UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

High-Integrity Carbon Markets Toolkit



Advancing Social Integrity in Forest Carbon Initiatives

Insights from Brazil, Costa Rica and Ecuador

MODULE 2 | INTRODUCTION TO CASE STUDIES

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This publication was developed with support from the UN-REDD Programme. UN-REDD is the United Nations knowledge and advisory platform on forest solutions to the climate crisis. It supports nationally-led REDD+ processes and promotes the informed and meaningful involvement of all stakeholders, including Indigenous Peoples and local communities, to mobilize finance for and implement REDD+ activities agreed under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). UN-REDD builds on the convening capacity and technical expertise of FAO, UNDP and UNEP, serving 65 partner countries. UN-REDD is made possible through support from the European Commission and the governments of Denmark, Japan, Luxembourg, Norway, Republic of Korea, Spain, Switzerland and United Kingdom.

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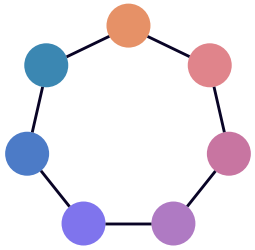
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UNDP's High-Integrity Carbon Markets Toolkit serves **supply-side** actors—governments, project developers, companies, NGOs, Indigenous Peoples and local communities—and **demand-side** actors, including investors, corporates and individuals. It equips them to **design, implement and scale** high-integrity carbon market activities that **deliver real and equitable climate outcomes**.

It also supports institutions that **shape and uphold market quality**—including standard-setters, rating agencies, validation and verification bodies, and integrity initiatives—helping to build a **trusted global framework** for carbon markets that deliver lasting benefits for climate, people and nature.

The Toolkit offers **flexible, multimedia content**—from webinars and case studies to guidance notes and presentations—for both self-paced and group learning.

Developed with **leading international partners**, the Toolkit focuses first on **social integrity**, an area where UNDP brings deep expertise and global relevance.

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Brazil

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Costa Rica

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Key insights

These case studies examine how social integrity has been operationalized in jurisdictional forest carbon programmes in Brazil, Costa Rica and Ecuador, drawing on implementation experience applying UNDP's Social and Environmental Standards in the context of the Green Climate Fund (GCF) REDD+ Results-Based Payments window.

Within UNDP's High-Integrity Carbon Market Toolkit, carbon integrity refers to the technical robustness of emission reductions and removals, ensuring that they are real, measurable, additional, permanent and not double counted. Social and environmental integrity refers to the systems that protect rights, promote gender equality, enable meaningful participation, ensure access to grievance mechanisms, support equitable benefit sharing and contribute to broader sustainable development objectives.

This publication, and the corresponding case studies, advance a central argument:

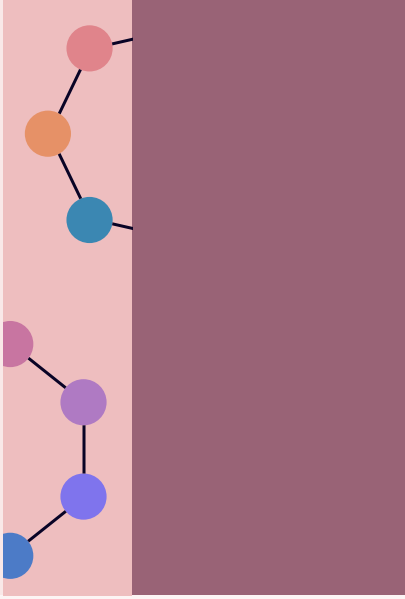
Carbon integrity alone is insufficient. Jurisdictional forest carbon finance can only be credible when social integrity is embedded in programme design and implementation.

Across the three case studies, several core insights emerge:

- → The evolution of REDD+ safeguards and results-based finance has clarified that environmental performance and social legitimacy are inseparable.
- → Aligning programme design with international human rights obligations transforms normative commitments into operational practice.
- → Meaningful participation depends on grounding processes in national legal frameworks and territorial institutions developed by Indigenous Peoples and local communities.
- → When treated as institutional architecture rather than compliance checklists, safeguards can strengthen representation, clarify roles and improve benefit-sharing arrangements.
- → Structural conditions, including land tenure security and political commitment, shape the boundaries within which social integrity mechanisms operate.
- → Long-term investment in representative bodies and participatory systems is necessary to maintain legitimacy beyond a single funding cycle.

Together, these case studies demonstrate that a rights-based approach, embedded in law, institutions and practice, is foundational to high-integrity carbon markets.

Introduction to the case studies



The global landscape related to social and environmental standards in the forest carbon space has changed significantly over the past 15 years.

At the outset of REDD+ negotiations in 2008, safeguards, with a focus on Indigenous Peoples' rights, took on heightened urgency, with Indigenous Peoples proclaiming, "no rights, no REDD+", followed by subsequent UNFCCC decisions that fully incorporated safeguards as a requirement for REDD+ implementation and results-based payments.

Accompanying the evolution of safeguards requirements under the UNFCCC was a wide range of actors including governments, multilateral organizations, bilateral donors, NGOs, Indigenous Peoples' organizations and academia, engaged in a global effort to clarify and operationalize safeguards application in the context of forest carbon projects and programmes.

2008	REDD+ negotiations and system and UNFCCC decision to incorporate safeguards in REDD+
2011	REDD+ readiness programmes and jurisdictional process develop safeguarding guidance on range of issues
2017	GCF establishes REDD+ RBP Pilot and associated safeguard requirements
2018	Launch of the ART programme and the TREES Standard
2019 - present	As an accredited entity, UNDP partners with Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Indonesia to access REDD+ RBP from the GCF through jurisdictional REDD+ programmes

Starting in 2011, leading REDD+ readiness programmes and jurisdictional processes, including the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) and the UN-REDD Programme (FAO, UNDP, UNEP), collaborated to develop guidance materials aimed at ensuring effective safeguards implementation in line with UNFCCC requirements and institutional safeguard frameworks. Guidance on stakeholder engagement; free, prior and informed consent (FPIC); grievance redress mechanisms (GRMs); tenure; and gender were developed and applied in participant countries. Guidance was also developed on the UNFCCC requirements related to Summaries of Information (SOI) and Safeguards Information Systems.

The establishment of the Green Climate Fund's (GCF) REDD+ Results-Based Payment (RBP) Pilot in 2017, and its associated safeguards requirements, provided a new incentive and opportunity to further test and refine these approaches within jurisdictional programmes seeking access to results-based finance.

The GCF REDD+ RBP Pilot required a retroactive assessment of how host countries applied the Cancun Safeguards during the REDD+ results period through an Environmental and Social Assessment, demanding more concrete evidence, analysis and independent review than that required under the UNFCCC's SOI. Also applicable were the GCF's policy and reporting requirements related to Indigenous Peoples, FPIC, grievance mechanisms and gender associated with the use of proceeds from the REDD+ RBP programmes, implemented through Accredited Entities' own policies and procedures.

Donors, NGOs and local communities alike welcomed this more rigorous approach to safeguards application as countries progressed from readiness to implementation and results-based finance.

From 2019 to present, UNDP has partnered, as an Accredited Entity, with four countries to access REDD+ RBP from the GCF through jurisdictional REDD+ programmes operating at national or subnational scale: Brazil (US$ 96 million), Costa Rica ($54 million), Ecuador ($18.5 million) and Indonesia ($103.8 million). This publication focuses on the Latin America and the Caribbean experience, drawing on the Brazil, Costa Rica and Ecuador programmes.



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As an Accredited Entity, UNDP worked with host countries to apply innovative safeguards approaches within jurisdictional programmes accessing GCF RBP. These included:

- **assessing consistency between national law and international obligations;**
- **strengthening consultation and consent processes;**
- **undertaking participatory impact assessments;**
- **advancing gender equality;**
- **developing social and environmental indicators;**
- **engaging independent verification bodies;**
- **improving benefit-sharing systems; and**
- **reinforcing grievance mechanisms.**

Together, these components form core elements of what this publication refers to as 'social integrity', and are further explored in UNDP's High Integrity Carbon Market Toolkit. This publication forms part of Module 2, Consultation and Consent, of the Toolkit, which focuses on respecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples, local communities and other rights holders, and ensuring their meaningful participation and consent in carbon market activities that affect them. Grievance redress mechanisms and equitable benefit sharing — both integral to social integrity — are examined in depth in Modules 4 and 5 of the Toolkit, respectively.



The initial GCF RBP programmes coincided with the 2018 launch of the Architecture for REDD+ Transactions (ART) programme and the TREES Standard, under which jurisdictional REDD+ carbon credits are issued. The TREES Standard further clarified expectations related to safeguards adherence, aligning in important respects with the requirements of the GCF RBP Window.

Some countries accessing GCF RBPs were simultaneously working to access finance through the LEAF Coalition, which requires certification under the TREES Standard administered by ART. UNDP supported Costa Rica and Brazilian states in meeting the safeguards requirements of the TREES Standard under the ART programme.

UNDP's combined experience of supporting jurisdictions through these two financing models for REDD+ results, market and non-market, together with more than a decade of engagement during the readiness phase across over 40 countries, has allowed for deeper reflection on what enables and constrains social integrity in jurisdictional forest carbon programmes.

Across Brazil, Costa Rica and Ecuador, these experiences reveal that social integrity is not an ancillary safeguard requirement, but a structural determinant of whether jurisdictional forest carbon finance can function credibly at scale.

In **Brazil**, the Floresta+ Amazônia Project demonstrated how building on existing territorial governance instruments such as Indigenous Territorial and Environmental Management Plans (PGTAs), community-developed FPIC Protocols and established representative bodies enabled local projects to align with self-determined priorities while meeting GCF safeguards requirements.

In **Costa Rica**, the formalization of the 2018 Consultation Mechanism and the development of Forest and Territorial Environmental Plans (PAFTs) illustrated how consultation processes can evolve into governance instruments that guide benefit sharing, territorial planning and long-term investment.

In **Ecuador**, the participatory development and legal formalization of REDD+ FPIC Guidelines, coupled with the strengthening of regional Indigenous organizations such as CONFENIAE, demonstrated how safeguards processes can reinforce intercultural governance, community cohesion and alignment with Indigenous Life Plans.



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Taken together, these cases suggest that jurisdictional REDD+ programmes are most resilient when they build on existing rights frameworks where these are in place, invest in Indigenous and community governance structures, allocate sufficient time and resources for consultation, and treat consent as an iterative process rather than a one-off compliance milestone.

They also point to several **cross-cutting** determinants of social integrity:

- **Sustained commitment to consultation and FPIC as a continuous governance process, not a discrete compliance step.** In all three cases, consent was embedded across design, implementation and benefit-sharing phases.
- **Engagement across multiple levels of Indigenous representation including national, regional, territorial and community levels to reduce risks of exclusion and representation disputes.** Working through layered governance structures helped mitigate institutional blind spots.
- **Co-creation of national and programme-level consultation frameworks and FPIC Guidelines grounded in domestic legal systems and aligned with international human rights standards.** Legal recognition increased predictability, transparency and institutional accountability.



- **Recognition and strengthening of community-developed FPIC protocols and territorial governance instruments as expressions of self-determination.** Where programmes built upon existing Indigenous territorial plans, Life Plans or management frameworks, implementation was more coherent and less conflict prone.
- **Investment in trusted intermediaries and culturally competent facilitation.** Cultural mediators, Indigenous technicians and locally embedded staff were critical to building legitimacy, countering misinformation and sustaining dialogue over time.
- **Alignment of safeguards processes with territorial planning instruments.** Linking consultation to land use, environmental and development plans shifted engagement toward concrete, community-defined priorities.
- **Intentional measures to ensure the meaningful participation of women and youth.** Leadership roles, dedicated budget allocations and gender-responsive criteria strengthened programme legitimacy and long-term sustainability.
- **Adequate, multi-year budgeting for consultation, facilitation, monitoring and grievance systems.** Under-resourced processes risk compressing timelines and weakening safeguards credibility.
- **Direct access to and management of finance by Indigenous Peoples' organizations where feasible.** Financial agency reinforced institutional capacity and aligned incentives with self-determined priorities.

Broader **structural** takeaways include:

- **Enabling conditions** at national and jurisdictional levels including constitutional protections, sectoral laws, functioning institutions and political commitment **shape the outer boundary of what safeguards can achieve**.
- **Embedding jurisdictional programmes within broader governance systems enhances coherence, policy alignment and institutional learning.** Stand-alone projects are less likely to generate sustained change.
- **Robust safeguards requirements**, when paired with credible oversight and verification, **can catalyze institutional strengthening**, including improvements in grievance systems, benefit-sharing frameworks and inter-agency coordination.
- **Durability depends on long-term investment in representative structures and participatory governance platforms**. Social integrity cannot be built within a single funding cycle; it requires iterative institutional maturation.

As carbon market rules and expectations continue to evolve, the experiences presented here offer a grounded account of how social integrity can be prioritized and advanced, not only within forest carbon, but across jurisdictional carbon market mechanisms more broadly. They are intended to be read alongside the consultation and consent guidance, FAQs and practical tools in Module 2 of UNDP's High-Integrity Carbon Markets Toolkit.

Case studies



Advancing Social Integrity in Forest Carbon Initiatives **Insights from Brazil**



Advancing Social Integrity in Forest Carbon Initiatives **Insights from Costa Rica**



Advancing Social Integrity in Forest Carbon Initiatives **Insights from Ecuador**



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