

WWF on Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS)

What are Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS)?

The term “Environmental and Social Safeguards (or Standards)” is used by development institutions, international treaties and agencies to refer to policies, standards and operational procedures designed to first identify and then try to avoid, mitigate and minimize adverse environmental and social impacts that may arise in the implementation of development projects. ESS also have a pro-active dimension to try to increase chances that development projects deliver better outcomes for people and the environment.

Modern ESS attempt to address and redress a large array of issues

For example, the World Bank’s ESS, under review during 2015-2016 (available [here](#)), takes up 140 pages and beyond the policy and procedural sections includes 10 chapters detailing standards and procedures to address

- ESS 1. Assessment and Management of Environmental and Social Risks and Impacts
- ESS 2. Labor and Working Conditions
- ESS 3. Resource Efficiency and Pollution Prevention and Management
- ESS 4. Community Health and Safety
- ESS 5. Land Acquisition, Restrictions on Land Use and Involuntary Resettlement
- ESS 6. Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Management
- ESS 7. Indigenous Peoples
- ESS 8. Cultural Heritage
- ESS 9. Financial Intermediaries
- ESS 10. Stakeholder Engagement and Information Disclosure

Other agencies have similarly broad ESS procedures, For example you can peruse (a) Asian Development Bank safeguards [here](#); African Development Bank safeguards [here](#) International Finance Corporation [here](#) European Development Bank [here](#) and the Inter-American Development Bank safeguards [here](#). Looking through these policies you may find that,

- Safeguards policies apply to a broader geographic area than the immediate project boundaries. This broader area is known as the “areas of influence” and is defined during the initial “scoping” stage of the project.
- Some Safeguards policies are triggered even when expected impacts are positive (e.g. projects that affect natural habitats, forestry, or Indigenous Peoples). Also capacity building or technical assistance projects may trigger safeguards policies if directly linked to some on-the-ground investment.
- Safeguards cannot be monitored by using a checklist or by monitoring project indicators alone. There needs to be significant, safeguards specific supervision which includes site visits and, in some cases, third party due diligence.
- Implementing projects according to safeguard policies comes at cost. However these costs are more than justified when compared with any reputational risk or legal responsibility in the event of a project related grievance.

WWF as a watchdog of international agencies ESS

For many years WWF, either on its own, or in partnership with other CSOs has acted as a watchdog of international agencies ESS, regarding both their design and their on-the-ground implementation. Our focus has been on environmental safeguards but we have also addressed issues of transparency, consultations, treatment of Indigenous People and more.

Recent examples include our participation in the review of the World Bank Group safeguards (for more info on this please contact Anushika Karunaratne at WWF US) and our review and comments to the new Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank safeguards (for more info on this please contact Yinting Sun at WWF China)

And what about Environmental and Social Safeguards in WWF projects?

Until recently WWF had a piecemeal approach to ESS, We developed and apply to our projects many specific ESS policies, for example regarding the treatment of Indigenous People (see [here](#)),

But we lacked a consolidate repository of ESS covering all major areas of ESS concern and we also lacked a comprehensive approach to on-the-ground implementation and monitoring. As a result each WWF project would follow a mix of existing WWF safeguards plus relevant local, and donor's ESS.

This situation changed in 2010 when WWF US, on behalf of all WWF network, applied to become a project agency of the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The accreditation as a GEF agency required that WWF US put in place a consolidated and comprehensive suite of ESS and that, thereafter all WWF GEF financed projects comply with them. In this process, WWF become the first NGO to meet international standards related to ESS. All the GEF safeguard related information can be found on WWF-US Safeguards Resources page [here](#)

We think that the more we use these ESS in WWF projects, the better will the outcomes be. Well managed ESS will help identify and minimize any potential adverse impacts of our conservation projects, and in doing so it will also help reduce and manage reputational risks for WWF and our partners.

Furthermore, in early 2016 we expect that WWF-US, again on behalf of the whole network, will become and international accredited entity of the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and thereafter a comprehensive suite of ESS will also be a requirement for every WWF projects funded in whole or part by the GCF.

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