



Rainforest Alliance

GUIDE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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The Rainforest Alliance works to conserve biodiversity and ensure sustainable livelihoods by transforming land-use practices, business practices, and consumer behavior.

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Guide for Environmental and Social Impact Assessment

Critical criterion 1.4 of the 2017 Rainforest Alliance Standard requires that

“an independent environmental and social impact assessment (ESIA) is conducted prior to land conversion or the development or expansion of farm infrastructure when required by applicable law or when these proposed changes will exceed Rainforest Alliance ESIA parameters...”

This document summarizes the applicability, requirements and implementation of Criterion 1.4.

1. DEFINITION AND PURPOSE

An ESIA is an analysis and planning process to be carried out prior to the development of a project that may have significant environmental or social impacts.

This process incorporates relevant environmental and social data, as well as stakeholder consultations, in order to identify potential project impacts and to determine whether these impacts can be satisfactorily addressed, in which case the project proponent also defines specific actions to minimize and mitigate potential negative impacts.

In the context of the 2017 Rainforest Alliance Standard, the purpose of the ESIA requirement is to ensure that farms conduct sound planning processes – considering a full range of relevant sustainability issues – prior to instituting major changes that could affect sustainability performance, ecosystems, communities, or future adherence to the Rainforest Alliance Standard.

T&D Communities:

People or group of people living in the same place or region affected or impacted by the existence or operation of a farm or group of farms. Rural workers, farm inhabitants, neighbors of farms, traditional and indigenous people, and inhabitants of villages or cities are considered communities affected by a certain farm or group of farms. Indigenous people are people native to a particular place, often ethnic minorities who have been marginalized as their historical territories have become part of a state.

2. APPLICABILITY

Conducting an ESIA applies only in the case of substantial new agricultural development (such as new crop plantings or livestock production areas), or the establishment of substantial new or expanded farm infrastructure.

The 2017 Rainforest Alliance Standard requires that certified operations conduct an ESIA if:

- a) It is required by law; or
- b) The certified operation meets any of these thresholds:

1. Land conversion exceeding 500 hectares;
2. Additional water withdrawal exceeding 500,000 cubic meters per year for irrigation or processing; or
3. Additional industrial wastewater discharge exceeding 10,000 cubic meters per year.

Note: *If a development project is “segmented” into smaller pieces, these triggers apply to the project in its entirety. For instance, if 900 hectare tea expansion is segmented into three phases of 300 hectares each, an ESIA would be required prior to the first project phase and assessing the full project.*

For current Rainforest Alliance certificate holders, compliance with Criterion 1.4 requires completion of the five ESIA steps (see Section 3 of this document) before the project is initiated, while the resulting plan (Step 5) must be followed during the project’s installation and operation phases.

For new applicants in the midst of developing a project triggering Rainforest Alliance ESIA parameters, the applicant shall demonstrate the steps taken to minimize negative impacts during the project installation phase and shall document and implement an action plan to minimize and mitigate negative impacts during the operation phase (Step 5).

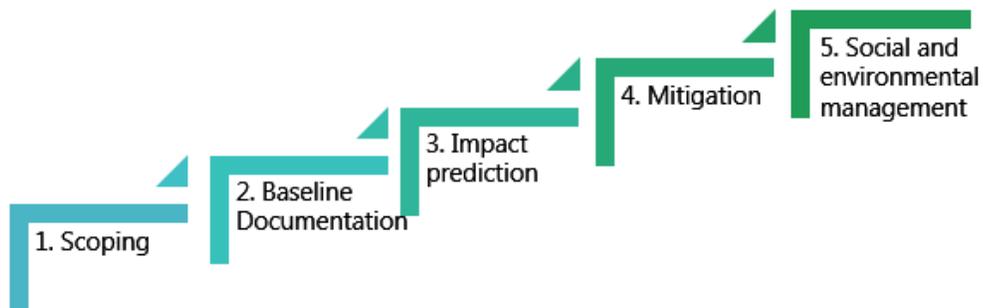
3. CONDUCTING AN ESIA

The ESIA shall be conducted by an independent organization, multi-disciplinary team or competent professional with suitable expertise in impact assessment methodologies and in the specific impact subject areas to be included in the ESIA.

In cases when the proposed project could diminish the land or resource use rights or collective interests of communities, it is required to seek Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC – Critical Criterion 4.20). In such cases, the ESIA and FPIC processes shall be conducted as one integrated process (see Rainforest Alliance Guide for FPIC Processes RA-G-SP-2-V1 for more information).

Potentially affected communities shall be engaged in all five ESIA steps, and – in the event that the affected communities agree for the project to proceed – the negotiated outcomes of the FPIC process shall be reflected in steps 4 and 5.

Figure 1: Steps for the independent environmental and social impact assessment



STEP 1 – SCOPING

The scoping process determines which impacts are likely to be significant and shall be included in the following steps of the ESIA. Scoping shall consider all potential impact areas, as specified in the Rainforest Alliance ESIA parameters:

- Biodiversity and High Conservation Value areas;
- Water quantity and quality;
- Soils, air and waste;
- Employment and labor rights;
- Land and natural resource use rights, tenure and conflicts;
- Climate change; and
- Other possible impacts on local communities.

Stakeholders such as government agencies, local NGOs, and local communities shall be consulted to help identify the areas of potential impact.

As an output of this process, a scoping document shall be produced defining the scope of the ESIA, including topics to be covered, the scale at which each topic shall be addressed, and a rational analysis for any of the above-listed topics that are deemed unnecessary to include.

STEP 2 – BASELINE DOCUMENTATION

This step is intended to identify and understand the social or environmental assets that may be affected by the project.

For instance, if the project includes major new water withdrawals as defined by applicable law or Rainforest Alliance ESIA parameters, then the baseline shall document existing quantities and seasonality of water resources, and the dependency on these resources by natural ecosystems, wildlife, and human communities.

When FPIC is required or when there are potential impacts to local livelihoods, participatory methods shall be used to document existing social conditions.

Maps shall be included to illustrate baseline conditions.

STEP 3 – IMPACT PREDICTION

The impact prediction step determines which type of impacts to measure in which way.

- a) Within the ESIA scope, impacts of the proposed project shall be estimated using methods such as technical analysis, quantitative modeling, and stakeholder consultations.
- b) When there are other activities nearby that may affect the overall impact on communities or ecosystems, indirect impacts shall be assessed and cumulative impacts shall be evaluated.
- c) The significance of each impact shall be characterized through consultations with local stakeholders to the extent they may be affected.

STEP 4 – MITIGATION

During this step 4 of the ESIA process, the project proponent shall develop and propose mitigation measures to address all significant impacts.

Measures shall follow the “mitigation hierarchy” – aiming first to avoid impacts, then to reduce impacts where unavoidable, and finally to compensate for remaining and unavoidable impacts.

If impacts cannot be avoided or mitigated, then the proposed project shall be re-designed, reduced in scale, or cancelled altogether.

When FPIC is required, affected communities may set mitigation conditions or choose to reject the project, within the bounds of their legal or customary rights.

STEP 5 – ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

A management plan shall be developed to document the specific actions that will be taken to minimize negative impacts and optimize the project’s sustainability performance during both the development and operation phases.

The management plan shall be developed once all mitigation measures are defined. This plan shall be incorporated into the farm’s or group administrator’s overall social and environmental management system, as required by Critical Criterion 1.6 of the 2017 Rainforest Alliance standard.

Rainforest Alliance authorized certification bodies and their registered auditors will evaluate the implementation of these plans during audits to ensure that the ESIA process results are fully complied with.

4. REFERENCES

For further information and resources, please consult:

International Finance Corporation. (s.f.). The Social and Environmental Impact Assessment Process. World Bank Group.

United Nations Environment Programme. (2001). Environmental Impact Assessment Training Resource Manual: Topic 7 -Mitigation and impact management. UNEP.

Vanclay, F. (2015). Social Impact Assessment: Guidance for assessing and managing the social impact of projects. International Association for Impact Assessment.