proforest



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Guidance on Human Rights Grievance Management in Landscape and Jurisdictional Initiatives (LJIs)

Acknowledgments

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Landscape and Jurisdictional Initiatives (LJIs) are long-term, place-based, collaborative approaches that bring together multiple stakeholders to achieve shared goals for people, nature, and climate. Many LJIs have been established primarily to deliver environmental outcomes, such as reducing deforestation, protecting ecosystems, improving land-use planning, or supporting more sustainable commodity production. At the same time, these initiatives depend on the participation, trust, and cooperation of people living and working in the landscape, including Indigenous Peoples, local communities, smallholders, workers, implementing partners, and other affected stakeholders.

While these initiatives aim to deliver positive outcomes, any intervention - even one intended to do good - can also create actual or potential adverse impacts on people or the environment if not carefully managed. Effective safeguards help initiatives identify risks to people, and assess, prevent, mitigate and address adverse impacts.

Even with strong safeguards in place, grievances may occur. Grievances can be linked to adverse impacts on both people and the environment. However, this guidance focuses specifically on social and human rights grievances. Accordingly, a grievance is understood as a claim or allegation that an individual or group has experienced adverse impacts linked to an initiative's activities, decisions, or implementation. Where an initiative has caused or contributed to or is directly linked to adverse impacts through its interventions, it has a responsibility to respond appropriately and, where relevant, contribute to remedy.

A grievance mechanism is a key component of safeguards and an important element of broader due diligence processes and is increasingly recognised as both general good practice and a minimum element of social safeguards[1] in LJIs. This is reflected in the Core Criteria for Mature Landscape Initiatives, a collective position developed and endorsed by more than 20 leading landscape practitioners that provides a shared benchmark for what "maturity" looks like at landscape level. Similar expectations are increasingly reflected in the requirements and due diligence approaches of funding companies, including members of the Consumer Goods Forum's Forest Positive Coalition.

Under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), grievance mechanisms are '*any routinised, State-based or non-State-based, judicial or non-judicial processes through which grievances concerning human rights abuse can be raised and remedy can be sought*'. In practice, this refers to the processes and procedures an actor, such as companies or LJIs, establishes to receive, manage, and resolve grievances (also called grievance procedures or remediation mechanisms).

This guidance focuses on non-judicial[2] processes, which can provide early, accessible, and effective avenues for affected stakeholders to raise concerns and seek remedy alongside, rather than instead of, judicial or administrative processes. A well functioning mechanism helps ensure grievances are addressed in ways that build trust between the LJI and communities, enable learning and improvement, and prevent the escalation of conflicts. In addition, it also reduces reputational risks for companies and funders associated with the initiative.

1 More information can be found in the Proforest and Landesa guidance on Social Safeguarding Process for Landscape and Jurisdictional Initiatives (LJIs). This will be updated to v2, once it has been published

2 A non-judicial grievance mechanism is a process, outside of courts or formal legal proceedings, through which individuals or communities can raise complaints about adverse impacts and seek remedy.

Where an LJI includes activities that may affect Indigenous Peoples and local communities, a grievance mechanism should be understood as complementary to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), rather than a substitute for it. FPIC helps prevent adverse impacts by ensuring affected rightsholders can participate in decision-making and, where relevant, give or withhold consent to proposed activities that may affect them. A grievance mechanism serves a different but complementary function by providing an ongoing process through which concerns can be raised, remedy can be sought and FPIC commitments can be monitored over time.

This guidance has been developed by Proforest in collaboration with Landesa, with input from organisations involved in implementing LJIs. Their contributions have helped ensure that the guidance reflects practical implementation considerations, including governance, participation, accountability, and access to remedy across different contexts.

1.2 Purpose, Objectives, and Scope

The purpose of this guidance is to support LJI implementers in designing, establishing, and strengthening their human rights grievance mechanisms as part of their broader social safeguards process.

The guidance aims to provide practical, context-appropriate recommendations that can help initiatives develop grievance mechanisms that are aligned with the effectiveness criteria of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) while remaining proportionate to the initiative's scale, governance arrangements, resources, and operating context.

This guidance focuses on human rights grievances related to the initiative itself, including grievances arising from its activities, decisions, and implementation processes, and the conduct of actors operating on its behalf. It is intended to support the identification, assessment, management, and resolution of such grievances, as well as access to remedy where adverse impacts have occurred.

The guidance is not intended to address every grievance or dispute that may arise within the wider landscape that is not directly linked to the LJI's interventions. Many adverse impacts may fall outside the initiative's responsibility, mandate, or sphere of influence, including grievances related to company-specific operations (i.e. labour issues), government processes, or other conflicts that are not connected to the initiative's activities. In such cases, the grievance mechanism should provide clear referral pathways and, where appropriate, coordinate with existing mechanisms rather than creating unnecessary duplication. Wherever feasible, initiatives should seek to avoid creating unnecessary complexity or confusion by building on/enhancing existing mechanism rather than establish parallel systems.

Examples of grievances that may fall within the scope of an LJI grievance mechanism include:[3]

- Concerns related to staff behaviour: For instance, a community member reports that an implementer's staff member spoke to them in a disrespectful or intimidating manner during a project activity.

- Concerns related to implementation processes: For example, a community group believes they were not adequately informed, consulted, or included in decision-making processes relating to initiative activities and may have experienced adverse impacts as a result.

3 For a real-life example of a locally adapted grievance mechanism, see the case study on Conservation International Ecuador's "CI-Escucha" system in the Social Safeguards Guidance. The case study provides an overview of how the mechanism functions, including the different channels and procedures available for submitting grievances, and supporting communication materials.

What about environmental grievances?

Some organisations address social and environmental issues through a combined safeguards approach and may therefore develop grievance procedures that cover both social and environmental grievances. This guidance focuses specifically on human rights-related grievance management in LJIs, as part of broader social safeguards and human rights due diligence processes.

LJIs may nevertheless receive grievances concerning environmental issues, such as deforestation, pollution, water quality, biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation, or land-use change. Where appropriate and practical, initiatives should use an integrated intake process, so stakeholders have a clear and accessible entry point for raising different types of concerns.

However, the assessment and resolution of environmental grievances may require different expertise, stakeholders, methods, and forms of action from those described in this guidance.

For example, environmental grievances may require engagement with environmental authorities, technical experts, conservation organisations, land-use planning bodies, customary or community resource-management institutions, affected land users, companies, or implementing partners, depending on the issue. Resolution may require technical assessment, site verification, environmental monitoring, compliance review, restoration measures, changes to land-use or implementation practices, or referral to statutory or specialist mechanisms.

The general principles outlined in the guidance, such as accessibility or transparency, remain relevant. However, technical guidance on environmental safeguards, environmental impact assessment, and ecological remediation is beyond the scope of this document.



1.3 Structure of the Guidance

An effective non-judicial grievance mechanism should be based on Principle 31 of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), which outlines effectiveness criteria for non-judicial grievance mechanisms.

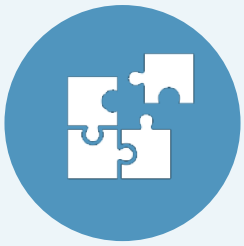
For LJIs, the UNGP effectiveness criteria provide an important reference point, but they need to be applied in ways that reflect the initiative's context. Relevant considerations include multi-stakeholder governance and shared responsibility; resource constraints and different levels of institutional maturity; local norms, languages, and trust in available processes; and the geographic scale and complexity of the landscape, which may require decentralised or hybrid approaches.

UNGP Criteria	Aspiration in the context of an LJI 
Legitimacy	Ensure oversight and decision-making involve trusted actors such as community representatives, local government, and civil society to build credibility.
Accessibility	The mechanism is known and usable by all affected groups, including Indigenous Peoples, smallholders, and marginalised communities. It uses culturally appropriate outreach methods, explains how information is shared, and provides assistance or alternative communication channels for people who may face barriers to access.
Predictability	Provide a clear process with defined steps, timelines, and outcomes, adapted to the LJI's governance structure, indicating the roles and responsibilities among the implementing partners and other relevant stakeholders.
Equitability	Ensure all stakeholders, especially vulnerable groups, have access to relevant information, advice, and expertise necessary to engage on fair, informed and respectful terms. It requires actively addressing barriers and power imbalances so that no party is disadvantaged in the process.
Transparency	Keep parties to a grievance informed about progress and provide sufficient information about the mechanism's overall performance to build confidence in the process. This may include clear roles and responsibilities, communication channels (email, written notice, meeting), phases of escalation steps, decision points, indicative timeframes in which grievances will be addressed and periodic public updates on grievance management that protect confidentiality and safety.
Rights-Compatibility	Ensure outcomes and remedies comply with internationally recognised human rights standards.
Continuous Learning	Use grievance data to improve initiative design, stakeholder engagement, and safeguard implementation.
Dialogue and Engagement	Resolve grievances through inclusive dialogue with affected stakeholders, respecting local customs and governance norms.

Figure 1: UNGP Effectiveness Criteria within the context of landscape and jurisdictional initiatives.

While all LJIs are encouraged to work toward alignment with the UN Guiding Principles (UNGP) effectiveness criteria, the pathway will vary depending on each initiative's scale, maturity, capacity, governance arrangements, and operating context. This document distinguishes between core expectations marked with a I, which grievance mechanisms should seek to establish from the outset, and enhanced practices marked with a μ, which initiatives may adopt progressively as their systems develop. Over time, monitoring, learning, and continuous improvement can help initiatives strengthen their mechanisms and deepen alignment with the UNGPs.

To support this progression, the guidance presents the development and operation of grievance mechanisms in three sequential — but interconnected — phases:



Design and Establishment

Establishing the mechanism's foundation, including governance structures, accessibility, and stakeholder engagement.



Receiving, Processing, and Responding to Grievances

Operationalising the mechanism to ensure timely, fair, and transparent handling of complaints.



Monitoring and Evaluation

Assessing performance, identifying lessons learned, and driving continuous improvement.

These phases reflect a practical implementation sequence. They are presented in order, but initiatives may not need to have completed each step in Phase 1 before moving to Phase 2. Instead, implementers should aim to complete the steps over time in a way that supports a mechanism that is functional, credible, accessible, and able to evolve as lessons are identified.

For each phase outlined in the following sections, the guidance includes:

- Core steps to implement.
- The UNGP criteria linked to each step.

Practical operational considerations:

✓ **Core expectations** ★ **Enhanced practices**

2 Phased Approach for Establishing an Effective Grievance Mechanism

Although the three phases are presented separately for clarity, they are interconnected. Considering remediation, communication, and monitoring requirements during the design stage can help ensure the mechanism is feasible to implement, proportionate to available resources, and able to upscale and improve over time.

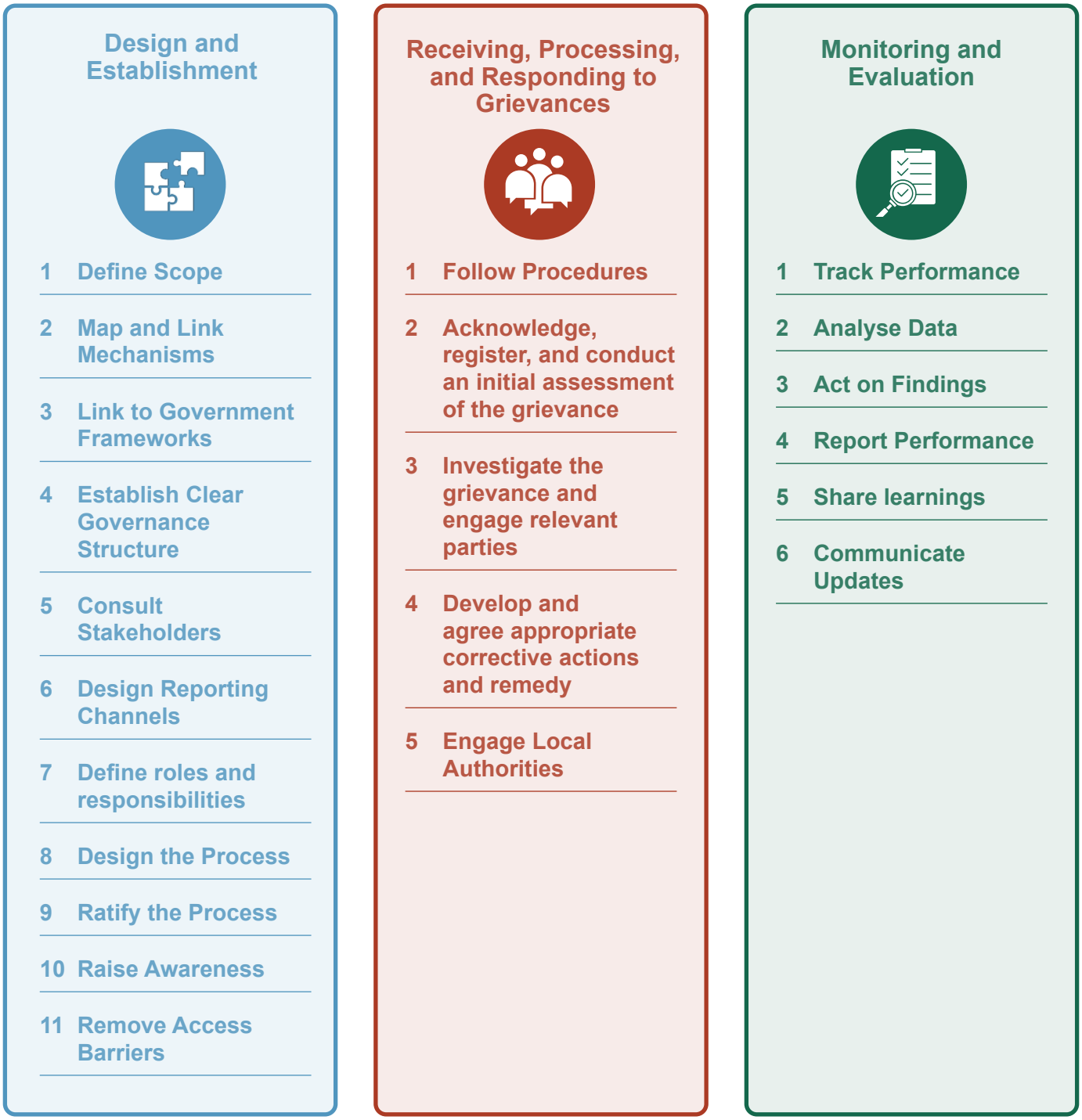


Figure 2: Core Steps of Implementing an Effective Grievance Mechanism.

2.1 Phase 1: Design and Establishment

Core step	1. Define the scope of the grievances that the mechanism will address in the context of an LJI
UNGP Criteria	**Predictability**
Operational Guidance	✓ Define the scope of the types of grievances that the mechanism can address. The grievance mechanism should be clearly positioned as part of the LJI's social safeguards framework. It addresses grievances directly linked to the initiative's activities and does not replace company-level grievance systems or handle all grievances in the landscape. ✓ Include a scope statement in all outreach materials and onboarding sessions. Communicating a clear scope upfront prevents misunderstandings and unrealistic expectations.

Core step	2. Map and link to existing mechanisms
UNGP Criteria	**N/A**
Operational Guidance	✓ Identify and map existing mechanisms[4] (intake channels, resolution processes, timelines, etc.) that are present within the area in which the LJI operates. ✓ Assess opportunities for integration, e.g. for embedding mechanism within existing structures, where appropriate. *Note: Engagement with existing mechanisms may be needed but should remain pragmatic to avoid over-complication.* ✓ Define a process for handling grievances that fall outside the initiative's scope. At a minimum, this should include: (1) acknowledgement of receipt of the grievance; and (2) a referral protocol that directs the grievance to the most appropriate channel identified during the mapping process (e.g., a company grievance mechanism or government system). Referral pathways should be clearly defined for grievances concerning human rights abuses occurring within the broader landscape but not directly linked to the initiative (e.g., allegations of forced labour at a mill within the commodity supply chain), to ensure such cases are appropriately addressed.

4 Such as: Government systems (Labour offices, local ombudsman, land dispute resolution bodies, court or other justice systems), Community-based platforms (Customary councils, village committees, religious or cultural dispute resolution forums), or Partner organisation, company or other mechanisms (Certification schemes (e.g., RSPO, FSC), corporate grievance channels, NGO-led systems).

Core step	2. Map and link to existing mechanisms (Cont.)
Operational Guidance	★ A more advanced system may also: – Document and track referrals to external mechanisms for transparency and learning. – Provide detailed guidance and support on external mechanisms for out-of-scope grievances. – Maintain a grievance log for all known grievances linked to stakeholders within the landscape, referrals made to appropriate external channels, and, where feasible, significant grievance trends relevant to the initiative and its stakeholders. ★ Explore how the LJI can support resolution indirectly, e.g., coordinating joint action among the responsible parties, facilitating mediation between parties, building capacity for local actors to manage grievances effectively.

Core step	3. Align with and link to government frameworks
UNGP Criteria	**Legitimacy**
Operational Guidance	★ Engage local authorities as observers or advisors to reinforce credibility, where appropriate. ★ Align with statutory[5] grievance procedures where possible.
UNGP Criteria	**Accessibility**
Operational Guidance	★ Share information on government grievance channels as complementary options.

Core step	4. Establish a clear governance structure for the mechanism within the LJI, which is operationalised in the internal management system
UNGP Criteria	**Legitimacy, Transparency, Equitability**
Operational Guidance	✓ Draft a stepwise management process to implement the mechanism, e.g., a simple checklist of all elements the grievance mechanism should include and the actions it takes to implement it. ✓ Designate staff within the LJI implementing team (and/or external third-party organisation) with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for implementing the mechanism, monitoring grievance reporting, and managing grievance response.

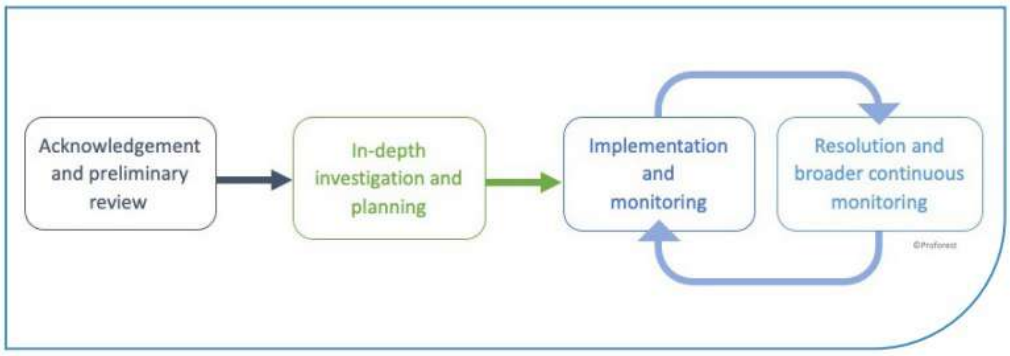
5 Statutory grievance mechanisms are grievance or dispute resolution mechanisms established by law and administered by public authorities, such as labour inspectorates, ombudsman offices, regulatory bodies, courts, and tribunals.

Core step	**4. Establish a clear governance structure for the mechanism within the LJI, which is operationalised in the internal management system (Cont.)**
Operational Guidance	✓ Assign staff with appropriate qualifications. ✓ Ensure responsibility for managing and implementing the mechanism, including clear lines of accountability. ✓ Ensure the grievance mechanism remains impartial by separating day-to-day coordination (handled by designated staff) from investigation and decision-making, which should be carried out by independent persons or bodies not involved in the activities subject to complaints. ✓ Manage conflicts of interest through minimum safeguards, including mandatory conflict-of-interest declarations by those handling complaints; recusal where there is an actual, potential, or perceived conflict, reassignment to an alternative investigator, use of external experts or independent third parties for sensitive, high-risk, or conflicted cases and separation between decision-makers and persons who are the subject of the grievance. ★ Grievances are integrated into and addressed through existing landscape governance structures – such as a multi-stakeholder platform (MSP) – to ensure coherence, accessibility, and consistency across the landscape. *Note: While this approach represents best practice and promotes collective ownership and legitimacy, its full implementation may not always be feasible in contexts where resources and, critically, time are limited.* ★ Include multi-stakeholder representation in grievance management (civil society, community representatives, companies funding the LJI and other companies operating in or connected to the landscape that are relevant to the types of grievances the mechanism is expected to address). ★ Where feasible, involve local third-party or independent support for intake, investigation, mediation, and review of grievances, since this can reduce fear of retaliation, increase trust, and strengthen impartiality. ★ Ensure relevant staff receive regular training on: – The types of grievances likely to arise in the initiative. Training should cover assessment of potential harm to people and of barriers they may face in accessing the grievance mechanism. – Inclusive facilitation, cultural sensitivity, rights-based approaches and conflict resolution. This can also be in collaboration with local experts, e.g. CSOs working on conflict resolution or gender equity. Note that this might also apply to field staff, even if they do not work directly on grievances, as rightsholders may prefer approaching staff in person. All staff must uphold high standards of professionalism, impartiality, and confidentiality throughout the process. – How to explain the grievance process to relevant stakeholders in a clear, accessible, and audience-appropriate manner, including available channels, expected timelines, confidentiality measures, and potential outcomes or remedies.

Core step	5. Consult stakeholders and rightsholders
UNGP Criteria	**Legitimacy, Dialogue and Engagement, Equitability**
Operational Guidance	✓ Provide a channel for feedback on the mechanism itself and implement a review process to ensure it is being accessed and used effectively. ★ Conduct consultations with relevant stakeholders and rightsholders on the design, revision, and monitoring process of the mechanism. Consultations should help identify access barriers, preferred communication channels, culturally appropriate terminology, expectations around confidentiality, and practical ways for affected people to participate safely and meaningfully in the process. ★ Conduct consultations to align on and establish clear definitions outlined in the mechanism (e.g. grievance, resolution etc). ★ Seek feedback during grievance handling to understand how processes can be improved.

Core step	6. Design reporting channel(s)
UNGP Criteria	**Accessibility, Equitability**
Operational Guidance	✓ Use stakeholder consultation findings to select reporting channels that are culturally appropriate, trusted, and practical for affected groups, avoiding unnecessary duplication with consultation activities already described in Step 5. ✓ Identify and address access barriers identified through consultation, such as literacy, language, mobility, cultural or gender norms, confidentiality concerns, fear of retaliation, or low trust in implementing partners or funders. ✓ Provide simple, low-barrier reporting options, such as a phone number, WhatsApp contact, suggestion box, in-person focal point, or facilitated submission through a trusted intermediary. ✓ Provide multiple access points, including community-based access points, accessible meeting locations, or home visits where mobility barriers make this necessary and safe. ✓ Ensure that there is no access fee and that potential financial costs are minimised. ✓ Have an explicit commitment to protect complainants and their representatives from reprisals, re victimisation, intimidation, or exposure to additional harm, including human rights defenders and whistleblowers. ✓ Offer safe and confidential reporting options, especially for vulnerable groups and for grievances involving retaliation, violence, abuse, or other sensitive issues. This includes providing both anonymous and non-anonymous reporting channels and ensuring that the identity and personal information of those raising grievances are appropriately protected. ✓ Allow collective grievances where rightsholders raise shared concerns, while verifying that representatives have consent to act on behalf of affected people and that the views of affected individuals or groups are sought through appropriate consultation.

Core step	7. Define roles and responsibilities
UNGP Criteria	**Predictability, Transparency**
Operational Guidance	✓ Identify who is responsible and accountable for managing grievances within the LJI, such as a designated focal point, committee, or secretariat. The allocation of responsibilities should cover intake, assessment, referral, investigation, decision-making, communication, remedy implementation, and monitoring, and should be clear to implementing partners and affected stakeholders. ✓ Ensure all implementing partners understand their roles in intake, referral, and resolution. ★ Assign responsibility for preparing and publishing performance updates. *A RACI matrix (Responsible–Accountable–Consulted–Informed) is a useful tool to clarify accountability and escalation pathways.*

Core step	8. Design the overall process
UNGP Criteria	**Predictability, Transparency**
Operational Guidance	✓ Develop clear procedures for receiving, responding to, resolving, and remediating complaints and grievances. The procedure should broadly reflect the following stages of grievance-handling:  Figure 3: Grievance Management Procedures - Proforest Graphic, Source: Proforest ✓ Include clear and realistic timeframes for each stage of the grievance process and communicate the types of outcomes and remedies available. Timeframes should: 1. Comply with applicable legal requirements, including any mandated deadlines for acknowledgement, investigation, response, or access to remedies, where relevant.

Core step	8. Design the overall process (Cont.)
Operational Guidance	2. Reflect indicative good-practice service standards, for example: – Acknowledgement: 2–7 working days. – Initial assessment: 10–14 working days. – Investigation: within 30 working days. – Resolution proposal/action plan: within 30–60 working days. 3. Allow for escalation and proportionality, recognising that life-threatening, severe, or otherwise high-risk cases should be prioritised and addressed as a matter of urgency, while more complex cases may require extensions, provided affected stakeholders receive regular progress updates. ***Note:*** *These timeframes are indicative and should be adapted to the nature, severity, and complexity of the case.* ✓ Clearly capture responsibilities, decision points, referral pathways, and escalation triggers. ★ Develop a flowchart of the process with expected response times.

Core step	9. Ratification of process by all implementing and funding partners
UNGP Criteria	**Legitimacy**
Operational Guidance	✓ Document and share final process along with any key decisions with implementing and funding partners.

Core step	10. Socialisation of grievance mechanism
UNGP Criteria	**Accessibility**
Operational Guidance	✓ Communicate the mechanism in plain and local languages, using visual aids and accessible formats where needed. ✓ Use the outreach methods identified during stakeholder consultation, such as community notice boards, radio, social media, posters, field staff, or project partners, and ensure messages explain scope, channels, confidentiality, timelines, and referral options.

Core step	10. Socialisation of grievance mechanism (Cont.)
UNGP Criteria	**Predictability**
Operational Guidance	✓ Communicate the scope and process early and often to all stakeholders to prevent misunderstandings and frustration.[6] ★ Publish an external-facing governance document describing the grievance mechanism and its management process, including how grievances are received, logged, assessed, addressed, and how the effectiveness of the mechanism is reviewed. The document should outline the general process, roles, and indicative response timeframes, and may be presented through a simple flowchart or similar visual format for use in community outreach materials (e.g., posters or infographics). ***Note:*** *This requirement relates to transparency about the grievance mechanism and its procedures only. It does not require the public disclosure of individual grievance cases, grievance logs, or case-specific information. An example of the elements the process should cover can be found in Figure 3.* ★ Develop templates for acknowledgment letters and resolution summaries. Communication templates should include information on next steps and expected timeframes.

Core step	11. Provide practical support to overcome identified barriers
UNGP Criteria	**Equitability**
Operational Guidance	✓ Provide targeted practical support where access barriers have been identified, such as translation, help with written submissions, provision of transportation, or formats suitable for people with low literacy. ✓ Ensure affected stakeholders have access to independent advice or expertise to help them engage in the grievance process in a fair, informed, and respectful way. They should also receive all relevant information and timely updates, and, wherever possible, be actively involved in defining appropriate remedies. ★ Establish additional protections for sensitive grievances, such as cases involving gender-based violence, child abuse, retaliation, threats against human rights defenders, or whistleblowing. These protections may include survivor-centred approaches, restricted case access, enhanced confidentiality, and referral to specialist service providers where appropriate. ★ Assign community liaisons or translators to assist with grievance submission. ★ Provide information on legal aid or advisory services. ★ Where possible, offer financial support for participation (e.g., travel costs for hearings). ★ If advisory, technical, or financial support is provided to complainant, ensure that they have and are aware of the right to decide who represents them.

6 **Note:** There is frequent confusion about the purpose and scope of grievance mechanisms. Without clear communication, stakeholders may expect the LJI to resolve all disputes in the landscape—even those unrelated to its activities—leading to disillusionment and reputational risk.

2.2 Phase 2: Receiving, Processing, and Responding to Grievances

Core step	1. Follow the policies and processes
UNGP Criteria	**Predictability, Transparency**
Operational Guidance	✓ Follow the processes that have been communicated to stakeholders, including communicated timelines. ✓ When there are deviations from the process or exceptions to timelines, communicate proactively about such changes with relevant stakeholders. ✓ Document all communications, timeline changes, rationale and decisions in a case management log for accountability (e.g. physical book, excel form, digital dashboard, etc.). ✓ Ensure parties have and are aware of the option to withdraw from the process whenever they choose.
UNGP Criteria	**Accessibility, Transparency, Equitability**
Operational Guidance	✓ Provide regular and timely updates on case progress at key stages of the process (see Figure 3), particularly to the grievance raiser. Where appropriate, use mechanisms such as a case reference number or secure tracking system so individuals can monitor progress while protecting their identity. ✓ Use communication channels that are accessible, appropriate, and safe for the individual, such as in-person meetings, SMS, WhatsApp, email, or trusted intermediaries, to ensure updates can be received and understood.

Core step	2. Acknowledge, register, and conduct an initial assessment of the grievance
UNGP Criteria	**Accessibility, Predictability, Legitimacy, Transparency**
Operational Guidance	★ Actively engage with existing grievance mechanisms and traditional community channels (e.g. community representatives or local leaders) outside the LJI's own reporting channels to ensure grievances within the scope of the LJI's grievance mechanism are identified and captured, regardless of where they are raised. ✓ Acknowledge receipt promptly: Confirm that the grievance has been received and recorded within the defined timeframe, i.e. via email.

Core step	2. Acknowledge, register, and conduct an initial assessment of the grievance (Cont.)
Operational Guidance	✓ Prioritise and classify grievances, assessing the scale, scope, and irremediability of harm. While all grievances should be reviewed and addressed, risk classification can help ensure that the most urgent and severe cases receive timely attention and receive the resources necessary for an effective response. Risk classification may also support understanding of the potential implications for affected people, the initiative's operations, and its reputation. Risk levels should be determined based on the severity of the actual or potential harm (including its scale, scope, and irremediability), rather than solely on the category of grievance. The examples above are illustrative only. – Lower-risk grievances may relate to communication or information-sharing concerns. – Medium-risk grievances may involve inadequate consultation or stakeholder engagement. – High-risk grievances may involve land-related conflicts. – Critical-risk grievances may include violence, intimidation, retaliation, or threats against individuals, including Human Rights Defenders, or other situations involving significant or immediate risks to people. Such cases should be prioritised (if there are multiple pending grievances) and escalated as appropriate. ✓ Conduct an initial screening to determine whether the grievance falls within scope of the grievance mechanism, meaning that the initiative may have caused, contributed to, or be linked to the harm and understand how the complainant or affected party is connected to the initiative or its partners. ✓ Assess the credibility of the grievance and establish the relevant facts, drawing on available evidence and information from relevant parties. The depth of the assessment should be proportionate to the severity and complexity of the grievance and should inform decisions on any further investigation required. ✓ Identify the party(s) responsible for the activity linked to the grievance. In an LJI, responsibility may lie with: – Implementing partners involved in the activity that caused harm. – Contractors or service providers engaged by the initiative that failed to meet agreed standards. – Other relevant actors in the landscape linked to the activity or impact.

Core step	2. Acknowledge, register, and conduct an initial assessment of the grievance (Cont.)
Operational Guidance	**Responsibility and remedy:** Initial screening should consider the initiative's relationship to the adverse impact. • Where the LJI caused the impact, it should provide or enable remedy. • Where it contributed to the impact, it should contribute to remedy in cooperation with other responsible actors. • Where it is directly linked to the impact through relationships or activities, it should use appropriate leverage, support referral or cooperation with relevant actors, and monitor whether affected stakeholders can access appropriate remedy. ✓ Discuss the grievance with relevant internal stakeholders before responding to the complainant to determine the appropriate course of action, responsibilities, and response, while ensuring confidentiality where relevant. ✓ Notify the complainant whether the grievance falls within the scope of the mechanism and communicate the next steps. If the grievance is outside the mechanism's scope, communicate this clearly and respectfully, explain the reason, and follow the referral protocol where one is in place.

Core step	3. Investigate the grievance and engage relevant parties
UNGP Criteria	**Accessibility, Predictability, Legitimacy, Transparency**
Operational Guidance	✓ Engage with the grievance raiser(s) (if possible) when undertaking any further investigation. ✓ Give all relevant parties the opportunity to verify and comment on information before decisions are made. ★ Engage a trusted third party to manage grievances, where possible. ✓ Include special procedures for sensitive grievances, such as sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, child abuse, threats against human rights defenders, retaliation, whistleblowing, or gender-based violence. These procedures should prioritise safety, dignity, privacy, informed choice, enhanced confidentiality, restricted case access, referral to specialist support services, and appropriately qualified or independent investigators where required.

Core step	3. Investigate the grievance and engage relevant parties (Cont.)
UNGP Criteria	**Accessibility, Transparency, Equitability**
Operational Guidance	✓ Maintain open communication with parties throughout the process to gather additional information, share relevant case documents, clarify concerns, and respond to questions, using methods that are accessible and appropriate to their circumstances. Inform parties how they can request access to information that can appropriately be shared.

Core step	4. Develop and agree appropriate corrective actions and remedy
UNGP Criteria	**Predictability, Transparency, Equitability**
Operational Guidance	✓ Develop a time-bound mitigation plan that includes: – Stopping any harmful practices and addressing immediate risks. – Preventing recurrence through improvements to policies, procedures, or practices. – Providing appropriate remediation to affected parties, ensuring their meaningful participation in determining suitable remedies. **Note:** *The mitigation plan should clearly assign remediation responsibilities to the appropriate actor(s). In some cases, remediation may require collaboration and shared responsibility among multiple parties.* **Examples of remedy that could be provided in practive include:** • **Apologies:** A formal acknowledgement and apology where initiative activities or partners have caused harm, excluded stakeholders from decision-making, or failed to respect agreed consultation processes. • **Restitution:** Restoring affected individuals or communities to their previous situation where possible, for example by reinstating access to land, natural resources, or livelihood opportunities, restoring damaged community infrastructure, or correcting unfair exclusion from project benefits. • **Rehabilitation:** providing appropriate support to affected individuals or communities, such as access to legal assistance, psychosocial support, livelihood restoration programmes, capacity-building, or other measures that help address the impacts experienced. • **Financial compensation:** Compensation for demonstrable losses or damages resulting from initiative activities, such as loss of income, damage to crops or community assets, or costs incurred by affected stakeholders. • **Corrective actions and guarantees of non-repetitions:** Changes to policies, procedures, engagement processes, or implementation practices to prevent similar harms from occurring in the future, including improved FPIC, consultation, worker protection, or grievance management systems.

Core step	4. Develop and agree appropriate corrective actions and remedy (Cont.)
UNGP Criteria	**Rights-Compatibility, Dialogue and Engagement**
Operational Guidance	✓ Hold consultation sessions with affected parties before agreeing on remediation measures to ensure that remedies are designed to reflect rightsholders' needs and preferences. This is particularly important when grievances are raised by third parties on behalf of rightsholders, as it helps confirm that affected individuals agree with both the claims being made and the proposed remedies. ★ Use mediation and joint problem-solving techniques to reach mutually acceptable solutions. ***Note:*** *In cases where negotiation of remedies is complex or contentious, it is considered best practice to involve neutral third parties—such as mediators or independent experts—to facilitate dialogue.* ✓ Before finalising any decision, check whether proposed remedies do not create any new risks for the complainant or other stakeholders. ✓ Analyse potential remedies to ensure they are adequate, effective, prompt, culturally appropriate, gender-sensitive, and otherwise aligned with international human rights standards.[7] ***Note:*** *If national law conflicts with international norms, the LJI should be sure to comply with national law while also doing what they can to honour the principles of the international standards.*[8]
UNGP Criteria	**Accessibility, Transparency, Equitability**
	✓ Communicate clearly about the remedies that are possible through the mechanism, the extent that they can be enforced, and their implementation monitored. ★ At the end of the process, provide a clear summary of the grievances and resolutions at community level including: – The steps taken and decisions made. – Any agreements on remediation. ✓ Establish and communicate a formal Appeal and Escalation Process for complainants who are dissatisfied with the outcome of a grievance. At a minimum, this should include clear timeframes for submitting appeals, review by an individual or panel independent of the original decision, and documented procedures for communicating and implementing final decisions.

7 International human rights standards are the globally recognised principles that outline the fundamental rights, freedoms, and protections owed to all individuals. These standards are articulated in international treaties, conventions, and normative frameworks, many of them adopted by the United Nations. They guide governments, organisations, and initiatives in respecting, protecting, and fulfilling human rights. Examples include The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), or the ILO Core Labour Standards.

8 For more information on this topic in relation to broader HRDD: https://www.biicl.org/documents/17_1930_biicl_bn_report_web.pdf

Core step	5. Engage Local Governance Structures, where needed
UNGP Criteria	**Rights-Compatibility**
Operational Guidance	✓ If remedies involve legal obligations (e.g., land rights, labour law), coordinate with relevant government authorities or appropriate local organisations (which themselves have better access or know how to better manoeuvre local laws despite sometimes difficult enforcement) to ensure compliance and legitimacy and if appropriate, develop a Referral Protocol for government mechanisms.
UNGP Criteria	**Dialogue and Engagement**
	★ Inviting local officials to joint dialogues where appropriate. ★ Coordinating with traditional authorities or community leaders to enhance legitimacy, when relevant. ***Note:*** *Ensure government involvement does not compromise neutrality or confidentiality.*

When can a grievance document be considered resolved?



- ✓ The agreed remedy or corrective actions have been implemented.
- ✓ Affected stakeholders have been informed of the outcome and have been given the opportunity to provide feedback.
- ✓ There is evidence that the issue had been adequately addressed.
- ★ Where possible closure should be confirmed with the complainant, recognising that agreement from all parties may not always be achievable.

Note: *Participation in the grievance mechanism does not limit a rightsholder's ability to seek remedy through judicial processes or other appropriate channels if they believe the grievance has not been adequately addressed, including after the grievance process has been closed.*

2.3 Phase 3: Monitoring and Evaluation

Core step	1. Collect data to monitor effectiveness of the grievance mechanism
UNGP Criteria	**Transparency, Rights-Compatibility, Continuous Learning, Dialogue and Engagement**
Operational Guidance	✓ Keep a centralised record of complaints, this can be analogue or digital. ✓ Monitor whether the agreed remedies and mitigation actions are being implemented by the responsible party, in line with the timelines outlined in the mitigation plan. Monitoring should also verify that implemented actions remain consistent with applicable legal requirements and do not create unintended adverse impacts or risks for affected stakeholders. Monitoring may include stakeholder consultations (i.e. via surveys), site visits, or community-based monitoring systems for IP&LC-related grievances. ★ Seek external inputs on implementation and compliance, where appropriate, i.e.: – Engage independent advisory panels, civil society organisations, or trade unions for impartial review, where relevant. – Use external experts for complex cases or systemic risk analysis. ★ Track basic data: – Number of grievances received. – Resolution time per case. – Types of grievances and trends. – Channels used for submission. – Stakeholder demographics (where reported). ★ Track long-term commitments, monitor preventive measures, and assess unintended consequences of remediation activities. ✓ Use performance indicators to track and evaluate the mechanism's functioning, accessibility, remedy outcomes, and learning. Indicators may be grouped as follows: – Process indicators: percentage of grievances acknowledged within the communicated timeframe; average time for initial assessment and resolution; percentage resolved within indicative timeframes. – Remedy and outcome indicators: evidence that agreed remedies have been implemented; affected stakeholder satisfaction; recurrence of similar issues. ***Note:*** *These indicators can be strengthened over time as more data becomes available. This may include more detailed stakeholder feedback on accessibility barriers, as well as evidence of outcomes such as changes to procedures, outreach, referral pathways, or remedy implementation.* ★ Include field visits and community feedback, not just remote monitoring, through tools like performance review checklists, feedback forms and periodic community sessions to gather input on the mechanism and its performance. These sessions can be integrated into other activities carried out by the implementer(s) within the landscape. ***Note:*** *Schedule feedback sessions at times and locations convenient for rightsholders, and ensure participation is voluntary and safe.*

Core step	2. Review and analyse the data
UNGP Criteria	**Continuous Learning**
Operational Guidance	⊘ If agreed actions for remedy have not been implemented, identify the underlying reasons and any barriers to implementation. ★ Regularly review systemic risk trends and grievance mechanism performance, including access barriers. ★ Reviews should be conducted regularly, as appropriate to the scale and complexity of the initiative.

Core step	3. Respond to findings of data analysis
UNGP Criteria	**Transparency, Rights-Compatibility, Continuous Learning**
Operational Guidance	⊘ Develop a plan to address non-implementation of remedy. This may include intensified engagement with the responsible party, suspension of collaboration, or responsible disengagement—always proportionate to the severity of the issue. Escalation decisions must consider which partner or actor is responsible and how this affects the initiative's broader governance and commitments. ⊘ If a remedy is found to be ineffective, address any deficiencies with relevant stakeholders. ★ Use findings to adjust outreach strategies, improve accessibility, address existing gaps and improve the mechanism over time.

Core step	4. Publish regular summaries of how the mechanism is performing, while respecting confidentiality and minimising retaliation risks
UNGP Criteria	**Transparency**
Operational Guidance	⊘ Publish understandable aggregate information about grievances received, progress made, and outcomes reached, where this can be done without compromising confidentiality, anonymity, safety, or the integrity of the process. Case-specific information should only be shared with the grievance raiser and relevant parties, unless disclosure is agreed and appropriate. Published information may include: – Total number of grievances received. – Types and nature of grievances. – Number of grievances rejected (and reasons). – Number resolved, broken down by type. – Short case descriptions only where affected stakeholders have consented, and the risk of re-identification, retaliation, or harm is low. ★ Share updates periodically, e.g. quarterly or bi-annually through: – Public reports on LJI website. – Community meetings. – LJI website or social media.

Core step	5. Share learnings
UNGP Criteria	**Continuous Learning**
Operational Guidance	⊘ Share learnings internally (e.g. within implementing partners) and externally (e.g. with funders, local stakeholders or in collaboration spaces such as RSPO). ★ Publish mechanism reports and records of continuous improvement e.g. via annual learning briefs summarising trends and actions taken. ★ Where grievance analysis identifies recurring or systemic issues that fall beyond the direct responsibility or control of the LJI, consider bringing these issues to relevant stakeholders, or into relevant forums, dialogues, or governance processes to encourage broader action and systemic improvement.

Core step	6. Communicate updates of the overall process
UNGP Criteria	**Predictability**
Operational Guidance	⊘ Communicate updates of the overall process proactively.

3 Appendices

a. Key Definitions

Adverse Impact:

A negative effect on people resulting from an initiative's activities, decisions, or relationships. Adverse impacts may affect individuals' or groups' human rights, livelihoods, health, safety, wellbeing, land tenure, cultural heritage, or other protected rights and interests. Impacts may be actual or potential and may vary in scale, scope, and irremediability.

Duty Bearer:

Individuals or entities that have specific obligations to respect, protect, and fulfil human rights, and to abstain from violating them. While states are the primary duty-bearers under international human rights law, non-state actors—such as private companies, local organisations, donors, and international institutions—may also hold human rights responsibilities depending on the context.[9] *See also 'Responsible Party'*.

Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC):

Free, Prior and Informed Consent is a principle protected by international human rights standards that state, 'all peoples have the right to self-determination' and 'the right to freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development'.

- **Free:** Consent given voluntarily and free of "coercion, intimidation or manipulation"; without undue influence; or manipulation through cash donations to influential community members.
- **Prior:** Consent is sought sufficiently in advance of any authorisation or commencement of activities.
- **Informed:** Refers mainly to the nature of the engagement. Information should be complete and simplified in the language that is understood by the community.
- **Consent:** Refers to the collective decision made by the rights-holders and reached through the customary decision-making processes of the affected peoples. Consent must be sought and granted or withheld according to the unique political-administrative dynamic of each community.

Grievance:

A grievance is a concern, allegation, or claim raised by an individual or group regarding actual or potential adverse impacts linked to an initiative's activities, decisions, implementation processes, or business relationships. A grievance may be raised before, during, or after impacts occur and may ultimately be substantiated or unsubstantiated through the grievance process.

Grievances may concern adverse human rights or environmental impacts. In the context of this guidance, the focus is on human-rights-related grievances.

9 Reinforcing capacities of duty bearers | UNESCO

Grievance mechanism/management system:

Grievance mechanism is defined by the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) as "any routinised, State-based or non-State-based, judicial or non-judicial process through which grievances concerning business-related human rights abuse can be raised and remedy can be sought."

A "grievance mechanism or management system" relates to the formal or informal process a party puts in place to receive, manage and remedy grievances (sometimes known as a grievance procedure, grievance mechanism or grievance remediation mechanism).

Grievance Raiser:

Also referred to as a complainant, is the individual, group, or legitimate representative who raises a grievance. In an LJI context, this may include community members, workers, IP&LC representatives, Civil Society Organisations or other affected parties.

Landscape and jurisdictional initiatives:

Landscape and jurisdictional initiatives are long-term, place-based, collaborative, multi-stakeholder approaches to realise common goals and positive outcomes for people, nature, and climate in the context of agricultural production. A variety of different landscape and jurisdictional initiatives are being developed. They generally combine most or all of the following elements:[10]

- Development and implementation at the scale of a jurisdiction (i.e. local or national government) with a focus on the performance of the whole landscape.
- Participation of government together with other stakeholders such as civil society groups, communities, private sector companies and farmers.
- One or more shared goals that support sustainable development (e.g. reducing deforestation, eliminating child labour or supporting smallholders).
- Alignment of the activities and inputs of different stakeholders (e.g. incentives, enforcement, and planning) to increase effectiveness.
- Accountability to provide credibility and assurance including long-term governance, monitoring, transparency, communication, and verification.

Mitigation:

Actions taken to prevent, reduce, minimise, or cease actual or potential adverse impacts. Mitigation focuses on addressing the causes of impacts and preventing their occurrence or recurrence. Mitigation measures may include changes to project design, policies, procedures, governance arrangements, implementation practices, or capacity-building efforts.

***Note:** Mitigation and remedy are complementary but distinct. Mitigation seeks to prevent or reduce adverse impacts, whereas remedy addresses the consequences experienced by affected rightsholders.*

10 See more details in this briefing: Introduction to landscape or jurisdictional initiatives in commodity agriculture.

Remedy:

Remedy refers to the processes and outcomes intended to address adverse impacts experienced by affected rightsholders. Depending on the nature of the impact and the initiative's relationship to it, remedy may include apology, restitution, rehabilitation, compensation, satisfaction, guarantees of non-repetition, or other measures developed with affected stakeholders. Remediation should be timely, rights-compatible, culturally appropriate, and informed by the participation of affected people.

Responsible Party *(Also referred to as 'Grievance Holder' or 'Duty Bearer')*:

The individual, organisation, implementing partner, contractor, or other actor responsible for addressing a grievance and implementing mitigation measures and/or remedy. Identifying the responsible party is critical to ensuring accountability and effective remedy within Landscape and Jurisdictional Initiatives. Responsibility should be determined based on the actor's relationship to the impact, including whether it caused, contributed to, or is directly linked to the adverse impact.

Rightsholder:

Individuals or groups of people who are actually or potentially adversely affected by a proposed operation, product, project or programme. Rightsholders are entitled to enjoy and exercise their rights by virtue of being human, as well as to access effective remedy when their rights have been breached.

Risk: The possibility that an initiative's activities, decisions, or relationships may cause, contribute to, or be directly linked to adverse impacts on people. Within social safeguards and human rights due diligence, risk refers primarily to risks to people rather than risks to the implementing organisation itself.

SOP (Standard Operating Procedure):

A formally documented, step-by-step guide establishing how grievance processes are managed. An SOP outlines responsibilities, timelines, communication strategies, recordkeeping, and escalation protocols to ensure consistency and transparency.

Stakeholder:

Any individual or organisation that may affect, or be affected by, or have an interest in an LJI's activities and decisions. In the context of the UN Guiding Principles and this guidance, particular attention should be given to affected stakeholders and their legitimate representatives, including Indigenous Peoples, workers, local communities, trade unions, civil society organisations, and human rights defenders.[11]

11 STAKEHOLDER: UN Guiding Principles Reporting Framework

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