

ART Fact Sheet Regarding the Validation and Verification of Conformance of Guyana's REDD+ Program with TREES Requirements

The ART Secretariat is providing the following fact sheet in response to inquiries we have received regarding the independent validation and verification process for Guyana's REDD+ Program with compliance with technical and safeguards requirements in ART's Standard TREES.

TREES Safeguards

TREES is ART's standard for the measurement, monitoring, reporting and verification of jurisdictional-scale forest emission reductions and associated environmental and social safeguards. The Safeguards in TREES were developed from the internationally agreed upon Cancún Safeguards. As such, there are numerous themes within the TREES requirements that focus explicitly on the rights of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities. These include:

- Identify Indigenous Peoples and local communities, or equivalent
- Respect and protect traditional knowledge
- Respect, protect, and fulfil rights of Indigenous Peoples and/or local communities, or equivalent
- Respect, protect, and fulfill the right of all relevant stakeholders to participate fully and effectively in the design and implementation of REDD+ actions
- Promote adequate participatory procedures for the meaningful participation of indigenous peoples and local communities, or equivalent.

In addition, safeguard themes relating to land tenure, access to information and dispute resolution mechanisms also protect the right of Indigenous Peoples.

The independent validation and verification process conducted by third parties evaluates whether each Participant has demonstrated conformance with these safeguards for the REDD+ activities in the timeframe being reviewed. Auditors gather evidence such as reports, documents, statements, public comments, and interviews to make their assessment. This assessment then moves to the ART Board for review and additional information, or questions may be requested. Only following ART Board approval will credits be issued to the Participant.

Guyana Consultation Process

While the audit was conducted by Aster Global Environmental Services, as discussed later in the Fact Sheet and not by the ART Secretariat itself, some key evidence that was considered to determine the conformance with these safeguards are the following:

1. The support documents reviewed and interviews conducted by Aster Global provided evidence that there was extensive participation for the development of the LCDS 2009 and the LCDS 2030. The evidence shows that indigenous peoples from all of Guyana's regions were consulted to develop these strategies that are the framework for Guyana's REDD+ initiative.
2. Consultations on LCDS 2030 (which includes phases for REDD+ and the pathway for revenue sharing) occurred from October 2021 to July 2022. Chapter 8 of the LCDS 2030 document, available [here](#), outlines the consultation process in more detail. Feedback received and responses are available on the website [here](#).

3. The National Consultation consisted of:
 - national level engagements where 77 stakeholder groups were directly engaged in presentations and discussions (including three Indigenous Peoples organizations: APA, GOIP and TAAMOG);
 - thematic engagements; and
 - community based consultations that consisted of 16 sessions (at least one in each region, attended by representatives of over 200 of the 218 Indigenous Villages and forest based communities).
4. The consultation process for the LCDS 2030 was overseen by a Multi Stakeholder Steering Committee (MSSC) which included the following. This group will continue to meet regarding ongoing consultations and implementation of the LCDS.
 - the Offices of the President and the Vice President,
 - the Office of the Prime Minister,
 - Ministry of Public Works,
 - Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,
 - Ministry of Finance,
 - Ministry of Natural Resources (including Guyana Forestry Commission and Guyana Geology and Mines Commission),
 - Ministry of Agriculture,
 - the National Toshias' Council,
 - Indigenous Peoples Commission,
 - Amerindian Peoples' Association (APA),
 - Guyanese Organisation of Indigenous Peoples (GOIP),
 - The Amerindian Action Movement of Guyana (TAAMOG),
 - National Amerindian Development Foundation,
 - Private Sector Commission,
 - Forest Products Association,
 - Guyana Gold and Diamond Miners Association, and
 - Representatives of Labour Unions, Women's organizations and youth groups.
5. On July 15th, 2022 the National Toshias' Council (NTC) unanimously passed a resolution endorsing the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) 2030 and the benefit sharing arrangement for the REDD+ benefits that will be generated from Guyana's first issuance of TREES credits. That resolution was voted upon during their National Assembly and was signed by their Executive Committee. The National Toshias' Council is the governance structure defined by the Amerindian Act. Toshias are elected from each titled and untitled community or village.
6. The benefit sharing arrangement established in the LCDS 2030, consulted with all the relevant stakeholders and endorsed by the NTC specifies that all revenues would be invested through two pathways:
 - 85% of the revenue will go to nationally administered programmes as outlined in the draft LCDS 2030 (renewable energy in hinterland communities, land titling for indigenous communities, repairing canals, and protecting against climate change)

- 15% of the revenue to community/village-led programmes for indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) as set out in Village Sustainability Plans or equivalent, elaborated by communities themselves.

Additional information regarding the consultation can be found in the LCDS [Infostream](#). This includes a [Statement by Derrick John, Chair of NTC](#) which thanks all of the consultation participants representing Indigenous perspectives, discusses the transition to implementation and reiterates the NTC’s support for Guyana’s participation in ART and the benefit sharing approach outlined in the LCDS 2030. The Infostream also includes additional news items regarding the issuance and the first transaction of TREES Credits by the Government of Guyana. This site also includes copies of the resolutions from the [NTC](#) and [Parliament](#) as well as summary minutes of the Multi Stakeholder Steering Committee (MSSC) meetings.

TREES Carbon Accounting

ART and its standard TREES builds on early action pilot programs and is consistent with UNFCCC decisions including the Paris Agreement, the Warsaw Framework and as mentioned previously, the Cancún Safeguards.

ART’s goal in developing TREES was to incorporate the appropriate requirements to make TREES credits comparable among governments and fungible in carbon markets with credits from other sectors and to attract finance at the scale needed to protect and restore forests globally. Without the appropriate market-specific elements and safeguards, results are not fungible carbon credits. They will not pass muster with increasingly savvy buyers, nor will they be deemed as eligible for corporate offsetting claims by a range of NGO-led initiatives that provide trusted guidance in the space.

TREES requires meeting precise and comprehensive requirements for:

- accounting and crediting,
- demonstrating rights to the emission reductions and removals,
- monitoring, reporting and independent verification,
- mitigation of leakage and reversal risks,
- avoidance of double counting, and
- the transparent issuance of serialized units on a public registry.

The independent validation and verification process conducted by third parties also evaluates whether each Participant has demonstrated conformance with these requirements.

ART’s Process for Independent Validation and Verification of Guyana’s results

ART requires an audit that all technical and safeguards requirements of TREES were followed. This audit must be carried out by an accredited validation and verification body. The full details of the process can be reviewed in the Validation and Verification Reports available in the [ART Registry](#). Highlights are provided below.

The validation and verification was performed by Aster Global Environmental Solutions, Inc., (Aster Global) following the steps required by the TREES Validation and Verification Standard and in line with industry best practice as defined by ISO 14064-3 and ISO 14065 among others. This firm has significant experience in verifying both carbon accounting and safeguards having conducted numerous project

verifications as well as jurisdictional verifications for the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF).

Aster Global's team spent 9 months with a team of 12 employees reviewing the components of the Guyana Forestry Commission's REDD+ Program and submission to ART for conformance with TREES requirements. The process included over 30 meetings between the auditors and Guyana team, significant numbers of emails, and field visits and interviews by two audit teams. Public comments received from two different indigenous representative organizations in Guyana were incorporated into the audit as per our process.

The field visits included meetings with public and private stakeholders, including government agency stakeholders, and NGOs representing stakeholders for national REDD strategy activities, including the National Steering Committee of Community Forest Organisations, Guyana Organisation of Indigenous People (GOIP), The Amerindian Action Movement of Guyana (TAAMOG), and Amerindian People's Association (APA). Appendix B of the validation report presents a list of meetings, participants, and topics. Even prior to the first public comments being received from APA and TAAMOG, these organizations had been identified as key stakeholders. As such, they were interviewed during the site visit. Aster Global also visited six Amerindian villages and one Amerindian community including Aishalton, Parabara, Shulinab, Moco, Yupukari, Massara, and Fairview. Details on the process for selecting stakeholders are available in the reports.

Based on review of the TREES Registration Document [and the TREES Monitoring Report](#), supporting documentation provided by the Government of Guyana and other stakeholders, and site visit observations and interviews, Aster Global evaluated conformance with each criterion required by TREES v2.0. Aster Global issued three rounds of clarification requests and findings, which were all addressed by Guyana prior to Aster Global concluding that all requirements of TREES had been met. This number of clarification requests and findings is not unexpected for such a large program and for the first validation and verification under ART. Every finding is described in the [reports](#), which are publicly available.

As required by ART, the validation and verification reports and opinions regarding conformance with TREES requirements, including the Checklist of Findings, were reviewed by an independent internal reviewer with Aster Global before the reports were provided to the ART Board for review.

Multiple layers of oversight were applied during the validation and verification process. Representatives of the ART Secretariat participated as an observer in most meetings, emails, and during the site visit to ensure the requirements of TREES were being met and to answer questions regarding the requirements of TREES as needed. Both the Aster Global auditor and the ART Secretariat representatives took the opportunity during each interview to actively solicit comments and feedback regarding the TREES Documents submitted by Guyana as well any feedback in general regarding the Guyana's REDD+ program. In addition, an auditor from the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) body that provides Aster Global's accreditation participated in all activities as well to conduct her audit of Aster Global's performance for accreditation to ART. Both organizations reviewed the validation and verification reports before they were finalized and published.

The ART process does not stop after this single validation and verification event, however. ART requires ongoing reporting from the Government of Guyana and a new independent verification every one to two years moving forward. Safeguards are not implemented in a singular event but rather are an ongoing set of processes and programs that must be monitored and confirmed. Requiring such frequent

reporting and verification was a deliberate choice by ART to ensure transparency and rigor and to ensure that stakeholders have numerous ongoing opportunities to share perspectives and engage with the ART process outside of the REDD+ processes in their country. While the initial verification may cover multiple historical years, the verifications moving forward will be limited to one to two years at a time. We hope that all stakeholders will continue to participate in the validation and verification process and provide comments each time as we value the inputs to the process.

Complaints and Appeals

ART encourages all stakeholders to utilize the dispute resolution mechanisms within their country to the fullest when complaints or concerns arise. These systems are required by the TREES Safeguard Theme 2.4 and will likely be most effective in resolving the issue. In addition, each verification will evaluate the conformance of these systems with the requirements of TREES, providing independent oversight.

If any stakeholder or Participant objects to a decision made by ART representatives or the application of the ART program requirements, they are able to use the confidential complaint process outlined in TREES Section 16.1. If a complaint remains unresolved after the conclusion of the complaint procedure, a Participant or stakeholder may appeal any such decision or outcome reached. Complaints against Validation and Verification Bodies may be made directly to the VVB or using the same process outlined in TREES. The ART Secretariat will ensure complaints are routed to the appropriate parties for resolution.