

Safeguard Implementation Guidance for ART TREES 3.0 (Section 12)

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Theme 1.1: Consistency with the objectives of National Forest Programs	4
Theme 1.2: Consistency with the objectives of relevant international conventions and agreements ..	6
Theme 2.1: Respect, Protect, and Fulfill the Right of Access to Information.....	9
Theme 2.2: Promote Transparency and Prevent Corruption, including through the promotion of anti-corruption measures.	12
Theme 2.3: Respect, Protect, and Fulfill Land Tenure Rights.....	15
Theme 2.4: Respect, Protect, and Fulfill Access to Justice (Grievance Redress Mechanisms)	18
Theme 3.1: Identification of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (and equivalent groups) ..	21
Theme 3.2: Respect and Protect Traditional Knowledge and Practices.....	24
Theme 3.3: Respect, Protect, and Fulfill the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Local Communities, and Afro-Descendant Peoples.....	27
Theme 4.1: Respect, protect, and fulfill the right of all relevant stakeholders to participate fully and effectively in the design and implementation of REDD+ activities.....	30
Theme 4.2: Develop adequate participatory procedures for the effective participation of Indigenous Peoples, Local Communities and Afro-descendant Peoples, or equivalent.	36
Theme 5.1: Non-conversion of natural forests and other natural ecosystems.....	43
Theme 5.2: Protect natural forests and other natural ecosystems, biological diversity, and ecosystem services and enhance environmental benefits	50
Theme 5.3: Enhancement of Social Benefits	57
Theme 6.1: Reversals	60
Theme 7.1: Displacement.....	63

Introduction

This guidance document provides detailed implementation advice for Section 12 (Safeguards) of the ART TREES 3.0 Standard. It is designed to help jurisdictions (“Participants”) develop and implement REDD+ programs in consistency with all Cancun Safeguards.

The guidance is organized by safeguard theme, following the thematic breakdown of the Cancun Safeguards in TREES. For each theme, the guidance:

- **Clarifies the objective** of the safeguard,
- **Sets out benchmarks and expectations** for the Structure/Process and Outcome indicators under TREES, and
- **Provides examples** of implementation measures and appropriate documentation.

Notably, this guidance underscores that meeting the TREES safeguards is **more than a “do no harm” checklist – jurisdictions must actively align their REDD+ implementation with the Cancun safeguard principles**. In practice, this means demonstrating that all REDD+ actions in a jurisdiction’s implementation plan are carried out consistently with the safeguards so that activities truly do no harm. TREES 3.0 accordingly shifts emphasis toward **proactive, ongoing adherence** to safeguards (rather than solely retrospective reporting) as REDD+ activities are implemented. The level of detail in this document reflects good-practice international standards (e.g. IFC Performance Standards, UNDP Social and Environmental Standards), making it a comprehensive companion to TREES 3.0 that elaborates on internationally recognized good practices without duplicating TREES text.

Theme 1.1: Consistency with the objectives of National Forest Programs

Objective: *Ensure that REDD+ actions are designed and implemented in harmony with the country's national forest programs, strategies, or policies.*

This safeguard theme corresponds to Cancun Safeguard (a), requiring REDD+ actions to **complement or be consistent with national forest program objectives**. The goal is to promote country ownership and policy coherence: REDD+ should reinforce existing forest goals and objectives (such as those contained in national forest plans and/or programmes). In practice, this means a jurisdiction's REDD+ actions must align with and support national priorities for forest conservation, sustainable management, and climate goals (including the country's NDC and other commitments).

Structure/Process Indicators– Expectations for Jurisdictions

Jurisdictions must demonstrate that their REDD+ actions are consistent and/or complement national forest program's goals or objectives. Specifically, auditors will expect to see the following information and associated evidence of:

- **Legal and Institutional Forest Framework:** the key legal and policy instruments that together define the objectives of national forest programs (if a sub-national jurisdiction, should also include state level legal and policy architecture that define objectives of sub-national forest programs).
- **Legal and Institutional REDD+ Framework:** The REDD+ strategy is in place, formally adopted, and disseminated. This strategy should outline the country's objectives for forests (e.g. reducing deforestation, enhancing carbon stocks, improving livelihoods) and identify and/or provide guidance or criteria for REDD+ actions. There should be institutions or coordination bodies responsible for implementing this strategy, and which have clear mandates and procedures that support this consistency.
- **Alignment between REDD+ actions and forest objectives:** a clear understanding and description of how the REDD+ strategy (and if possible, each REDD+ action) is consistent with national forest policies/programs. It is recommended that a summary table is prepared (see illustrate example below), which synthesizes this legal and institutional alignment by listing:
 - The forest program/legal instrument;
 - Its key objectives;
 - How Jurisdiction's REDD+ strategy supports those objectives;
 - The responsible institutions; and
 - The specific mandates or processes of these institutions that contributes to the achievement of REDD+ Strategy (REDD+ actions) objectives.

Forest Program / Legal Instrument	Forest Objectives	How the Jurisdiction's REDD+ Strategy is consistent with these objectives	Responsible Institution	Institutional mandates and procedures
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Outcome Indicators – Expectations for Jurisdictions

Over time, jurisdictions must show that **REDD+ actions have been designed and carried out in a way that is consistent with, or complements, the national forest program's objectives**. In practical terms, this means

auditors should find that REDD+ actions are not isolated or contradictory efforts, but rather **contribute to these broader goals**. Expected evidence and outcomes include:

- **Consistent Design:** REDD+ Strategy (and if possible, each REDD+ action) can be traced to one or more objectives or priorities in the national forest policies/plans. For example, if the national forest policy prioritizes reducing deforestation in high-biodiversity areas, the REDD+ activities implemented (such as creating protected areas, community forestry in those regions) should reflect that priority. Documentation might include a mapping of REDD+ actions against the strategic goals in the national forest plan. Auditors may cross-check REDD+ actions against existing laws and sector plans to ensure consistency.
- **Policy Complementarity in practice:** REDD+ Strategy (and if possible, each REDD+ action) fill gaps or strengthen the national forest policies. If the national forest policy has introduced certain regulations (e.g. a logging moratorium or agroforestry promotion), the REDD+ actions should help enforce and complement those regulations on the ground. There should be **no conflicts** between what REDD+ actions do and what national laws/policies require. Jurisdictions should be able to clearly demonstrate the REDD+ strategy has **contributed to tangible outcomes** that directly advance national and subnational forest objectives, including on forest conservation, sustainable use, and climate resilience at the jurisdictional level.
- **Institutional Coordination in Practice:** Evidence that public institutions involved in REDD+ (forest departments, environment ministries, etc.) actually coordinate their efforts under the umbrella of the national forest policy. For instance, minutes from inter-agency meetings or joint implementation reports can show that REDD+ actions are implemented as part of a unified program rather than disparate actions.

Implementation Guidance

To meet Theme 1.1, jurisdictions should take the following steps and provide robust documentation:

- **Establish the National Strategy and embed alignment:** Ensure a **National REDD+ Strategy or equivalent forest strategy/plan** exists. This should be publicly available and officially endorsed. If one exists, document its key objectives and scope, including how each REDD+ action contributes to objectives of forest policies, programs and/or plans. If not, describe interim measures (e.g. a draft strategy or relevant forest policies) that guide REDD+ implementation.
- **Coordination Mechanisms:** Form **multi-level coordination bodies** – e.g. a National REDD+ Steering Committee including subnational representatives – to oversee alignment. Document meeting schedules, participant lists, and decisions or recommendations issued to ensure activities support national objectives.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Communicate REDD+ strategy's objectives and goals to local stakeholders so they understand how local REDD+ actions fit into the bigger picture. This can improve buy-in and coherence. For enabling measures (policy-level), engage national stakeholders (e.g. civil society, indigenous peoples' organizations) in their development to ensure broad support, which helps in aligning field activities later.
- **Documentation Examples:** Participants can provide copies of the national forest program/REDD+ strategy, official policy statements linking REDD+ to national goals, memos or letters that instruct subnational agencies on aligning REDD+ actions with national plans, and any analytical mapping of REDD+ outcomes to national targets (for instance, a table showing how each REDD+ action contributes to national deforestation reduction targets or sustainable development goals).

Theme 1.2: Consistency with the objectives of relevant international conventions and agreements

Objective: *Ensure that REDD+ implementation recognizes and promotes the application of all relevant international conventions and agreements that the country has ratified.*

This theme is a second part of Cancun Safeguard (a), extending the alignment beyond national programs to **global commitments**. The goal is to prevent REDD+ actions from undermining a country's international obligations and to leverage REDD+ as a means to fulfil those obligations (for example, commitments under the UNFCCC, Convention on Biological Diversity, human rights treaties, etc.). In practice, jurisdictions must integrate the principles and requirements of ratified treaties into the design and execution of REDD+ actions.

Structure/Process – Expectations for Jurisdictions

Jurisdictions need to show they have the **legal and policy mechanisms to uphold international agreements** in the context of REDD+. Key expectations include:

- **Inventory of Relevant Conventions:** The Participant should identify which international conventions, agreements, and declarations are *relevant to REDD+* and have been ratified or endorsed by the country. These typically include environmental agreements (UNFCCC, CBD, CITES, UN Convention to Combat Desertification), human rights agreements (ILO conventions on labor, UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), etc.), and cross-cutting ones (e.g. UN Convention Against Corruption if applicable to benefit transparency).
- **Domestic Incorporation:** Evidence that the country's domestic framework (laws, regulations, or strategies) incorporates the obligations or principles of those international agreements. For example, if the country is party to the Convention on Biological Diversity, there should be a national biodiversity strategy or provisions in environmental law that align with CBD commitments. The presence of enabling legislation or policy directives that translate treaty commitments into action is a strong indicator.
- **Legal and Institutional REDD+ Framework:** The REDD+ strategy is in place, formally adopted, and disseminated. This strategy should outline the jurisdiction's objectives that are relevant and consistent with its international commitments. There should be institutions or coordination bodies responsible for implementing this strategy, and which have clear mandates and procedures that support this consistency.
- **Alignment between REDD+ actions and global objectives:** a clear understanding and description of how the REDD+ strategy (and if possible, each REDD+ action) is consistent with objectives of international conventions and agreements. It is recommended that a summary table is prepared (see illustrate example below), which synthesizes this legal and institutional alignment by listing:
 - The relevant international convention or agreement;
 - Its key objectives;
 - How the Jurisdiction's REDD+ strategy supports those objectives;
 - The responsible institutions; and
 - The specific mandates or processes of these institutions that contributes to the achievement of REDD+ Strategy (REDD+ actions) objectives.

International convention or agreement	Objectives	How the Jurisdiction's REDD+ Strategy is consistent with these objectives	Responsible Institution	Institutional mandates and procedures
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Outcome – Expectations for Jurisdictions

Jurisdictions must demonstrate that **REDD+ activities have been implemented in a manner consistent with the identified international conventions**, meaning that they actively uphold and do not violate any of the country's treaty obligations. Expected outcomes and evidence include:

- **No Violations of International Obligations:** Auditors should find no instance where a REDD+ action led to a breach of a treaty commitment. For example, if the country has an obligation to protect endangered species (under CBD or CITES), REDD+ actions should not involve harm to such species or their habitats. If the country committed to human rights treaties, there should be no REDD+ measure that resulted in human rights infringements.
- **Support of International Goals:** Ideally, REDD+ actions contribute positively to fulfilling international commitments. Evidence could be qualitative or quantitative: e.g. reports showing how REDD+ actions helped progress on biodiversity targets (Aichi targets or post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework), or how it advanced the Paris Agreement goals on mitigation by delivering verified emission reductions. If the country supports the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the REDD+ program outcomes can be mapped to relevant SDGs (such as SDG 13 Climate Action, SDG 15 Life on Land, SDG 16 institutions in terms of transparency).
- **Regular Reporting and Transparency:** Many conventions require reporting (e.g. CBD National Reports, human rights reviews). The outcome of consistency means the jurisdiction can include REDD+ information in these reports as evidence of compliance, and vice versa. The country's Summary of Information on safeguards (submitted to UNFCCC) can also highlight how international obligations were respected in the REDD+ program.
- **Institutional Cooperation:** Public institutions responsible for treaty implementation (such as environment, foreign affairs, or human rights commissions) have been engaged in REDD+ governance. Their involvement (documented via inter-ministerial committees or advisory inputs) shows that REDD+ outcomes were scrutinized for consistency with international standards. This often results in REDD+ program adjustments to better meet treaty standards (for example, improving gender inclusion to align with CEDAW – Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women – obligations).

Implementation Guidance

To meet Theme 1.2, jurisdictions should take the following steps and provide robust documentation:

- **Mapping relevant and applicable international conventions and agreements:** Conduct a **mapping exercise** of all international conventions and agreements relevant and applicable to REDD+ and identify how each safeguard theme relates. For example, map Cancun Safeguard (c) & (d) to human rights treaties (ICCPR, ICESCR, UNDRIP), Safeguard (e) to environmental treaties (CBD, Ramsar), Safeguard (b) to UNCAC (anti-corruption), etc. This mapping can guide implementers on what international principles to uphold.

- **Legal Gap Analysis:** Review national legislation/policies to ensure that for each ratified convention, there is corresponding domestic coverage. If gaps exist (e.g. a country ratified UNDRIP but has no legal mechanism for FPIC), develop interim measures for REDD+ specifically. For instance, the REDD+ strategy could require FPIC in line with UNDRIP even if not yet mandated by law. Document these measures clearly.
- **Establish the National Strategy and embed alignment:** Ensure a **National REDD+ Strategy or equivalent forest program** exists. This should be publicly available and officially endorsed. If one exists, document its key objectives and scope, including how each REDD+ action contributes to objectives of relevant and applicable international conventions and agreements. If not, describe interim measures (e.g. a draft strategy or relevant forest policies) that guide REDD+ implementation.
- **Coordination Mechanisms:** Form **multi-level coordination bodies** – e.g. a National REDD+ Steering Committee including subnational representatives – to oversee alignment. Document meeting schedules, participant lists, and decisions or recommendations issued to ensure activities support objectives of relevant and applicable international conventions and agreements.
- **Capacity Building:** Train REDD+ program staff and stakeholders on the content of key conventions. If communities are involved, raising their awareness that the program intends to uphold things like UNDRIP, ILO 169, etc., can build trust. For enabling actions such as passing new regulations, ensure drafters consult international standards or model laws (many treaties come with guidance on national implementation).
- **Engage Treaty Focal Points:** Coordinate with national focal points for conventions (e.g. the UNFCCC National Focal Point, CBD focal point, etc.) during the planning and monitoring of REDD+ actions. Their input can ensure the program's direction supports international reporting and compliance. Keep records of such consultations or written advice from these offices.
- **Documentation Examples:** A comprehensive **safeguards report** by the Participant can list each relevant international convention and describe measures taken to ensure consistency in REDD+ implementation. Other documentation might include excerpts of laws or strategies transposing treaty requirements, meeting notes with ministries (for example, Ministry of Environment confirming that REDD+ adheres to biodiversity obligations), and evidence of no-objection or endorsement from bodies like National Human Rights Institutions for how REDD+ action respects international human rights commitments.

Theme 2.1: Respect, Protect, and Fulfill the Right of Access to Information

Objective: *Ensure transparency and access to information for all stakeholders regarding REDD+ activities, benefit distribution, and how safeguards are addressed.*

This theme (under Cancun Safeguard B: governance) is about upholding the **public's right to know**. It aims to foster trust, accountability, and informed participation by guaranteeing that stakeholders – especially those affected by or interested in REDD+ – can obtain relevant information easily. In essence, jurisdictions must both proactively disclose information about the REDD+ program and respond to information requests, in a non-discriminatory manner.

Structure/Process – Expectations for Jurisdictions

Participants should have in place laws, policies and procedures to provide access to REDD+-related information. Key expectations include:

- **Freedom of Information (FOI) or Transparency Laws:** Ideally, a national (or subnational) law exists that grants the public the right to access government-held information, including environmental information. If such a law (e.g. a Freedom of Information Act) is in place, the Participant should clearly apply it to REDD+ actions. If no general law exists, the REDD+ program should have its own transparency policy – for instance, a commitment in the REDD+ Strategy that certain documents and data will be made public.
- **Defined Scope of Information:** The information that must be accessible encompasses among others, the *REDD+ actions*, *REDD+ benefit distribution*, and *safeguards implementation*. This means stakeholders should be able to find out what REDD+ actions are being carried out, where and by whom; how benefits (like carbon payments or other incentives) are allocated and distributed; and how the various safeguard requirements (like those in this guidance) are being met. The Participant should have a list or inventory of such information and make much of it **proactively available** (e.g. via websites, public reports, or community notice boards).
- **Procedures for Information Access:** There should be an established process for stakeholders to request information and receive it in a timely manner. This could build upon existing FOI request systems or could be a dedicated helpdesk or contact point for the REDD+ program. The procedure should be timely, and “non-discriminatory and non-cost-prohibitive” – meaning anyone can request information without facing prohibitive fees or biases, and information should be provided in languages/forms accessible to local communities (e.g. translations, plain language summaries).
- **Resources and Record-Keeping:** The jurisdiction needs to assign responsibility (e.g. Safeguard's officer) and resources to manage information dissemination. They should also maintain records of what information has been disclosed or requested, to track responsiveness.

Outcome – Expectations for Jurisdictions

In practice, the outcome should be that **public institutions have indeed provided access to REDD+ information**, and stakeholders are aware of and exercise their right to know. This can be evidenced by:

- **Availability of Key Documents:** Core REDD+ documents are published and readily accessible. This includes the REDD+ implementation plan (in alignment with section 3.3. of TREES), summaries of consultation meetings, benefit-sharing plans or reports, the safeguards Summary of Information,

periodic monitoring reports, and validation/verification reports. An outcome indicator of success is that these documents are not just theoretically available but have actually been distributed or accessed by stakeholders (e.g. copies available in local government offices of the project area, or online downloads).

- **Stakeholder Awareness and Use:** The public (especially local communities, civil society groups, and other stakeholders) knows that they can obtain information and has done so. For instance, community members can recount receiving information about a REDD+ action in their area, or an NGO can confirm it obtained data about benefit distribution after requesting it. Evidence might include records of information requests by stakeholders and the responses given. If, say, a community organization asked for details on how carbon credit revenues were spent and the government provided a breakdown, that illustrates the right to information being exercised.
- **Transparency Platforms:** The existence of a Safeguards Information System (SIS) or similar platform where safeguard and REDD+ info is periodically updated and publicly accessible. Many countries develop an SIS web portal under UNFCCC requirements – if the Participant has one, it should contain relevant info (policies, indicators, results) and usage statistics can show it's being accessed. If no portal, then perhaps periodic public meetings or bulletins are used – outcome success would be that these channels are active and well-known.
- **No Reports of Withheld Information:** An important outcome is that there are no substantiated complaints that information about the REDD+ program was unjustifiably withheld or kept secret. If stakeholders or observers have accused the program of secrecy in the past, the Participant should have addressed it (e.g. by releasing the information). Ideally, auditors will find a culture of openness – e.g. officials readily sharing data when asked, and project proponents publishing results voluntarily.

Implementation Guidance

To meet Theme 2.1, jurisdictions should take the following steps and provide robust documentation:

- **Develop a Public Information Plan:** At the program outset, develop a plan that lists what information will be made public, in what form, and when. For example, **commit to publishing:** the REDD+ strategy and REDD+ implementation plan, summaries of consultations, environmental and social impact assessments (ESIAs)-as relevant, benefit-sharing mechanisms and annual reports on benefit distribution, monitoring reports (with safeguards updates), and verification findings. Also outline how the public can request additional information.
- **Outreach and Communication:** Don't assume "post it and they will see it." Actively disseminate information to stakeholders. For local communities, that could mean translating summaries into local languages and distributing pamphlets or using radio announcements about REDD+ actions and how to get more information. For national stakeholders, hold press releases or webinars when major REDD+ reports are released. The aim is widespread awareness that information is available.
- **Facilitate Information Requests:** Set up clear channels – an email address, a website form, or an office – where anyone can request REDD+ information. Define service standards (e.g. respond within 30 days). Train the responsible staff to handle requests professionally. Keep a log of requests and outcomes. Over time, analyze this log: Are there recurring types of info people seek? Make those proactively available if not already.
- **Protect Confidentiality as Needed:** Some information (like exact locations of endangered species or personal data of beneficiaries) might need to be handled carefully. Define in the public information

plan what categories might be sensitive and how to provide info in aggregated form if needed. But this should be minimal – err on the side of disclosure unless strong reasons otherwise.

- **Documenting Compliance:** To demonstrate implementation, the Participant can compile a repository of disclosed materials (e.g. links to websites, copies of publications, distribution lists for reports). If a SIS exists, take screenshots or export logs showing content and usage. If responding to requests, keep correspondence records. Essentially, maintain an “audit trail” of transparency.

Theme 2.2: Promote Transparency and Prevent Corruption, including through the promotion of anti-corruption measures.

Objective: *Ensure that REDD+ actions and benefit distribution are carried out transparently and with integrity, including the prevention of corruption, fraud, and mismanagement of resources.*

This theme addresses a core governance safeguard: that the REDD+ program upholds principles of **accountability, rule of law, and integrity** in all its operations. The aim is to foster public confidence and equitable outcomes by minimizing opportunities for corruption – for instance, how funds are allocated to communities, or how results are reported. Cancun Safeguard B implicitly covers this through “transparent and effective governance,” and here it’s made explicit with anti-corruption emphasis.

Structure/Process – Expectations for Jurisdictions

Participants should have in place laws, policies and procedures **that actively promote transparency and combat corruption**, and are applicable to REDD+. Key elements include:

- **Anti-Corruption Legal Framework:** Existence of anti-corruption laws and enforcement bodies (e.g. anti-corruption commission, auditor-general’s office) in the country. The Participant should show that these laws apply to REDD+ finance and actions. If the country is party to the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC), that framework should influence REDD+ governance. Policies might include codes of conduct for public officials, conflict of interest rules, and whistleblower protections, all of which help deter corrupt practices.
- **Transparency Measures:** Institutionalized requirements for financial transparency and oversight in the REDD+ program. For example, if there is a national REDD+ fund or similar, it should have clear rules for budgeting, independent audits, and public financial reporting. Procurement rules for REDD+ should mandate competitive bidding and publication of awarded contracts to avoid favouritism. Participants should maintain records for all financial transactions and decisions in the program. The principles of proper management of public funds and integrity must be evident in processes (for instance, dual signatories for fund disbursements, regular financial reconciliations, etc.).
- **Anti-Corruption Procedures Specific to REDD+:** In many countries, REDD+ involves significant financial flows (e.g. results-based payments), so specific measures might be put in place: such as a corruption risk assessment for the REDD+ strategy, mitigation plans (training staff on anti-corruption, establishing third-party monitoring by civil society), and integration of REDD+ into any existing national anti-corruption action plans. There should also be sanctions or corrective mechanisms defined if corruption is detected (e.g. fraudulent use of REDD+ funds leads to prosecution or fund suspension).
- **Resource and Capacity:** Allocation of resources to implement anti-corruption measures – e.g. having an internal auditor for the REDD+ program, or dedicating some budget to independent financial audits and anti-corruption training. Also, clarity of roles: who in the REDD+ governing body is responsible for compliance with financial management rules?

Outcome – Expectations for Jurisdictions

The program should demonstrate that **REDD+ activities and benefit distribution have been conducted in a transparent, accountable manner and that corruption has been prevented or promptly addressed.**

Expected outcomes include:

- **Transparent Operations:** Evidence that decisions and financial flows in the REDD+ program are open and traceable. For instance, communities and stakeholders know the criteria for benefit distribution and can see the records of who received what (hence tying back to transparency in Theme 2.1). If funds were allocated to certain REDD+ actions, the amounts and recipients should be publicly available. Independent oversight bodies (like national audit offices) have reviewed REDD+ accounts and found them satisfactory. Public institutions have carried out REDD+ actions in an accountable manner, meaning budget execution reports match plans, and any discrepancies are explained.
- **No Significant Corruption Incidents:** Ideally, there have been no confirmed cases of corruption or fraud within the REDD+ program. If any allegations arose, they were investigated and resolved. An outcome indicator of success would be, for example, an auditor-general's report that raises no red flags on the REDD+ accounts, or an evaluation that finds funds have reached intended beneficiaries without diversion. Additionally, qualitative feedback: stakeholders feel the process is fair and have not observed officials abusing REDD+ for personal gain.
- **Anti-Corruption Enforcement in Action:** If any misuse of funds or corrupt practice was identified, the outcome should show that enforcement mechanisms kicked in. For example, if a local official misallocated REDD+ money, the Participant took action (legal or administrative) to correct it and prevent recurrence. *Preventing corruption* also means reducing opportunities for it – an outcome might be that the program instituted improvements like digital tracking of payments or community monitoring committees, which in turn resulted in more efficient, cleaner management (this could be captured in progress reports).
- **Enhanced Trust and Participation:** A less tangible but important outcome is that due to transparency and integrity, stakeholders trust the REDD+ program and are therefore more willing to participate. Auditors might glean this from stakeholder interviews (e.g. “We trust the funds are handled properly because we see the reports”) or increased stakeholder engagement (people are willing to invest time or co-finance because they see accountability).

Implementation Guidance

To meet Theme 2.2, jurisdictions should implement a range of anti-corruption and transparency measures:

- **Financial Management Systems:** Establish robust financial management procedures for REDD+ funds. This includes budgeting, accounting, and auditing processes consistent with international standards. Every dollar (or credit) from REDD+ should be accounted for. Utilize independent financial audits annually – these audit reports should be shared with the program's stakeholders for transparency. For benefit distribution, create clear formulas or criteria and document every disbursement, ideally in publicly accessible ledgers.
- **Anti-Corruption Risk Assessment:** Conduct a corruption risk assessment specifically for the REDD+ program. Identify where risks are highest (e.g. in selecting project areas, in contracting service providers, in disbursing benefits) and implement targeted controls. For example, risk: *elite capture of benefits* – control: involve community representatives in benefit allocation decisions and require multiple sign-offs; risk: *fraudulent reporting of emission reductions* – control: independent third-party verification and use of transparent monitoring technology.

- **Transparency & Accountability Tools:** Implement tools such as public dashboards showing REDD+ fund flows (who got funds, for what purpose, when) to allow public scrutiny. If a grievance mechanism (Theme 2.4) receives any corruption complaints, ensure they are investigated in coordination with anti-corruption authorities. Encourage civil society oversight – e.g. allow NGOs to observe REDD+ governance meetings or join oversight committees.
- **Adherence to Procurement Standards:** If REDD+ involves procurement (e.g. hiring contractors for MRV, purchasing equipment, etc.), enforce procurement rules that emphasize transparency and value-for-money. Use open tenders, publish tender results, and allow independent observers in tender committees. Keep procurement records for audit.
- **Capacity Building and Culture:** Train all personnel involved in REDD+ on ethics and anti-corruption. Develop a code of conduct for the REDD+ program that explicitly forbids bribery, nepotism, and misuse of funds, and have everyone sign it. Establishing a culture of zero-tolerance is key. Participants may also set up confidential channels for whistleblowers to report any wrongdoing (and protect those who come forward).
- **Documenting Measures:** The Participant should maintain documentation such as: anti-corruption policy documents or circulars applicable to REDD+; minutes of oversight committee or audit committee meetings; copies of audit reports (internal and external) with any findings and follow-up actions; procurement records and contract award notices; and evidence of transparency initiatives (e.g. screenshots of the fund transparency portal, community scorecards if used, etc.). These documents demonstrate the systems in place and their effectiveness.

Theme 2.3: Respect, Protect, and Fulfill Land Tenure Rights

Objective: *Ensure that the REDD+ program recognizes and secures **customary and statutory land and resource tenure rights** of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, Afro-descendant Peoples (or equivalent groups), and other stakeholders, and that REDD+ activities do not undermine these rights.*

Secure land tenure is fundamental to both safeguard social rights and to the success of REDD+ (as unclear tenure can lead to conflict or deforestation). This theme aligns with Cancun Safeguard B (transparent governance) and Safeguard C (rights of indigenous and local communities) by requiring jurisdictions to **formalize and strengthen land tenure** and avoid involuntary resettlement or displacement of people for REDD+ without consent.

Structure/Process – Expectations for Jurisdictions

Participants should have in place laws, policies and procedures to recognize, document, and secure land and resource tenure relevant to REDD+. Key expectations:

- **Legal Recognition of Tenure:** The jurisdiction's laws should recognize both **statutory tenure** (formal titles, deeds, concessions) and **customary tenure** (traditional land use rights of communities and indigenous groups) in forest areas. There should be provisions for registering communal lands, ancestral domains, or user rights. If gaps exist in national law (e.g. customary rights not formally recognized), the REDD+ program should have interim measures like agreements or moratoria on activities that could alienate customary lands.
- **Land Tenure Inventory and Mapping:** A process should exist to **identify and map out land claims** within the REDD+ accounting area. This includes determining who owns or uses land and resources in REDD+ program areas – whether it's individuals, communities, or the state – and resolving overlapping claims. Participants should produce or reference cadastral maps, community maps, or similar inventories.
- **Procedures to Secure Tenure:** If tenure is not yet secure, procedures like land titling programs, issuance of certificates, or creation of community forestry agreements should be in place or initiated. There should also be legal protection against eviction: laws or policies should prohibit forced evictions and lay out due process for any necessary relocations (aligning with international standards).
- **Resources and Institutions:** An institutional setup (e.g. a land administration agency or a task force under the REDD+ program) tasked with handling tenure issues. Adequate resources (survey teams, legal aid, etc.) should be allocated to document and strengthen tenure where REDD+ is implemented. The structure should enable communities to formally lodge claims or seek clarification of their rights as part of REDD+ planning.

Outcome – Expectations for Jurisdictions

The ultimate outcome is that **land and resource rights in REDD+ areas are recognized, mapped, and secured**, and that stakeholders retain access to and control over their lands throughout REDD+ implementation. Specific outcomes and evidence include:

- **Recognition and Security Achieved:** Public institutions have demonstrably **recognized and secured land tenure rights** in the REDD+ context/REDD+ accounting area. For example, by the time of verification, communities in REDD+ areas may have received land titles or formal

management rights to their traditional forests if they didn't have them before. If formal titles are not feasible in the short term, then at least there are binding agreements or designations (like community forest reserves) that acknowledge their rights. Auditors might see copies of land titles, certificates of customary ownership, or signed agreements between government and communities.

- **No Involuntary Relocation without FPIC:** A critical outcome is that **no REDD+ actions caused involuntary relocation or displacement of people** without their Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC). In other words, REDD+ did not force anyone off their land. If any relocation or land use restriction was necessary for a REDD+ action (for instance, declaring a protected area), records should show that affected people consented through an FPIC process and were compensated or otherwise benefited.
- **Continued Access and Use:** Outcome means that stakeholders (especially communities) continue to have **access to and use of their land and resources** as appropriate during REDD+. If restrictions on resource use were part of REDD+ (e.g. reduced timber cutting), these should have been agreed upon and alternative livelihoods provided. Evidence could be community testimonies that “we still manage our forest, just now under a conservation agreement,” indicating rights are intact, just exercised in a sustainable way.
- **Conflict Reduction:** By securing tenure, an outcome should be a reduction in land conflicts in REDD+ areas. The program should not exacerbate disputes; ideally it helps resolve pre-existing conflicts. For instance, if multiple communities had overlapping claims, through the REDD+ process they might have delineated boundaries amicably. If outcome indicators or reports show fewer disputes brought to authorities, or successful mediation cases resolved, that demonstrates respect for tenure.
- **Benefit Flows to Rightful Owners:** Another sign of respected tenure is that benefits (carbon payments, etc.) are distributed to those with rights to the land. If communities have rights, they should be receiving benefits accordingly; if government holds the land but communities have use rights, benefit-sharing agreements should reflect that. Outcomes might include evidence of communities receiving payments or support proportionate to their stewardship roles.

Implementation Guidance

Key implementation measures for Theme 2.3 include:

- **Tenure Assessment:** Early in program design, conduct a **land tenure assessment** for all areas to be included in REDD+ accounting area. This entails identifying all stakeholders with claims or dependence on the land (indigenous territories, community lands, private lands, public forests used by locals, etc.). Document these findings in a baseline report. Use participatory approaches – involve community elders, local authorities, women, and other land users to capture the full picture of land use and rights.
- **Legal Empowerment of Communities:** Where communities lack formal recognition, implement activities to secure their rights. This could be assisting them in the legal process of titling or registration of their land. If formal title is not possible in the short term, consider interim measures like Memoranda of Understanding that acknowledge the community's right to continue using and managing the land for REDD+. Provide legal aid or support from NGOs if needed to navigate the processes.
- **Integrate FPIC for Land Use Changes:** Any REDD+ action implying changes in land use or restrictions (e.g. creating a conservation zone, or changing access to a forest) must involve **Free,**

Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) from the indigenous peoples or local communities whose lands are affected. Ensure that this process is documented: meeting minutes, agreed terms, even video or written consent from community assemblies. If communities do not consent to a proposed activity that would displace them or curtail their fundamental land rights, the REDD+ action design should be adjusted or that action should not proceed.

- **Benefit Sharing Agreements:** Develop benefit-sharing mechanisms that reinforce land rights- in alignment with section 3.4.2. of TREES. For example, a carbon benefit-sharing agreement could explicitly recognize the community's land stewardship role and tie benefits to it, effectively serving as a contract acknowledging their rights and responsibilities on that land. This both incentivizes protection and formalizes their claim in the context of REDD+.
- **Grievance Mechanisms for Tenure Issues:** Ensure that the grievance redress mechanism (Theme 2.4) is accessible for land and resource rights issues. If someone feels their land rights are threatened or not respected by a REDD+ action, they should have recourse to raise it and get a prompt resolution (e.g. boundary clarification, stopping an encroachment, etc.).
- **Alignment with National Land Reforms:** If the country is undertaking land tenure reforms or cadastral updates nationally, integrate REDD+ areas into those efforts. For instance, if there's a national program to issue titles or demarcate indigenous land, prioritize REDD+ zones. Coordination with the land administration authority is crucial.
- **Documentation and Monitoring:** Keep a detailed record of land tenure status in the REDD+ accounting area. This might include: maps showing land ownership/use, lists of titles issued or in process, FPIC agreements signed, and records of any relocation (voluntary) that occurred. Monitor over time –as part of monitoring reports, include a section on tenure update (e.g. “X additional communities obtained legal title since last report,” or “No changes in tenure; rights maintained”).

Theme 2.4: Respect, Protect, and Fulfill Access to Justice (Grievance Redress Mechanisms)

Objective: *Ensure that all stakeholders in REDD+ have access to fair, effective, and culturally appropriate dispute resolution and grievance redress mechanisms, allowing them to raise and remedy any grievances related to REDD+ implementation (including safeguard violations or rights infringements).*

In simpler terms, this theme guarantees that if people have complaints or conflicts arising from the REDD+ program, there are processes to address them **promptly, without discrimination or prohibitive cost**, and to provide recourse or remedies. This operationalizes Cancun Safeguard B's call for effective governance by embedding rule of law and accountability at the site level.

Structure/Process – Expectations for Jurisdictions

Participants should have in place laws, policies and procedures that guarantee access to justice for stakeholders in the context of REDD+. Key structural elements include:

- **Grievance Redress Mechanisms (GRMs):** a dedicated REDD GRM is not required. The standard requires that jurisdictions have GRMs that are accessible to all stakeholders (e.g. communities, individuals, NGOs, private entities) and can be used for REDD+ related issues. It/they should cover a range of issues: from safeguard issues (e.g. if someone's rights were violated, or promised benefits not delivered) to operational problems. The GRMs should have clear procedures (how to submit a grievance, timelines for response, steps of investigation, and decision-making) and be **non-discriminatory** (open to all, including women, minorities, remote groups) and **free of charge**.
- **Culturally Appropriate Mechanisms:** For Indigenous Peoples, local or Afro-descendant communities, the mechanism should allow grievances to be raised and resolved in ways that respect their culture and access needs. This might involve community elders or traditional authorities in the process, or providing translation. The structure might include local grievance committees or focal points within communities, feeding into the larger mechanism.
- **Awareness and Capacity:** The presence of a mechanism is not enough; stakeholders must be informed about it and how to use it. The Participant should have an outreach strategy (posters, trainings, community meetings explaining the GRMs) and potentially provide support to those who might face barriers in using it (e.g. literate intermediaries to help fill forms, etc.). The mechanism's staff or committee must also be trained in fair resolution techniques (mediation, investigation, etc.), including sensitivity to gender and power dynamics.

Outcome – Expectations for Jurisdictions

The expected outcome is that **disputes and grievances related to REDD+ have been effectively addressed and remedied** through accessible mechanisms, maintaining stakeholders' trust and upholding their rights.

Evidence of outcomes includes:

- **Resolved Grievances:** Public institutions have indeed resolved disputes, grievances, or competing claims that arose, in a manner considered fair by the parties. For instance, if two communities disputed a forest boundary in a REDD+ area, the outcome might be a mediated agreement on boundaries. If an individual complained about non-payment of a benefit, the outcome might be that payment was made or an explanation given. Outcome success is measured not just by number of

grievances handled, but by **the effectiveness of outcomes** – e.g. grievances are closed with mutual agreement or appropriate corrective action, and recurrence of similar issues is minimized.

- **Remedies Provided:** In cases where rights or agreements were violated (say a community wasn't consulted properly), the outcome should show that **effective remedies** were provided. Remedies can include apologies, compensation (monetary or in-kind), policy changes, or other actions to make amends. The key is that those who suffered a loss or harm due to the program feel that the situation was corrected. So an outcome indicator could be statements from previously aggrieved parties that "yes, my issue was resolved and I'm satisfied with the outcome."
- **Non-Discriminatory Access:** Outcomes should demonstrate that vulnerable or marginalized groups were able to use the grievance mechanism when needed. For example, if women or minority members had grievances, they were heard and resolved, indicating the mechanism was not biased or inaccessible to them. Also, cost did not deter people – if someone with little means raised an issue, they could do so freely and got a fair hearing. The absence of grievances from certain groups isn't necessarily positive – it could mean they couldn't access it – so auditors will look qualitatively to see if any group with likely issues was left out.
- **Reduced Conflicts Escalation:** Ideally, because of the GRMs, fewer conflicts escalate to serious disputes or litigation. If no one had to resort to protests, external complaints to donors, or court cases, that suggests the relevant GRMs are working. If some did escalate, was it because the GRMs failed or because the issue was beyond its scope?
- **Continual Improvement:** An outcome of a well-functioning GRM is that it feeds back into program improvement. Patterns of complaints may lead to changes in program implementation (for example, multiple grievances about benefit delays could lead the program to overhaul its distribution process). Evidence of that adaptive management (like revised guidelines following grievances) shows the mechanism is not a formality but a driver of accountability.

Implementation Guidance

Steps to implement Theme 2.4 effectively include:

- **Ensure access to Grievance Redress Mechanisms:** Ensure the REDD programs allows for **multiple entry points**: community-level (where local committees or project staff can receive complaints) and program-level (a central unit that can take complaints via phone, email, or in-person).
- **Communicate and Train:** Roll out a communication plan about the GRM. Communicate the clear steps/procedure of the GRMs: acknowledgment of receipt (within X days), initial assessment, deliberation or investigation, response, and appeal process if unsatisfied. Distribute brochures in local languages. Post signs at project sites with contact info for complaints (as simple as a phone number or address). Provide training sessions for community focal points who can assist others in submitting grievances.
- **Link to Formal Justice:** Establish protocols for when to escalate issues to other authorities. For example, if a complaint alleges criminal activity (like corruption or violence), the GRM should refer it to law enforcement and not attempt to resolve solely internally. For other complex matters (like boundary disputes), the GRM might coordinate with government land dispute bodies or customary arbitration as appropriate. Document these referral pathways.
- **Record-Keeping:** Set up a **grievance log** or database. Every grievance gets an ID, date, summary, steps taken, outcome, and status (open/closed). This log will be crucial for monitoring and audit. It

should also note any demographic info (if provided) of complainants to track if diverse groups are using the system.

- **Monitoring and Feedback:** Regularly review grievance data for patterns. Are many complaints about the same issue? That indicates a systemic fix is needed. Also gauge satisfaction – possibly through follow-up surveys with complainants (did they feel heard? was the outcome fair?). Use this feedback to refine the mechanism. Many effective GRMs have an iterative process to improve responsiveness and outreach.
- **Appeals and Higher-Level Recourse:** Check if any grievances were escalated to higher authorities or even to the ART program level. If yes, see how those were handled. The resolution of escalated cases will show if the safeguard system as a whole functions. If nothing was escalated, ensure it's because issues were solved locally, not because people felt they couldn't escalate.
- **Integration with Safeguard Reporting:** The Participant's monitoring reports should mention grievance handling (summarizing number of grievances, etc.). Auditors will cross-verify the consistency between reported info and what the logs/interviews show. Discrepancies (like report says "0 grievances" but auditors find some) would need clarification.
- **Continuous Operation:** Confirm the GRM is not just on paper but operational throughout the crediting period. If the program expanded to new areas, did the mechanism cover those too? If new stakeholders (like contractors) came in, were they briefed about handling complaints? Auditors may ask if the mechanism has evolved (for example, introduced community grievance officers after seeing initial low uptake). A static mechanism in a changing program might not suffice, so adaptiveness is important.

Theme 3.1: Identification of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (and equivalent groups)

Objective: *Ensure that all Indigenous Peoples, local communities, Afro-descendant Peoples, and any equivalent marginalized groups potentially affected by or involved in REDD+ are identified and recognized, including those who may not be easily visible (such as uncontacted peoples or nomadic/transhumant communities).*

This is a prerequisite for effectively respecting their rights and including them in REDD+. Essentially, the REDD+ program must **know who the stakeholders are** in terms of indigenous and community presence in the forest areas. This corresponds to Cancun Safeguard C (respect for knowledge and rights of indigenous peoples and local communities) by first delineating **who** those peoples/communities are.

Structure/Process – Expectations for Jurisdictions

Participants should have in place laws, policies and procedures to **identify or enable self-identification** of all relevant indigenous and community groups in the REDD+ accounting area. Key expectations:

- **Criteria for Identification:** A clear definition or criteria is used to determine who qualifies as *Indigenous Peoples, Local Communities, Afro-descendant Peoples*, or equivalent terms nationally (could include ethnic minorities or tribal groups). This should align with international criteria (e.g. for Indigenous: distinct social/cultural identity, attachment to ancestral lands, own customs and institutions). For local communities, typically forest-dependent or traditional communities in the area. The Participant should either follow national definitions or adopt international definitions if national law is silent. Self-identification is a key principle: groups that identify themselves as indigenous or tribal should be acknowledged as such.
- **Baseline Data Gathering:** There should be a process to collect data on the presence and distribution of these groups in the REDD+ accounting area. This can involve reviewing census data, ethnographic studies, consulting indigenous peoples' organizations, and ground-truthing with local knowledge. The output is a **list of all distinct groups and communities** in the region, with info on their locations, population (if known), and any special attributes (like uncontacted or voluntarily isolated groups, who need special handling, or transhumant communities that use the area seasonally).
- **Culturally Appropriate Approach:** The process of identification should respect the perspectives of the communities. That means engaging with community leaders to validate who they are and what they call themselves. If communities have their own names and categories, use those. Avoid any approach that would impose external labels or miss groups due to bureaucratic oversight. For instance, if a semi-nomadic group isn't settled, a typical census might miss them – the process should adapt (maybe working with anthropologists or NGOs familiar with them).
- **Inclusivity in Identification:** Ensure **no group is overlooked**, especially those that are often marginalized (like pastoralists, recent migrants who depend on forests, or women's user groups within communities). While "Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities" is broad, think of all relevant sociocultural groupings. If Afro-descendant or other ethnic groups exist with similar status, include them as stakeholders in the REDD+ program. Uncontacted peoples (if any in remote forests) require identification by anthropological evidence and establishing buffer zones, etc., even though direct engagement isn't possible. The structure should acknowledge their existence and rights to remain uncontacted, which implies safeguarding their lands.

Outcome – Expectations for Jurisdictions

The outcome is that **all Indigenous Peoples and local community groups living in or using the REDD+ accounting area have been identified and recognized by public institutions**, forming the basis for inclusion in safeguards processes. Evidence of outcomes includes:

- **Complete Stakeholder List:** There is a comprehensive list (or database/ map) of the indigenous and community groups in the REDD+ program area, which is **publicly available or at least available to auditors/stakeholders**.
- **Recognition by the Government:** It's not enough to list them; they should be **formally acknowledged** as stakeholders in the REDD+ program. This might be evidenced by official communications: e.g. invitation letters to those communities to participate in consultations, inclusion of indigenous representatives in REDD+ committees, or government reports (like the Summary of Information) naming those groups as part of the REDD+ program. Essentially, the government and implementing agencies demonstrate that they know these groups exist and consider them rights-holders/participants.
- **No Group Left Out of Consultations/Benefits:** As a result of proper identification, **no indigenous or local community group was omitted** from REDD+ consultations, consent processes, or benefit schemes due to ignorance of their existence. Outcomes to check: Did all identified groups get consulted? Are they all considered in benefit-sharing plans? If the program has, say, 10 indigenous communities identified, the consultation logs should show engagement with all 10. If any group was missed in initial planning but later discovered, outcome success means they were quickly integrated into the process (the mechanism was flexible to add new stakeholders once identified).
- **Cultural Mapping Outcomes:** Sometimes identification includes mapping cultural and resource use zones for each group. If undertaken, an outcome could be that **each group's traditional area is mapped and recognized** in the REDD+ planning. This can prevent future overlaps or conflicts because the program has clearly demarcated which community uses which forest area.
- **Improved Data on Communities:** As an outcome, the jurisdiction might have better demographic or socio-cultural data on these groups than before (like an updated count of community members, or documentation of their traditional knowledge). This is a positive co-benefit outcome as it supports long-term inclusion beyond REDD+. It's often noted in outcome reporting if, for example, the REDD+ readiness phase helped identify previously unrecognized tribes or gather data that's now used in broader policy.

Implementation Guidance

To implement Theme 3.1, jurisdictions should undertake:

- **Stakeholder Mapping Exercise:** Early in program design, do a thorough **stakeholder mapping** focusing on indigenous and local communities. Use multiple sources: government records (like lists of recognized indigenous territories), NGO databases, academic research, and direct field scoping. Engage anthropologists or local NGOs who have field knowledge. Go community by community in forested areas to identify who lives there or uses it. For areas with no apparent settlements, investigate if there are known nomadic routes or historical claims.
- **Validation with Communities:** Once you have a draft list of groups and their locations, **validate it with the communities themselves** and with representative bodies (like indigenous peoples' organizations or forest user associations). Ask if there are any groups missing or if the identity labels

are correct. Communities should have the chance to self-identify – for instance, they might say “We identify as People X, not just a generic local community.” Record those self-identifications accurately.

- **Government Recognition Process:** If some groups are **not officially recognized** by the government (some indigenous or minority groups might lack official status), initiate a process to recognize or at least formally acknowledge them in the context of the REDD+ program. That might involve a statement from environment or indigenous affairs ministry that for the REDD+ program, these groups are considered stakeholders with rights, even if other legal recognition is pending. In parallel, the REDD+ program can encourage steps toward formal recognition if necessary (e.g. support them in applying for official recognition or territory demarcation if that’s a process in country).
- **Regular Updates:** The identification process is not one-off. Maintain an updated register. If new information surfaces (say an uncontacted group’s presence is confirmed by a study, or a new community forms from migration), update the records and adjust engagement plans accordingly. Set a schedule to review stakeholder list every so often (e.g. annually or before each verification).
- **Sensitive Handling of Uncontacted Peoples:** If applicable, have a protocol consistent with national and international guidance (e.g. do not try to contact them, establish protective measures around their lands, etc.). Identification in that case might rely on expert advice and signals (like presence of hunting camps, etc.), and outcomes revolve around protecting their territory.
- **Documentation:** Document the identification process and results. Include who was consulted to identify groups, what sources were used, and a final list with descriptions. If there’s a national Summary of Information (SOI) on safeguards, list all groups under Safeguard C section. Also, map products: cultural/territorial maps showing group locations are very useful documentation (with sensitive data treated carefully as needed).

Theme 3.2: Respect and Protect Traditional Knowledge and Practices

Objective: *Ensure that the traditional knowledge and practices of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and Afro-descendant Peoples (or equivalent) are respected and protected in the design and implementation of REDD+ activities.*

This means the program must not exploit or undermine their knowledge and practices, and where possible, should integrate or support them. It aligns with Cancun Safeguard C's intent (taking into account knowledge of indigenous and local communities) and is connected to international instruments like CBD Article 8(j) on traditional knowledge, and UNDRIP provisions on cultural heritage.

Structure/Process – Expectations for Jurisdictions

Participants should have in place laws, policies and procedures to **safeguard traditional knowledge and cultural practices** relevant to forests within REDD+. Key elements:

- **Legal Protections for Traditional Knowledge:** Check for any laws or regulations that recognize and protect traditional knowledge (TK) or intellectual property of indigenous and local communities. For instance, some countries have laws requiring consent and benefit-sharing if traditional knowledge is used for commercial purposes (like a national Access and Benefit-Sharing law under the CBD's Nagoya Protocol). If such frameworks exist, the REDD+ program should commit to complying with them (e.g. not disclosing sacred or sensitive knowledge without permission, not enabling biopiracy, etc.). If these laws don't exist, the Participant should adopt interim policies and/or procedures, such as a commitment that any traditional ecological knowledge (e.g. on medicinal plants, fire management, etc.) shared by communities during the REDD+ program will be used only with permission and with appropriate benefit-sharing.
- **Incorporation of Traditional Practices in REDD+:** The program structure should actively seek to **incorporate and validate traditional forest management practices** where they contribute to REDD+ goals. For example, if indigenous fire management or agroforestry practices help reduce wildfire risk or enhance carbon stocks, the REDD+ program's design should include those practices rather than override them. There might be guidelines or a task force to integrate local knowledge into technical MRV, baselines, or activity planning. This structural inclusion shows respect (valuing TK as a resource, not an obstacle).
- **Safeguards against Negative Impacts on Culture:** Procedures to ensure REDD+ actions do not inadvertently forbid or inhibit traditional practices without consent. For instance, if a community traditionally uses shifting cultivation (and it's sustainable at small scale), the REDD+ strategy should not outright ban it without providing culturally acceptable alternatives or having their agreement. Another example: sacred sites and cultural rituals in forests must be respected – REDD+ interventions (like enforcement patrols or project infrastructure) should avoid disturbing these. A process, such as a cultural impact assessment, could be required before starting activities in areas rich in cultural heritage.
- **Documentation and Consent for TK Use:** If the REDD+ program intends to use or document traditional knowledge (say to inform policy or to share lessons), there should be a protocol: only do so with the knowledge-holders' consent and ideally with benefit-sharing. E.g., if a community shares their practice of sustainably harvesting a forest product and the program publishes it in a report, ensure the community is acknowledged and that publishing doesn't harm their IP or lead to exploitation. Perhaps formal agreements (like a memorandum if the project records traditional knowledge for project design or carbon estimation) are made.

Outcome – Expectations for Jurisdictions

The outcomes should demonstrate that **traditional knowledge and practices have been respected and safeguarded throughout REDD+ implementation**. Examples of outcomes and evidence:

- **No Erosion of Traditional Practices:** The REDD+ actions did **not lead to the loss or suppression of traditional practices** important to communities. For example, if communities have traditional rotational farming or harvesting rituals, these were either left intact or incorporated into project plans, not banned without consent. Auditors would seek evidence that communities are continuing their cultural practices (maybe even strengthening them under the REDD+ program). If any practice was modified (e.g. reduced burning), it was done with community agreement and knowledge integration (like replacing it with another traditional technique or a jointly designed alternative).
- **Protection of Sacred/Important Sites:** Outcomes should show that sites of cultural significance (sacred groves, burial grounds, ritual areas) in the forests were protected from any REDD+ disturbance. If a new patrol post or project structure was built, it was sited away from sacred zones as identified by communities. Community feedback might indicate “the project respected our sacred sites – they even helped us mark and protect them.”
- **Use of Traditional Knowledge in Outcomes:** A positive outcome is when traditional knowledge has contributed to the success of REDD+ and is duly credited. For example, the program’s fire management improved because it adopted indigenous burning calendars – and as an outcome, wildfire occurrences dropped. Another example, forest regeneration was faster because communities applied their traditional seed dispersal methods. These success stories, if present, should be documented and attributed to the community’s knowledge, reflecting respect.
- **Benefit-Sharing for Knowledge Use:** If the program did leverage traditional knowledge for, say, developing an eco-tourism component or a value-added product, the outcome should show that the knowledge holders benefited. For instance, if an indigenous technique for making a forest product is used commercially via the REDD+ program, those communities should be receiving royalties or other benefits – demonstrating both respect and legal compliance with ABS (Access and Benefit Sharing) principles.
- **Community Perception of Respect:** Ultimately, an outcome is that communities *feel* their knowledge was respected. This might be gauged qualitatively – e.g. community members saying “They listened to us about how we manage the forest” Or “Our language names for animals and places were used in project materials.” Such sentiments indicate outcome success in cultural terms.

Implementation Guidance

To achieve Theme 3.2, jurisdictions can adopt the following measures:

- **Cultural Engagement Plans:** Develop a cultural heritage or traditional knowledge engagement plan as part of REDD+ action planning. This plan identifies key knowledge/practices relevant to the REDD+ action and outlines how they will be protected or used with permission. It could involve, for example, documenting traditional forest management practices (with permission) and exploring how to integrate them into the REDD+ action’s implementation (like community monitoring uses indigenous species identification skills).

- **Prior Informed Consent for Knowledge Use:** Ensure FPIC extends to the use of traditional knowledge as needed. For instance, if researchers want to study a community's plant-based knowledge for carbon-friendly livelihoods, get explicit consent and agree on benefit sharing if any commercialization. Keep records of these agreements.
- **Promote Co-Learning:** Set up forums or workshops where project scientists and local knowledge holders exchange ideas as equals. For example, in designing reforestation, combine scientific species data with elders' knowledge of local species and planting times. This co-learning approach should be part of the implementation process, and the outcomes (like species selected) should reflect both inputs. Document how traditional knowledge informed decisions – this shows respect in action.
- **Protect Knowledge Confidentiality:** Recognize that some knowledge might be sacred or confidential (e.g. certain medicinal knowledge or spiritual practices) and not meant for outsiders or public dissemination. The program should identify if such sensitive knowledge exists and make sure not to inadvertently expose it. For example, if doing participatory mapping, maybe certain sacred locations are recorded only in a confidential annex managed by the community, not on public maps.
- **Cultural Impact Monitoring:** Just as environmental and social impacts are monitored, consider monitoring cultural impacts. For example, track if any traditional festivals or practices related to forest have changed since REDD+ program start. Ideally, they remain strong or are revitalized (which sometimes happens when communities receive support for cultural revival as part of benefit programs). If any practice is declining because of the REDD+ program (e.g. youth stop learning certain skills due to new jobs), that might be unintended and could be mitigated by consciously supporting cultural transmission (like adding cultural education as part of project benefits).
- **Link to Knowledge Protection Initiatives:** If available, tie in with national or international initiatives. E.g., some countries have traditional knowledge registries. The Participant can consult such frameworks to ensure compliance and respectful use. Also, linking with the **CBD's Nagoya Protocol** obligations: if REDD+ intersects with any potential genetic resource utilization, definitely follow those ABS rules.
- **Capacity and Experts:** Have anthropologists or cultural experts on the safeguards team who can advise on respecting and integrating traditional knowledge. They can help mediate between scientific and traditional perspectives and ensure respectful documentation (if any).
- **Knowledge Exchange Agreements:** If the project facilitates knowledge exchange between communities (like one community teaching another a practice), do so in a way that respects protocols (some knowledge might not be shareable beyond certain groups). Always get community approval for such exchanges and give credit.

Theme 3.3: Respect, Protect, and Fulfill the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Local Communities, and Afro-Descendant Peoples

Objective: *Ensure that the human rights of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and Afro-descendant (or equivalent) peoples are respected, protected, and fulfilled throughout REDD+ implementation, consistent with international human rights standards and in conformity with those peoples' customary laws and practices.*

This is a broad safeguard theme capturing the commitment that REDD+ will uphold and advance the rights of these groups – civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights – and specifically ensure they share in REDD+ benefits. It directly reflects Cancun Safeguard C (knowledge and rights of IP/LC) and ties into multiple international norms (UNDRIP, ILO 169, etc.).

Structure/Process – Expectations for Jurisdictions

Participants must have in place laws, policies and procedures to **guarantee and promote the rights** of these groups in the context of REDD+. Key aspects:

- **Legal Recognition of Rights:** The jurisdiction should have laws/policies acknowledging key rights of indigenous and local communities – such as rights to lands and resources (often via land tenure laws, see Theme 2.3), cultural rights (maybe via heritage protection laws), political representation rights (like seats in decision-making bodies), and basic human rights (non-discrimination, etc.). The REDD+ program should explicitly commit to adhering to these and not overriding any rights. For example, if indigenous peoples have self-governance rights in their territories by law, the REDD+ program must operate through their institutions. If such laws are absent, the Participant should follow international standards (like UNDRIP) as a matter of policy for the program.
- **Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC):** A clear **requirement for FPIC** with indigenous peoples for any REDD+ action that would impact their rights (lands, resources, livelihoods, cultural or spiritual values). This structure element might be a documented FPIC guideline or protocol that the Participant follows, even if not mandated by national law (since TREES requires it effectively).
- **Benefit-Sharing Provisions:** REDD+ program should guarantee that these communities receive equitable benefits from REDD+ (financial or otherwise). This ties to their rights to livelihoods and development. So, part of this structure/process indicator is a Benefit Sharing Plan (BSP) in alignment with section 3.4.2 of TREES. Legal backing can come from national REDD+ decrees or program rules. Ensuring benefit equity, especially gender inclusion (women's rights to benefit), is crucial – notice Theme 5.3 on social benefits addresses women, youth too, but here specifically for these groups at large.
- **Non-Discrimination and Inclusion:** There must be a commitment that the program will not discriminate against these groups and will proactively include them. If these groups historically face marginalization, the REDD+ program should have measures to level the playing field (like capacity-building so they can engage effectively). The jurisdictions could note and include training workshops, funds set aside for community-led activities, etc.

Outcome – Expectations for Jurisdictions

The outcomes should show that **the rights of IPs/LCs have been upheld and even strengthened by the REDD+ program**, and they have effectively participated in and benefited from REDD+. Outcome evidence includes:

- **No Rights Violations:** There have been no incidents where REDD+ implementation violated the rights of these peoples. For example, no community was coerced, no excessive use of force by forest guards against communities, no denial of rights to free expression or assembly about the project, etc. If any allegations arose, they were resolved (per Theme 2.4) and corrective action taken. Essentially, REDD+ did not lead to infringe on human rights (e.g. an outcome compliance means this did not happen, or if enforcement existed it was done lawfully and with community agreement like community rangers).
- **FPIC Achieved for Relevant Activities:** In outcomes, when looking at specific interventions, we see evidence that FPIC was obtained where required. For instance, if a new protected area was created on indigenous lands for REDD+, the community gave their free, prior, informed consent documented in an agreement (or they initiated it). If not consent, the REDD+ action didn't proceed or was redesigned. So outcome is communities are content with what's happening on their lands. Auditors might see signed FPIC agreements, testimonies, etc.
- **Effective Participation and Influence:** IPs and local communities have been able to influence REDD+ decisions at all relevant levels. This is evidenced by their representation in decision-making bodies, modifications to REDD+ action design based on their input, etc. Essentially, their right to self-determination and participation (UNDRIP Article 18, ICCPR Article 27 on minorities participation) is realized. For example, outcome could be "the benefit sharing plan was co-developed with indigenous representatives and reflects their priorities" – indicating their rights to decide on matters affecting them were respected.
- **Benefit Sharing Realized:** Outcomes show these communities are **receiving benefits** and improved welfare from REDD+. That is fulfilling their economic and social rights. For example, carbon payment shares delivered to community funds, community development projects (health, education) funded by REDD+ proceeds, or employment. An outcome might measure that X% of REDD+ benefits went to communities or Y number of community members got jobs/training. Also, ensure **women and vulnerable members within those communities** share in benefits (this ties to Theme 5.3 but in context, rights fulfilment includes gender equality as fundamental right).
- **Empowerment and Capacity:** A positive outcome is that through REDD+, the communities' own institutions and capacity have been strengthened to assert their rights. For instance, maybe the program helped an indigenous community map their territory and that map was used to secure a legal title (fulfilling rights). Or it supported the creation of a community forest governance committee that continues to manage resources. Essentially, outcomes that leave communities more empowered (knowledge of rights, organizational capacity) than before indicate rights are not only respected but actively promoted.

Implementation Guidance

Measures to implement Theme 3.3 effectively include:

- **Human Rights Due Diligence:** Conduct a human rights risk and impact assessment for the REDD+ program. Identify which rights (land, culture, health, etc.) could be at risk and ensure measures to mitigate any negative impact. For example, check that increased conservation enforcement won't restrict communities' subsistence unless alternatives are provided (right to food). Align this with UN guiding principles on business & human rights methodology but apply to REDD+ context.
- **Establish FPIC Protocol:** Develop a detailed **FPIC protocol** in collaboration with indigenous leaders, outlining how consent will be obtained for each phase or activity that affects them. Make sure

it includes information disclosure in appropriate languages, decision-making through their own institutions (echoing Theme 4.2), and documentation of agreements. Train project staff and government officials on FPIC practices so they know it's non-negotiable for relevant activities.

- **Inclusive Governance:** Set up governance structures for REDD+ (like steering committees, technical working groups, benefit distribution committees) that **include representatives of IP/LC**. Give them a real voice (potentially with veto in matters deeply affecting them or at least consensus decision-making in those cases). This structural inclusion helps operationalize rights (like the right to participation and to free determination of development priorities). Document their roles formally (e.g. TOR of committees state representation quotas or roles for IP/LC).
- **Legal Agreements with Communities:** Use formal agreements to embed rights. For instance, a community might sign a Benefit-Sharing Agreement with the government. In that text, incorporate language that “nothing in this agreement shall be construed as waiving the community’s rights under national/international law” and that their customary laws (listed as applicable) will be respected in implementation. For indigenous peoples, you might have “protocols of engagement” that incorporate their customs (like requiring speaking with the council of elders for any major decision).
- **Benefit-Sharing Mechanism Design:** Ensure the benefit-sharing mechanism is developed with equity and rights in mind. It should be transparent (ties to anti-corruption and info access rights), fair (non-discriminatory, e.g. doesn’t bypass women or more marginalized community members), and reflective of communities’ contributions and priorities. The process of designing it should involve communities (so that it is effectively an exercise of their right to development). Implementation of benefits should be done in partnership (perhaps communities themselves decide how to use funds, which is fulfilling their self-governance rights).
- **Capacity Building and Legal Literacy:** Invest in capacity building for communities about their rights and how to exercise them in the context of REDD+. For example, run workshops on UNDRIP, national forestry law rights, grievance filing, etc., so they are empowered to claim their rights. Also train government staff on indigenous rights.
- **Monitoring Rights Fulfilment:** Integrate indicators of rights fulfilment in monitoring. For instance, track representation of IP/LC in meetings (quantitative), track instances of rights-related grievances (hopefully zero unresolved ones), do periodic satisfaction surveys or participatory evaluations where communities can voice if they feel their rights are being respected. Use that feedback adaptively. Possibly work with human rights institutions or observers to audit the program’s rights performance.

Theme 4.1: Respect, protect, and fulfill the right of all relevant stakeholders to participate fully and effectively in the design and implementation of REDD+ activities

Objective: *Ensure that all relevant stakeholders – including indigenous peoples, local communities, women, youth, and other vulnerable groups – have the right and opportunity to participate fully and effectively in REDD+ planning, implementation, and benefit-sharing.*

This directly corresponds to Cancun Safeguard (d), which calls for the full and effective participation of stakeholders (with special emphasis on indigenous peoples and local communities) in REDD+ actions. The aim is to uphold democratic engagement and community ownership in the REDD+ program: those affected by or interested in REDD+ decisions should have a voice in shaping them. Effective participation requires not just one-off consultations, but ongoing involvement, timely access to information, and mechanisms to ensure stakeholder inputs are taken into account (and recourse if they are not). In practice, this safeguard helps build local support for REDD+ and improves outcomes by incorporating diverse knowledge and priorities.

Structure/Process – Expectations for Jurisdictions

Participants should have in place laws, policies and procedures to guarantee inclusive participation in REDD+. Key expectations include:

- **Legal/Policy Framework for Participation:** Existence of laws, policies or regulations that mandate stakeholder participation in environmental or land-use decisions. The instruments should specifically mention inclusion of marginalized groups (women, youth, minority ethnic groups) so that **no one is left out** of the process. It should also align with any broader participation rights in national law (e.g. freedom of information acts, public consultation laws) and international commitments (e.g. the country's commitments under Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration or SDG 16.7 on inclusive decision-making). Essentially, there must be a recognized *right to participate* in REDD+ for stakeholders, backed by government commitment.
- **Stakeholder Identification and Mapping:** A procedure to identify all relevant stakeholders (affected communities, indigenous groups, local authorities, NGOs, private sector, etc.). This links with Theme 3.1 (for IP/LC identification) but extends to other stakeholders like farmers' groups, women's associations, or businesses. Jurisdictions should maintain a stakeholder registry or mapping for REDD+, ensuring even less-visible groups (e.g. landless forest users, nomadic groups, youth organizations) are identified. This mapping underpins an inclusive process by defining *who* needs to be at the table.
- **Stakeholder Engagement Plan:** A documented plan or strategy for ongoing engagement of stakeholders throughout the REDD+ program. This plan should outline how information will be disclosed (formats, languages, timing), how consultations will be conducted (public meetings, focus groups, surveys, etc.), and how feedback will be integrated. It should be tailored to the context – e.g. using local languages and culturally appropriate methods – and scaled to the program's scope and impacts. The plan must also include **differentiated measures for vulnerable groups**: for instance, separate women's meetings if needed, or providing transport so remote communities can attend workshops. It should cover participation not only in initial design, but also in implementation (monitoring, evaluation) and in deciding how benefits are distributed (e.g. community representation on benefit-sharing committees).
- **Access to Information:** Procedure to ensure stakeholders have **timely access to all relevant information** in an understandable form. Transparency is a prerequisite for meaningful participation.

Jurisdictions are expected to proactively share information about the REDD+ program – such as proposed activities, social and environmental assessments, benefit-sharing plans, and progress reports – in local languages and accessible formats *before* consultations take place. For example, there might be public websites, radio announcements, or village bulletin boards with REDD+ info. The procedure should guarantee that stakeholders can obtain information easily (reflecting the principle of transparency from Safeguard (b) and in alignment with Theme 2.1 (this overlaps with Theme) In effect, the REDD+ program should operate under open information principles, so communities are well-informed and can engage from a position of knowledge.

- **Inclusive Decision-Making Procedures:** The procedure of participation must be **fully inclusive and respectful of stakeholder input**. This means using participatory methods (workshops, community dialogues, participatory rural appraisal, etc.) where people can freely express views. It also means **adapting to stakeholders’ cultural norms and schedules** – for instance, holding meetings at times and places convenient for local people (not just in capitals), and allowing community leaders to facilitate if appropriate. When engaging indigenous or traditional communities, it’s critical to follow their decision-making structures (this overlaps with Theme 4.2). For other local stakeholders, it could involve working through existing community forums or local councils. Special efforts should be made to hear from women and youth (e.g. ensuring they are invited and feel safe to speak). The jurisdiction might, for example, set a guideline that at least 30% of community meeting attendees are women, or have youth representatives in consultations. There should also be *feedback loops*: stakeholders are informed how their input influenced final decisions, which builds trust that participation is not merely token.
- **Resources and Capacity for Participation:** The jurisdiction should allocate adequate resources (human, financial, technical) to carry out meaningful stakeholder engagement. This could include a dedicated focal point within the REDD+ management unit, budget for conducting consultations in remote areas, and capacity-building programs so stakeholders can engage effectively. For instance, training community representatives in basic climate change and REDD+ concepts enables more informed dialogue. Providing small grants or stipends for stakeholder representatives to travel to meetings, or funding NGOs to facilitate community consultations, are ways to operationalize this. Without resources, participation processes often falter, so auditors will look for evidence that the program invested in outreach and consultation activities.
- **Grievance/Recourse Mechanisms:** To reinforce genuine participation, stakeholders must have a way to raise concerns if the participation process is flawed or if they feel their views were ignored. This links to Theme 2.4 (Grievance Redress). The procedure should ensure that if, say, a community was not consulted about a project that affects them, they can file a complaint and get the process corrected. Essentially, there is a check to “ensure the participation process is respected”. This might be the same grievance mechanism discussed in Theme 2.4 or a specific feedback mechanism for consultations (like evaluation forms or community monitoring committees).

Outcome – Expectations for Jurisdictions

Over time, jurisdictions must demonstrate that stakeholders *did* participate fully and effectively and that their participation influenced REDD+ outcomes. Indicators of success and evidence include:

- **Broad Stakeholder Involvement:** Records show that **all identified stakeholder groups were engaged** in the REDD+ program. For example, consultation meeting minutes, attendance sheets, or participant lists should include representatives from each key group (communities, indigenous groups, local NGOs, women’s groups, etc.). An outcome indicator could be the *number and diversity of stakeholders* participating in REDD+ meetings or decision bodies. If 95% of targeted communities have been consulted, or if multi-stakeholder steering committees exist at national or subnational

levels including civil society and community members, that's evidence of broad involvement. There should be no major stakeholder group left out of the process due to oversight or barriers. Auditors may cross-check a sample of communities or groups: each should confirm they had a chance to engage.

- **Gender and Social Inclusion in Practice:** Outcomes should show that women, youth, and other vulnerable groups have been able to participate and have their perspectives considered. For instance, meeting reports might note women's inputs or separate women's focus groups conducted. One measurable outcome might be *women's participation rate* in consultations (e.g. "40% of participants in community consultations were women" or "women chaired 2 of the 5 local REDD+ committees"). Another outcome is empowerment: e.g. testimonies from women or minority members that they felt comfortable to speak and their concerns were addressed. The program should avoid outcomes where only local elites or men dominated the process. In short, participation was **not merely formal but equitable**. If these groups have remained silent or passive, the "full and effective" criterion isn't fully met.
- **Stakeholder Influence on Decisions:** A critical outcome is that **stakeholder inputs have meaningfully shaped REDD+ decisions**. Auditors will look for concrete examples: perhaps the REDD+ strategy was revised after public consultation (and the final document acknowledges stakeholder suggestions), or a planned REDD+ activity (like a logging ban) was modified because communities raised concerns.
- **Local Ownership and Trust:** An intangible but important outcome is **increased local ownership and trust in the REDD+ program**. Communities and stakeholders should feel the program is partly "theirs" because they had a hand in shaping it. Evidence might be statements in evaluation surveys or interviews such as "We feel we are partners in this program" or high turnout in voluntary meetings (indicating interest and trust). High levels of transparency (stakeholders say "we are kept informed about REDD+") also reflect trust. These qualitative outcomes can be captured via stakeholder feedback assessments.
- **Integration into Benefit Decisions:** Since the safeguard also specifically mentions participation in decisions about **REDD+ benefit distribution**, an expected outcome is that stakeholders have actively shaped how benefits are shared and have oversight of it. Evidence could include community-benefit committees making decisions on fund use, or public validation of benefit-sharing plans by stakeholders. An outcome might be that benefit-sharing arrangements are widely accepted as fair – for example, indigenous communities confirm they agreed to the benefit rules, or women's groups report that they received a portion of benefits in accordance with decisions they took part in. Essentially, benefit-sharing should not be top-down; stakeholders' participation ensures the outcomes (who gets what benefit) are viewed as legitimate and equitable.
- **Adaptive Management Through Feedback:** Because of continuous stakeholder engagement, the program should show signs of adaptive management, i.e. adjusting and improving over time in response to stakeholder feedback. For instance, if early in implementation communities complained meetings were too technical, the program might have adapted by using more local facilitators or simplifying materials. By verification stage, auditors might see that consultation methods have evolved (perhaps more frequent village meetings or translation provided) because stakeholders indicated a need. This outcome – that stakeholder feedback loops lead to improvements – demonstrates that participation is not a one-off event but a guiding principle in implementation.

Implementation Guidance

To achieve Theme 4.1, jurisdictions can take the following steps and measures:

- **Develop a Stakeholder Engagement Plan:** create a **Stakeholder Engagement Plan** (SEP) that outlines how all relevant stakeholders will be involved. This plan should identify stakeholder groups (using the mapping from Theme 3.1 for IP/LC and expanding to other groups like private landowners, NGOs, academia, etc.), methods of engagement for each (e.g. community meetings for villages, workshops for NGOs, one-on-one meetings for key informants, online disclosure for wider public), and a timeline aligning with program milestones. For example, the SEP might schedule initial consultations for strategy design, then periodic meetings every six months during implementation, and additional meetings whenever major decisions (like allocating carbon revenues) are made. Make sure the SEP is **publicly available** so stakeholders know how and when they can participate. Build in translations and culturally appropriate formats – e.g. if literacy is low in some communities, plan for oral presentations and use of visuals rather than relying on written handouts only. The SEP becomes a roadmap ensuring engagement is systematic and not ad hoc.
- **Inform and Train Stakeholders:** Prior to consultations, implement a process of information dissemination and capacity-building. This could include simplified brochures on the REDD+ program, community radio broadcasts explaining REDD+ in local dialects, or short workshops to explain technical concepts (carbon, baselines, etc.) in lay terms. The idea is to empower stakeholders with knowledge so they can participate effectively (often called informed participation). In some cases, hiring or partnering with local NGOs or community-based organizations to do outreach can be effective, as they may be trusted intermediaries. Additionally, consider “training of trainers” – e.g. train community facilitators who can then lead local discussions. By the time formal consultations happen, stakeholders should not be hearing about REDD+ for the first time; they should come prepared with some understanding and questions. This addresses the power imbalance (government experts vs. villagers) by elevating stakeholders’ ability to engage.
- **Use Multiple Participation Channels:** Implement diverse channels for participation to reach different groups. For example, hold *community consultations* in villages (ensuring to visit remote areas, not just easily accessible ones), *thematic workshops* at the provincial or national level (on topics like gender and REDD+, or REDD+ and biodiversity, inviting subject-matter stakeholders), and establish *online platforms or feedback forms* for those who prefer written input (like NGOs or citizens who can submit comments). This multi-pronged approach acknowledges that one size doesn’t fit all. For remote or resource-poor communities, in-person dialogue is crucial (and budget for travel as needed). Also, create a mechanism for continuous input, not just set-piece meetings – e.g. a hotline or an email address where stakeholders can send suggestions or concerns at any time. By diversifying participation methods, you broaden the reach and make it easier for all to contribute in a way comfortable to them.
- **Culturally Appropriate and Gender-Sensitive Methods:** Tailor the engagement methods to be culturally appropriate. In indigenous or traditional communities, this may mean working through respected leaders or councils, observing local protocols (e.g. starting meetings with a customary ritual or meeting at a customary gathering place), and being mindful of local decision-making practices (some communities deliberate internally before giving an answer – accommodate that by not forcing immediate decisions). Provide information in local languages (use interpreters if needed). Ensure meetings are facilitated in an inclusive manner – facilitators should encourage quieter members (often women or youth in some cultures) to speak and ensure that no single faction dominates. Consider separate sessions if power dynamics require it (for instance, women-only focus groups can allow women to speak freely on issues like fuelwood use, which they might not in a mixed group). Show respect for cultural calendar – do not schedule important meetings during harvest or festivals when people are unavailable. These adjustments demonstrate respect and help foster trust, leading to more genuine participation.

- **Document Consultation Processes and Responses:** Keep thorough documentation of all stakeholder engagement activities. For each meeting or consultation: record the date, location, participants (with demographics like gender, affiliation), topics discussed, and importantly the feedback given and questions asked. Then document the program's response or how the feedback was considered. This could be in a "consultation report" or a matrix listing stakeholder inputs and how they were addressed in the REDD+ design. Sharing back these reports with stakeholders (in an appropriate format) closes the loop and shows that their time and input was valued. For example, after a series of regional workshops on the REDD+ strategy, the government might publish a summary of comments received and indicate which suggestions were incorporated. If some suggestions were not adopted, explain why. Such documentation is also critical for auditors as evidence that due process was followed.
- **Institutionalize Ongoing Participation:** Move beyond one-off consultations by institutionalizing stakeholder participation in the governance of the REDD+ program. This can be done by establishing permanent bodies or forums that include stakeholder representatives. For instance, create a multi-stakeholder REDD+ steering committee or working group that meets regularly to guide implementation – with seats for community representatives, civil society, perhaps private sector. Likewise, at subnational levels, form local REDD+ committees or forest management committees that involve community members in day-to-day decision-making. Provide clear terms of reference that these bodies have influence (e.g. they review annual work plans or approve benefit distribution plans). This ensures participation is embedded in the program's governance structure, not just external advisory. It also gives stakeholders a sense of responsibility and co-ownership.
- **Link Participation to Benefit-Sharing and Monitoring:** Ensure that stakeholders are not only involved in planning but also in monitoring and benefit-sharing decisions. For benefit-sharing, one practice is participatory budgeting – where communities decide how a portion of REDD+ funds are used for local projects. Provide facilitation for communities to hold their own discussions on benefit use priorities (education, healthcare, livelihoods, etc.), and then have those decisions reflected in program budgets. Similarly, involve stakeholders in monitoring the social impacts of REDD+ (did livelihoods improve, were there any issues?) through community surveys or joint field evaluations. When stakeholders see that their participation extends into implementation oversight – for example, community members helping to evaluate whether safeguards are working – it reinforces the credibility of the process. It also helps catch issues early. In essence, treat stakeholders as partners and co-implementers, not just consultees.
- **Coordinate National and Local Engagement:** For programs at subnational level, coordinate with national REDD+ participation processes (and vice versa) to avoid gaps or duplications. For instance, if a province is doing its own consultations for a subnational strategy, ensure that feeds into the national stakeholder engagement so that local voices are heard nationally. Conversely, national-level workshops should include delegates or representatives from local levels. This vertical integration prevents a situation where something is decided nationally without local input, or local processes occur in isolation. Establish channels for information flow up and down – e.g. national REDD+ civil society platforms that aggregate local concerns and bring them to policy makers. Many countries have set up REDD+ stakeholder platforms or committees at multiple levels; leveraging these ensures consistency and comprehensive coverage in participation. Enabling local community representatives to attend national policy dialogues (perhaps through federations or umbrella organizations) is a good practice.
- **Adapt and Iterate:** Finally, approach participation as an iterative process of improvement. Solicit feedback on the engagement process itself (meta-feedback). For example, ask participants at the end of a workshop: "Was this meeting useful? How could we improve next time? Did you feel all voices were heard?" Use grievance data (Theme 2.4) as well – if there are complaints like "we weren't

informed about X,” that indicates a participatory process gap to fix. Be willing to adjust the Stakeholder Engagement Plan as the program evolves – maybe new stakeholders emerge (e.g. a new community settles in the area or a new NGO forms) or maybe initial methods aren’t reaching some groups (then try other methods). Demonstrating this learning approach will enhance stakeholder trust and lead to more effective, sustained participation throughout the REDD+ program lifecycle.

Theme 4.2: Develop adequate participatory procedures for the effective participation of Indigenous Peoples, Local Communities and Afro-descendant Peoples, or equivalent.

Objective: *Guarantee that the participation of **Indigenous Peoples, local communities, Afro-descendant Peoples**, and other equivalent groups in REDD+ is carried out through **their own representative institutions and decision-making processes**, using culturally appropriate procedures.*

In practical terms, this theme operationalizes the requirement that indigenous peoples and local communities have a special status in REDD+ participation: their rights to self-governance and consent must be respected.

The aim is to uphold their self-determination: they participate not as just another stakeholder, but in accordance with their customs and with the power to give or withhold consent for interventions on their lands. This is closely tied to international standards like UNDRIP (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples), which enshrines the right of indigenous peoples to FPIC, and ILO 169 (if ratified). In essence, Theme 4.2 ensures that REDD+ does not override indigenous/local governance, but rather works *with* it, guaranteeing culturally appropriate engagement and consent.

Structure/Process – Expectations for Jurisdictions

Participants must have in place laws, policies and procedures to **ensure Indigenous and community participation is both effective and respectful of their autonomy**. Key elements include:

- **Recognition of Traditional Decision Structures:** The jurisdiction should formally acknowledge the decision-making structures of IPs and LCs. For instance, if indigenous communities have councils of elders, village assemblies, or other customary institutions, these should be recognized as the legitimate channels for consultation and decision-making. The Structure/Process Indicator explicitly expects participation occurs through these structures. In practice, this means the jurisdiction has laws, policies, procedures stating that when engaging an indigenous community, the REDD+ program will follow that community's own protocols (e.g. sending a request to their council, allowing internal consensus processes) rather than imposing external committee structures. If national law provides for this (some countries have legal requirements to consult via traditional authorities), that law should be cited and followed. If not in law, the REDD+ program should adopt this principle in its strategy/plan. Essentially, *who* represents the community is determined by the community, not by the government or project – be it a tribal chief, a committee elected by the community, or any other form they use.
- **FPIC Policy or Guidelines:** There must be a clear requirement and procedure for Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) with indigenous peoples (and, where applicable, local communities) for REDD+ activities that impact them. Many countries have developed FPIC guidelines as part of their REDD+ readiness; if so, the Participant should implement those. The procedure should define *when* FPIC is required (e.g. for any activity affecting land/territory rights, causing relocation, or impacting cultural resources) and *how* FPIC is obtained. This usually involves multiple consultation rounds, documentation of consent decisions (e.g. written agreements or videos of community meetings), and involvement of independent observers in sensitive cases. The FPIC process must be **free** (no coercion or manipulation), **prior** (consent sought well before implementation and with enough lead time), **informed** (communities get all relevant information in a culturally appropriate manner), and culminate in **consent** (a clear endorsement by the community, or a refusal which must be respected) The expectation is that the Participant has something like an “FPIC Protocol” in place – that staff and partners are trained on. FPIC should not be an afterthought;

it needs to be built into project design timelines and approval processes (e.g. a project impacting an indigenous territory *cannot proceed* to implementation until evidence of FPIC is obtained).

- **Culturally Appropriate Consultation Procedures:** Beyond formal FPIC moments, all consultations with IP/LC must be **culturally appropriate**. This implies using local languages, respecting cultural norms (as touched on in Theme 4.1), and allowing communities to participate in a way that aligns with their customs. The procedures should ensure, for example, that **interpreters or cultural facilitators** are available if government staff don't speak the local language, that meetings are held in community venues, and that consultation scheduling respects things like seasonal calendars or religious events. Moreover, information should be provided in forms that resonate – perhaps oral storytelling, using radio, or visuals for communities with oral traditions. The presence of **community elders and knowledge holders** should be facilitated, as they are often key decision-makers. The expectation is that the procedure adopted principles for culturally sensitive engagement. In some cases, communities have their own engagement protocols (some indigenous groups have written FPIC protocols for outsiders) – the procedure in this case, should commit to following those. All these measures are to ensure that indigenous/local participants are comfortable and fully able to engage, setting the foundation for genuine consent.
- **Adequate Conditions for Participation:** The Safeguard wording mentions ensuring *adequate conditions* for IP/LC participation. The Structure/Process Indicator here refers to two key conditions. Firstly, providing **resources and time** for communities to consult internally. For instance, after presenting a proposal, the REDD+ program should allow the community time (maybe weeks or months as needed) to discuss among themselves according to their traditions (which might involve multiple village meetings or seeking the advice of spiritual leaders, etc.). The REDD+ program might provide logistical support for these internal discussions (like transportation for clan representatives to gather). Another condition is **capacity-building**: some communities may need support to understand technical aspects – the program could offer independent legal advice or involve indigenous NGOs to help communities analyze proposals. Also, the process should allow for *iterations* – consent is not a one-off yes/no; communities might say “yes if these conditions are met” which requires further negotiation. The structure should accommodate that iterative dialogue. In summary, “adequate conditions” means the process is not rushed, communities aren't pressured, and they have the means (info, capacity, time) to make decisions on their own terms.
- **Documentation and Verification of Consent:** The jurisdiction's procedure should require **thorough documentation of the consent process and outcomes**. This includes minutes of meetings, lists of participants (to show it was representative – ideally including women, youth, traditional authorities), copies of materials shared (to prove information was given), and the actual *consent agreement* (which could be a memorandum of understanding, community resolution, or other record of the community's decision). Often, communities will provide a signed letter or a video statement of consent; whatever form, it should be archived. Additionally, the procedure may call for **independent verification** of FPIC – for example, having a respected NGO, notary, or ombudsperson observe key meetings and attest that the process was free and fair. Some programs convene independent panels to verify that FPIC was obtained (especially to avoid later disputes).
- **Legal Support and Conflict Resolution:** Recognizing that FPIC and consultations can be complex, the Participant should have provisions for **legal or mediation support**. Communities might need legal advice to understand agreements (so providing access to independent counsel or NGO support is good practice). Also, if disagreements arise during negotiations, having a conflict resolution mechanism (like involving a neutral mediator or referring to a customary conflict-resolution method) is part of the structure. For instance, if a community is split internally on whether to consent, the program might pause and allow their customary dispute resolution to reach unity, rather than forcing a quick decision.

- **Extension to Benefit-Sharing Decisions:** The second half of the Theme 4.2 structural and process indicator mentions participation in decisions about REDD+ benefits through their structures. Thus, not only must *project* activities get consent, but also how benefits are allocated within or to communities should be decided with their own institutions. The expectation is that benefit-sharing mechanisms (discussed in Theme 3.3 and 5.3) for indigenous/local communities are designed in a culturally appropriate way. For example, if a community receives funds, the use of those funds might be decided in a community assembly per their tradition, rather than by an external committee. The REDD+ program should facilitate that by channelling benefits in a form that communities can manage (like community funds or through indigenous organizations). It's about self-determined development with the REDD+ benefits.

Outcome – Expectations for Jurisdictions

The expected outcomes are that **Indigenous Peoples and local communities participated on their own terms and that their rights and decisions were respected in REDD+ implementation**. Evidence of outcomes includes:

- **Community Consent Obtained (or Withheld) and Respected:** For any REDD+ activities affecting indigenous or community lands/rights, there should be clear outcomes in terms of FPIC. **If communities gave consent**, there will be tangible proof: signed community agreements, formal consent declarations, or resolutions by indigenous authorities. Auditors should see that those exist for, say, the establishment of a REDD+ conservation area on communal land, or for any project that restricts land use. The quality of consent matters: it should be *broad community consent*, not just one leader's signature without community endorsement. On the other hand, if a community **withheld consent** to a proposed activity, outcome compliance means that activity was either revised to meet their conditions or not implemented at all. Essentially, *no REDD+ activity that significantly impacts IP/LC proceeded against their will*. This could be evidenced by program revisions: e.g., initially planned logging reductions in a community forest were put on hold because the community didn't agree, and the program respected that. The presence of consent agreements and the absence of credible allegations of forced implementation indicate success. This outcome directly reflects the principle of FPIC: communities are content with what's happening on their lands because they agreed to it.
- **Participation via Customary Institutions:** An outcome is that indigenous and local community institutions had a decisive role in REDD+ decisions affecting them. For example, minutes might show that a council of elders approved the community's REDD+ plan, or a village assembly decided on how to use funds. If the REDD+ program set up committees, outcome evidence would show these committees included the legitimate community representatives (e.g. traditional leaders or people chosen by the community). A positive outcome is if communities say "We made decisions through our own meetings and the program respected them." Another indicator: any agreements or MOUs are co-signed by traditional authorities or community representatives, demonstrating they were the ones negotiating and agreeing, not bypassed. In cases of indigenous territories, you might see that the indigenous governing body is running the local REDD+ actions. Such outcomes show that participation was not only culturally appropriate on paper, but in reality, communities steered the process within their domain.
- **Culturally Appropriate Outcomes/No Cultural Offenses:** Because of using proper protocols, the program outcomes should include no major cultural conflicts or offenses. For instance, no sacred sites were disturbed, no culturally inappropriate actions were taken by project staff, and the communities express that their customs were honoured. While this overlaps with Theme 3.2 (traditional knowledge/culture), it's also a participation outcome: if processes were done correctly,

communities will feel respected. Evidence could be simply the absence of disputes regarding cultural insensitivity. Or conversely, if initial missteps occurred (maybe a team entered an area without permission), by outcome stage these were corrected via apology and proper FPIC thereafter. A satisfied statement from a community like “They approached us correctly through our elders and followed our ways” is a qualitative outcome showing the participation was culturally appropriate.

- **Effective Influence & Self-Determination:** Similar to Theme 3.3 outcomes, IP/LC should have had real influence on REDD+ at all relevant levels. Outcomes might show that indigenous peoples’ representatives sit on national REDD+ committees and have influenced national strategy (e.g. the national REDD+ strategy might include a chapter on indigenous peoples developed by indigenous delegates). Locally, outcome could be that a community’s land-use plan (part of REDD+) was developed by the community itself with technical support, rather than imposed. Essentially, communities can point to decisions or elements of the REDD+ program that were *theirs*. The right to self-determination (UNDRIP Article 3) means they shape their development path; a fulfilled outcome is when, for example, an indigenous community uses REDD+ benefits for a project of their choosing (like cultural center or school), not what outsiders dictated. Also, their **right to say “no”** is a crucial outcome: if a community said no to some aspect and that decision was upheld, it demonstrates respect for their self-determined choice. A track record of negotiations where sometimes the community’s position prevailed, or compromises were reached, indicates the FPIC process was genuine.
- **Grievance-Free (or Resolved) Implementation for IP/LC:** One would expect that if FPIC and proper participation occurred, there are few or no grievances from these communities about REDD+ implementation. Outcome verification includes checking that, for instance, no community has filed an official complaint to the relevant GRMs, or to the ART Secretariat claiming their rights were violated. If any issues did arise, they were addressed via the grievance mechanisms or dialogues to the satisfaction of the community (as indicated in Theme 2.4 outcomes). For example, if there was a misunderstanding about benefit-sharing, it was resolved in a culturally sensitive way through additional consultations. The absence of escalated conflicts (like protests or international campaigns by indigenous groups against the program) is a strong outcome signal that the jurisdiction managed participation and consent well. Given the history of many forest projects facing backlash when FPIC is not done, a lack of such backlash is meaningful.
- **Benefit Plans Reflect Community Decisions:** Since benefits are part of this theme, a successful outcome is that benefit-sharing outcomes for IP/LC align with what those communities decided. For instance, if a community decided that 70% of their carbon payments go to a community development fund and 30% as household dividends, the actual distribution should match that. Auditors might see community meeting minutes about benefit use and then see project financial reports showing expenditures accordingly – alignment indicates respect for their decisions. Also, benefits should be delivered in a way communities agreed (e.g. not in a form they didn’t want). Another outcome could be that communities feel the benefits are fair and contribute to their well-being (this overlaps with Theme 5.3 outcomes on social benefits). Specifically for IP/LC, they might have stipulated benefits like land titling support or cultural heritage support, and those were provided, reflecting their priorities. Essentially, the outcome is that *communities benefited on their own terms*, which reinforces that their consent was tied to certain conditions and those conditions were met.

Implementation Guidance

Steps and good practices for implementing Theme 4.2 include:

- **Develop Specific FPIC Protocols:** Work with indigenous leaders and community representatives to develop a clear FPIC protocol for the REDD+ program. This could be a stand-alone document or part of the REDD+ program guidelines, detailing each step: initial engagement, information

provision, community deliberation, decision-making, verification, and documentation. The protocol should be tailored to national context – possibly drawing on existing national FPIC guidelines (if the country has one under its national or international commitments) and on communities’ own inputs. For example, convene a workshop with indigenous organizations to outline how they want FPIC to be carried out. Elements would include how much advance notice communities need, in what format to present information (e.g. culturally appropriate media), who should be present (maybe requiring presence of traditional authorities and at least X% of adult community members for quorum), and how the community signifies consent (written resolution, etc.). Agree on this protocol with communities in advance of project roll-out. This ensures everyone knows the rules of engagement and builds trust that the program is serious about consent. Once established, train all project staff and partners on the FPIC protocol so they adhere to it rigorously (no shortcuts).

- **Engage Indigenous Organizations and Leaders Early:** Before finalizing REDD+ implementation plans, actively involve indigenous peoples’ organizations and community leaders at the earliest stages. For instance, in designing the national REDD+ strategy or the REDD+ implementation plan for TREES, set up an indigenous advisory group or include representatives in the drafting team. This early engagement is part of obtaining broad support and will inform of potential concerns upfront. Co-design strategies with them if possible – e.g. incorporate traditional knowledge and community proposals into the REDD+ activities from the beginning (this will also facilitate their consent later, as they see their ideas in the plan). Additionally, early engagement should map out the specific instances where formal FPIC will be sought. For example: “We will need community X’s FPIC to create a protected area in their territory; community Y’s FPIC for reforestation on their land,” etc., and plan timelines accordingly.
- **Allocate Time and Resources for Community Decision-Making:** When scheduling activities, build in ample time for community consultation and internal decision-making. FPIC is a process, not a one-off event. For example, if you aim to start an activity by a certain date, start the FPIC process many months earlier. Expect to visit the community multiple times: first to introduce the concept, then maybe a second meeting for detailed discussion, then leave information and allow the community to meet internally (perhaps several meetings over weeks), then a follow-up to answer questions, etc. Only after the community has had their own deliberations and indicates readiness, hold the decision meeting. Rushing this process is a common failure – avoid setting arbitrary short deadlines (“we need your decision by next week”). Provide **logistical support**: e.g. if a community is geographically dispersed, help them gather representatives together; if literacy is an issue, present info orally; if they request visiting another community that has done REDD+ to learn from them, facilitate that. By giving communities control over the pace, you respect the “prior” element of FPIC. Document these timelines in work plans so higher-ups and funders understand (to manage expectations that starting implementation takes time when FPIC is involved).
- **Ensure Information is Culturally Relevant and Complete:** For communities to give informed consent, they must **fully understand the REDD+ proposal, including potential risks and benefits**. Prepare communication materials in the local language and in forms that suit the audience (for instance, use storyboards, diagrams, or drama to explain, if those resonate better than reports). Cover all key points: What is REDD+ and how does it work? What changes or restrictions might happen (e.g. “you might no longer cut trees in area Z”)? What benefits are promised (payments, jobs, etc.) and how will they be delivered? What are the community’s responsibilities? What happens if there’s a dispute or if the project ends? Use analogies or draw on their experiences (e.g., relate REDD+ to any existing conservation initiatives they know). It’s often useful to have **independent interpreters or facilitators** (perhaps from an indigenous NGO) present information, to avoid the perception of bias. Also, allow communities to seek external advice – encourage them to consult with an indigenous federation or legal advisor if they wish. During the process, continuously check

understanding: ask community members to explain back the idea in their own words to gauge if the information is truly absorbed.

- **Negotiate in Good Faith and Accommodate Community Proposals:** FPIC is essentially a **negotiation process**. Be prepared to **adapt REDD+ actions** in response to community input in order to reach an agreement. For instance, a community might say, “We would consent if you adjust the boundary to exclude our sacred site, and if we are hired as forest guards.” The implementing agency should seriously consider and, where feasible, incorporate such conditions. Flexibility is key: maybe the timeline shifts, or additional components (like a livelihoods project) are added as part of the consent deal. Document any **conditions or agreements** that are part of consent. Also, if communities request it, put benefit-sharing or safeguard commitments in writing as part of the consent agreement (e.g. “Community consents to conservation of 500 ha, and government commits to build a school and title their land” – whatever is agreed).
- **Include Women and Youth in Community Consultations:** Even though communities have their own structures (which might be male-dominated or elder-dominated), make efforts to ensure inclusive participation within the community during the FPIC process. This might involve holding separate discussions with women’s groups or youth groups to hear their perspectives, then conveying those to the community leaders. If the community so permits, ensure women are part of the delegation or committee that discusses with the program. Practically, you could request the community to allow a portion of meeting time for women to speak or propose that two representatives from each demographic (men, women, young people) be part of negotiation meetings. Ultimately the community decides, but by encouraging inclusive practices, you help avoid intra-community grievances.
- **Document and Validate Consent Decisions:** When a community reaches a decision, formally document the outcome and have it validated. For example, if the community gives consent, prepare a Consent Agreement that states what is being consented to, any conditions, the date, and is signed (or thumb-printed) by the recognized representatives *and* perhaps a majority of community members or elders to show broad support. Alternatively, the community might produce a resolution letter. If possible, have a trusted third party witness the signing (could be a local official, NGO, or notary). Take photos or video of the consent ceremony if appropriate (some communities may allow this as evidence). In cases of refusal or non-consent, document that clearly too (e.g. minutes of meeting where community said no and why). This protects both the community and the program by providing a record. Also ensure copies of the agreement are given to the community in their language. **Validate** the consent through follow-up: perhaps the next day, project staff meet informally with different community members to confirm “do you all agree with this outcome?” – this can catch any lingering dissent that was not voiced publicly. It’s wise to have the community’s own authority structure internally validate it (e.g. the council of elders signs off that proper procedure was followed in reaching the decision). Thorough documentation and validation prevent disputes later about whether consent was actually given or who agreed to what.
- **Monitor and Honor FPIC Agreements:** After consent is obtained and project implementation begins, monitor compliance with the terms of consent. Implementation should stick to what was agreed – if the agreement said only 500 hectares would be set aside, don’t later try to expand it without new consent. If it promised jobs or benefits, ensure those are delivered as stated. It’s good practice to have periodic check-ins with the community to verify that conditions are being met and that they remain supportive. These check-ins can be informal or formal (some agreements set up a joint committee to oversee implementation). If circumstances change or new activities are proposed, remember FPIC is an ongoing principle – seek fresh consent for any substantial change not covered in the original agreement. For example, if later on the project wants to introduce a new carbon

monitoring plot on community land, even though small, it's expected to ask permission in line with FPIC spirit.

- **Utilize Independent Observation or Facilitation:** Bringing in an independent observer or facilitator for FPIC processes can add credibility. This might be a respected local NGO, a representative from a national human rights institution, or an anthropologist with knowledge of that community. They can help ensure communications are clear and also later attest that the process was fair. If trust between government and communities is low historically, this third-party role is especially helpful. The observer can write a short report on whether FPIC criteria were met. Similarly, consider South-South exchanges: having someone from another indigenous community that successfully did FPIC in a REDD+ project come and share their experience. This peer learning can ease fears and provide a relatable perspective to the community considering consent. It's part of facilitation – making the process as community-friendly as possible. Ensure the independent party is truly trusted by the community (sometimes communities suggest who they'd like to involve). This step can also protect the implementing agency – you have an external validation if later someone challenges the legitimacy of consent.
- **Plan for Non-Consent Scenarios:** Despite best efforts, it's possible a community may ultimately decide *not* to participate or to reject certain project elements. The REDD+ implementation plan should have contingency options for this scenario. For instance, if one community out of several in a REDD+ program says no to establishing a protected area, can the program adjust by creating a protected area only on consenting communities' land and excluding that community? Or if a community doesn't want cash benefits but prefers infrastructure, can the benefit plan be tailored differently for them? The program should be flexible to accommodate varying outcomes. In extreme cases, if a key community's non-consent would derail the REDD+ action, the jurisdiction must be ready to respect that and possibly forego that component. Having a plan B (like alternative locations or activities that achieve similar goals without infringing on non-consenting communities) is wise. This underscores that FPIC is taken seriously – consent cannot be presumed, and the program is prepared to respect self-determination even if it means scaling back or redesigning parts of the project.

Theme 5.1: Non-conversion of natural forests and other natural ecosystems

Objective: *Ensure that REDD+ actions are **consistent with the conservation of natural forests and other natural ecosystems**, and that REDD+ is not used to justify the **conversion of natural forests** to other land uses (such as plantations or agriculture).*

In other words, the REDD+ program must protect natural forests and biodiversity and avoid any activity that would destroy or degrade them. This objective comes directly from Cancun Safeguard (e), which mandates that REDD+ actions **not be used for the conversion of natural forests, but instead to incentivize the protection and conservation of natural forests and their ecosystem services**. The safeguard recognizes the risk that an ill-guided program might, for example, replace natural forests with fast-growing plantations under the guise of increasing carbon stocks. Thus, Theme 5.1 enshrines a “no conversion” rule and aligns REDD+ with broader forest conservation goals. It also ties into international commitments like the **NY Declaration on Forests** and SDG 15 (Life on Land) which call for ending deforestation. Essentially, the REDD+ program should contribute to **net forest conservation**: protecting existing natural forests, restoring degraded forests, and not inadvertently causing loss of natural ecosystems elsewhere.

Structure/Process – Expectations for Jurisdictions

Participants should have in place laws, policies and procedures to prevent natural forest conversion and promote forest conservation. Key expectations include:

- **Clear Definition of “Natural Forest” and Ecosystems:** The jurisdiction must define what counts as “**natural forests**” and **other natural ecosystems**, distinct from plantations or other land types. A clear, operational definition is critical to enforce no-conversion. This often involves criteria like native species composition, degree of human modification, and ecosystem function. For example, *natural forest* might be defined as a forest area composed predominantly of native tree species, with species composition and structure not significantly altered by human activities, and not established through planting. Plantations (even if woody) should be classified separately. This definition should be embedded in REDD+ policy documents or regulations, and ideally harmonized with national forest definitions (e.g. used in national forestry law or FREL/FRL setting). Essentially, without a definition, “conversion” can be loophole-ridden, so having it explicitly in relevant laws or policy is expected.
- **Legal/Policy Prohibition on Conversion in REDD+:** There should be laws, policies or directives stating that **REDD+ activities shall not cause conversion of natural forests or other natural ecosystems**. This may be contained in their national REDD+ strategy. For example, a national REDD+ strategy might say “No REDD+ activities will involve the clearing of natural forests for the establishment of plantations or other land uses.” If such a statement is not explicitly available, the Participant should demonstrate that their selection of REDD+ actions inherently avoids conversion (e.g. they focus on reducing deforestation, restoration of degraded lands, improving forest management – none of which entail purposeful forest clearance). In addition, existing **forest protection laws** can also be used to comply with this indicator: for instance, if the country has a law banning conversion of primary forests or requiring environmental impact assessments for land-use change, the REDD+ program should align with and enforce those laws in its area. Essentially, there must be a *no-net-loss of natural forests* approach built into how REDD+ is governed. If the program includes any plantation forestry components (e.g. timber plantations for livelihoods), policies must ensure these are established only on non-forest lands (e.g. degraded lands or grasslands). Auditors will expect to see that the Participant’s guiding documents commit to the conservation principle in line with Cancun Safeguard (e).

- **Spatial Identification and Baseline of Natural Forests:** A structural measure is having a **baseline map of natural forests and other critical ecosystems** in the REDD+ accounting area. Participants should map out where the remaining natural forests are (and other ecosystems like wetlands if relevant) as of the start of the program. Many countries have forest cover maps distinguishing natural forest vs. plantations (perhaps using remote sensing, satellite imagery analysis). This map is used to monitor that these areas are not being converted. It might also include classification of forests (primary, secondary natural forest, etc.). The Participant should also identify *other natural ecosystems* (the Cancun safeguard is often interpreted to include non-forest ecosystems like natural grasslands if relevant to REDD+ scope). By having these areas delineated, the program can specifically protect them. For subnational Participants, this might involve a provincial forest inventory or use of national data downscaled. **Participatory mapping** can augment this – working with communities to mark sacred forests or old-growth patches ensures fine-scale knowledge is captured. In structure terms, the program should treat these maps as reference: any project proposal or land use change is checked against whether it would affect mapped natural forests. This ties into the next point on procedures to vet activities.
- **Screening Procedures for REDD+ Activities:** Many countries have legal or policy provisions that clearly mandates against conversion of natural forests, and to ensure this jurisdiction should have a screening or approval process that checks proposed activities (including REDD+ actions) for compliance with the no-conversion rule. For example, if a REDD action encompasses tree planting, a screening criterion must be: is the planting site currently natural forest or other natural ecosystem? If yes, that action is not permitted (or must be reformulated as restoration rather than conversion). There may be a requirement that all proposed land-use changes (including under REDD+) undergo an environmental impact assessment (EIA) where any risk of conversion flags a stop. A “**conversion check**” should be ingrained in all project planning. This process might be documented in the REDD+ Strategy and/or REDD+ implementation plan: e.g., “All REDD+ actions will be assessed to ensure they do not involve conversion of natural forests to other land uses.” If any risk is identified that action is redesigned or dropped. This systematic check is a key structural/process measure to operationalize the no-conversion commitment.
- **Legal Protection and Management of Forests:** The jurisdiction should also have legal/policy provisions to **protect natural forests**– at least for the REDD+ accounting area. This could be via declaring new protected areas, strengthening enforcement in existing protected zones, or recognizing community conservation areas. Cancun Safeguard (e) says use REDD+ to incentivize protection, so Participants are expected to have measures (including REDD+ actions per se) like forest moratoria, improved forest law enforcement, or community forestry agreements that secure these forests. If the jurisdiction hasn’t already, they should consider updating land-use plans to zone remaining natural forests as conservation or sustainable management zones where conversion is not allowed. Allocating budget or programs for forest management (patrols, fire control, etc.) is part of this structure/process indicator too – ensuring that protecting forests is not just on paper but in practice. Many countries integrate REDD+ with initiatives use the **High Conservation Value (HCV) approach**, identifying high-biodiversity or high-carbon forests that must be conserved. Meeting this indicator might include listing such HCV areas and stating commitments not to convert them. Ultimately, the underlying expectation is **policy coherence**: REDD+ should reinforce, not undermine, forest conservation laws. For example, if the country has joined the Bonn Challenge or made a zero-deforestation pledge, the REDD+ program’s rules should clearly advance those commitments.
- **Monitoring System for Deforestation and Conversion:** A strong measure to implement this structural/policy indicator includes a **forest monitoring and reporting system** (likely part of the NFMS – National Forest Monitoring System) capable of detecting any deforestation or land-use change of natural forests in near-real-time. The program should use remote sensing (satellite imagery

analysis) and ground checks to monitor forest cover. By having this system, the Participant can **quickly identify if any natural forest area is being lost** within the REDD+ program boundary. The jurisdiction should define roles: which agency or team monitors, how often (e.g. annually or more frequently), and procedures when change is detected. For instance, if the monitoring system picks up an alert that a patch of forest has been cleared, what happens? Ideally, a rapid response: investigation on ground, determine cause (illegal logging, encroachment, etc.), and take action (enforcement, replanting) to prevent further loss and remedy if possible. Also, the monitoring results feed into reporting for safeguards: the Participant should report area of natural forest at start vs. current and show *no conversion*. Essentially, an MRV (Measurement, Reporting, Verification) system is in place to ensure **accountability** to the no-conversion commitment.

- **Alignment with Land-Use Planning:** The Participant's land-use planning processes (like any land allocation, permitting, or development planning in the region) must be aligned such that **no new licenses or permits are issued that would lead to forest conversion** in the REDD+ accounting area. For example, a province participating in ART should not at the same time be licensing large-scale agriculture that clears forest – that would be contradictory. So structurally, the jurisdiction could have a directive or cross-sector committee to review and veto any such plans. If high-level plans (like a national agricultural expansion plan) foresee using forest lands, there should be a reconciliation process to avoid overlap with REDD+ conservation areas. Perhaps the REDD+ program has mapped “no-go” areas for conversion and communicated these to other ministries. The presence of a multi-agency REDD+ coordination body can help – ensuring agriculture, mining, etc., are aware that under the REDD+ commitments, certain forests are off-limits. In effect, the jurisdiction should “seal off” natural forests from conflicting land-use decisions. If necessary, this might involve compensatory measures: e.g. if not converting forest means some economic opportunity is foregone, perhaps REDD+ benefits help offset that to local stakeholders. But the bottom line is any REDD+ action in the REDD+ accounting area that would convert a natural forest area should be halted or rerouted. A clear sign of structure here would be official letters or decrees that, say, suspend new agricultural concessions in remaining natural forests (some countries have done such moratoria as part of REDD+ readiness).

Outcome – Expectations for Jurisdictions

The outcomes should demonstrate that **no natural forests or natural ecosystems have been converted or degraded as a result of REDD+**, and ideally that natural forest protection has been enhanced. Specific outcome indicators and evidence include:

- **No Reduction in Natural Forest Area Due to REDD+:** The most direct outcome is that **natural forest area remains stable or increases** over the program period, and no instances of conversion to non-forest land uses occurred in the REDD+ accounting area. Auditors will look at forest cover data: if at baseline there were X hectares of natural forest, at verification those X (or more) are still intact (minus any allowable natural losses). Especially, there should be **zero cases of intentional conversion** (e.g. clearing forest to establish a plantation or other activity under the REDD+ program). If some deforestation did happen (due to illegal activity or external factors), the Participant should show it was not part of the REDD+ strategy and ideally that they responded to counter it. In outcome terms, *public institutions implemented REDD+ without converting forests*. If, for example, new plantations were established, outcome evidence must show they were on non-forest lands (degraded land, pastures, etc.). A quantitative outcome indicator might be “Hectares of natural forest converted: 0” as reported. Auditors may cross-verify by sampling a few areas: e.g., if they know a plantation project happened, they’ll check the before/after land cover. The expected result is always that no natural forest was lost. In fact, because REDD+ aims to reduce deforestation, an ideal outcome is **reduced deforestation rates** compared to baseline. So not only did REDD+ not cause

conversion, it actively *prevented* conversion that would have happened without the program (reflected in emission reductions).

- **Natural Forests Under Improved Protection/Management:** An outcome of successful implementation is that **natural forests are better protected or managed** than before. This could be evidenced by new protected areas declared, increased patrolling efforts, community guardianship programs, or legal protections enacted during the program. For example, if a certain expanse of forest was previously unprotected and seeing encroachment, the REDD+ program might have helped designate it as a conservation area or community forest with secure management – outcome evidence: that forest is now under a protection regime and encroachment has stopped. Another sign: **no new encroachment or plantations** inside natural forests. If earlier, some conversion for agriculture was happening, maybe outcome is that it halted because of alternatives provided (like intensifying agriculture outside forests). Reports or remote sensing might show stable forest boundaries with no new clearings along the edges (where previously forest frontier was receding). Also, biodiversity indicators can reflect this: for instance, wildlife returning or fewer signs of logging. This theme overlaps with biodiversity (Theme 5.2) but specifically on forest cover: one can point to **areas that were at risk of deforestation now safeguarded**. The outcome might be qualitative: statements like “Government reports zero illegal logging incidents in REDD+ accounting area in the past year, as opposed to several before, indicating improved protection.” The overarching narrative should be that **REDD+ drove a conservation outcome** – not just avoided harm, but actively secured forests.
- **No REDD+-driven Plantation Replacing Forest:** Auditors will check that any tree planting or agricultural intensification promoted by REDD+ did **not come at the expense of natural forests**. The outcome confirmation is that **all REDD+ afforestation/ reforestation occurred on non-forest lands** (e.g. degraded lands, shrublands, ex-agricultural land) and **no natural forests were cleared to “make space”** for presumably higher carbon systems. For example, if the program includes an agroforestry component, outcome evidence should show it was implemented on farmers’ fields or degraded land, not by clearing existing forest to plant fruit trees. Outcome can be demonstrated by maps: showing new plantations (if any) overlay with prior land cover classified as non-forest. Or by statistics: e.g. “0 ha of natural forest converted to plantation; all 1,000 ha of new plantations were on grassland areas.” Essentially, **no perverse incentives** played out where someone might cut forest to then get benefits for planting trees (the program should have explicitly forbidden that, and outcome confirms it didn’t happen).
- **Maintenance of Ecosystem Services:** As Cancun (e) also mentions ecosystem services, an outcome is that **ecosystem services from natural forests are maintained or enhanced**. This can be inferred from the forest cover stability – intact forests continue to provide water regulation, soil protection, pollination, etc. Some programs might monitor specific services: for example, stable river flow in a watershed because forests weren’t cut. Or communities reporting that after REDD+ they still have access to forest products and environmental benefits because the forest wasn’t diminished (in fact maybe improved). If any baseline data on ecosystem services exist (e.g. water quality, incidence of erosion), outcome should ideally show no deterioration. This outcome is often qualitative but important to note – not only are the forests there, but their *function* is preserved, which was a safeguard intent (“conservation of... ecosystem services”).
- **Reduced Deforestation Leakage (Spatially):** We want to see that conservation in the REDD+ accounting area did not simply push deforestation to other areas (this is directly addressed in Safeguard (g) Theme 7.1, but also relevant here as a reality check of forest conservation). A positive outcome is if overall deforestation in the jurisdiction or country decreased, not just inside the program boundary. But specifically for theme 5.1: within the accounting area, no internal leakage pockets appear. If, say, one zone’s deforestation dropped but another zone’s rose, auditors will investigate if any REDD+ action inadvertently caused that. The ideal outcome is **uniform or**

targeted protection so that such displacement didn't occur (or was minimal and addressed).

Essentially, forest conservation under the program should be **additional and comprehensive** rather than shifting problems around. The Participant might provide analysis showing deforestation rates in surrounding regions also went down or at least did not spike because of REDD+ (that analysis pertains more to Theme 7.1, but it's relevant to confirm the integrity of forest conservation outcome).

- **High Conservation Value (HCV) Forests Preserved:** If applicable, any identified **high conservation value or primary forests remain intact**. Outcome evidence could highlight that primary forests (those never logged or of high biodiversity) saw zero loss. Some programs measure forest degradation too – an outcome could be that **forest degradation (e.g. from logging or fire) was reduced** in natural forests, not just outright deforestation. For example, if previously there was selective logging in natural forests, the program might have curbed illegal logging, so forests are healthier (this overlaps with improved management mentioned above).

In summary, the outcome is a *net positive or at least no negative impact* on natural forests. REDD+ implementation led to **no instances of the safeguard being violated (no conversion)** and ideally a demonstrable conservation success (like reduced deforestation rate by X% against baseline, number of hectares of forest that would have been lost but weren't).

Implementation Guidance

To meet Theme 5.1, jurisdictions should implement practical measures such as:

- **Enforce “No Conversion” from Day One:** Make it clear to all REDD+ implementing entities (government agencies, project developers, communities) that **clearing natural forests is off-limits**. Issue a **policy note or directive** at program outset: e.g., “All REDD+ activities must avoid any conversion or degradation of natural forests; any proposal involving clearing or replacing natural ecosystems will be rejected.” Communicate this also to communities and local governments so everyone knows the ground rule. This may involve training local project managers on identifying natural forests vs. degraded land so they don't accidentally plan an activity in the wrong area. If the jurisdiction has a lot of secondary forests or degraded forests, clarify what is allowed (e.g. restoration and enrichment planting *within* forests is fine, but not clearing them outright).
- **Promote Reforestation on Degraded Lands:** Direct the REDD+ program's tree planting or forestry enhancements towards **degraded lands or non-forest lands** to both boost carbon stocks and adhere to no-conversion. This means identifying areas such as deforested scrublands, abandoned agricultural fields, or degraded secondary forest land with low canopy cover, as priority sites for reforestation or agroforestry. By doing this, you **create carbon sinks without harming existing forests**. For instance, if communities want to establish fruit tree orchards as part of livelihoods, encourage doing so on **idle lands** rather than clearing any bush or forest. Provide incentives or technical support for using degraded lands (they may need more preparation or enrichment to be arable or plantable – incorporate that in project design). This approach also yields co-benefits: restoring degraded lands can reduce pressure on natural forests by providing alternate resources (fuelwood plantations on degraded lands can spare natural forest wood). Document success stories: e.g., “The project planted 1000 ha of trees on former pasture – turning unproductive land into carbon sequestering agroforests, with no encroachment on natural forests.” These examples reinforce the viability of avoiding conversion while still increasing forest cover.
- **Implement Strong Forest Protection Measures:** As part of REDD+ implementation, allocate effort and resources to **actively protect existing natural forests**. This could involve establishing or strengthening forest patrols (community rangers or forest guards) to deter illegal logging or

encroachment. Introduce or support community-based forest monitoring where local people report any unauthorized activities. Technology-aided monitoring can be used too: e.g., use satellite alert systems and send out response teams when alerts show possible clearing. If the area is large, prioritize hotspots of past deforestation for intensive monitoring. The REDD+ program might fund new guard posts, boundary demarcation (putting clear markers or signs indicating protected status), and awareness campaigns in local communities about the value of keeping the forest intact (to build local constituency for conservation). Where possible, involve law enforcement and forest authorities to crack down on outside actors (illegal timber traders, land grabbers). If part of the REDD+ strategy is giving communities user rights or payments for protecting forests, ensure those contracts clearly forbid them from clearing the forest (which they likely do, as conditionality). Essentially, treat natural forests as *zero-tolerance zones for clearance* and operationalize that with boots on the ground and eyes in the sky. Track performance: e.g., “no new deforestation fronts emerged in protected blocks A, B, C after patrols were instituted.”

- **Address Drivers of Deforestation to Prevent Conversion:** Work on the underlying **drivers of deforestation** so that there’s less pressure to convert forests. For example, if shifting agriculture by communities was a driver, implement agroforestry or intensification programs that allow them to increase yields on existing farmland and not clear new forest (coupled with community agreements not to expand farming into forest). If illegal logging was a driver, alternative livelihood programs for loggers or tighter enforcement and market controls (like banning illegal timber trade) can remove that pressure. If plantation agriculture (e.g. oil palm or soy) is a big driver, coordinate with agricultural authorities to perhaps zone such plantations on degraded lands and enforce a ban on forest clearing for new plantations (some countries have palm oil no-deforestation policies – integrate those). **Essentially, by reducing demand for forest conversion, you uphold the safeguard.** Depending on the drivers, some concrete actions can help uphold this safeguard, such as: develop a land-use plan that clearly allocates land for agriculture expansion away from natural forests, implement a moratorium on certain commodities in forested regions, introduce efficient cookstoves or woodlots for fuel so that communities don’t resort to unsustainable wood harvesting that degrades forests (thus preventing gradual conversion). Many REDD+ programs include such driver-addressing components; tie them explicitly to safeguarding forests. Monitoring driver indicators (like agricultural yield increases, reduced illegal logging volume) can be used to show these interventions likely prevented conversion that would have happened absent REDD+.
- **Leverage Incentives for Forest Conservation:** Use the carrot as well as the stick – **incentivize communities and landholders to conserve natural forests.** REDD+ performance-based payments themselves are one incentive (if the program is structured to share carbon revenue or benefits for keeping forests). Make sure those incentives are felt locally. For example, set up a benefit-sharing mechanism where villages that successfully protect their forest patches for a year get a community reward. Or support sustainable enterprises (NTFP harvesting, ecotourism) that give economic value to standing forests. The idea is to make forests worth more alive than converted. If communities see tangible benefits (jobs as rangers, payouts, or new infrastructure) linked to forest conservation, they are less likely to clear for short-term gain. Performance contracts can be established: e.g., community conservation agreements that specify actions and benefits. By implementing these under REDD+, jurisdictions align local incentives with the no-conversion safeguard. Publicize these arrangements so that it’s widely understood that protecting forest is rewarded whereas clearing it forfeits benefits. This socio-economic approach is crucial because enforcement alone may not stop all conversion – providing alternatives and rewards completes the strategy.
- **Regular Safeguard Monitoring and Rapid Response:** Integrate a **safeguard monitoring system** that specifically tracks any sign of forest conversion and triggers a **rapid response** protocol. For instance, set thresholds: “If more than 1 hectare of natural forest loss is detected in any quarter, an investigation will be launched within X days.” Establish a Task Force or assign the REDD+

Safeguards coordinator/officer to handle these. They would verify the cause of loss (was it a fire, illegal clearing, etc.) and coordinate appropriate action (law enforcement, community mediation, replanting). Document each incident and response. Over time, the presence of this mechanism will deter would-be converters because they know it will be spotted and addressed. Also, it provides transparency: you can report, “Two minor incidents of illegal clearing (totalling 5 ha) occurred; both were detected and stopped, with reforestation underway on those 5 ha and offenders penalized.” That level of detail shows a functioning safeguard system. This ties in with Theme 7.1 (reversals and displacement risk management) – essentially treating any forest loss as a “reverse” that must be corrected or accounted for. Additionally, incorporate community reporting: empower local people to alert authorities if they witness clearing. Perhaps a hotline or community monitoring app could be part of it. Ensuring no incident goes unaddressed is key to maintaining the no-conversion norm.

- **Harmonize with Commodity and Land-Use Initiatives:** If the country or jurisdiction is involved in broader initiatives like zero-deforestation supply chains (for palm oil, cocoa, beef, etc.), **harmonize REDD+ efforts with those.** For instance, if companies have committed to no conversion for their sourcing, partner with them to enforce that on the ground. REDD+ could provide monitoring data to help companies exclude any deforestation from their operations. Conversely, leverage company presence to support community livelihoods that don’t involve deforestation (CSR programs or certification premiums). Alignment of public (REDD+) and private (sustainability commitments) strategies can create a unified front against conversion. Use these alignments as an implementation tactic: e.g., adopt the same cutoff dates or definitions as commodity standards for deforestation (if a palm oil company says no clearing of forest after 2018, ensure REDD+ likewise uses 2018 baseline for no new clearing – which it does inherently, but making it explicit helps collaborations).

Theme 5.2: Protect natural forests and other natural ecosystems, biological diversity, and ecosystem services and enhance environmental benefits

Objective: *Ensure that REDD+ implementation **protects biological diversity and ecosystem services**, and actively promotes the **conservation of natural forests and other ecosystems** beyond just carbon benefits. In practice, this means REDD+ actions should avoid harm to biodiversity (no adverse impacts on threatened species or sensitive habitats) and should ideally enhance environmental co-benefits like watershed protection, soil conservation, and climate resilience.*

This theme expands on Cancun Safeguard (c) by emphasizing the **conservation of biological diversity and ecosystem services** and not just preventing conversion.

The goal is to align REDD+ with the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) – conserving biodiversity and sustainably using ecosystem components – as well as ensuring that REDD+ generates “other environmental benefits” as noted in Cancun. In other words, beyond carbon emission reductions, REDD+ should yield positive outcomes for wildlife, flora, and ecological processes. This theme also resonates with international calls for nature-based solutions that address climate change while bolstering biodiversity (e.g., the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework’s integration with climate action).

Structure/Process – Expectations for Jurisdictions

Participants should have in place laws, policies and procedures to integrate **biodiversity and ecosystem service considerations** into REDD+ planning and have measures to safeguard and enhance these values. Key expectations include:

- **Biodiversity Assessment and Baseline:** The jurisdiction should have conducted or compiled a **biodiversity assessment** of the REDD+ program accounting area, identifying key species (especially endangered or endemic ones), critical habitats, and high conservation value areas. A baseline of biodiversity conditions – e.g., lists of species present, conservation status, and any known pressures – is expected. This might be part of the national REDD+ readiness studies or an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment. For instance, mapping of **High Conservation Value (HCV) forests** or **Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs)** within the jurisdiction provides a spatial guide to where special care is needed. If the country has a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), the REDD+ strategy/plan should reference it and align with its priorities (e.g., protecting certain ecoregions or species). Essentially, biodiversity should be **recognized in the REDD+ planning** – not treated as incidental. The presence of a biodiversity baseline allows later monitoring of impacts.
- **Integration of Biodiversity into REDD+ Strategy:** The REDD+ strategy or REDD+ implementation plan should explicitly include **goals or actions for biodiversity conservation**. This could manifest as strategic objectives like “conserve intact forest habitats of high biodiversity” or specific policies like “no REDD+ activity will be undertaken in protected areas unless it strengthens their protection”. There might be **co-benefit targets** (e.g., number of hectares of critical habitat maintained or number of endangered species populations benefiting). The structure expects that REDD+ is not solely carbon-driven; it should incorporate biodiversity safeguards such as requiring an environmental impact screen for any intervention that could affect wildlife. If the strategy includes reforestation, it should prefer **native species and ecological restoration** rather than monocultures, for example. If enrichment planting is done, guidelines should ensure it doesn’t reduce biodiversity (e.g., don’t introduce invasive exotics). In sum, biodiversity objectives are mainstreamed in REDD+

program design – possibly via multi-sector coordination (like involving wildlife departments or environmental ministries in REDD+ planning).

- **Protection of Critical Habitats:** Jurisdictions must have measures to **protect critical habitats** (areas essential for endangered species or high ecological value) within the REDD+ program area. Practically, this means if, say, an important orangutan habitat or bird nesting ground lies in the forest, the REDD+ program will prioritize its preservation. If any REDD+ action is near a critical habitat, the jurisdiction should have clear procedures to enforce *mitigation hierarchies*: avoid impacts first, if unavoidable, minimize and mitigate, and as a last resort offset (though in general, avoid is key). The Participant might have identified **High Conservation Value 1-4 areas** (which cover species diversity, ecosystems, etc.) and pledged not to negatively affect them. The structural expectation is robust enough that one could say: *the REDD+ program treats biodiversity-rich areas as no-go zones for harmful activities and actively works to keep them healthy.*
- **Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for REDD+ Actions:** There should be a process to **screen and assess environmental impacts** of REDD+ interventions, especially those that might affect biodiversity. Many REDD+ actions (like patrolling forests, community agroforestry) have low negative impact, but some (like ecotourism facilities) could disturb wildlife if not planned well. Jurisdictions requiring an **Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA)** or similar review for any significant on-the-ground activities is expected to meet this indicator. For instance, if the program planned to build fire control access roads or dams for peatland rewetting, an EIA should evaluate potential biodiversity effects and propose mitigation (wildlife crossings, timing construction outside breeding seasons, etc.). Even things like extensive replanting could warrant ecological assessment to ensure species mix and densities align with ecosystem restoration best practices. In practice, the Participant might apply the existing national EIA regulations for relevant REDD+ actions.
- **Monitoring of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Co-Benefits:** Jurisdictions would be expected to have in place **monitoring biodiversity and ecosystem service indicators** throughout REDD+ implementation. While not as formal or rigorous as carbon MRV, there should be some system: perhaps periodic surveys of indicator species, community reporting on wildlife sightings or resource availability, or remote sensing of forest cover quality (like fragmentation indices as a proxy for habitat integrity). The Participant might have identified a few **key indicators**— e.g., population trends of flagship species (orangutan nests, tiger camera trap rates, bird diversity indices), or condition of ecosystems (water quality in forest streams, extent of intact wetlands). Integration with existing national biodiversity monitoring (if any) is helpful. For example, if the country does regular wildlife censuses or has an alert system for human-wildlife conflict, the program could use that data to gauge if REDD+ is helping or harming. Additionally, **ecosystem service monitoring** might include measuring flow in rivers for watershed services or tracking harvests of non-timber forest products by communities to ensure they're sustained or improved. The Jurisdiction should assign responsibility: maybe the wildlife department or academic partners are engaged to do biodiversity monitoring in REDD+ zones. The existence of a **Biodiversity Monitoring Plan** (even basic) would be ideal. If none exists, auditors might raise it as a gap to address, because it's hard to demonstrate protection without monitoring.
- **Sustainable Management of Forests:** If REDD+ involves any **forest management or utilization**, it should be done sustainably per safeguard requirements. For instance, if part of REDD+ is promoting sustainable community logging or harvesting of forest products, the jurisdiction should have **sustainable forest management (SFM) guidelines** (possibly referencing things like FSC standards or national codes) that ensure biodiversity is not significantly harmed (e.g., retention of seed trees, protecting riparian zones, limiting harvest rates, etc.). Under Cancun (c), REDD+ is explicitly not just conservation but also “and their ecosystem services” implying sustainable use where appropriate.

So, an expectation under this indicator is any utilization sub-component has an associated management plan that safeguards regeneration and species diversity. If grazing or agroforestry is allowed in forests, guidelines should prevent overuse. This falls under environment management frameworks. If the jurisdiction has **certified forest areas or community forestry** programs, tying those into REDD+ is good: for instance, only carbon credits from areas managed to high standards (no clear-cuts, maintaining habitat complexity). Having a policy like “REDD+ will adhere to Sustainable Forest Management principles (as per national law or int’l best practice)” is a relevant structural commitment.

Outcome – Expectations for Jurisdictions

The outcomes should show that **REDD+ implementation has had no negative impacts on biodiversity, and preferably that it has contributed positively to conservation**. Key outcomes and evidence include:

- **No Significant Harm to Biodiversity:** There have been **no reports or evidence of biodiversity loss or ecosystem degradation caused by REDD+ activities**. For example, no species have been driven to decline or extirpation due to the program, no critical habitats have been damaged, and no invasive species were introduced. If environmental impact monitoring was done, it should show that populations of key wildlife are stable or increasing, not decreasing. For instance, if the program operates in tiger habitat, one might expect poaching to have reduced due to better patrolling, hence tiger numbers are stable or slightly up – that’s a positive outcome. If any negative incidents occurred (say, a controlled burning for fuel reduction got out of hand and affected more forest than intended), the outcome should be that it was minor, mitigated, and did not lead to long-term biodiversity loss. Essentially, **the REDD+ program did not undermine the natural ecosystem health**; it maintained it. Auditors will look for any “collateral damage” – finding none (or minimal, promptly corrected) is a mark of success.
- **Conservation of High-Value Areas:** Outcomes should show that **areas of high biodiversity value remained protected or even got enhanced protection**. For example, if the program encompassed a national park or KBA, outcome is that the park’s integrity was upheld (perhaps even improved with more staffing). One might cite that “forest cover in critical elephant corridors remained continuous with no new fragmentation” or “the nesting success of a key bird species improved after REDD+ reduced logging disturbances.” Qualitative evidence could be testimonies like park rangers saying illegal activities are down, or community members noting more wildlife sightings as hunting pressure dropped. If new protected areas were created or expanded as part of REDD+, that’s a concrete outcome – e.g., “50,000 ha of previously unprotected primary forest now designated as a conservation reserve, safeguarding numerous species.” That clearly ties REDD+ to a biodiversity gain. Another outcome metric could be **avoided biodiversity loss**: if baseline predicted that X habitat would be lost absent REDD+, and now it’s not, you effectively saved that habitat and all species within. Some programs quantify co-benefit gains (like number of IUCN Red List species benefiting from the program), which would be an outcome to highlight if available.
- **Maintenance/Improvement of Ecosystem Services:** Outcomes should indicate that **key ecosystem services have been maintained or enhanced** thanks to REDD+. For instance, if watershed protection was a goal, measurable outcomes might be stable dry-season water flow in streams or reduced sedimentation (communities downstream may report cleaner water or fewer floods). If pollination services are relevant (like forests supporting bees for crops), perhaps local farmers see consistent yields, implying pollinators are doing fine. While these links can be anecdotal, some programs do monitor things like water quality or soil erosion rates. An improvement example: “Since slash-and-burn practices reduced under REDD+, incidents of damaging wildfires dropped by 60%, improving overall forest soil moisture and reducing haze.” Or “Mangrove conservation under

REDD+ led to increased fish nursery habitat – local fish catch volumes have risen modestly.” These kinds of data or observations show the broader environmental benefits being realized.

- **Diverse Native Species Use in Reforestation:** If reforestation or enrichment planting was done, the outcome should be that **native species and diversity were prioritized**, leading to more heterogeneous forests rather than monocultures. Evidence: planting records showing a mix of indigenous tree species (vs. just exotics), or biodiversity surveys in planted areas showing return of multiple native flora and fauna (e.g., “regenerated areas now see natural regeneration of 20 additional plant species and use by wildlife like deer and birds”). If the program explicitly aimed to restore ecosystems (not just tree cover), an outcome might be that “X hectares of degraded forest now show improved structure and species composition closer to natural forest,” an indicator of success. Conversely, an absence of negative outcome: no sign that any planting scheme became invasive or reduced local genetic diversity. For example, sometimes fast-growing exotics can invade; here the outcome should be that didn’t happen (partly because likely none were used, per guidance).
- **Synergy with Protected Areas & Species Recovery:** Perhaps due to REDD+, **existing protected areas are better resourced and effective**, yielding outcomes like increased wildlife populations. If REDD+ channelled funds to national parks, an outcome could be, say, “patrol coverage in Park Y increased by 50%, and recent wildlife surveys indicate stabilizing populations of key species that were previously declining.” Or “the program facilitated a community conservation area where an endangered primate has its habitat; since establishment, no hunting incidents recorded, and the primate population has shown first signs of increase.” These outcomes tie directly to biodiversity conservation success stories attributable to REDD+. They may not have quantitative rigor if not thoroughly monitored, but even case studies or anecdotes can illustrate the trend. At minimum, **no worsening of conservation status** of critical areas or species in the REDD+ zone is expected, which is itself a positive given global trends.
- **Stakeholder Perceptions of Environmental Benefits:** Another outcome is that **local stakeholders perceive and appreciate environmental co-benefits** of REDD+. Communities might report that “the forest is healthier” or “we’ve noticed more birds or wild animals now that we’re protecting the forest.” These qualitative outcomes are often gathered in participatory monitoring or feedback sessions. They demonstrate that REDD+ is delivering tangible ecosystem benefits recognized on the ground, which also helps sustain support. So far, outcomes should be largely positive or neutral on these aspects, and any negatives minor and mitigated.

Implementation Guidance

To achieve Theme 5.2, jurisdictions should implement measures such as:

- **Align REDD+ with National Biodiversity Strategy:** Ensure that the REDD+ program explicitly supports the country’s **National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP)** or similar frameworks. In practical terms, map REDD+ interventions against NBSAP targets – for example, if the NBSAP aims to increase protected area coverage to 17% by protecting under-represented ecoregions, use REDD+ finance or projects to help create protected areas in those ecoregions (especially forested ones). Or if NBSAP calls for species conservation plans (say for elephants or orangutans), integrate those into REDD+ by focusing activities on key habitats of those species. **Institutionalize collaboration:** have biodiversity experts involved in REDD+ planning (e.g., on technical working groups). By aligning, you avoid siloed efforts – the climate team and biodiversity team work in tandem. For instance, if forest carbon plots are set up, maybe concurrently set up biodiversity monitoring plots nearby, leveraging field efforts for both carbon and biodiversity monitoring. Or during REDD+ stakeholder consultations, include topics about wildlife and

ecosystem services to gather local knowledge on biodiversity (communities can identify culturally important species or areas to prioritize). Essentially, treat REDD+ as a tool to *implement biodiversity policy* in forest areas. This will guide the selection of project sites (e.g., prioritize high-biodiversity forests for REDD+ conservation, which typically also have high carbon so it's win-win). Document these linkages – e.g., in REDD+ strategy say “this contributes to Aichi Target X or GBF Target Y.” That way, implementers constantly keep biodiversity in scope.

- Develop and Enforce Wildlife Protection Measures:** As part of REDD+, ramp up **anti-poaching and wildlife protection** efforts in the project areas. Many threats to biodiversity (especially charismatic megafauna) come from poaching or illegal wildlife trade, which might not directly be addressed by carbon-focused actions. Recognizing this, allocate some resources to **wildlife rangers, community wildlife monitoring, and awareness campaigns**. For example, train community members as “forest guardians” not only to check deforestation but also to report snares or illegal hunting. Coordinate with wildlife authorities to conduct patrols focusing on key species’ habitats. If REDD+ provides performance payments to communities, include conditions about protecting wildlife (some agreements have clauses like no hunting of endangered species). Introduce alternative protein or income sources if bushmeat hunting is an issue – e.g., assist communities in livestock rearing or fish ponds to reduce reliance on hunting. Conduct **awareness workshops** on the importance of biodiversity and laws protecting it, as part of REDD+ community engagement. Also, if human-wildlife conflict arises (a possible side effect of increased wildlife due to conservation), have plans in place: e.g., crop protection techniques, compensation schemes – being proactive prevents backlash against conservation. By implementing these measures, the program ensures it’s not just preserving trees, but also the fauna that lives in them.
- Use Native and Diverse Species for Reforestation:** In any tree planting or forest restoration activity, emphasize **native species and high diversity planting**. Develop or consult a list of native tree species for each forest type (with input from botanists or local knowledge). Instead of monoculture, design mixed-species planting schemes that mimic natural forest structure. For example, if restoring a degraded rainforest patch, plant a mix of pioneer natives (for quick canopy) along with slower-growing climax species, fruit-bearing trees for wildlife, etc., aiming for tens of species if possible. Avoid exotic or invasive species – if an exotic is considered (perhaps for quick erosion control or economic reason), carefully evaluate its invasive risk and have a phase-out plan once natives establish. If communities desire certain species for livelihood (like rubber or fruit trees), integrate them in an agroforestry design around core conservation areas, not replacing native forest in core zones. **Collect seeds from local forests** to maintain genetic stock adapted to the area; set up community nurseries focusing on indigenous seedlings. Provide training to planters on planting techniques that enhance survival and growth of a variety of species. Over time, this yields a more resilient forest that supports more biodiversity. Document the planting plans: e.g., how many species and seedlings of each were planted – showing it’s not a single-species approach. Possibly engage ecologists to guide these restoration efforts – maybe partner with a university to design scientifically-sound restoration plots (some REDD+ programs have experimental plots to test what species mix works best). This ensures restoration is *restorative* for the ecosystem, not just adding biomass. And as outcome, one can measure that e.g. after 5 years, natural regeneration of other species is happening under the planted ones, etc.
- Establish Conservation Zones and Buffer Zones:** Within relevant REDD+ program areas, implement **land-use zoning** that explicitly sets aside areas for strict conservation and others for sustainable use, to manage human impact on biodiversity. For instance, identify the core intact forests or critical habitats and designate them as “no disturbance” zones (except maybe controlled eco-tourism). Surround those with buffer zones where limited sustainable activities (like selective logging, NTFP collection, agroforestry) are allowed under management plans. Mark these zones on maps and communicate them to communities and enforcement personnel. Use REDD+ incentives to

encourage compliance: e.g., communities agree not to farm/hunt in core zones and get benefits in return (like intensification support on lands outside). In community forests, create microzones – e.g., “this valley is a sacred grove, no cutting; that ridge is for fuelwood, regulated cutting.” These finer plans ensure biodiversity refuges remain undisturbed. They mirror the **protected area buffer concept**: protecting inside and managing edge zones to reduce pressure. If the REDD+ program area doesn’t have formal protected areas, the REDD+ program can create de facto ones through community agreements or local ordinances. If formal protected areas exist, work to strengthen their buffer zones via community projects to reduce park-people conflicts. Use **geospatial tools** to plan these zones, overlapping biodiversity maps and community use maps to find solutions. Implementation could involve demarcating boundaries on the ground (signboards, boundary markers) and raising awareness: “beyond this river is conservation area – no agriculture beyond here.” By physically and institutionally zoning, you help concentrate human use where it’s less damaging and keep core habitats intact.

- **Promote Sustainable Livelihoods that Reduce Pressure:** Introduce and support **sustainable livelihood activities** that both provide economic benefits and rely on maintaining healthy ecosystems, thereby incentivizing biodiversity protection. Examples: eco-tourism (wildlife viewing tours, homestays for birdwatchers), sustainable harvesting of non-timber forest products (honey, medicinal plants, rattan) under management plans, or value-added processing of such products to increase income without increasing harvest quantity. Also, **forest-friendly agriculture** practices: shade-grown coffee or cocoa under native trees can encourage keeping forest cover and provides habitat. Aquaculture or improved fisheries management can take pressure off over-hunting of wildlife. Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) schemes beyond carbon – e.g., water utilities paying communities to maintain upland forests for water quality – can be instituted. The idea is to tie local benefits to conservation outcomes. If people earn from intact forest (tourism jobs, sustainable harvest fees, PES), they become stewards. Provide technical training and possibly micro-grants or market linkages to get these enterprises running. For example, train villagers as para-guides for a community forest that has unique wildlife; help them form an association and market tourism. Or assist in certifying a product (like sustainably harvested wild honey) so it fetches a premium price. These activities appear more under social co-benefits, but they also directly help biodiversity by **creating economic reliance on conservation success**. Monitor uptake and success of such livelihoods – if alternative incomes grow, one can correlate that with reduced hunting or deforestation. Essentially, solve the “why might people harm biodiversity” problem by giving them other opportunities. This is often key: without addressing subsistence or income needs, pure enforcement may fail in the long run.
- **Monitor and Share Biodiversity Results:** Set up a **biodiversity monitoring program** (even if modest) and share the results with stakeholders and decision-makers to reinforce the value of safeguarding biodiversity. For example, involve community members or local students in wildlife monitoring (camera traps, bird counts, etc.) and have them present findings at community meetings or in reports. When communities see, for example, that “we recorded 2 more hornbill nests this year,” it builds pride and buy-in that their efforts are yielding outcomes. Similarly, sharing with national policymakers that “the REDD+ area has become a refuge for Species X and Y” can attract further support or funding (maybe leveraging species-focused programs). Use simple indicators that are meaningful locally – e.g., number of fish in streams via simple catch surveys or presence of pollinators in farms (like farmers notice more bees). Train community “eco-guards” not just in patrol but also basic ecological data collection (some REDD+ initiatives equip communities with smartphone apps to record wildlife sightings). Then **publicize success stories**: e.g., a brochure or local radio segment: “Our forest now has elephants coming back – a sign of a healthy forest, thanks to collective protection.” This not only helps maintain community motivation but also can garner external recognition (maybe an award or media coverage) that further incentivizes maintaining high standards. Moreover, such data can feed into national reporting for CBD or SDGs, showing how climate funds can deliver biodiversity benefits – a powerful narrative internationally.

- **Adaptive Management for Biodiversity:** Employ an **adaptive management approach**: if monitoring or feedback indicates any negative trends for biodiversity, adjust REDD+ actions and associated measures to address them. For example, if it's observed that a particular species is declining because even a low level of offtake is unsustainable, tighten restrictions or provide substitutes. Or if human-wildlife conflict emerges (e.g., more elephants mean more crop raids), implement measures like crop guarding or chili fences to mitigate conflicts, preventing retaliatory harm to wildlife or souring community attitudes. If some planted species in restoration aren't doing well or perhaps attracting pests, switch them out for more suitable natives. Adaptation might also mean scaling up things that work: if camera trapping finds a previously unknown population of a rare animal in part of the forest, maybe concentrate more patrols there or propose making it a strict conservation zone. Essentially, **use the information gleaned to fine-tune actions**. This shows a commitment to continuous improvement in safeguarding biodiversity.

Theme 5.3: Enhancement of Social Benefits

Objective: *Ensure that REDD+ implementation delivers tangible social benefits and an equitable distribution of REDD+ benefits, with specific inclusion of women, youth, and other vulnerable groups.*

This safeguard theme corresponds to Cancun Safeguard (e), which goes beyond a “do no harm” approach and calls for actively “enhancing other social and environmental benefits” from REDD+ actions. In practice, this means REDD+ programs should not only avoid negative social impacts but also contribute positively to poverty reduction, livelihood improvement, and social well-being in forest communities. The Paris Agreement reinforces this intent by urging Parties to respect and promote human rights, the rights of indigenous peoples, gender equality, women’s empowerment, and intergenerational equity in all climate actions.

Theme 5.3’s objective is therefore to leverage REDD+ as a vehicle for “doing good” on social fronts – improving the lives of forest-dependent people and delivering co-benefits such as better incomes, education, health, and empowerment – while ensuring that these benefits are shared inclusively among all stakeholder groups (especially those traditionally marginalized).

Structure/Process – Expectations for Jurisdictions

Participants should have in place laws, policies and procedures **to identify, enhance, and share REDD+ benefits**. Key expectations include:

- **Policy Commitment to Co-Benefits:** Clear policy statements or program objectives that REDD+ strategies aim to deliver social benefits (e.g. improved local livelihoods). For instance, the national REDD+ strategy should explicitly mention goals like poverty reduction in forest communities, or gender empowerment as part of REDD+ implementation. This shows a top-level commitment to go beyond carbon.
- **Benefit Sharing Mechanisms:** Established **mechanisms for equitable benefit-sharing** of REDD+ proceeds or benefits with indigenous peoples, local communities, and other stakeholders. This could be a benefit-sharing plan or fund that allocates a portion of carbon revenue to community projects, or policies ensuring communities gain improved services (health, education, infrastructure) as a result of REDD+. The structure should define *who* is eligible for benefits, *how* benefits are calculated and distributed, and include measures to ensure transparency and participation in these decisions (e.g. community committees or legal agreements for benefit sharing).

The plan should cover both **monetary benefits** (e.g. REDD+ revenue shares, grants, performance bonuses) and **non-monetary benefits** (e.g. community projects, land tenure security, capacity-building, improved services), reflecting a comprehensive approach to social enhancement. It is important that the BSM/BSP is developed **through a participatory process**, identifying the needs and priorities of different groups (women, youth, indigenous peoples, local communities, etc.) so that benefits are aligned with local development aspirations.

- **Integration with Development Plans:** Processes to integrate REDD+ actions with broader **sustainable development and conservation programs**. REDD+ is not a standalone effort – it is coordinated with national or subnational development plans (e.g. poverty alleviation programs). For example, if a jurisdiction has a rural development or green growth strategy, REDD+ interventions should be aligned so that they contribute to those socio-economic goals (like job creation or improved natural resource management). Evidence may include MoUs or coordination committees

between the REDD+ program and agencies for rural development, agriculture, or social welfare to ensure benefits are delivered in tandem.

- **Monitoring and Reporting Systems:** A system to **monitor, measure, and report on non-carbon benefits** over time. Jurisdictions should be developing indicators for key social benefits (e.g. number of households with improved income from REDD+ activities) and have a plan or baseline to track these. The presence of surveys, or periodic social impact assessments would indicate the jurisdiction is structurally prepared to assess outcomes in this theme.

Outcome – Expectations for Jurisdictions

Over time, jurisdictions need to show **tangible positive outcomes for people** resulting from REDD+. Auditors should find evidence that REDD+ implementation is *in fact* delivering the promised benefits (or well on its way to doing so). Key outcomes and indicators include:

- **Improved Livelihoods and Well-Being:** Demonstrable enhancements in the socio-economic conditions of communities participating in or affected by REDD+. For example, records or case studies showing increased income levels from sustainable forest-based enterprises, new employment opportunities (forest monitoring crews, rangers, ecotourism guides, etc.), or improved access to resources (e.g. community forestry agreements granting communities more control and benefits from forests). Social outcome indicators could include the number of community projects funded by REDD+ benefits, surveys of participant households showing reduced poverty levels or food insecurity, or testimonies from community members about improved quality of life.
- **Benefit Distribution and Community Satisfaction:** Outcomes should show that benefits are not only generated but **distributed equitably**. Auditors could check if the intended beneficiaries actually received the benefits promised. For example, if the plan was to share carbon revenues, have funds been disbursed to communities or local development projects? Are there tangible outputs like new schools, clinics, or community facilities built using REDD+ funds? Stakeholder interviews can reveal whether local people feel they are better off thanks to the REDD+ program. A high level of community support or satisfaction (documented through surveys or grievance mechanisms with few complaints) is a qualitative outcome indicating the enhancement of social well-being.
- **Institutionalization of Co-Benefits:** A longer-term outcome is that the **principle of enhancing benefits becomes embedded** in how the jurisdiction manages forests. This might be evidenced by new laws or policies adopted to reinforce social and environmental goals (for example, a law establishing that a share of REDD+ proceeds must go to local communities, or integration of REDD+ benefit targets into the national development indicators). The presence of sustained funding streams (like trust funds or budget allocations) for community forestry, conservation incentives, or similar programs beyond the initial REDD+ finance period would indicate the outcomes are being sustained and scaled up.

Implementation Guidance

To effectively implement Theme 5.3, jurisdictions should take proactive steps to design and document their programs for **maximum social benefits**:

- **Identify and Prioritize Social Benefits Early:** During REDD+ planning (e.g. the REDD+ strategy or REDD+ implementation plan), conduct assessments or participatory planning to **identify potential social benefits** and those that are highest priority locally. For instance, some communities may prioritize livelihood improvements (such as agroforestry training, NTFP marketing, or jobs),

while others may prioritize ecosystem services (like reliable water supply from forest protection). Jurisdictions can use tools like social impact assessments, gender analysis, and biodiversity significance mapping to pinpoint opportunities. Document these assessments and show how their findings shape the choice of REDD+ Policies and Measures.

- **Design Benefit-Sharing and Incentive Mechanisms:** Establish clear **benefit-sharing arrangements** to redistribute REDD+ benefits in a fair and transparent way. For example, a jurisdiction could set up a benefit-sharing plan where a percentage of carbon credit revenue goes to local community funds, or provide performance-based incentives (like payments for ecosystem services) to villages that successfully reduce deforestation. Provide guidance on how benefits will reach women and marginalized groups (e.g. dedicated livelihood programs for women, or ensuring equitable representation in decision-making about fund use). Implementation may involve legal agreements (e.g. benefit-sharing contracts with communities or local governments) and establishing financial management capacity (such as community-run funds) – auditors will look for evidence of these.
- **Leverage Direct vs. Enabling Actions:** Recognize how **direct interventions** and **enabling measures** can both enhance social benefits, in different ways, and implement complementary approaches. For **direct REDD+ interventions** (like specific conservation projects, reforestation, or community forest management initiatives), build in components that directly benefit local people – e.g. a reforestation project could hire community members and share revenue from fruit or timber production, or a protected area project might include community ecotourism enterprises. For **enabling actions** (such as policy reforms or land tenure clarification), emphasize the social/environmental benefits of those reforms – e.g. a new land tenure law can secure indigenous community lands (social benefit) and thereby encourage communities to invest in forest stewardship (environmental benefit). When documenting enabling measures, explicitly describe their social benefit rationale.
- **Institutional Coordination for Benefits:** Set up **coordination mechanisms between REDD+ programs and other government agencies or initiatives** responsible for social and environmental programs. Collaboration is key to amplifying benefits. For instance, coordinate with the Ministry of Social Development or rural development programs to channel REDD+ funds into local development projects (avoiding duplication and ensuring consistency with national poverty alleviation efforts). Similarly, coordinate with wildlife or biodiversity authorities to align REDD+ with biodiversity conservation targets (perhaps co-managing conservation areas or sharing data). Regular inter-sectoral meetings or a multi-stakeholder committee that includes social development experts can help steer REDD+ toward social benefit delivery. Document these coordination efforts (TORs of committees, meeting minutes, joint plans) to show a structured process for integrating multiple objectives.
- **Monitoring, Evaluation and Adaptive Management:** Implement a plan for **monitoring social benefits** and use adaptive management to enhance them over time. This involves defining indicators, establishing baselines (e.g. initial community income levels), and then periodic data collection to gauge progress. Importantly, if monitoring finds certain benefits are not being realized as expected (for example, if a livelihood program isn't yet improving incomes, or if a conservation measure isn't benefiting biodiversity), the program should adapt – perhaps by reallocating resources, adjusting strategies, or consulting stakeholders for solutions. Showing this feedback loop in implementation (e.g. “Year 2 review showed uneven benefit distribution, so criteria were adjusted in Year 3”) is a strong sign of a robust approach under Theme 5.3.

Theme 6.1: Reversals

Objective: *Ensure that the **emission reductions and other gains achieved by REDD+ are not temporary** – they should be maintained over the long term, with mechanisms in place to prevent or address any “reversal” (loss of carbon stocks after initial gains).*

This theme corresponds to Cancun Safeguard (f), which requires “**actions to address the risks of reversals**”, i.e. to guarantee the permanence of REDD+ results.

In practice, this means a jurisdiction’s REDD+ program must be designed and implemented in a way that forest carbon sinks remain intact and protected against future threats (like illegal logging resurgences, policy rollbacks, or natural disturbances). The objective is to give confidence that climate benefits are **durable** – that forests protected or restored through REDD+ won’t simply be cleared a few years later.

Process – Expectations for Jurisdictions

Participants should have in place procedures **to assess and mitigate reversal risks**, and to respond if reversals occur. Key expectations include:

- **Reversal Risk Assessment:** A systematic **assessment of risks that could cause future emissions increases (carbon stock loss)** in the program area. Is expected that Participant to have identified the drivers and events that might lead to a reversal of REDD+ gains. This could be documented in the REDD+ implementation plan or a standalone risk assessment report. It should cover both anthropogenic risks (e.g. return of deforestation due to agricultural expansion, illegal logging, infrastructure development, loss of political support or enforcement capacity) and natural risks (fires, pests, storms exacerbated by climate change). The assessment should also evaluate the magnitude and likelihood of these risks. For example, a jurisdiction might categorize areas by fire susceptibility or highlight policy risks like an upcoming logging concession auction. This forms the basis for planning mitigation actions.
- **Permanence Measures and Buffering:** **Institutional and technical measures to ensure permanence**, often including the use of buffer reserves or contingency strategies. Under ART TREES, jurisdictions contribute a portion of their credited emission reductions to a collective buffer pool as insurance against future reversals. The jurisdiction accepts and has accounted for this requirement (e.g. evidence in the documentation that X% of credits are set aside as per the TREES risk assessment). Beyond the buffer, jurisdictions should have *domestic* permanence policies: for instance, a policy that any subprogram or project must commit to long-term maintenance of forests (often 20+ years), or legal arrangements such as conservation easements, long-term forest leases, or designating areas as permanent forest estates. The presence of an **enforcement mechanism or agreement that outlasts the crediting period** (like a 30-year community conservation agreement or a protected area designation) is a strong structural indicator.
- **Mitigation Strategies for Identified Risks:** For each major identified risk, there should be **specific strategies or processes in place to mitigate it**– evidence of concrete actions planned or underway: e.g. a fire management plan (with budgets, fire brigades, early warning systems) to address wildfire risk; alternative livelihood or crop intensification programs to reduce the risk of agricultural rebound deforestation; strong legal enforcement provisions to prevent illegal logging resurgence (e.g. anti-encroachment patrols, stiff penalties codified in law). Essentially, the jurisdiction’s REDD+ implementation plan or framework should integrate these risk mitigation actions. The expectation is that risk mitigation isn’t an afterthought but part of the design (consistent with the theme text that

risk of reversals is *integrated in design, implementation and periodic assessments* of REDD+ measures.

- **Monitoring and Early Warning Systems: A National Forest Monitoring System (NFMS) or equivalent** process must be in place to detect any reversals (i.e. significant forest loss or emission spikes) in a timely manner. This means the jurisdiction should have remote sensing and field surveillance capacities covering the REDD+ area year-over-year. Jurisdictions are expected to have an operational MRV (Measurement, Reporting, Verification) system that not only measures annual emissions but is also capable of alerting authorities to sudden forest cover changes. The process expectation is that if an area that was forest (and contributing to credits) starts getting deforested, the system flags it and triggers a response. Documents like a description of the NFMS, examples of monitoring reports, or protocols for handling detected deforestation will demonstrate compliance with this indicator.
- **Contingency and Response Plans:** Linked to monitoring, there should be **established protocols for responding to detected reversals**. Jurisdiction are expected to have a **reversal management plan** – for example, a plan that if deforestation increases beyond a certain threshold or a significant reversal event (like a large fire) occurs, the government will take defined actions: e.g. mobilize enforcement, engage communities to replant, draw from emergency funds, or adjust policies. The jurisdiction might have in place an inter-agency task force for reversals or predefined roles (who does what if a reversal is identified). Additionally, the Participant should understand the ART requirements for reporting reversals: e.g. immediate notification to the ART Secretariat and the process to have buffer credits cancelled. Having these procedures written down (perhaps in the monitoring plan or national REDD+ registry procedures) will be a sign of readiness.

Implementation Guidance

To meet Theme 6.1, jurisdictions should embed **permanence provisions and risk management practices** throughout REDD+ program design and execution:

- **Conduct a Thorough Risk Analysis:** Begin by **identifying drivers of potential reversals** and assessing their likelihood. Jurisdictions can use tools like scenario planning or existing frameworks to score and categorize risks. Typical risks to consider: changes in commodity prices (could drive deforestation back up), population or resettlement pressures, governance changes (e.g. election leading to reduced enforcement), project longevity issues (community fatigue or loss of funding), and natural disturbances. Document this analysis in the REDD+ implementation plan and/or safeguard summaries of information report. Clarity in understanding the risk landscape is the foundation for all other guidance steps.
- **Integrate Risk Mitigation into REDD+ Plans:** For each key risk, **build in mitigation measures** as part of the REDD+ implementation plan. This could entail policy actions (e.g. if agricultural expansion is a risk, implement a policy that restricts land conversion and promotes yield intensification on existing farmland), community measures (if loss of community support is a risk, ensure robust benefit-sharing as per Theme 5.3 to keep communities committed long-term), and technical measures (if fire is a risk, allocate budget for firefighting capacity and early warning systems). Make these measures explicit in program documentation. *Example:* If “weak enforcement” is a risk, the program might allocate part of REDD+ revenue to hire and train additional forest rangers or empower local forest user groups with enforcement authority – and note this as a safeguard action under permanence. By linking each risk to a concrete action (and responsible entity), the jurisdiction shows a proactive stance. Notably, many **underlying safeguards** help mitigate reversal risk: clarifying land tenure (Theme 2.3) reduces future conflict-driven deforestation, providing alternative livelihoods (Theme 5.3) reduces odds that communities revert to illegal logging, strong

stakeholder engagement (Theme 4) builds local support to prevent backsliding. Jurisdictions should highlight these synergies – indeed, best practice literature notes that measures like land tenure security, sustainable livelihoods, and good governance *greatly lower* the risk of reversals.

- **Establish Long-Term Protection Instruments:** Wherever feasible, use **long-term or permanent legal instruments** to lock in the conservation status of forests. This might involve gazettement relevant REDD+ program, areas as national parks, reserves, or other protected areas (with legal protection status), or if community lands, establishing community conservation agreements of long duration (e.g. 20-year conservation contracts with renewal options). Another tool is conservation easements or covenants in law that bind the land to forest conservation even if ownership changes. By doing this, the jurisdiction reduces the chance that future political or economic shifts will open those forests to exploitation. In implementation, this means working with legal authorities early to identify which forests can be upgraded to stronger protection. Also, aligning REDD+ with long-term national goals (for instance, incorporating REDD+ results into the country's Nationally Determined Contribution and treating them as commitments to maintain) can create an external incentive to not reverse gains. Document any **legal designations or agreements** achieved – e.g. copies of decrees establishing protected areas or signed community pacts – as evidence of this step.
- **Pooled Buffer and Insurance Mechanisms: Participate fully in ART's buffer pool** and consider supplemental insurance mechanisms for extra assurance. Under TREES, the buffer contribution is non-negotiable, but jurisdictions can go further: for example, they might maintain a *national buffer reserve* (credits or funds they set aside beyond ART's requirement) for their own comfort. Additionally, explore innovative insurance schemes – some countries have looked into forest insurance that pays out in case of a catastrophic reversal (like a huge wildfire). As best practice, clearly communicate to stakeholders that not all credits are for sale – some are reserved for permanence – to manage expectations. In sum, use the buffer not just as an accounting formality but integrate it into the national carbon accounting such that any reversal triggers the pre-agreed response of cancelling credits, as per TREES rules. This aligned approach with ART is a cornerstone of international best practice.
- **Develop a Reversal Response Plan:** Create a step-by-step **Reversal Response Plan** that outlines what happens if a significant reversal is detected. This plan might specify: how the area of loss will be identified and secured (e.g. immediate dispatch of enforcement to stop ongoing deforestation), how stakeholders will be engaged (perhaps an emergency meeting with community leaders or relevant agencies to address underlying causes), and how restoration or remediation will occur (like replanting trees, or expanding efforts in other areas to compensate). It should also cover the process of reporting to ART and cancelling buffer credits (with roles assigned, e.g. which office prepares the report to ART). Practically, this plan can be an annex in the REDD+ implementation plan or part of the national REDD+ registry operating procedures. By having this blueprint, the jurisdiction can react swiftly and systematically.
- **Continuous Improvement and Periodic Review:** Implement a process for **periodic review of reversal risks and mitigation effectiveness**. Over a 5-year crediting period or at each verification cycle, the jurisdiction should revisit its risk assessment: Have new risks emerged (e.g. new infrastructure plans in the region)? Have previous risks diminished or heightened? Also evaluate whether mitigation measures are working – for instance, is the fire prevention effort actually reducing fires? – and adjust accordingly. This creates a feedback loop ensuring the permanence strategy stays relevant. In practice, this could mean updating the risk section in each Monitoring Report submitted or producing a brief “safeguard progress report” mid-way through a crediting period. Document any changes made as a result of these reviews – it shows learning and improvement.

Theme 7.1: Displacement

Objective: *Ensure that REDD+ efforts do not simply **shift deforestation or emissions from one location to another** – i.e. to minimize **leakage** or **displacement of emissions**. The aim is that emission reductions achieved within the REDD+ program aren't negated by increases in emissions **outside the program boundaries** as an unintended consequence.*

This theme corresponds to Cancun Safeguard (g), which calls for “actions to reduce displacement of emissions”

In practical terms, a jurisdiction must design REDD+ policies and measures such that they address the drivers of deforestation holistically rather than pushing the problem to other forests. For a national program covering all forests, internal leakage is less an issue (since all emissions are counted), but displacement could still occur across borders or between sectors, so vigilance is needed. For subnational programs, this safeguard is critical: if one state or province reduces deforestation, the pressure might move to another region not under REDD+ unless preventive steps are taken. The objective aligns with the principle of **environmental integrity** in carbon accounting – emission reductions should be *real* and not offset by hidden increases elsewhere.

Process – Expectations for Jurisdictions

Jurisdictions must show they have **considered and put in place procedures and measures to prevent or minimize emissions displacement** to areas outside their accounting boundary. Expectations are:

- **Leakage Risk Assessment:** Similar to reversals, a **risk assessment for potential displacement** should be undertaken. This involves identifying *where* and *how* deforestation drivers might relocate if they are curbed in the REDD+ area. The assessment should also consider **market leakage** – if the jurisdiction reduces timber or crop output to save forests, will increased demand elsewhere cause suppliers to step up production (potentially via deforestation) in other regions or countries? Auditors expect to see documentation of such analysis, perhaps in a section of the REDD+ implementation plan. It might include maps of high-risk leakage “hotspots” just outside the program boundary or statistics on commodity production shifts.
- **Scope and Boundary Choices:** A key measure to minimize leakage is the **definition of the program's geographic and sectoral scope**. Jurisdictions should set boundaries that reduce leakage risk – for instance, covering an entire ecological region or administrative unit rather than a patchwork. TREES encourages as large an area as feasible (national or large subnational) and classifies leakage risk by the share of national forest included. Additionally, **sectoral scope** matters: if measures only target certain drivers (e.g. stopping illegal logging but not addressing agricultural clearing), leakage might occur via the unattended drivers. Jurisdictions need processes to include all major deforestation drivers in their strategy to avoid displacement from one driver to another.
- **Policies to Address Displacement Drivers Nationally:** **Institutional mechanisms or policies that reach beyond the REDD+ area** to tackle deforestation drivers elsewhere. For example, if a province implements strict forest protection, the national government might concurrently implement a policy to increase agricultural yields nationwide so that demand for new cropland doesn't simply shift to other provinces. Or a logging ban in one region could be paired with tighter control of logging permits in other regions. Auditors will expect to see that the jurisdiction has engaged the national level (if subnational) or neighboring jurisdictions in developing complementary measures. This can be evidenced by policy documents – e.g., a national moratorium on new forest conversion that applies countrywide, or inter-provincial agreements/MoUs where provinces collectively commit to preventing shifting cultivation from moving among them. In short, a **framework for coordinated**

action is a structural indicator that leakage is being addressed not just locally but at the scale of the leakage risk.

- **Monitoring and Accounting for Leakage:** There should be a **system to detect and account for any displacement of deforestation**. This ties into the NFMS as well – the jurisdiction (especially if subnational) should be monitoring forest change *outside* the REDD+ boundary in the rest of the country. TREES requires a leakage deduction based on area covered and detection of any actual increase in emissions outside is part of the safeguard expectation. Auditors expect the Participant to have defined *how* they will quantify leakage. A clear process would be: national monitoring indicates whether deforestation increased outside – if yes, investigate causes and report accordingly. The presence of a national MRV covering all regions (not just the accounting area) is a strong structural sign.

Implementation Guidance

To fulfil Theme 7.1, jurisdictions should incorporate **leakage prevention strategies at every stage of REDD+ planning and execution**:

- **Broaden the Scope Whenever Feasible:** The simplest way to reduce leakage is to **increase the geographic scope of accounting**. Jurisdictions are encouraged to move toward **national-scale accounting** as soon as possible (consistent with ART’s encouragement for full national implementation by 2030). In practical steps, this might mean setting a timeline to include additional provinces or remaining forest areas. While a subnational program is underway, start capacity-building in other regions, harmonize MRV methods nationally, and create a pathway for expansion (this could be documented in the REDD+ strategy’s future steps). In the interim, design the subnational boundary to naturally reduce leakage: e.g. use ecological or administrative boundaries that contain deforestation drivers. Also, consider **all forest types** – if the program focuses only on, say, dense forests, drivers might shift to woodlands or peatlands; so try to include those in accounting or at least monitor them. Essentially, cast the net wide so there are fewer places for leakage to go.
- **Address Drivers at Their Source:** When planning REDD+ interventions, aim to **neutralize the underlying driver** rather than just displace it. For each deforestation driver identified, ask “If we restrict it here, how do we ensure the demand or behavior behind it is managed so it doesn’t pop up elsewhere?”. Guidance examples: If illegal logging is a driver, strengthen timber legality enforcement nationwide (not just in the REDD+ area) – e.g. implement a timber tracking system or a ban on illegal timber trade across the country. If subsistence agriculture is a driver, perhaps a national program to intensify agriculture or provide alternative livelihoods in all rural areas is needed, not just those in the program area. By tackling the root causes (market demand, lack of livelihoods, governance gaps) broadly, there’s less spillover.
- **Regional Cooperation:** Leakage often doesn’t respect political boundaries. Jurisdictions should pursue **regional or cross-boundary cooperation agreements** to mitigate displacement. For subnational programs, work with neighbouring provinces or states: share information on deforestation activity, coordinate land-use planning (so one province’s strict conservation isn’t undermined by the next province’s lax policies), and ideally have joint enforcement operations for border areas. Some jurisdictions set up inter-provincial REDD+ committees or sign MoUs to collaborate. Document any such cooperation efforts, as they signal proactive leakage management beyond one’s jurisdiction.
- **Leakage Monitoring and Early Warning:** Extend the **monitoring system beyond the project area**. Jurisdictions should configure their forest monitoring (satellite, ground reports) to track deforestation in potential leakage zones. If subnational, this might be done in partnership with the

national MRV unit – e.g. get deforestation alerts for the whole country, not just the crediting area. Periodically analyze data: *Did deforestation increase there?* If yes, investigate causes (maybe unrelated, but if related to displaced agents, then adjust strategy). By including this in the standard operating procedures of the MRV team, leakage can be caught in near-real-time. Some programs even involve communities outside the project area in participatory monitoring to help signal influx of new deforesters.

- **Incorporate Flexibility and Adaptive Management:** Recognize that leakage patterns may change and be prepared to **adapt interventions**. For instance, initial analysis might not foresee a certain leakage pathway, but during implementation you might notice a new trend – e.g. a protected area leads to more mining in another region. The guidance is to keep an eye on these dynamics and be ready to expand or tweak REDD+ actions. If leakage is detected in a specific area, consider **extending program incentives or support to that area** (even if it's outside the original boundary). This adaptive approach should be documented: for example, in the Safeguard report for the next verification, explicitly mention “We observed some leakage in area X, so we have since done Y to address it.” That level of responsiveness shows conformance with the safeguard's intent.
- **International Market Considerations:** For market-driven leakage (like commodity markets), implement measures such as **sustainable supply chain initiatives**. Encourage or mandate that commodities from your country/jurisdiction are produced deforestation-free across the board. This can involve certification schemes, moratoria (like the Soy Moratorium in Brazil which helped prevent soy farmers from moving into forests), or engagement with companies to not simply shift sourcing to non-REDD regions. If your REDD+ program reduces timber harvest in natural forests, work on boosting plantation timber or imports from sustainable sources rather than leaving a supply gap that others fill unsustainably. Essentially, align with international best practice that calls for demand-side measures (e.g. the EU's deforestation regulation) – by doing so, you reduce leakage via markets. Implementation might include partnering with commodity roundtables or creating incentives for deforestation-free production in the whole country. Demonstrating that the jurisdiction is aware of and acting on these market dynamics can be part of the narrative that leakage risk is under control. (Auditors will not hold a country accountable for global market shifts, but showing due diligence in this area underscores commitment to the spirit of Safeguard 7.1.)