The Global Biodiversity Standard

Safeguarding Protocol

June 2025

BOTANIC GARDENS CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL

PLAN VIVO
For nature, climate and communities

TRAFFIC

1. Executive Summary

The Global Biodiversity Standard (TGBS) exists to ensure that nature-based solutions and restoration projects deliver positive biodiversity outcomes while upholding the highest environmental and social standards. This **Safeguarding Protocol** outlines the process used by TGBS to identify, assess, and manage social risks associated with certified projects.

Safeguards are essential to prevent harm to people and communities, especially as TGBS expands to diverse geographies and project types. The protocol is designed to:

- Protect the rights, wellbeing, and participation of affected stakeholders;
- Avoid reputational and legal risks for TGBS and its partners;
- Align with international best practice on social and environmental safeguards.

Key features of the safeguarding protocol are:

- **Mandatory Exclusion List**: All applicants must certify that their project does not involve any prohibited activities listed by TGBS.
- **Elective Social Risk Management Process**: Funders and project developers may opt to apply a stepwise social safeguards process, including:
    - Completion of a **Social Risk Screening Questionnaire**
    - Assignment of a **risk score** to the project (Low, Medium, High)
    - Field-based **Social Risk Assessment** and development of a **Mitigation Plan**
    - **Independent expert review** of the assessment and mitigation measures

Projects scoring **Medium or High Risk** may remain eligible for TGBS certification if mitigation is deemed adequate by an independent expert.

TGBS hubs and Secretariat staff do **not** evaluate safeguard materials. All evaluations are conducted by a qualified **independent social safeguards expert**. This ensures objectivity, consistency, and credibility.

TGBS also provides:

- A formal **Appeals Process** for applicants contesting safeguarding decisions
- A **Complaints Mechanism** for affected stakeholders to raise concerns, including anonymous submissions
- Transparent logging and reporting of cases to support continuous improvement

The safeguarding process is designed to be rigorous but flexible. By making most components elective, the protocol can be adapted to different project contexts while maintaining high ethical and social standards. Where the safeguarding steps are not

undertaken, a formal disclaimer is issued stating that no safeguards assessment was conducted by TGBS.

Contents

1. Executive Summary 2
2. Context 4
2.1 Environmental and Social Risks and Safeguards 4
2.2 TGBS Projects 5
3. Social risk management process in TGBS 5
4. TGBS Exclusion List 7
5. Social Risk Screening 9
5.1 Business, investment and supply chains 9
5.2 Labour, health and safety 9
5.3 Community, health, safety and security 10
5.4 Participants 10
5.5 Land and livelihoods 11
5.6 Human rights and social impacts 11
6. Social Risk Score 12
7. Social Risk Assessment 19
8. Roles and Responsibilities 19
9. Appeals and Complaints Mechanism 20
9.1 Appeals Process 20
9.2 Complaints from Affected Parties 21
9.3 Reporting and Oversight 21
10. Version Control 22
11. Annexes 23
Annex 1 – Environmental & Social Standards 23

2. Context

2.1 Environmental and Social Risks and Safeguards

Environmental and Social (E&S) risks are negative social or environmental impacts triggered by or inherent to a project. Safeguards are measures put in place to manage these undesired and unexpected adverse risks and impacts.

E&S safeguards are important in The Global Biodiversity Standard (TGBS) for the following reasons:

- From an ethical perspective to ensure that no TGBS certified project is having a negative environmental or social impact
- To ensure the sustainability of the project
- To avoid legal and reputational risks to TGBS

As TGBS certified projects will undergo a thorough biodiversity assessment, any potential negative environmental impacts are likely to have strong mitigating measures or be avoided entirely. However, it is important that TGBS also has a strong social risk assessment process. Social risks are particularly likely to occur without appropriate safeguarding procedures. Social risks can include harm to:

- Indigenous Peoples
- Gender equity and gender dynamics
- Vulnerable groups (for example, people with disabilities, low incomes, children or the elderly)
- Access restrictions & livelihoods
- Human Wildlife interactions (e.g. leading to conflict and displacement)
- Cultural and religious heritage
- Stakeholder engagement and participation
- Legacy issues (e.g. land tenure, resettlement)
- Community Health and Security
- Human rights and dignity
- Labour rights and working conditions

2.2 TGBS Projects

Projects of a wide range of sizes and types will be able to apply for TGBS certification. Projects may:

- Implement a variety of restorative and rehabilitative land use interventions (such as restoration, agroforestry, conservation or plantation forests)
- Be owned and run by local communities, companies, private landowners or governments
- Be based anywhere around the world

Projects that are deemed higher risk may apply to TGBS (for example REDD+ projects on privately owned or government owned land, plantation forests).

There is increasing scrutiny around negative impacts of conservation projects, including 'fortress conservation' approaches that can lead to harmful impacts to the human rights claims of local communities and make it challenging for duty bearers to meet their responsibilities (for example, see news stories from Tanzania[1] and the Democratic Republic of Congo[2]). As such it is important that TGBS incorporates appropriate safeguarding measures.

3. Social risk management process in TGBS

The safeguarding protocol of TGBS outlines a process to identify, manage, and mitigate social risks. This framework includes both mandatory and elective components.

1. Exclusion List (Mandatory)

All applicants must confirm that their project does not involve any activities included in the TGBS Exclusion List. This is a mandatory step and forms part of the TGBS Terms and Conditions.

[1] https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/06/tanzanian-authorities-brutally-violated-maasai-amid-forced-evictions/

[2] https://news.mongabay.com/2022/04/rangers-in-drc-gorilla-park-abused-indigenous-villagers-report-says/

2. Social Risk Screening (Elective)

Applicants may complete a Social Risk Screening Questionnaire during the application process. This covers categories such as land tenure, Indigenous rights, labour practices, and community engagement – see table 1 for more details.

3. Risk Score Assignment (Elective)

Based on screening responses, a provisional risk rating is assigned by an independent social safeguards expert: **Low, Medium, or High**.
This step is administrative and does not constitute expert judgement.

4. Social Risk Assessment (Elective)

Projects rated **Medium** or **High** risk must conduct a field-based social risk assessment in consultation with local stakeholders. This shall explore identified risks.

5. Risk Management and Mitigation Plan (Elective)

Following the assessment, applicants should develop a Risk Management Plan outlining:

- Specific mitigation actions for each significant risk
- Monitoring indicators to evaluate effectiveness

6. Independent Expert Review (Elective)

An independent social safeguards expert — commissioned by TGBS — reviews the social risk assessment and mitigation plan to determine:

- Whether key risks have been adequately identified
- Whether proposed mitigation measures are appropriate and feasible

7. Eligibility

Projects rated **Medium or High Risk that do not implement appropriate mitigation** measures are **not eligible** for TGBS certification.

While the Exclusion List is a mandatory requirement for all applicants seeking certification under The Global Biodiversity Standard (TGBS), all other safeguarding steps — from social risk screening through to risk assessment and mitigation — are elective.

These **elective components** may be applied at the **discretion of funders, project developers, or implementing partners**, depending on the context, scale, and sensitivity of the project. When the elective safeguarding pathway is chosen:

- TGBS facilitates the process but does not enforce it.
- An **independent social safeguards expert**, not the TGBS hub or Secretariat, will be engaged to review any submitted assessments and mitigation plans.
- The full elective process, comprising steps 2-6 above, must be completed.

For projects that do not undertake the elective safeguarding steps, a disclaimer will be included stating that no social safeguarding assessment has been conducted by TGBS, and responsibility lies with the applicant and associated parties.

"This project has not undergone a social safeguards assessment by The Global Biodiversity Standard. Responsibility for identifying and managing environmental and social risks lies with the implementing organisation and associated funders." – TGBS Safeguards disclaimer.

Alternatively, applicants may demonstrate compliance with a recognised third-party E&S standard (see Annex 1), including an existing risk management plan. These are reviewed by the independent expert.

This approach provides flexibility for funders and implementers while ensuring transparency in which projects have undergone a safeguarding review.

4. TGBS Exclusion List

The TGBS Exclusion list has been adapted from the Plan Vivo exclusion list[3]. The following exclusion list must be signed by all applicants:

In making a TGBS application, Applicants hereby certify that they and their subsidiaries have environmental risk assessment and human rights due diligence processes and further do not:

1. Contribute to violations of domestic and international environmental law.
2. Enable poor labour conditions in respect to national and international labour standards.

[3] A foundation that manages a reputable Voluntary Carbon Market Standard and Biodiversity Standard supporting smallholders and climate sensitive communities through sustainable land-use projects.

This includes preventing modern slavery, bonded labour, trafficking, forced labour or harmful child labour[4].

3. Have an adverse effect on gender equity, including but not limited to sexual assault and harassment and gender-based violence[5].

4. Contribute to involuntary physical displacement and/or forced eviction of people.

5. Encroach on lands owned, claimed or occupied by Indigenous Peoples, without full documented consent of such peoples that has been obtained legally and with free, prior and informed (FPIC) consent.

6. Discriminate against any individual or group based on protected characteristics such as religion, gender, sexual orientation, race, disability, language, ethnicity[6].

7. Exploit minerals from conflict-affected and high-risk areas[7].

8. Implement any trade related to sexual exploitation of any form[8].

9. Cause irreversible modification or significant displacement of an element of culturally critical heritage[9].

10. Harvest and/or trade any wildlife resources illegally under national or international law.

11. Engage with organisations or individuals that have been linked to human rights violations in the last 10 years.

The Global Biodiversity Standard, acting through BGCI, reserves the right to turn down an application and/or remove certification from any applicant that is found to violate these terms and conditions. Applicants that are considered to violate these terms and conditions will be contacted in writing. Applicants then have a maximum of 30 days to respond before a final decision will be made.

---

[4] For example, in respect to relevant ILO conventions C29, C105, C138, C182, C131, C95, C87, C98, C155, C100, C111,. For further guidance see: ETI Base Code | Ethical Trading Initiative (ethicaltrade.org).

[5] For further information see C190 - Violence and Harassment Convention, Article 1 ILO C190 Guide | Iloc190

[6] This includes production and distribution of, or investment in, media that are racist, antidemocratic or that advocate discrimination against a part of the population.

[7] For example, exploitation of diamond mines or marketing of diamonds where the host country has not adhered to the Kimberley Process. Tin, tantalum, tungsten and gold coming from conflict-affected and high-risk areas, sourced irresponsibly and funding armed conflict or other illegal practices. Key countries of production include: China, Indonesia, Myanmar, DRC, Rwanda, Brazil, Vietnam, Mongolia, Russia and Australia.

[8] For example, pornography or prostitution.

[9] Critical cultural heritage" is considered as any heritage element recognised internationally or nationally as being of historical, social and/or cultural interest.

5. Social Risk Screening

Applicants that elect for the social risk screening shall respond to the following questions. Applicants are requested to consider the following risk areas for all project partners and state whether each is relevant or not. If relevant, applicants are requested to outline how risks will be managed and if the risk is not relevant to the project, to explain why. Applicants are also requested to include any relevant mitigation measures already in place in their responses.

5.1 Business, investment and supply chains

- Does the project promote business activities that rely on natural resources e.g. use of non-timber forest products?
- Does the project involve supply chains that are near to or related to biodiversity?
- Does this project or do any project partners produce or trade tobacco and other drugs? If so, have any associated risks been understood and addressed by the project?
- Does the project work with any CITES listed or endangered species?
- Does this project or do any project partners finance or support gambling, gaming establishments, casinos? If so, have any associated risks been understood and addressed by the project?
- Does this project or project partners trade in Genetically Modified Organisms/fund research into GMOs/plant GMOs? If so, have any associated risks been understood and addressed by the project?
- Does the project provide finances to military institutions involved in conservation or security activities? Detail any relevant risks and associated mitigation measures.

5.2 Labour, health and safety

- Is there a risk that the project, including project partners, would lead to working conditions for project workers or staff[10] that are not aligned with national labour laws or the International Labor Organization's (ILO) Declaration on the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. For example, violation of minimum wage regulations, discriminatory working conditions, lack of equal opportunity, lack

[10] Project workers include project coordinator staff, staff of other project partners, third party groups fulfilling core functions of the project, and community volunteers or contracted workers.

of clear employment terms, failure to prevent harassment or exploitation, failure to ensure freedom of association?

- Is there an occupational health and safety risk to project workers while completing project activities? For example, are irritant materials such as dust or wood chip produced? Do project participants require protective clothing?
- Is there a risk that the project could support or be linked to forced labour, harmful child labour, or any other damaging forms of labour?

5.3 Community, health, safety and security

- Is there a risk of exacerbating existing social, political and/or stakeholder conflicts through the implementation of project activities? For example, existing conflicts over land or natural resources, between communities and the state.
- Does the project provide support (technical, material, financial) to law enforcement activities? For example, support to government agencies and to Community Rangers or members conducting monitoring and patrolling. If so, is there a risk that these activities will harm communities or personnel involved in monitoring and patrolling?
- Are there any other activities that could adversely affect community health and safety?

5.4 Participants

- Does the project directly or indirectly discriminate against vulnerable groups, for example regarding access to project services or benefits and decision-making?
- Have accommodations been made to ensure the participation of vulnerable or disadvantaged groups? (For example, materials translated into appropriate languages or visual materials if illiteracy is high)
- Is there a risk that the project negatively affects Indigenous Peoples[11] through economic displacement, negatively affects their rights (including right to FPIC), their self-determination, or any other social or cultural impacts?

[11] As per the IUCN Environmental and Social Management System, Indigenous Peoples include: “(i) peoples who identify themselves as "indigenous" in strict sense; (ii) tribal peoples whose social, cultural, and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations; and (iii) traditional peoples not necessarily called indigenous or tribal but who share the same characteristics of social, cultural, and economic conditions that distinguish them from other sections of the national

- Is there a risk that there is inadequate consultation with Indigenous Peoples, and/or that the project does not seek the FPIC of Indigenous Peoples, for example leading to lack of benefits or inappropriate activities?

5.5 Land and livelihoods

- Have formal and informal land tenure and use rights in the project area been assessed and understood?
- Is there a risk that project activities will exacerbate any existing land tenure conflicts, or lead to land tenure or use right conflicts?
- Will the project include activities that could restrict people's access to land or natural resources where they have recognised rights (customary, and legal). Consider projects that introduce new access restrictions (e.g. creation of a community forest), reinforce existing access restrictions (e.g. improve management effectiveness and patrolling of a community forest), or alter the way that land and natural resource access restrictions are decided (e.g. through introducing formal management such as co-management).
- Is there a risk that the access regulations introduced /reinforced /altered by the project will negatively affect peoples' livelihoods?
- Is there a risk that the project will negatively impact intangible cultural heritage? Consider for example cultural practices, social and cultural norms in relation to land and natural resources.

5.6 Human rights and social impacts

- What risks exist for the project that will regress or prevent people fulfilling their economic, social and cultural rights, including but not limited to the right to food, education, adequate standard of living, water and sanitation?
- Is there a risk that the project prevents people from enjoying their procedural rights, for example through exclusion of individuals or groups from participating in decisions affecting them? How will these risks be addressed?
- Does the project operate in an area or country with high levels of corruption, low rule of law or a lack of trust in local institutions?
- How were previous negative social impacts reported and addressed?

community, whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions, and whose livelihoods are closely connected to ecosystems and their goods and services" (IUCN 2016).

- What risks exist that project activities could cause or contribute to gender-based violence? For example, risks of sexual exploitation, sexual abuse or sexual harassment (SEAH)? Consider partner and collaborating partner organizations' capacity and relevant policies they have in place. Please describe these.
- Is there a risk that the project will contribute cumulatively to existing negative environmental or social impacts, for example through introducing new access restrictions in a landscape with existing restrictions and limited land availability?
- Are there any other social risks you have identified that are not covered by the topics and questions above?

6. Social Risk Score

In the TGBS safeguarding process, each question in the Social Risk Screening is categorised as **low**, **medium**, or **high** risk, and awarded a corresponding score of **1**, **2**, or **3** points respectively. These scores reflect the potential severity of the identified risk.

The points from all questions are then **summed** to produce a **total risk score** for the project. Based on this total, the project is assigned to a **risk band** as follows:

- **Low Risk**: 28-47
- **Medium Risk**: 48-66
- **High Risk**: 67-85

Table 1 below highlights the **risk level assigned to each question**, based on the applicant's response. This helps identify which specific areas may require further assessment or mitigation during project planning or implementation.

Table 1: Social Risk Score Tool

Section		Question	Low Risk (1 point)	Medium Risk (2 points)	High Risk (3 points)
Business, Investment & Supply Chains	Supply Chains	Does the project promote business activities that rely on natural resources e.g. use of non-timber forest products?	Project does not involve use of non-timber forest products for commercial purposes	Project involves use of timber for commercial purposes with sustainable management plans in place	Project involves timber and no sustainable management plan is in place
		Does the project involve supply chains that are near to or related to biodiversity?	Project involves no supply chains near or related to biodiversity	Project involves supply chains near or related to biodiversity. These are mapped out and explained in the application with impact assessment undertaken	Project involves biodiversity related supply chains. No impact assessment or management response are available.
		Does this project or do any project partners produce or trade tobacco and other drugs? If so, have any associated risks been understood and addressed by the project?	Project does not produce or trade tobacco or other drugs.	Project includes small scale production of tobacco or other drugs, and there is a plan in place to phase these out.	Project includes production or trade of tobacco or other drugs, and there is NO plan in place to phase these out
		Does the project work with any CITES listed or endangered species?	Project does not work with any CITES listed or endangered species	Project works with some CITES listed or endangered species with appropriate management plans in place and engagement with national CITES authorities.	Project does not know or does work with CITES listed species with no management plan in place and/or no engagement with national CITES authorities.
	Ethical Investment	Does this project or do any project partners finance or support gambling establishments or casinos? If so, have any associated risks been understood and addressed by the project?	No	Small scale gambling, casinos on Indigenous Reservations, who owns these institutions, registered with appropriate financial institutions	Unclear ownership / land tenure related to gambling institutions / contention over establishment.
		Does this project or project partners trade in Genetically Modified Organisms/fund research into GMOs/plant GMOs? If so, have any associated risks been understood and addressed by the project?	Project does not trade in Genetically Modified Organisms/fund research into GMOs/plant GMOs OR any planting of GMOs is clearly justified (e.g. to preference climate resilient species) and risk mitigation has been put in place (e.g. where local farming communities have GMO free cultivation).	Project trades in Genetically Modified Organisms/funds research into GMOs/plants GMOs for to increase climate suitability but risk mitigation measures are not in place or could be improved.	Project trades in Genetically Modified Organisms/funds research into GMOs/plants GMOs for reasons other than to increase climate suitability.

Section		Question	Low Risk (1 point)	Medium Risk (2 points)	High Risk (3 points)
		Does the project provide finances to military institutions or law enforcement involved in conservation or security activities? Detail any relevant risks and associated mitigation measures.	Project does not finance military institutions.	Project finances military institutions involved in conservation or security activities and some provisions are made to mitigate these risks.	Project finances military institutions involved in conservation or security activities and no provisions are made to mitigate these risks. Risk of harm to communities.
Labour, Health & Safety		Is there a risk that the project, including project partners, would lead to working conditions for project workers staff that are not aligned with national labour laws or the International Labor Organization's (ILO) Declaration on the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. For example, violation of minimum wage regulations, discriminatory working conditions, lack of equal opportunity, lack of clear employment terms, failure to prevent harassment or exploitation, failure to ensure freedom of association?	For example, minimum wages: workers receive a fair wage for their activities (where legal provisions exist wage is in line with this), e.g. it is sufficient for them and their families to live on for the proportion of the year that restoration activities occur (they do not need to hold multiple jobs, excluding those held out of restoration activity season).	For example, minimum wages: some evidence of low wages or not meeting minimum wage or lack of premium distribution to restoration practitioners, but good examples exist and are abundant for the species, e.g. FairWild and FairTrade certifications, collectives are common.	Evidence of widespread low wages for restoration practitioners, e.g. must have multiple sources of income to survive, wealth is concentrated at institutional level; and good examples of responsible supply chains are sparse.
		Is there an occupational health and safety risk to project workers while completing project activities? For example, are irritant materials such as dust or wood chips produced? Do project participants require protective clothing?	There are no activities being undertaken which are a risk to the health and safety of workers. OR Workers are highly skilled/trained and the work they complete is either safe, or adequate safeguards are known to be in place across the industry.	Work undertaken has some dangers or difficulties associated with it but is unlikely to be immediately life-threatening, e.g. traveling long distances, digging, and possible risk of snake/spider/insect bites.	Work has life-threatening dangers associated with it that are likely or highly likely to occur, and/or adequate safeguards cannot be confirmed across the industry - e.g. harvesting products at heights or atop steep inclines without a harness, traveling for days to a harvest site without access to fresh water or first aid, using toxic chemicals to process an ingredient without adequate skin/eye/breathing protection.
		Is there a risk that the project could support or be linked to forced	No documented cases of forced labour. Global Slavery Index prevalence	No documented cases of forced labour specific to restoration activity and commodities commercialised.	Many documented cases of forced labour in country. Global Slavery Index prevalence

Section		Question	Low Risk (1 point)	Medium Risk (2 points)	High Risk (3 points)
		labour, harmful child labour, or any other damaging forms of labour?	score of <2/1000 Global Slavery. Index vulnerability score of <20.	Global Slavery Index prevalence score of 2.0-5.0/1000. Global Slavery Index vulnerability score of 20-55.	score of >5.1/1000. Global Slavery Index vulnerability score of >55.
Community, Health, Safety & Security		Is there a risk of exacerbating existing social, political and/or stakeholder conflicts through the implementation of project activities? For example, existing conflicts over land or natural resources, between communities and the state.	No evidence of discrimination against workers, community, other stakeholders AND there are no known access rights issues, AND workers do not fall under 'vulnerable workers' definition.	No evidence of discrimination against workers, the community, other stakeholders; however, some can be considered vulnerable and are therefore at higher risk, and/or there are some reports of access rights issues.	Evidence of discrimination and/or there are well-documented access rights issues, which may be targeted at a specific group/type of individual e.g. casual labourers, members of a specific ethnic or protected group.
		Are there any other activities that could adversely affect community health and safety?	None identified/Those identified clearly articulated with mitigation and/or management plans in place.	Other activities identified but risk and management plans could be improved.	Other activities identified OR assessor identifies other activities not articulated in application. No management or risk plans available.
Participants	Vulnerable Groups	Does the project directly or indirectly discriminate against vulnerable groups, for example regarding access to project services or benefits and decision-making?	No presence of vulnerable groups, OR vulnerable groups have clearly defined access to project services and are involved in project decision making in a meaningful way.	Vulnerable groups are present AND can access some project services or are involved in some project decision-making.	Vulnerable groups are present AND cannot access project services or decision making.
		Have accommodations been made to ensure the participation of vulnerable or disadvantaged groups?	No presence of vulnerable groups OR clear and effective accommodations have been made to ensure their participation in the project. (For example, materials translated into appropriate languages or visual materials if illiteracy is high).	Vulnerable groups present, AND some accommodations have been made to encourage their participation.	Vulnerable groups present, AND no accommodations have been made to encourage their participation, OR accommodations have been made however vulnerable groups still cannot participate.
	Indigenous Groups	Is there a risk that the project negatively affects Indigenous Peoples (IPs) through economic displacement, negatively affects their rights (including right to FPIC), their self-determination, or any other social or cultural impacts?	No presence of IPs OR Project actively strengthens their rights.	IPs present and project activities could cause economic displacement, negatively impact their rights, self-determination or any other social or cultural impacts.	IPs present and project activities are likely to cause economic displacement, negatively impact their rights, self-determination or any other social or cultural impacts.

Section		Question	Low Risk (1 point)	Medium Risk (2 points)	High Risk (3 points)
		Is there a risk that there is inadequate consultation of Indigenous Peoples, and/or that the project does not seek the FPIC of Indigenous Peoples, for example leading to lack of benefits or inappropriate activities?	No presence of Indigenous Peoples OR There is evidence that IPs have provided FPIC AND are involved in the project governance.	IPs are present and there is evidence that they have provided FPIC but NOT involved in the project on an ongoing basis.	IPs are present and there is no evidence of FPIC AND no evidence of involvement in the project.
Land & Livelihoods	Land tenure & conflicts	Have formal and informal land tenure and use rights in the project area been assessed and understood?	Formal and informal land tenure rights are clearly understood.	Some understanding of formal OR informal land tenure rights.	Neither formal nor informal land tenure rights in the area have not been assessed or understood.
		Is there a risk that project activities will exacerbate any existing land tenure conflicts, or lead to land tenure or use right conflicts?	Land tenure is clear, and project activities do not affect any stakeholder's tenure or use of the land.	Land tenure is clear, and project activities may affect a stakeholder's tenure or use rights.	Land tenure is complex, and the project activities could cause conflict between stakeholders with differing claims to the land.
	Access restrictions & livelihoods	Will the project include activities that could restrict people's access to land or natural resources where they have recognised rights (customary, and legal). Consider projects that introduce new access restrictions (e.g. creation of a community forest), reinforce existing access restrictions (e.g. improve management effectiveness and patrolling of a community forest), or alter the way that land and natural resource access restrictions are decided (e.g. through introducing formal management such as co-management).	Project does not include activities that could restrict people's access to land or natural resources where they have recognised rights (customary, and legal).	Project introduces new access restrictions (e.g. creation of a community forest), reinforce existing access restrictions (e.g. improve management effectiveness and patrolling of a community forest), or alter the way that land and natural resource access restrictions are decided (e.g. through introducing formal management such as co-management). Project has clear compensation or mitigation strategies in place.	Project introduces new access restrictions (e.g. creation of a community forest), reinforce existing access restrictions (e.g. improve management effectiveness and patrolling of a community forest), or alter the way that land and natural resource access restrictions are decided (e.g. through introducing formal management such as co-management). Project DOES NOT HAVE clear compensation or mitigation strategies in place.
		Is there a risk that the access regulations introduced /reinforced/altered by the project will negatively affect peoples' livelihoods?	No access regulations are introduced, OR clear mitigation measures in place to compensate for any negative livelihoods impact.	Some mitigation measures are in place to compensate for any negative livelihoods impact.	No mitigation measures are in place for any negative livelihoods impact.
	Cultural heritage	Is there a risk that the project will negatively impact intangible cultural heritage? Consider for example	No cultural practices or social or cultural norms exist in relation to land and natural	Project activities could limit a group's ability to carry out their cultural practices or negatively impact on	Project activities could limit a group's ability to carry out their cultural practices or negatively

Section		Question	Low Risk (1 point)	Medium Risk (2 points)	High Risk (3 points)
		cultural practices, social and cultural norms in relation to land and natural resources.	resources in the project area OR cultural heritage is strengthened through project activities.	their social and cultural norms AND there are some mitigation strategies in place.	impact on their social and cultural norms AND there are NO mitigation strategies in place or mitigation strategies are ineffective.
Human Rights & Social Impacts	Human rights	What risks exist for the project will regress or prevent people fulfilling their economic, social and cultural rights, including but not limited to the right to food, education, adequate standard of living, water and sanitation?	No risks OR Risks identified with risk management and mitigation in place. Ideally a human rights risk assessment has been undertaken.	Some risks identified with management and mitigation in place, but this is likely incomplete and could be improved.	Clear risks which have not been identified OR risks identified but no mitigation or management in place.
		Is there a risk that the project prevents people from enjoying their procedural rights, for example through exclusion of individuals or groups from participating in decisions affecting them? How will these risks be addressed?	No risks OR Risks identified with risk management and mitigation in place. Ideally a human rights risk assessment has been undertaken.	Some risks identified with management and mitigation in place, but this is likely incomplete and could be improved.	Clear risks which have not been identified OR risks identified but no mitigation or management in place.
	Corruption & rule of law	Does the project operate in an area or country with high levels of corruption, low rule of law or a lack of trust in local institutions?	Third-party assessment of corruption risk that is not worsening articulated AND the project has identified corruption risks and put measures in place to limit corruption.	Third-party assessment of corruption risk is articulated AND the project has identified corruption risks and put measures in place to limit corruption.	No third-party assessment of corruption risk articulated and no measures in place to limit corruption.
	Prior negative social impacts	How were previous negative social impacts reported and addressed?	No previous negative social impacts.	Some negative impacts, mitigation measures addressed negative impacts. Any negative impacts reported.	Previous negative social impacts, not addressed or not reported.
	Gender equality	What risks exist that project activities could cause or contribute to gender-based violence? For example, risks of sexual exploitation, sexual abuse or sexual harassment (SEAH)? Consider partner and collaborating partner organizations capacity and relevant policies they have in place. Please describe these.	Risks identified, whistle-blowing mechanism in place with independent grievance process. Policies are publicly available and applied. Authorities are informed of breaches where legally required.	No clear policies in place. Whistle-blowing mechanism and independent grievance mechanism in place but no evidence of use.	Known incidences of SEAH.

Section		Question	Low Risk (1 point)	Medium Risk (2 points)	High Risk (3 points)
	Other	Is there a risk that the project will contribute cumulatively to existing negative environmental or social impacts, for example through introducing new access restrictions in a landscape with existing restrictions and limited land availability?	No clear risks / actively improving E&S impact.	Risks identified but mitigation plans in place.	Risks identified but no mitigation plans in place.
		Are there any other social risks you have identified that are not covered by the topics and questions above?	None known/Yes and well-articulated with consideration of mitigation and management.	Aware of some risks and some consideration of mitigation and management.	There are some clearly articulated additional risks. No consideration of mitigation and management.

7. Social Risk Assessment

Projects rated **Medium** or **High** risk must conduct a field-based social risk assessment in consultation with local stakeholders.

The social risk assessment is a largely field-based assessment to understand the direct and indirect impacts of the proposed project. Assessment is based on meaningful consultations with stakeholders and vulnerable and/or disadvantaged people, and assesses the significance of potential risks and impacts, and develops mitigation measures to avoid, minimise or mitigate these impacts. Methods often include community meetings, focus group discussions, interviews, and use of participatory rural appraisal techniques. Social risk assessments should focus on those risks identified as 'high' in the risk screening.

8. Roles and Responsibilities

To ensure impartiality, rigour, and alignment with international best practice, all social safeguard evaluations within the TGBS process are conducted by an **independent social safeguards expert**. TGBS hubs and administrative staff **do not evaluate** social risks or mitigation plans but play a facilitative role in supporting the process.

Table 2: Roles and Responsibilities

Step	**Responsible Party**	**Role**
Exclusion List	Applicant	Confirms project does not engage in prohibited activities listed in the TGBS Exclusion List.
Safeguarding Opt-in	Funders / Applicants	Decide whether to undertake the elective safeguarding process based on project context and funder requirements.
Social Risk Screening	Applicant	Completes the Social Risk Screening Questionnaire, providing responses and supporting documentation as needed.

Risk Score Assignment	Independent Expert	Risk scores are calculated based on applicant responses.
Social Risk Assessment	Applicant (with stakeholders)	For Medium/High risk projects, conducts a field-based assessment exploring risks and potential mitigation strategies.
Risk Mitigation Plan	Applicant	Develops a plan outlining mitigation measures and monitoring indicators for significant risks.
Expert Review	Independent Expert	Evaluates the quality and adequacy of the risk assessment and mitigation plan. Provides a recommendation regarding project risk level and whether safeguards are sufficient.
Field Verification	Independent Expert	Confirms the implementation of safeguarding mitigation measures.
Safeguards Outcome Decision	Independent Expert	Determines whether a project rated Medium or High risk has sufficiently addressed risks to remain eligible for certification.

9. Appeals and Complaints Mechanism

The Global Biodiversity Standard (TGBS) is committed to upholding transparency, accountability, and fairness in the implementation of its safeguarding protocol. To ensure due process, the following mechanisms are in place:

9.1 Appeals Process

Applicants may appeal safeguarding-related decisions in the following cases:

- An independent expert review concludes that the risk mitigation plan is insufficient to address identified social risks.

To lodge an appeal:

- The applicant must submit a written request for review within 30 calendar days of receiving the decision.

- Appeals must provide justification and, where applicable, new evidence or clarification.
- The appeal will be reviewed by a second independent expert, not involved in the initial assessment.
- A final decision will be issued within 75 days of the appeal submission.

9.2 Complaints from Affected Parties

TGBS recognises the right of affected stakeholders, including local communities, Indigenous Peoples, and workers, to raise concerns about social harms linked to certified projects.

Complaints may relate to:

- Alleged violations of the Exclusion List
- Social harms not identified or inadequately addressed during safeguarding assessments
- Breaches of the safeguarding process or TGBS code of conduct

To submit a complaint:

- Complaints must be submitted via the online form on the TGBS website or in writing to info@biodiversitystandard.org.
- Complaints via the online form may be submitted anonymously or with identity protected upon request.
- TGBS will acknowledge all complaints within **14 days** and assess them within **60 days**, involving independent experts as necessary.
- Where appropriate, mediation or corrective action will be recommended.

Note: Complaints may also be submitted by project staff, field assessors, or the general public. Retaliation against complainants is strictly prohibited.

9.3 Reporting and Oversight

All appeals and complaints will be logged, and anonymised summaries will be included in TGBS's annual report to promote transparency and continuous improvement.

10. Version Control

This protocol is Version 1.0, published in June 2025. It will be reviewed annually by the TGBS Secretariat, with updates published at: www.biodiversitystandard.org.

11. Annexes

Annex 1 – Environmental & Social Standards

The following standards are recognised by The Global Biodiversity Standard.

Standard	Date
IFC Performance Standards (PS1-8)	2012
The World Bank Environmental and Social Framework (ESF): ESS1-10[12]	2017
The World Bank Group's Environmental, Health and Safety (EHS) Guidelines, including General EHS Guidelines and Industry Specific Guidelines, as applicable	2007
ILO Core Labour Standards[13]	Various
Ethical Trading Initiative Base Code	2016
UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-based Evictions and Displacement	2007
KfW Sustainability Guidelines Exclusion Lists [Annex 2 and 3 in KfW 2012, and Appendix 3 of the ERM 2020 report]	2012
BMZ Guidelines on Incorporating Human Rights Standards and Principles, Including Gender, in Programme Proposals for Bilateral German Technical and Financial Cooperation	2013
FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT)[14]	2012
ISO 37101 - Sustainable development in communities	2016
ISO 26000:2010 - Social responsibility	2010

[12] https://www.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/environmental-and-social-framework

[13] ILO defines eight labor standards as fundamental, including: 87) Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize (1948) 98) Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining (1949) 29) Forced Labor (1930) 105) Abolition of Forced Labor (1959) 138) Minimum Age (1973) 182) Worst Forms of Child Labor (1999) 100) Equal Remuneration (1951) 111) Discrimination (1958)

[14] http://www.fao.org/tenure/en/