC occurs before project registration and implementation FPIC is based on accessible, locally appropriate information Consent is expressed through legitimate community institutions FPIC is treated as an ongoing process, not a one-off event

⁴⁵ Plan Vivo <https://www.planvivo.org/>

Standard	Approach to gender	Approach to equity	Approach to social inclusion	Approaches that safeguard Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities	Specific approach to FPIC
	- Gender roles and inequalities are understood and addressed in project design Mandatory identification of women as a stakeholder group Under the Plan Vivo Standard, project developers are required to: - Identify all relevant community groups, including women - Understand gender-specific roles in land use, resource management, and livelihoods	This directly addresses power asymmetries between developers and communities. Equitable and transparent benefit sharing Equity is most strongly operationalised through benefit-sharing requirements. Plan Vivo requires that: - Benefit-sharing mechanisms are transparent, agreed with participants, and documented - Benefits are accessible to all participants, not only elites or male household heads - Payments or in-kind benefits are fair relative to	- Social inclusion is assessed from the outset, not retrofitted Projects that are developer-driven without genuine community involvement cannot be certified. Identification of differentiated groups within communities Plan Vivo explicitly rejects treating “the community” as homogeneous. Projects must: - Identify different groups within communities (e.g. women, poorer households, land-poor participants, Indigenous groups)	institutions, not external developers This directly safeguards against dispossession, coercion, and externally driven land-use change. Explicit recognition of customary land and resource rights Plan Vivo requires projects to: - Respect customary, collective, and statutory land and resource rights - Recognise use rights even where formal legal title is absent - Demonstrate that project activities do not undermine existing access to land or resources	FPIC applies to both Indigenous Peoples <i>and</i> local communities At validation and verification, Plan Vivo assesses evidence of FPIC through: - Community consultation records - Governance arrangements - Participation agreements - Grievance mechanisms - Demonstrated community control over benefits and decisions Failure to demonstrate genuine consent can result in:

Standard	Approach to gender	Approach to equity	Approach to social inclusion	Approaches that safeguard Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities	Specific approach to FPIC
	Women cannot be subsumed under a generic “community” category. Gender-inclusive participation and decision making Plan Vivo requires meaningful participation of community members, including women, in: • Project design • Governance and decision-making • Monitoring and benefit distribution This includes: • Using appropriate consultation methods	contributions and opportunity costs Projects must show that benefits do not accrue disproportionately to: • Wealthier landholders • Community elites • Intermediaries or project proponents Procedural equity through inclusive participation Plan Vivo embeds equity through procedural fairness, requiring: • Meaningful participation of all relevant groups in: ○ Project design ○ Governance and decision-making ○ Monitoring and benefit distribution • Measures to address barriers to participation,	• Understand different roles, rights, and vulnerabilities This ensures that socially excluded or less powerful groups are visible in project design and implementation. Inclusive and meaningful participation Social inclusion under Plan Vivo is strongly procedural. Projects must demonstrate: • Meaningful participation of all relevant groups in: ○ Project design ○ Governance and decision-making ○ Monitoring and benefit distribution • Measures to overcome barriers related to gender,	This is particularly important for Indigenous Peoples and forest-dependent communities. Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) as a foundational principle Plan Vivo requires that participation be based on Free, Prior and Informed Consent, especially where Indigenous Peoples are involved. In practice, this means: • Participation is voluntary and non-coercive • Consent is obtained before activities begin	• Corrective Action Requests (CARs) • Delayed or denied issuance of Plan Vivo Certificates

Standard	Approach to gender	Approach to equity	Approach to social inclusion	Approaches that safeguard Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities	Specific approach to FPIC
	- Addressing cultural or practical barriers to women's participation - This is a strong form of procedural gender inclusion. Gender-responsive benefit sharing A defining feature of Plan Vivo is its requirement for transparent and fair benefit-sharing mechanisms. Projects must demonstrate that: - Women can access benefits directly, not only through male household heads - Payments, livelihood benefits, or in-kind support do not	including gender, poverty, literacy, or social status This helps ensure that less powerful groups can influence outcomes, not just receive information.	literacy, poverty, language, or social norms Participation must be active and influential, not tokenistic consultation. Transparent and accessible benefit sharing Plan Vivo requires benefit-sharing mechanisms that are: - Transparent and agreed with participants - Accessible to all participating groups, including women and poorer households - Designed to avoid elite capture or exclusion Social inclusion is therefore operationalised through who actually receives benefits, not just who is consulted.	- Communities receive clear, accessible information - Consent is treated as an ongoing process, not a one-off signature FPIC is embedded through Plan Vivo's participatory design and governance requirements rather than treated as a standalone procedural checkbox. Inclusive and culturally appropriate participation Safeguards are reinforced through requirements for: - Culturally appropriate engagement, respecting traditional governance and decision-making systems	

Standard	Approach to gender	Approach to equity	Approach to social inclusion	Approaches that safeguard Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities	Specific approach to FPIC
	reinforce existing gender inequalities This is particularly important in smallholder and Indigenous contexts. Gender considerations in safeguards (“do no harm”) Plan Vivo requires projects to show they: • Do not exacerbate gender inequality • Do not increase women’s unpaid labour burden or vulnerability • Respect women’s customary and use rights, even where statutory rights are weak Gender is therefore treated as a safeguard			• Inclusion of different groups within communities (e.g. women, poorer households, land-poor members) • Measures to address barriers to participation linked to power, gender, language, or literacy This ensures that safeguards apply within communities, not just between developers and communities. “Do no harm” and protection against exclusion Projects must demonstrate that they:	

Standard	Approach to gender	Approach to equity	Approach to social inclusion	Approaches that safeguard Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities	Specific approach to FPIC
	issue, not just a benefit claim.			- Do not make any group worse off relative to the baseline - Do not restrict access to land, resources, or livelihoods without consent - Include mechanisms to address grievances and disputes This protects IPLCs from unintended negative impacts. Ongoing monitoring and verification At validation and verification, Plan Vivo assesses: - Whether consent, participation, and governance arrangements are functioning in practice	

Standard	Approach to gender	Approach to equity	Approach to social inclusion	Approaches that safeguard Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities	Specific approach to FPIC
				• Whether IPLCs are receiving agreed benefits • Whether safeguards remain effective over time Failure to demonstrate this can delay or prevent issuance of Plan Vivo Certificates.	

Annex 2: Full analysis of how projects performed against the best practice areas

Table 18: Full analysis of the performance of 26-004: "Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+" project in Sierra Leone across best practice areas

Best Practice area	Performance
Gender	
Explicit gender equality objectives	Good. Gender equality is an explicit project concern, rooted in food security outcomes and women's roles in agriculture. The project identifies gender inequality (e.g. limited land access for women) as a key constraint and integrates gender considerations across land-use planning, agricultural training, and governance structures. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+, p2, 7–8. https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26004/26283/26-004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Mandatory identification of women as a distinct stakeholder group	Good. Women are consistently treated as a distinct stakeholder group, including through women-only focus group discussions, targeted social science research on women's food insecurity, and minimum female representation requirements in committees and trainings. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+, p7–9 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26004/26283/26-004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Gender-disaggregated indicators	Partial. Participation data are frequently gender-disaggregated (e.g. training participants, Species Champions, Natural Resource Management Committee (NRMC) composition), but outcome-level indicators (e.g. income, food security improvements) are not yet fully disaggregated in reported results. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+, p2, 7–9 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26004/26283/26-004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf

Best Practice area	Performance
Gender-responsive benefit sharing	Partial to Good. Benefit-sharing mechanisms explicitly aim to include women (e.g. minimum 40% female participation, women in VSLA leadership roles, targeting crops and activities linked to women's livelihoods). However, there is limited quantitative evidence on differential benefit levels between men and women. Reference: <i>Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+, p3, 7–9</i> https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26004/26283/26-004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Equity	
Identification of differentiated groups within communities	Good. The project explicitly recognises differentiated groups, including women, youth, poorer households, Species Champions, NRMC members, and households with high food insecurity or low dietary diversity. Reference: <i>Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+, p2, 4-7, 9.</i> https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26004/26283/26-004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Distributional equity analysis showing who benefits and who bears costs	Partial. Qualitative social science research explores who participates and who may be excluded and acknowledges that benefits may accrue unevenly due to social standing, labour availability, or household structure. However, there is no formal quantitative distributional equity analysis. Reference: <i>Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+, p2, 7–9</i> https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26004/26283/26-004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Transparent and equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms	Good (procedural), partial (outcomes). Benefit-sharing mechanisms (agricultural inputs, VSLAs, cash / food-for-work, stipends) are clearly described and embedded in community-agreed processes, but measured equity outcomes are still pending end-of-project evaluation. Reference: <i>Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+, p2-3, 7–9</i> https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26004/26283/26-004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf

Best Practice area	Performance
Procedural equity, ensuring marginalised groups can influence decisions, not just be consulted.	Strong. Communities influence decisions through NRMCS, participatory mapping, by-law development, and revision of MOUs / Conservation Agreements. Decision-making goes beyond consultation and includes community-defined land-use zones and rules. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+, p2, 4-5, 7-9 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26004/26283/26-004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Measured and verified equity outcomes	Not yet. Equity outcomes are discussed qualitatively, but formal measurement and verification are planned for end-of-project reporting rather than demonstrated at this stage. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+, p7-9 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26004/26283/26-004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Social inclusion	
Inclusive and culturally appropriate participation	Strong. Participation uses culturally appropriate mechanisms including chiefdom structures, community meetings, PRA tools, drama-based roadshows, and locally recognised governance processes. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+, p3, 4-7, 9 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26004/26283/26-004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Identification and engagement of marginalised or less powerful groups	Good. Women, poorer households, youth, and those with limited land access are explicitly identified and engaged through tailored activities, focus groups, and targeted livelihood support. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+, p2, 5-6, 8-9 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26004/26283/26-004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf

Best Practice area	Performance
Community-led project structures	Strong. Community-led structures include NRMCS, Species Champions, Village Savings and Loan Associations, and community-defined by-laws and land-use plans. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+, p2-5, 7</i> https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26004/26283/26-004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Monitoring of inclusion outcomes	Partial. Participation levels are monitored and discussed, and qualitative research explores inclusion barriers, but systematic inclusion outcome indicators are not yet fully quantified. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+, p7-9</i> https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26004/26283/26-004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Safeguarding Indigenous Peoples & Local Communities (IPLCs)	
Explicit recognition of customary and statutory land and resource rights	Good. The project explicitly recognises community forest rights and works within customary governance systems, embedding conservation within community-defined land-use plans and by-laws rather than transferring control externally. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+, p2-3, 7-8</i> https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26004/26283/26-004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Protection against dispossession and “land grabs” through: • Do-no-harm requirements • Transparent land-use change rules • Community-defined participation boundaries	Yes. Safeguards include community-defined conservation zones, negotiated Conservation Agreements, transparent rules on land-use change, and continued community governance over forest resources. However, no explicit do-no-harm policy. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+, p2-5, 7, 9</i> https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26004/26283/26-004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf

Best Practice area	Performance
Accessible grievance mechanisms	Poor. No standalone, formal grievance mechanism. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+, p3-9</i> https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26004/26283/26-004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Ongoing monitoring of social and livelihood impacts	Good. Ongoing qualitative and quantitative monitoring of food security, participation, governance, and livelihood impacts is embedded, with further analysis planned at end of project. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+, p4-9</i> https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26004/26283/26-004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
FPIC	
FPIC applies to both Indigenous Peoples <i>and</i> local communities	Good. The project is framed around local communities rather than formally recognised Indigenous Peoples, but FPIC-like principles are applied to all participating communities. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+, p2-3, 5-7, 9</i> https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26004/26283/26-004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Free: voluntary participation with no coercion or conditionality.	Good. Participation is voluntary. Evidence of communities exercising periods of non-participation and renegotiation. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+, p2, 7, 9</i> https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26004/26283/26-004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Prior: consent obtained <i>before</i> validation, registration, and land-use change.	Partial. Consent processes precede land-use planning and Conservation Agreements, but FPIC is not explicitly tied to carbon credit validation or issuance stages.

Best Practice area	Performance
	Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+, p2, 5-7 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26004/26283/26-004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Informed: information provided in appropriate languages and formats, with time for deliberation.	Good. Information is shared through meetings, roadshows, radio programmes, PRA tools, and local languages, with repeated engagement over time. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+, p4-6, 7, 9 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26004/26283/26-004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Consent: expressed through legitimate, community-recognised decision-making institutions, not proxy signatures.	Good. Consent is channelled through recognised institutions (chiefdom authorities, NRMCS, community meetings) rather than proxy signatures. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+, p2-3, 5-7 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26004/26283/26-004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Ongoing: consent revisited if project scope, impacts, or benefit arrangements change.	Partial. The project adapts through revised MOUs and Conservation Agreements, implying ongoing consent, but this is not explicitly framed as a formal FPIC re-validation process. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+, p2, 4-5, 7-8 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26004/26283/26-004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Verified: failure to maintain FPIC can delay or block credit issuance.	No / not explicit. FPIC is not explicitly verified as a condition for carbon credit issuance, reflecting the project's primary framing as a conservation and livelihood intervention rather than a market-first carbon project. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Linking food security and forest conservation under REDD+, Across p1-9 no evidence FPIC tied to carbon standards https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26004/26283/26-004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf

Table 19: Full analysis of performance of DAREX004 “Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem Landscape” project in Tanzania across best practice areas

Best Practice area	Performance
Gender	
Explicit gender equality objectives	Strong. Gender equality is explicit and operationalised across the project, with clear targets for women’s participation, leadership, and livelihood benefits (e.g. women rangeland guardians, women’s beekeeping, Village Community Bank (VICOBA), eco-tourism groups). Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous, and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem landscape, p5–6, 15. https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAREX004/27828/DAREX004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Mandatory identification of women as a distinct stakeholder group	Strong. Women are consistently identified as a distinct group in consultations, governance, training, and livelihood interventions, including separate engagement of women, elders, and youth in community processes. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous, and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem landscape, p5–7, 15. https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAREX004/27828/DAREX004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Gender-disaggregated indicators	Good. Participation and training data are routinely gender-disaggregated (e.g. livestock fattening, beekeeping, rangeland restoration), though outcome-level income and power metrics are still emerging. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous, and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem landscape, p5–6, 15. https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAREX004/27828/DAREX004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Gender-responsive benefit sharing	Good. Multiple benefit streams are explicitly targeted at women (beekeeping revenues, VICOBA savings, tourism facilities, stipends for restoration work). However, there is limited published analysis of comparative benefit shares between women and men across the full project.

Best Practice area	Performance
	<i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous, and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem landscape, p5–6, 15. https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAREX004/27828/DAREX004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf</i>
Equity	
Identification of differentiated groups within communities	Good. The project recognises women, youth, elders, herders, grazing coordinators, and livelihood groups as distinct actors with different roles and interests. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous, and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem landscape, p5–7, 15. https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAREX004/27828/DAREX004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf</i>
Distributional equity analysis showing who benefits and who bears costs	Partial. The project's Annual Report⁴⁶ provides rich qualitative information on participation and benefits, but no formal distributional or incidence analysis. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous, and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem landscape, p5–7, 15. https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAREX004/27828/DAREX004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf</i>
Transparent and equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms	Partial. Livelihood and restoration benefits are transparent at activity level, but benefit-sharing arrangements for the soil carbon project remain under development and contested.

⁴⁶ **Darwin Initiative**, Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous, and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem Landscape <https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/project/DAREX004/>

Best Practice area	Performance
	Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous, and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem landscape, p5–7, 15. https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAREX004/27828/DAREX004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Procedural equity, ensuring marginalised groups can influence decisions, not just be consulted.	Good. Communities influence grazing plans, restoration priorities, livelihood design, and governance structures. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous, and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem landscape, p5–7, 15. https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAREX004/27828/DAREX004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Measured and verified equity outcomes	Not yet. Equity outcomes are discussed qualitatively; no verified or quantified equity outcome analysis is presented in either document. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous, and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem landscape, p5–7, 15. https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAREX004/27828/DAREX004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Social inclusion	
Inclusive and culturally appropriate participation	Strong. Participation is grounded in Maasai institutions, grazing committees, elders, women’s groups, and culturally embedded practices such as <i>Herders Under the Tree Schools</i>. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous, and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem landscape, p4–7, 15. https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAREX004/27828/DAREX004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Identification and engagement of marginalised or less powerful groups	Good. Women and youth are explicitly targeted; poorer households benefit from paid restoration work and savings groups.

Best Practice area	Performance
	Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous, and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem landscape, p5–7, 15. https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAREX004/27828/DAREX004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Community-led project structures	Strong. Village grazing committees, grazing coordinators, women-led livelihood groups, and community-based monitoring systems are central to project delivery. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous, and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem landscape, p4–7, 15. https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAREX004/27828/DAREX004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Monitoring of inclusion outcomes	Partial. Participation levels are monitored, but systematic tracking of inclusion outcomes (e.g. who gains decision-making power over time) is limited. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous, and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem landscape, p5–7, 15. https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAREX004/27828/DAREX004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Safeguarding Indigenous Peoples & Local Communities (IPLCs)	
Explicit recognition of customary and statutory land and resource rights	Strong. The project actively supports village land use planning and communal Certificates of Customary Rights of Occupancy (CCROs), strengthening legal recognition of pastoralist land rights. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous, and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem landscape, p10. https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAREX004/27828/DAREX004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf

Best Practice area	Performance
Protection against dispossession and “land grabs” through: • Do-no-harm requirements • Transparent land-use change rules • Community-defined participation boundaries	Partial. Core conservation and grazing components strengthen community control. The project applies adaptive management and consultation, but there is no standalone, explicit “do-no-harm” framework for the soil carbon component. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous, and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem landscape, p6-7, 10. https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAREX004/27828/DAREX004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Accessible grievance mechanisms	Partial. Dispute resolution largely relies on village and district governance structures; no independent or project-specific grievance mechanism for carbon contracts is clearly evidenced. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous, and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem landscape, p6-7. https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAREX004/27828/DAREX004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Ongoing monitoring of social and livelihood impacts	Good. Livelihoods, rangeland condition, and participation are actively monitored, though long-term social impacts of carbon contracting remain uncertain and contested. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous, and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem landscape, p5-7, 15. https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAREX004/27828/DAREX004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf

Best Practice area	Performance
FPIC	
FPIC applies to both Indigenous Peoples <i>and</i> local communities	Good (project intent), disputed (carbon component). The project recognises Maasai pastoralists as rights-holders.. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous, and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem landscape, p4-7, 15. https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAREX004/27828/DAREX004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Free: voluntary participation with no coercion or conditionality.	Partial. The Darwin report emphasises voluntary engagement. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous, and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem landscape, p4-7. https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAREX004/27828/DAREX004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Prior: consent obtained <i>before</i> validation, registration, and land-use change.	Partial. Community consultations occur prior to land-use planning and implementation, but there is no explicit sequencing of consent relative to carbon validation, registration, or contracting. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous, and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem landscape, p6-7. https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAREX004/27828/DAREX004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Informed: information provided in appropriate languages and formats, with time for deliberation.	Partial. Training and consultations are extensive. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous, and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem landscape, p4-7. https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAREX004/27828/DAREX004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Consent: expressed through legitimate, community-recognised decision-making institutions, not proxy signatures.	Good. Engagement is channelled through village councils, grazing committees, and recognised leadership structures. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous, and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem landscape, p6-7. https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAREX004/27828/DAREX004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf

Best Practice area	Performance
Ongoing: consent revisited if project scope, impacts, or benefit arrangements change.	Partial. Adaptive engagement is described, but no clear mechanism for re-validating consent over the lifetime of a long-term carbon contract is evidenced. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous, and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem landscape, p4-7. https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAREX004/27828/DAREX004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf
Verified: failure to maintain FPIC can delay or block credit issuance.	No / not demonstrated. No evidence showing FPIC being independently verified as a condition for carbon credit issuance. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 3 – Partnering for a biodiverse, prosperous, and resilient Tarangire Ecosystem landscape, Across report no evidence FPIC tied to carbon standards https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAREX004/27828/DAREX004%20AR3%20-%20edited.pdf

Table 20: Full analysis of performance of 26-016 "Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+" project in Zambia across best practice areas

Best Practice area	Performance
Gender	
Explicit gender equality objectives	Good. Gender equality is explicitly addressed in both Darwin-funded activities and the wider REDD+ programme, with stated intent to include women in decision-making, benefit-sharing, and employment (e.g. community scouts). Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 2 – Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ p6, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26016/25737/26-016%20AR2%20-%20edited.pdf
Mandatory identification of women as a distinct stakeholder group	Good. Women are recognised as a distinct group in governance processes (Community Resource Board (CRB) / Community Forest Management Group (CFMG) elections), scout recruitment, biodiversity monitoring roles, and REDD+ benefit-sharing arrangements. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 2 – Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ p6, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26016/25737/26-016%20AR2%20-%20edited.pdf
Gender-disaggregated indicators	Good. The annual report provides gender-disaggregated data for key roles (e.g. proportion of women among community scouts, trainees, and beneficiaries), though outcome-level empowerment indicators are not presented. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 2 – Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ p6, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26016/25737/26-016%20AR2%20-%20edited.pdf

Best Practice area	Performance
Gender-responsive benefit sharing	Good. REDD+ benefit-sharing mechanisms are designed to give women equal rights and access to economic resources, with more than half of beneficiaries reported to be women, and constitutional requirements for women's representation on committees. Good. The annual report provides gender-disaggregated data for key roles (e.g. proportion of women among community scouts, trainees, and beneficiaries), though outcome-level empowerment indicators are not presented. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 2 – Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ p15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26016/25737/26-016%20AR2%20-%20edited.pdf</i>
Equity	
Identification of differentiated groups within communities	Good. The project distinguishes between community scouts, CRB / CFMG members, Village Action Groups, women, and households benefiting from REDD+ investments. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 2 – Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ p6, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26016/25737/26-016%20AR2%20-%20edited.pdf</i>
Distributional equity analysis showing who benefits and who bears costs	Partial. The annual report documents large-scale benefit flows (e.g. US\$4m+ in REDD+ revenues, numbers of beneficiaries) but does not present a formal distributional or incidence analysis comparing costs and benefits across different groups. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 2 – Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ p6, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26016/25737/26-016%20AR2%20-%20edited.pdf</i>

Best Practice area	Performance
Transparent and equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms	Good. REDD+ revenues are channelled through legally mandated CRB / CFMGs with Annual Work Plans, democratic decision-making, and documented expenditure on community priorities. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 2 – Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ p15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26016/25737/26-016%20AR2%20-%20edited.pdf
Procedural equity, ensuring marginalised groups can influence decisions, not just be consulted.	Strong. Communities influence conservation priorities and spending through elected CRB / CFMGs, quarterly review meetings, Annual Work Plans, and democratic decisions on use of REDD+ income Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 2 – Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ p15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26016/25737/26-016%20AR2%20-%20edited.pdf
Measured and verified equity outcomes	Partial. Benefit delivery is well documented, but equity outcomes (e.g. relative gains between groups) are not formally measured or independently verified. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 2 – Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ p6-7, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26016/25737/26-016%20AR2%20-%20edited.pdf
Social inclusion	
Inclusive and culturally appropriate participation	Good. The project works through established local institutions (chiefdoms, CRBs / CFMGs) and community-based processes aligned with Zambian governance systems. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 2 – Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ p4-5, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26016/25737/26-016%20AR2%20-%20edited.pdf

Best Practice area	Performance
Identification and engagement of marginalised or less powerful groups	Good. Women and poorer rural households are explicitly targeted through employment (scouts), livelihood investments, and community development funded by REDD+. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 2 – Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ p6, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26016/25737/26-016%20AR2%20-%20edited.pdf
Community-led project structures	Strong. Conservation and REDD+ implementation is embedded in community-led CRB / CFMG structures with legal mandates and long-term management authority. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 2 – Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ p15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26016/25737/26-016%20AR2%20-%20edited.pdf
Monitoring of inclusion outcomes	Partial. Participation and beneficiary numbers are tracked, but systematic monitoring of social inclusion outcomes over time is limited. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 2 – Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ p6, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26016/25737/26-016%20AR2%20-%20edited.pdf
Safeguarding Indigenous Peoples & Local Communities (IPLCs)	
Explicit recognition of customary and statutory land and resource rights	Strong. The project is built around 30-year Community Forest Management Agreements that legally recognise community rights to manage forests and receive carbon revenues. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 2 – Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ p4-5, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26016/25737/26-016%20AR2%20-%20edited.pdf

Best Practice area	Performance
Protection against dispossession and “land grabs” through: • Do-no-harm requirements • Transparent land-use change rules • Community-defined participation boundaries	Good. Long-term agreements, legal mandates, and state oversight (Forestry Department, Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW)) provide safeguards against dispossession, though risks around benefit governance are acknowledged. However, no standalone “do-no-harm” framework. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 2 – Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ p4-5, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26016/25737/26-016%20AR2%20-%20edited.pdf
Accessible grievance mechanisms	Partial. Dispute resolution is handled through CRB / CFMG structures and government partners; no independent project-level grievance mechanism is described. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 2 – Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ p4-5, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26016/25737/26-016%20AR2%20-%20edited.pdf
Ongoing monitoring of social and livelihood impacts	Good. Social surveys, M&E systems, and reporting on livelihoods and community benefits are in place, though impacts are often described qualitatively. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 2 – Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ p6-7, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26016/25737/26-016%20AR2%20-%20edited.pdf

Best Practice area	Performance
FPIC	
FPIC applies to both Indigenous Peoples and local communities	Strong. The project is built around 30-year Community Forest Management Agreements that legally recognise community rights to manage forests and receive carbon revenues. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 2 – Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ p4-5, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26016/25737/26-016%20AR2%20-%20edited.pdf
Free: voluntary participation with no coercion or conditionality.	Good. Long-term agreements, legal mandates, and state oversight (Forestry Department, DNPW) provide safeguards against dispossession, though risks around benefit governance are acknowledged. However, no standalone “do-no-harm” framework. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 2 – Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ p4-5, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26016/25737/26-016%20AR2%20-%20edited.pdf
Prior: consent obtained before validation, registration, and land-use change.	Partial. Dispute resolution is handled through CRB / CFMG structures and government partners; no independent project-level grievance mechanism is described. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 2 – Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ p4-5, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26016/25737/26-016%20AR2%20-%20edited.pdf
Informed: information provided in appropriate languages and formats, with time for deliberation.	Good. Social surveys, M&E systems, and reporting on livelihoods and community benefits are in place, though impacts are often described qualitatively.

Best Practice area	Performance
	Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 2 – Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ p6-7, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26016/25737/26-016%20AR2%20-%20edited.pdf
Consent: expressed through legitimate, community-recognised decision-making institutions, not proxy signatures.	Strong. The project is built around 30-year Community Forest Management Agreements that legally recognise community rights to manage forests and receive carbon revenues. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 2 – Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ p4-5, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26016/25737/26-016%20AR2%20-%20edited.pdf
Ongoing: consent revisited if project scope, impacts, or benefit arrangements change.	Partial. Long-term Community Forest Management Agreements and ongoing engagement through CRB / CFMG governance provide continuity of consent, but there is no explicit mechanism for formally re-validating consent if carbon project scope, benefit-sharing arrangements, or obligations change over time. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 2 – Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ p4-5, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26016/25737/26-016%20AR2%20-%20edited.pdf
Verified: failure to maintain FPIC can delay or block credit issuance.	No / Not explicit. While community rights and governance are legally recognised through Community Forest Management Agreements and CRB / CFMG structures, the annual report does not explicitly state that failure to maintain FPIC would delay or prevent REDD+ credit issuance, nor is FPIC independently verified as a condition of carbon validation or registration. Reference: Darwin Initiative Annual Report 2 – Lion Carbon: creating biodiversity value and sustainable management through REDD+ p4-5, 15 (by omission regarding FPIC verification and linkage to credit issuance). https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR26016/25737/26-016%20AR2%20-%20edited.pdf

Table 21: Full analysis of performance of 19-016: "Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar" across best practice areas

Best Practice area	Performance
Gender	
Explicit gender equality objectives	Good. Gender equality is an explicit project concern, particularly through women's participation in mangrove reforestation, nursery management, monitoring, and governance. The project recognises women's central role in natural resource use and livelihood resilience, and deliberately prioritises women's engagement in restoration and capacity-building activities. Reference: Darwin Initiative Final Report – Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar p5-6, 9, 11, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR19016/24470/19-016%20FR%20edited.pdf
Mandatory identification of women as a distinct stakeholder group	Good. Women are clearly identified as a distinct stakeholder group, including women's associations managing mangrove nurseries, targeted training of women in reforestation and carbon monitoring, and explicit reporting of women's participation in project activities. Reference: Darwin Initiative Final Report – Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar p5-6, 9, 11, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR19016/24470/19-016%20FR%20edited.pdf
Gender-disaggregated indicators	Partial. Participation data are frequently gender-disaggregated (e.g. numbers of women trained in forest inventory, carbon monitoring, nursery management), but outcome-level indicators (e.g. income, decision-making power, livelihood impacts) are not systematically gender-disaggregated. Reference: Darwin Initiative Final Report – Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar p11, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR19016/24470/19-016%20FR%20edited.pdf

Best Practice area	Performance
Gender-responsive benefit sharing	Partial to Good. The project actively channels short-term benefits (training, paid restoration work, skills development) towards women, and anticipates future carbon and forest product revenues benefiting women through community-defined mechanisms. However, carbon revenues were not realised during the project, so gender-differentiated benefit outcomes remain prospective rather than demonstrated. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Final Report – Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar p5-6, 9, 11, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR19016/24470/19-016%20FR%20edited.pdf</i>
Equity	
Identification of differentiated groups within communities	Good. The project recognises differentiated groups including women, youth, charcoal producers, timber users, community forest management associations (such as Community-Led Bodies (CLBs)), and households with high dependence on mangrove resources. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Final Report – Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar p7-9, 11, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR19016/24470/19-016%20FR%20edited.pdf</i>
Distributional equity analysis showing who benefits and who bears costs	Partial. The project includes qualitative discussion of opportunity costs (e.g. restrictions on mangrove exploitation) and anticipated long-term benefits, but does not provide a formal quantitative distributional or incidence analysis. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Final Report – Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar p7-9, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR19016/24470/19-016%20FR%20edited.pdf</i>
Transparent and equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms	Good (design), partial (outcomes). Benefit-sharing is embedded in legally recognised community management structures (such as CLBs) with transparent rules, management plans, and locally agreed zoning. However, since carbon revenues had not yet materialised, equitable outcomes are not yet measurable. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Final Report – Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar p7-9, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR19016/24470/19-016%20FR%20edited.pdf</i>

Best Practice area	Performance
Procedural equity, ensuring marginalised groups can influence decisions, not just be consulted.	Strong. Communities actively shape land-use zoning, management plans, reforestation priorities, and rules governing access and use, through participatory mapping, Theory of Change exercises, and community-validated by-laws. Reference: Darwin Initiative Final Report – Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar p7-9, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR19016/24470/19-016%20FR%20edited.pdf
Measured and verified equity outcomes	Weak. Equity outcomes are discussed qualitatively, but no verified or quantified equity outcome analysis is presented during the project period. Reference: Darwin Initiative Final Report – Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar p15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR19016/24470/19-016%20FR%20edited.pdf
Social inclusion	
Inclusive and culturally appropriate participation	Strong. Participation is grounded in culturally appropriate mechanisms, including village-level meetings, participatory mapping, locally recognised governance structures, and tailored awareness-raising materials (including visual tools and local dialects). Reference: Darwin Initiative Final Report – Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar p7-9, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR19016/24470/19-016%20FR%20edited.pdf
Identification and engagement of marginalised or less powerful groups	Good. Women, youth, and poorer households dependent on mangrove resources are explicitly targeted through reforestation activities, training, and livelihood-related support. Reference: Darwin Initiative Final Report – Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar p5-6, 7-9, 11, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR19016/24470/19-016%20FR%20edited.pdf

Best Practice area	Performance
Community-led project structures	Strong. Community-led structures (CLBs, women's associations, locally validated management plans) are central to project governance and implementation. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Final Report – Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar p5-6, 7-9, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR19016/24470/19-016%20FR%20edited.pdf</i>
Monitoring of inclusion outcomes	Partial. Participation levels and training uptake are monitored and reported, but systematic tracking of longer-term inclusion outcomes (e.g. shifts in power or voice) is limited. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Final Report – Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar p11, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR19016/24470/19-016%20FR%20edited.pdf</i>
Safeguarding Indigenous Peoples & Local Communities (IPLCs)	
Explicit recognition of customary and statutory land and resource rights	Strong. The project places major emphasis on securing legally recognised community land and resource rights (e.g. Gestion Locale Sécurisée (Secure Local Management) (GELOSE) agreements, protected area governance), explicitly linking carbon rights to community tenure. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Final Report – Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar p7-9, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR19016/24470/19-016%20FR%20edited.pdf</i>
Protection against dispossession and “land grabs” through: • Do-no-harm requirements • Transparent land-use change rules • Community-defined participation boundaries	Good. Community-defined zoning, legally recognised management plans, and removal of areas with unresolved tenure conflicts reduce risks of dispossession. Land-use rules are locally agreed and validated. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Final Report – Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar p7-9, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR19016/24470/19-016%20FR%20edited.pdf</i>

Best Practice area	Performance
Accessible grievance mechanisms	Partial. Dispute resolution relies primarily on existing community and administrative structures; no standalone, project-specific grievance mechanism is clearly articulated. Reference: Darwin Initiative Final Report – Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar p7-9 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR19016/24470/19-016%20FR%20edited.pdf
Ongoing monitoring of social and livelihood impacts	Good. Socioeconomic baselines were established and an Integrated Social Survey was developed to support ongoing monitoring beyond the project timeframe. Reference: Darwin Initiative Final Report – Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar p7-9 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR19016/24470/19-016%20FR%20edited.pdf
FPIC	
FPIC applies to both Indigenous Peoples and local communities	Good. The project applies FPIC principles to local communities (rather than formally recognised Indigenous Peoples), consistent with the Malagasy context. Reference: Darwin Initiative Final Report – Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar p7-9, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR19016/24470/19-016%20FR%20edited.pdf
Free: voluntary participation with no coercion or conditionality.	Good. Participation is voluntary, with repeated consultation and no evidence of coercion. Reference: Darwin Initiative Final Report – Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar p7-9, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR19016/24470/19-016%20FR%20edited.pdf
Prior: consent obtained before validation, registration, and land-use change.	Good (for land-use). FPIC was completed prior to establishment of management plans and proposed carbon project boundaries. Carbon project validation had not yet occurred.

Best Practice area	Performance
	Reference: Darwin Initiative Final Report – Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar p7-9, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR19016/24470/19-016%20FR%20edited.pdf
Informed: information provided in appropriate languages and formats, with time for deliberation.	Strong. Extensive awareness-raising, locally adapted materials, repeated consultation rounds, and time for deliberation are well documented. Reference: Darwin Initiative Final Report – Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar p7-9, 11, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR19016/24470/19-016%20FR%20edited.pdf
Consent: expressed through legitimate, community-recognised decision-making institutions, not proxy signatures.	Strong. Consent is channelled through recognised community associations and governance structures, not proxy signatures. Reference: Darwin Initiative Final Report – Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar p7-9, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR19016/24470/19-016%20FR%20edited.pdf
Ongoing: consent revisited if project scope, impacts, or benefit arrangements change.	Partial. Adaptive engagement is evident, but formalised processes for revisiting FPIC over the full carbon project lifecycle are not yet established. Reference: Darwin Initiative Final Report – Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar p7-9, 15 https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR19016/24470/19-016%20FR%20edited.pdf
Verified: failure to maintain FPIC can delay or block credit issuance.	Not applicable / not yet demonstrated. No carbon credits were issued during the project period. Reference: Darwin Initiative Final Report – Leveraging markets to conserve mangrove biodiversity and alleviate poverty in Madagascar. Absence of credit issuance across report. https://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/documents/DAR19016/24470/19-016%20FR%20edited.pdf

Table 22: Full analysis of DAREX015: "Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia's Andean foothills" across best practice areas

Best Practice area	Performance
Gender	
Explicit gender equality objectives	Strong. The project is explicitly designed as gender-transformative, with gender equality treated as a cross-cutting objective throughout implementation. Eight of ten core project staff are female, and a dedicated transversal activity focuses on ensuring all activities are gender-positive. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Extra application – Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia's Andean foothills (DIR31EX\1334), p10–12, 18.</i>
Mandatory identification of women as a distinct stakeholder group	Strong. Women are explicitly identified as a priority group, particularly in relation to land ownership, water management, and benefit receipt. Conservation agreements explicitly require women to be co-signatories. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Extra application – Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia's Andean foothills (DIR31EX\1334), p7-8, 10-11</i>
Gender-disaggregated indicators	Strong. Multiple indicators are gender-disaggregated (e.g. 50% women in training, monitoring, decision-maker engagement; 20% female-headed households benefiting from livelihood improvements). <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Extra application – Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia's Andean foothills (DIR31EX\1334), p10-11, 18-20</i>
Gender-responsive benefit sharing	Strong. Benefit packages are explicitly designed to favour activities that benefit women (e.g. beekeeping, water access, biocultural products), with safeguards to ensure women directly receive and control benefits.

Best Practice area	Performance
	<i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Extra application – Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia’s Andean foothills (DIR31EX\1334), p10, 19</i>
Equity	
Identification of differentiated groups within communities	Good. The project explicitly identifies Indigenous peoples, women, youth, and other marginalised groups (including Afro-Bolivian communities and people with disabilities) as requiring targeted support. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Extra application – Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia’s Andean foothills (DIR31EX\1334), p10-11, 18-20</i>
Distributional equity analysis showing who benefits and who bears costs	Partial. The proposal clearly explains who benefits (e.g. 6,000 families, female-headed households, Indigenous communities), but does not present a formal ex-ante distributional cost-benefit analysis. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Extra application – Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia’s Andean foothills (DIR31EX\1334), p10-11, 18-20</i>
Transparent and equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms	Good. Benefit sharing is operationalised through reciprocal conservation agreements, Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) schemes, and clearly defined compensation packages linked to conservation commitments. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Extra application – Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia’s Andean foothills (DIR31EX\1334), p9, 11, 18-20</i>
Procedural equity, ensuring marginalised groups can influence decisions, not just be consulted.	Good. Indigenous authorities and municipal governments co-design agreements, laws, and benefit-distribution systems, indicating decision-making influence rather than consultation alone. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Extra application – Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia’s Andean foothills (DIR31EX\1334), p7-11</i>

Best Practice area	Performance
Measured and verified equity outcomes	Partial. Socio-economic baseline and endline surveys are planned, but explicit equity outcome metrics beyond participation and benefit counts are limited. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Extra application – Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia’s Andean foothills (DIR31EX\1334), p7-8, 18-20</i>
Social inclusion	
Inclusive and culturally appropriate participation	Strong. Project design relies on Indigenous governance structures, culturally appropriate engagement, and community-defined conservation agreements. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Extra application – Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia’s Andean foothills (DIR31EX\1334), p7-11</i>
Identification and engagement of marginalised or less powerful groups	Strong. Indigenous Peoples, women, youth, Afro-Bolivian minorities, and people with disabilities are explicitly identified and prioritised. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Extra application – Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia’s Andean foothills (DIR31EX\1334), p10</i>
Community-led project structures	Strong. Municipal and Indigenous governments lead implementation, with communities negotiating and enforcing conservation agreements themselves. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Extra application – Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia’s Andean foothills (DIR31EX\1334), p11, 21</i>
Monitoring of inclusion outcomes	Good. Inclusion is monitored through participation rates, gender-disaggregated indicators, and household-level socio-economic surveys, though inclusion-specific qualitative indicators are limited.

Best Practice area	Performance
	<i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Extra application – Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia’s Andean foothills (DIR31EX\1334), p11, 19</i>
Safeguarding Indigenous Peoples & Local Communities (IPLCs)	
Explicit recognition of customary and statutory land and resource rights	Strong. The project explicitly recognises Indigenous territorial governance, customary law, and municipal land-use authority, embedding these in project design and legal instruments. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Extra application – Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia’s Andean foothills (DIR31EX\1334), p18-19</i>
Protection against dispossession and “land grabs” through: • Do-no-harm requirements • Transparent land-use change rules • Community-defined participation boundaries	Good. Do-no-harm requirements are embedded in conservation agreements; land-use change is governed by legal protected area (PA) designation and Indigenous jurisprudence. Explicit anti-land-grab language is implied rather than detailed. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Extra application – Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia’s Andean foothills (DIR31EX\1334), p2, 9</i>
Accessible grievance mechanisms	Good. Safeguarding policies include whistle-blowing, anonymous reporting, and designated safeguarding focal points, applicable to community members and staff. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Extra application – Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia’s Andean foothills (DIR31EX\1334), p14, 23</i>
Ongoing monitoring of social and livelihood impacts	Strong. Baseline and endline surveys, household interviews, and continuous monitoring of livelihood and resilience outcomes are core M&E components.

Best Practice area	Performance
	<i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Extra application – Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia’s Andean foothills (DIR31EX\1334), p16, 19</i>
FPIC	
FPIC applies to both Indigenous Peoples <i>and</i> local communities	Strong. FPIC is explicitly referenced for Indigenous and local communities, particularly in relation to carbon finance and conservation agreements. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Extra application – Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia’s Andean foothills (DIR31EX\1334), p24</i>
Free: voluntary participation with no coercion or conditionality.	Good. Participation is framed as voluntary and incentive-based through negotiated agreements rather than compulsory restrictions. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Extra application – Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia’s Andean foothills (DIR31EX\1334), p6, 9, 19</i>
Prior: consent obtained <i>before</i> validation, registration, and land-use change.	Good. FPIC is embedded in the design of conservation agreements, protected area creation, and carbon governance frameworks before implementation. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Extra application – Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia’s Andean foothills (DIR31EX\1334), p19, 24</i>
Informed: information provided in appropriate languages and formats, with time for deliberation.	Good. Training, awareness-raising, and community-level capacity building on carbon, rights, and benefits are core activities, though language protocols are not detailed. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Extra application – Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia’s Andean foothills (DIR31EX\1334), p39</i>

Best Practice area	Performance
Consent: expressed through legitimate, community-recognised decision-making institutions, not proxy signatures.	Strong. Consent is channelled through recognised Indigenous authorities, municipal governments, and traditional governance structures, not proxy signatures. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Extra application – Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia’s Andean foothills (DIR31EX\1334), p18</i>
Ongoing: consent revisited if project scope, impacts, or benefit arrangements change.	Partial–Good. The proposal commits to halting activities if FPIC is not upheld, but explicit procedures for re-consenting following scope changes are not fully articulated. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Extra application – Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia’s Andean foothills (DIR31EX\1334), p18, 24</i>
Verified: failure to maintain FPIC can delay or block credit issuance.	Partial. FPIC compliance is embedded in governance and safeguarding systems, but there is no external verification or credit-issuance linkage specified. <i>Reference: Darwin Initiative Extra application – Sustainable Financing for Protected Area Management in Bolivia’s Andean foothills (DIR31EX\1334), p24</i>

Annex 3: Summary of how projects performed against the best practice areas

Table 23: Summary of performance of Sierra Leone project (26-004)

Best Practice Area	Performance
Gender	Overall rating: Good (with partial outcome evidence) Gender equality is an explicit and well-integrated project objective, grounded in food security outcomes and recognition of women's roles in agriculture and community governance. Women are consistently treated as a distinct stakeholder group through women-only focus groups, targeted social research, minimum participation thresholds, and leadership roles in VSLAs, with gender considerations embedded across land-use planning, training, and local governance structures. Participation data are routinely gender-disaggregated and benefit-sharing mechanisms are designed to include women; however, while women's involvement in decision-making has increased over time, particularly since 2017, structural and cultural constraints remain, including gender imbalances within project staffing and limited outcome-level evidence on sustained changes in women's income, influence, or agency⁴⁷.
Equity	Overall rating: Good (procedural), Partial (distributional outcomes) The project demonstrates strong procedural equity, explicitly recognising differentiated groups within communities and embedding decision-making authority within community-led institutions such as NRMCS, participatory mapping processes, and negotiated Conservation Agreements. Benefit-sharing mechanisms are transparent and community-agreed, supporting broad access to inputs, finance, and employment. However, evidence from implementation indicates that some more vulnerable groups, such as landless and female-headed households, have been harder to reach through standard interventions⁴⁸, and while uneven benefit distribution linked to social standing or labour capacity is recognised qualitatively, formal quantitative distributional equity analysis and verified equity outcomes are not yet available.

⁴⁷ RSPB (2025), Personal communication with Richard Dixon, Felicity Edwards, and Alade Adeleke on 19th January 2025

⁴⁸ RSPB (2025), Personal communication with Richard Dixon, Felicity Edwards, and Alade Adeleke on 19th January 2025

Best Practice Area	Performance
Social Inclusion	Overall rating: Strong Social inclusion is a core strength of the project, with culturally appropriate and locally embedded participation mechanisms including chieftdom structures, PRA tools, community meetings, and creative engagement approaches. Marginalised groups, particularly women, poorer households, youth, and those with limited land access, are explicitly identified and engaged through tailored activities and livelihood support, and inclusion is anchored in community-led structures such as NRMCS, Species Champions, and VSLAs. While inclusion barriers are explored qualitatively and participation levels monitored, systematic quantitative inclusion outcome indicators remain underdeveloped.
IPLCs	Overall rating: Good (with safeguarding gaps) The project strongly recognises and works within customary land and resource governance systems, embedding conservation within community-defined land-use plans and by-laws and maintaining community control over forests and resources. Local institutions, particularly the Gola Chieftdom Development Council and the council of Paramount Chiefs, play a central role in mediating relations between communities and the project, providing regular forums for oversight, dialogue, and conflict resolution⁴⁹. Safeguards against dispossession include negotiated Conservation Agreements, transparent land-use rules, clearly defined community participation boundaries, and ongoing monitoring of social and livelihood impacts. While grievance processes exist and can escalate beyond community level where required, these are not articulated as a standalone, project-specific mechanism or framed within an explicit do-no-harm policy, representing a partial gap relative to best practice safeguards.
FPIC	Overall rating: Partial to Good FPIC-like principles are applied across participating communities through voluntary engagement, consent obtained in advance of land-use planning, repeated information-sharing in appropriate local formats, and decision-making through legitimate, community-recognised institutions. These processes are supported by grievance mechanisms, with disputes addressed initially at community or Chieftdom level and escalated where necessary through independent arbitration, helping to maintain trust and

⁴⁹ **RSPB (2025)**, Personal communication with Richard Dixon, Felicity Edwards, and Alade Adeleke on 19th January 2025

Best Practice Area	Performance
	resolve concerns during implementation ⁵⁰ . While consent can be revisited through revised MOUs and Conservation Agreements, FPIC is not explicitly framed as a formal, periodically revalidated process, nor is it independently verified as a condition for carbon credit issuance.

Table 24: Summary of performance of Tanzania project (DAREX004)

Best Practice Area	Performance
Gender	Overall rating: Strong (with emerging outcome evidence) Gender equality is explicit and actively operationalised across the project, with clear objectives for women's participation, leadership, and livelihood benefits. Women are engaged through targeted roles and activities, including women rangeland guardians, beekeeping enterprises, VICOBA savings groups, and eco-tourism initiatives, and are consistently recognised as a distinct stakeholder group within consultations, governance structures, training, and livelihood design. Participation data are routinely gender-disaggregated. In addition, women identified prospective carbon revenues as a potential pathway to strengthen community services (e.g. health facilities, school infrastructure, bursaries) and reduce household-level economic pressures, which are often borne disproportionately by women⁵¹. However, women's influence over carbon-specific decision-making remains mediated through broader village governance structures, suggesting a ceiling on direct empowerment unless explicit gender-responsive carbon governance measures are introduced. Moreover, outcome data on income, decision-making power, and longer-term empowerment are still limited, but early indications suggest that the project has the potential to deliver gender-responsive benefits beyond participation alone as carbon revenues, if realised, begin to flow.

⁵⁰ **RSPB (2025)**, Personal communication with Richard Dixon, Felicity Edwards, and Alade Adeleke on 19th January 2025

⁵¹ **The Nature Conservancy**, Personal communication with Alphonse Mallya, Charles Massawe, and Philip Lukumay on 21st January 2025

Best Practice Area	Performance
Equity	Overall rating: Partial The project recognises differentiated groups within pastoralist communities, including women, youth, elders, herders, and grazing coordinators, and demonstrates strong procedural equity across core grazing management and livelihood activities, with communities influencing land-use planning, restoration priorities, and governance. Distributional equity analysis remains largely qualitative, and benefit-sharing arrangements for the soil carbon component are still being developed through ongoing engagement. External critiques, including those raised by the Maasai International Solidarity Alliance, point to potential risks in soil carbon initiatives more broadly, but project partners emphasise that mobility, negotiated access, and adaptive safeguards are integral to this project's design⁵². No verified equity outcome analysis is yet available, reflecting the early and adaptive status of the carbon component.
Social Inclusion	Overall rating: Good to Strong Social inclusion is a core strength of the project, grounded in culturally appropriate Maasai institutions including village grazing committees, elders' councils, women's groups, and <i>Herders Under the Tree</i> schools. Women, youth, and poorer households are explicitly targeted through livelihood support, paid rangeland restoration, and savings groups, with community-led structures underpinning delivery and day-to-day decision-making. Participation levels are routinely tracked, and inclusion barriers are addressed through repeated engagement rather than one-off consultation. However, systematic monitoring of longer-term inclusion outcomes remains limited, particularly in relation to who gains or loses influence as the soil carbon component evolves. While project partners have responded by slowing and adapting carbon-related processes, evidence on inclusion outcomes within carbon-specific governance arrangements is still emerging.
IPLCs	Overall rating: Partial (with carbon related safeguards still evolving)

⁵² The Nature Conservancy, Personal communication with Alphonse Mallya, Charles Massawe, and Philip Lukumay on 21st January 2025

Best Practice Area	Performance
	The project supports Indigenous pastoralist land and resource rights through village land-use planning and communal Certificates of CCROs, reinforcing community control over grazing areas and rangelands. Core conservation and livelihood activities are well aligned with customary governance systems, and social and livelihood impacts are monitored through established community institutions. For the soil carbon component, safeguarding arrangements are still under development. While project partners emphasise adaptive delivery, negotiated mobility, and the use of existing grievance pathways, benefit-sharing arrangements and the treatment of long-term carbon commitments have not yet been fully formalised or independently verified.
FPIC	Overall rating: Partial to Good FPIC processes in the Tanzania project are best characterised as iterative and evolving rather than one-off or extractive. Project partners acknowledged that community understanding of carbon markets remains uneven, reflecting low formal education levels and the abstract nature of soil carbon. However, engagement has been sustained over four years with repeated explanation, opportunities to pause or slow progress, and integration with existing pastoral mobility initiatives. Consent has therefore been treated as provisional and adaptive rather than assumed⁵³.

Table 25: Summary of performance of Zambia project (26-016)

Best Practice Area	Performance
Gender	Overall rating: Good Gender equality is explicitly addressed across both the Darwin Initiative-funded activities and the wider REDD+ programme, with institutional design intentionally enabling women's participation in governance, employment, and benefit-sharing. Women are

⁵³ The Nature Conservancy, Personal communication with Alphonse Mallya, Charles Massawe and Philip Lukumay on 21st January 2025

Best Practice Area	Performance
	recognised as a distinct stakeholder group through CRB / CFMG election processes, community scout recruitment, biodiversity monitoring roles, and REDD+ revenue allocation, with participation data routinely gender-disaggregated. Constitutional requirements and project rules provide women with equal rights to representation, voting, and access to economic benefits, and the number of female lead farmers and women in community leadership roles is comparatively strong⁵⁴. However, while these institutional arrangements create the conditions for sustained gender inclusion, outcome-level evidence of longer-term empowerment, such as shifts in income control, influence over household or community decisions, or durable changes in gender norms, is not systematically measured.
Equity	Overall rating: Good (procedural), Partial (outcomes) The project demonstrates strong procedural equity, clearly distinguishing between differentiated groups within communities and embedding decision-making authority within legally mandated, democratically elected CRB / CFMG structures that manage REDD+ revenues through Annual Work Plans and community review processes. In practice, during the initial operational phase of the REDD+ project, delivery focussed on visible livelihood and development activities alongside the establishment of community governance systems. This helped demonstrate commitment and manage expectations before larger and more predictable carbon revenue flows were realised.⁵⁵ While overall benefit delivery is transparent and large-scale REDD+ revenues and beneficiary coverage are well documented, formal distributional or incidence analysis assessing how costs and benefits are shared between different groups remains limited, and equity outcomes are not independently verified.
Social Inclusion	Overall rating: Good to Strong Social inclusion is well embedded through reliance on established local institutions, including chiefdoms and community forest governance bodies, with conservation and REDD+ implementation firmly community-led. Women and poorer rural households are explicitly targeted through employment opportunities, livelihood investments, and community development spending funded by

⁵⁴ BioCarbon Partners, Personal communication with Mike Mailloux, Gina Woolley, and Marius Van der Vyver on 19th January

⁵⁵ BioCarbon Partners, Personal communication with Mike Mailloux, Gina Woolley, and Marius Van der Vyver on 19th January

Best Practice Area	Performance
	carbon revenues. Participation and beneficiary numbers are monitored, but systematic tracking of longer-term social inclusion outcomes, such as sustained influence or empowerment of marginalised groups, is limited.
IPLCs	Overall rating: Strong (with safeguard gaps) The project strongly safeguards local community rights through 30-year Community Forest Management Agreements that legally recognise community authority over forest management and entitlement to carbon revenues. Long-term agreements, statutory mandates, and state oversight provide meaningful protection against dispossession and external land grabs, and social and livelihood impacts are actively monitored. However, safeguards rely on existing institutional arrangements rather than an explicit standalone do-no-harm framework, and grievance mechanisms are embedded within project and government structures rather than being independent.
FPIC	Overall rating: Good (institutionalised, but weakly verified) FPIC principles are deeply institutionalised through legally binding, long-term Community Forest Management Agreements that confer recognised decision-making authority to communities and embed consent within formal governance systems. Participation is voluntary, consent is expressed through legitimate community institutions rather than proxy signatures, and consent is effectively ongoing through long-term agreements and state oversight. However, FPIC is not independently verified as a condition for carbon credit issuance, grievance mechanisms are internal rather than independent, and the absence of an explicit do-no-harm framework weakens assurance against future risks.

Table 26: Summary of performance of Madagascar project (19-016)

Best Practice Area	Performance
Gender	Overall rating: Good (with partial outcome evidence)

Best Practice Area	Performance
	Gender equality is an explicit objective of this project, with deliberate prioritisation of women's participation in mangrove reforestation, nursery management, monitoring, and governance, reflecting women's central role in resource use and livelihood resilience. Women are clearly identified as a distinct stakeholder group through women's associations, targeted training, and gender-disaggregated participation reporting. Short-term benefits such as paid restoration work, skills development, and capacity building are actively channelled towards women; however, outcome-level indicators on income, decision-making power, and longer-term livelihood impacts are not systematically gender-disaggregated, and anticipated gender differentiated carbon-related benefits remain prospective as no credits were issued during the project period.
Equity	Overall rating: Good (procedural), Weak to Partial (outcomes) The project demonstrates strong procedural equity, explicitly recognising differentiated groups (including women, youth, charcoal producers, timber users, and mangrove-dependent households) and embedding decision-making authority within legally recognised community management structures (CLBs). Communities actively shape land-use zoning, management plans, and reforestation priorities through participatory mapping and validated by-laws. However, while opportunity costs and anticipated benefits are discussed qualitatively, there is no formal quantitative distributional equity analysis, and measured or verified equity outcomes are weak due to the absence of realised carbon revenues during the project period.
Social Inclusion	Overall rating: Strong Social inclusion is a clear strength of the project, grounded in culturally appropriate, locally adapted participation mechanisms including village meetings, participatory mapping, visual tools, and local dialects. Marginalised groups, particularly women, youth, and poorer households dependent on mangrove resources, are explicitly targeted through restoration activities, training, and livelihood-related support, and inclusion is anchored in community-led structures such as CLBs and women's associations. While participation levels and training uptake are monitored, systematic tracking of longer-term inclusion outcomes (e.g. shifts in voice or power) remains limited.
IPLCs	Overall rating: Strong (with minor gaps)

Best Practice Area	Performance
	The project places major emphasis on safeguarding local community rights, explicitly linking forest and prospective carbon rights to legally recognised tenure arrangements such as GELOSE agreements and protected area governance frameworks. Community-defined zoning, validated management plans, and exclusion of areas with unresolved tenure conflicts provide strong protection against dispossession and land grabs, and social and livelihood impacts are actively monitored through established baselines and an Integrated Social Survey. However, grievance resolution relies on existing community and administrative structures rather than a standalone, project-specific grievance mechanism.
FPIC	Overall rating: Good to Strong (pre-carbon) FPIC principles are well applied to local communities through voluntary participation, extensive awareness-raising, locally adapted communication materials, repeated consultation rounds, and consent expressed through legitimate community institutions rather than proxy signatures. Consent processes were completed prior to land-use planning and establishment of proposed carbon boundaries, and adaptive engagement is evident. However, FPIC has not yet been formalised across the full carbon project lifecycle, and verification of FPIC as a condition for carbon credit issuance is not applicable or demonstrated, as no carbon validation or issuance occurred during the project period.

Table 27: Summary of best practice of Bolivia project (DAREX015)

Best Practice Area	Performance
Gender	Overall rating: Partial (design-stage intent) Gender equality is referenced in the project design through commitments to inclusive participation, Indigenous governance, and equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms within protected area financing. Women are implicitly recognised as part of Indigenous and local community governance structures; however, gender is not consistently articulated as a distinct analytical category, and there is limited detail on gender-specific risks, differentiated impacts, or gender-responsive indicators. As a result, while gender inclusion intent is present, evidence of operationalisation and outcome-level measurement remains limited at proposal stage.

Best Practice Area	Performance
Equity	Overall rating: Partial (procedural focus) The project demonstrates a strong procedural equity orientation by recognising differentiated rights-holders, particularly Indigenous Peoples, and by emphasising equitable access to future financing streams through benefit-sharing frameworks and sub-national governance reform. However, distributional equity outcomes are not yet defined, and there is no quantified analysis of how costs and benefits would be shared across different community groups. Equity performance therefore remains contingent on future implementation and monitoring arrangements.
Social Inclusion	Overall rating: Good (design-stage) Social inclusion is a clear design principle, with emphasis on Indigenous participation, community-led governance, and culturally appropriate engagement mechanisms linked to protected area management and sustainable financing. The project proposes capacity building and institutional strengthening intended to enable meaningful participation rather than one-off consultation. However, inclusion outcomes (e.g. influence over decision-making, access to benefits) are not yet operationalised through specific indicators, reflecting the project's early stage.
IPLCs	Overall rating: Good (strong intent, untested) Safeguarding IPLCs is central to the project's theory of change, with explicit focus on Indigenous governance systems, recognition of customary rights, and Indigenous-led benefit-sharing models. The project seeks to address historic exclusion from conservation finance by embedding IPLCs within sub-national institutional frameworks. While intent and design alignment are strong, safeguards have not yet been tested in practice and remain dependent on future legal and institutional implementation.
FPIC	Overall rating: Partial to Good (design-stage) FPIC principles are clearly referenced in the project design, particularly in relation to Indigenous governance, protected area management, and any future engagement with carbon or ecosystem finance. The proposal recognises FPIC as an ongoing process rather than a one-off event. However, FPIC procedures are not yet fully specified, nor are they linked to enforceable triggers such as financing decisions or credit issuance. FPIC performance therefore remains prospective rather than demonstrated.

Annex 4: Bibliography of key documents reviewed in Literature Review

Carbon Standards and Certification Frameworks

- **Verra (2024)**. Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) Program, Version 4.7. Verra, Washington DC.
- **Verra (2024)**. VCS Methodology Requirements, Version 4.4. Verra, Washington DC.
- **Verra (2023)**. Climate, Community & Biodiversity (CCB) Standards. Verra, Washington DC.
- **Gold Standard (2023)**. Gold Standard for the Global Goals: Principles and Requirements. Gold Standard Foundation.
- **Gold Standard (2023)**. Safeguarding Principles and Requirements. Gold Standard Foundation.
- **Plan Vivo Foundation (2022)**. The Plan Vivo Standard for Community Payments for Ecosystem Services Programmes. Plan Vivo Foundation.

Carbon market integrity frameworks and buyer guidance

- **Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market (ICVCM) (2024)**. Core Carbon Principles and Assessment Framework. ICVCM.
- **Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) (2025)**. Draft Corporate Net-Zero Standard, Version 2. SBTi.
- **Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI) (2024)**. A Buyer's Guide to Carbon Credit Data Quality. RMI.
- **Ecosystem Marketplace (2025)**. State of the Voluntary Carbon Market 2025. Forest Trends' Ecosystem Marketplace.

Carbon market integrity and business-led initiatives

- **Earthly (2023)**. Carbon Credit Integrity Framework and Approach. Earthly. Available at: <https://earthly.org/>

Social integrity, FPIC, and rights-based safeguards

- **Biodiversity Challenge Funds (2023)**. *Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) Synthesis Report*. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

Biodiversity and nature-related integrity frameworks

- **Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) (2023).** Recommendations of the TNFD. TNFD.

Gender equality and international normative frameworks

- **United Nations (2015).** Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Selected analytical and policy literature

- **Guardian (2023).** *Revealed: more than 90% of rainforest carbon offsets by biggest certifier are worthless, analysis shows.* (Reviewed alongside Verra's published response and subsequent market analyses.)

Annex 5: Glossary of Carbon Credit terms

Additionality

The principle that a carbon project results in emissions reductions or removals that would not have occurred without carbon finance. A project is additional if its outcomes go beyond what would have happened under a realistic business-as-usual scenario.

Afforestation, Reforestation and Revegetation (ARR)

Land-use activities that increase tree or vegetation cover. Afforestation refers to planting trees on land not recently forested, reforestation refers to restoring forests on previously forested land, and revegetation refers to restoring vegetation cover more broadly.

Article 6 (Paris Agreement)

A section of the Paris Agreement that establishes rules for international cooperation on climate mitigation, including the transfer of emissions reductions between countries. Article 6 is relevant to voluntary carbon markets where claims may overlap with national climate targets.

Baseline

An estimate of emissions or carbon stocks that would occur in the absence of a carbon project. Baselines are used to calculate the volume of emissions reductions or removals credited by a project.

Benefit sharing

The arrangements through which financial and non-financial benefits from a carbon project are distributed among participants and affected groups, including Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities. Equitable and transparent benefit sharing is a core social integrity consideration.

Buffer pool

A reserve of non-tradable carbon credits set aside to manage the risk that credited carbon is later lost, for example through fire, disease, or land-use change. Buffer pools are commonly used in land-use and forestry projects to address non-permanence risk.

Carbon credit

A unit representing the reduction or removal of one tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO₂e), issued under a recognised standard and recorded in a registry. Carbon credits can be sold to buyers who use them for voluntary climate claims.

Carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e)

A standard unit that allows different greenhouse gases to be expressed in terms of their warming effect relative to carbon dioxide.

Carbon Dioxide Removal (CDR)

Activities that remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it for a long period, such as afforestation, soil carbon sequestration, or direct air capture.

Carbon registry

A system that records the issuance, transfer, and retirement of carbon credits to prevent double counting and enable transparency.

Corresponding adjustment

An accounting adjustment made by a host country to ensure that emissions reductions transferred internationally are not also counted towards its own national climate targets. Corresponding adjustments are a key concept under Article 6.

Double counting

The risk that the same emissions reduction is claimed more than once, for example by multiple buyers, or by both a project developer and a host country towards its national climate targets.

Emissions reduction

A decrease in greenhouse gas emissions relative to a baseline scenario, for example through avoided deforestation or improved land management.

Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)

The right of Indigenous Peoples and affected communities to give or withhold consent to activities that may affect their lands, territories, resources, or rights. FPIC must be free from coercion, obtained before activities begin, based on accessible information, and maintained throughout the project lifecycle.

Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market (ICVCM)

An independent governance body that has established the Core Carbon Principles, which define minimum integrity thresholds for carbon credits in voluntary markets.

Leakage

A situation where emissions reductions achieved by a project are offset by increased emissions elsewhere, for example when deforestation pressure shifts outside the project area.

Measurement, Reporting and Verification (MRV)

The processes used to quantify carbon outcomes, report results, and have them independently verified. Robust MRV is essential for credible carbon credits.

Non-permanence

The risk that carbon stored by a project is later released back into the atmosphere, for example due to fire, land-use change or ecosystem degradation. Non-permanence is a key concern for nature-based carbon projects.

REDD+

A framework for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, and for conserving and enhancing forest carbon stocks. REDD+ projects link forest conservation outcomes to results-based climate finance.

Soil carbon

Carbon stored in soil organic matter. Soil carbon projects aim to increase carbon storage through changes in land management, such as grazing practices or restoration, but face measurement and permanence challenges.

Validation and Verification Body (VVB)

An independent, accredited organisation that assesses whether a carbon project meets the requirements of a standard and verifies reported emissions reductions or removals.

Verified Carbon Unit (VCU)

A type of carbon credit issued under Verra's Verified Carbon Standard, representing one tonne of CO₂e reduced or removed.

Voluntary Carbon Market (VCM)

The market in which carbon credits are bought and sold on a voluntary basis, outside of mandatory compliance schemes. Buyers typically include companies seeking to make voluntary climate claims.