

# Company responsibilities for supporting credible landscape monitoring

## Landscape and Jurisdictional Practitioner Community - Joint Position Paper

January 2024

This position paper sets expectations for how companies can support effective monitoring and verification of landscape actions and performance outcomes. Companies that want to understand, manage, and communicate about the results of their investments in a landscape need good information about what is happening. By investing in monitoring of landscape actions and performance outcomes, companies can access the data they need to make credible claims.

This joint position paper is the fourth in a series of collective positions from the landscape and jurisdictional practitioner community<sup>1</sup> that aim to provide companies and the organisations that support them with accessible and consistent guidance for effective investment and action in landscapes and jurisdictions. The series provides a common baseline set

of expectations for companies, on which the practitioner community is building more detailed guidance and tools. This paper builds on and complements the first three collective positions defining landscape actions and how companies can communicate about their investments, actions, and contribution to landscape performance outcomes.<sup>2</sup>

1. See end of document for a list of participating initiatives supporting this position.

2. See Landscape Practitioner Community position paper one: '[What constitutes a landscape investment or action?](#)', position paper two: '[Making effective company claims about landscape investments and actions](#)', and position paper three: '[Effective company claims about contributions to landscape performance outcomes](#).'

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# Why should companies invest in landscape monitoring?

A growing number of companies understand that to make measurable progress on the sustainability issues that matter, collective action is needed at a scale that goes beyond project boundaries. Companies are investing in landscape action to secure their sourcing product, meet their business sustainability goals, and reduce socio-ecological risks<sup>3</sup>. Monitoring is an integral part of that investment because it provides the context for knowing whether the actions are achieving their intended impacts.

Companies can benefit from coordinated landscape monitoring in the following ways:

## 1 Provides evidence to substantiate claims and communications

Provides credible evidence of the work being done and transparency on progress achieved, which is required to substantiate action and performance claims and communications. This is particularly important for complying with emerging regulatory and reporting obligations, e.g. EU Green Claims Directive, Science-Based Targets for Nature from SBTN.

## 2 Strengthens alignment

Helps to ensure that actions and interventions across stakeholder groups in the landscape or jurisdiction are aligned and are contributing to collective landscape goals. This also helps companies to build and retain trust with local stakeholders.

## 3 Improves effectiveness

Provides insights into the effectiveness of collective action to address systemic issues like deforestation, biodiversity loss, and human rights. Knowing what is working or not enables companies, project implementers, multistakeholder platforms, and local governments to employ adaptive management at project and landscape scales.

## 4 Delivers cost efficiencies

Enables companies to share the cost of monitoring and reduce duplication in what is being monitored, reducing the burden for each individual participant.

## Company roles and responsibilities

The goal of all landscape monitoring systems is to have good quality, consistent, validated data about actions taken and landscape-scale performance change over time. Monitoring is a shared responsibility that engages companies, local governments and other stakeholders and is an integral part of any landscape investment.

Companies that invest in landscape initiatives have the following monitoring responsibilities:

## 1 Promoting a collective monitoring framework

Companies support landscape-scale multistakeholder platforms to develop a collective monitoring framework that enables measurement of actions and landscape-scale performance against prioritised issues and agreed sustainability goals and targets. In practice, this means companies promote alignment and convergence of existing

monitoring approaches with the collective monitoring framework. The monitoring framework should be based on a theory of change or results chain that links activities in the landscape to the agreed landscape-scale goals.

## 2 Establishing a baseline

Companies support these multistakeholder platforms to establish a landscape-scale performance baseline that informs where landscape actions are needed to achieve agreed sustainability goals and provides the critical reference point against which to measure change over time.

## 3 Monitoring activities

Companies ensure the activities they invest in and the outputs of those activities are being monitored. They can do this directly or by providing support (financial or in-kind) to the monitoring organisation, e.g., implementing partner or multistakeholder platform.

3. See CDP [Meeting Nature Goals: Landscape and Jurisdictional Approaches](#).

#### 4 Monitoring performance

Companies support coordinated monitoring and data collection (financial or in-kind) on landscape-scale performance outcomes and impacts, in line with the collective monitoring framework and consistent with baseline data that has been collected.

- **Monitoring over time:** Companies invest in monitoring over the full period for which they want to make claims or communicate about performance outcomes in the landscape.

#### 5 Validating or verifying data

Companies support data validation or verification that is sufficiently robust to engender trust in its reliability and accuracy and in the resulting claims and communication.

#### 6 Sharing data

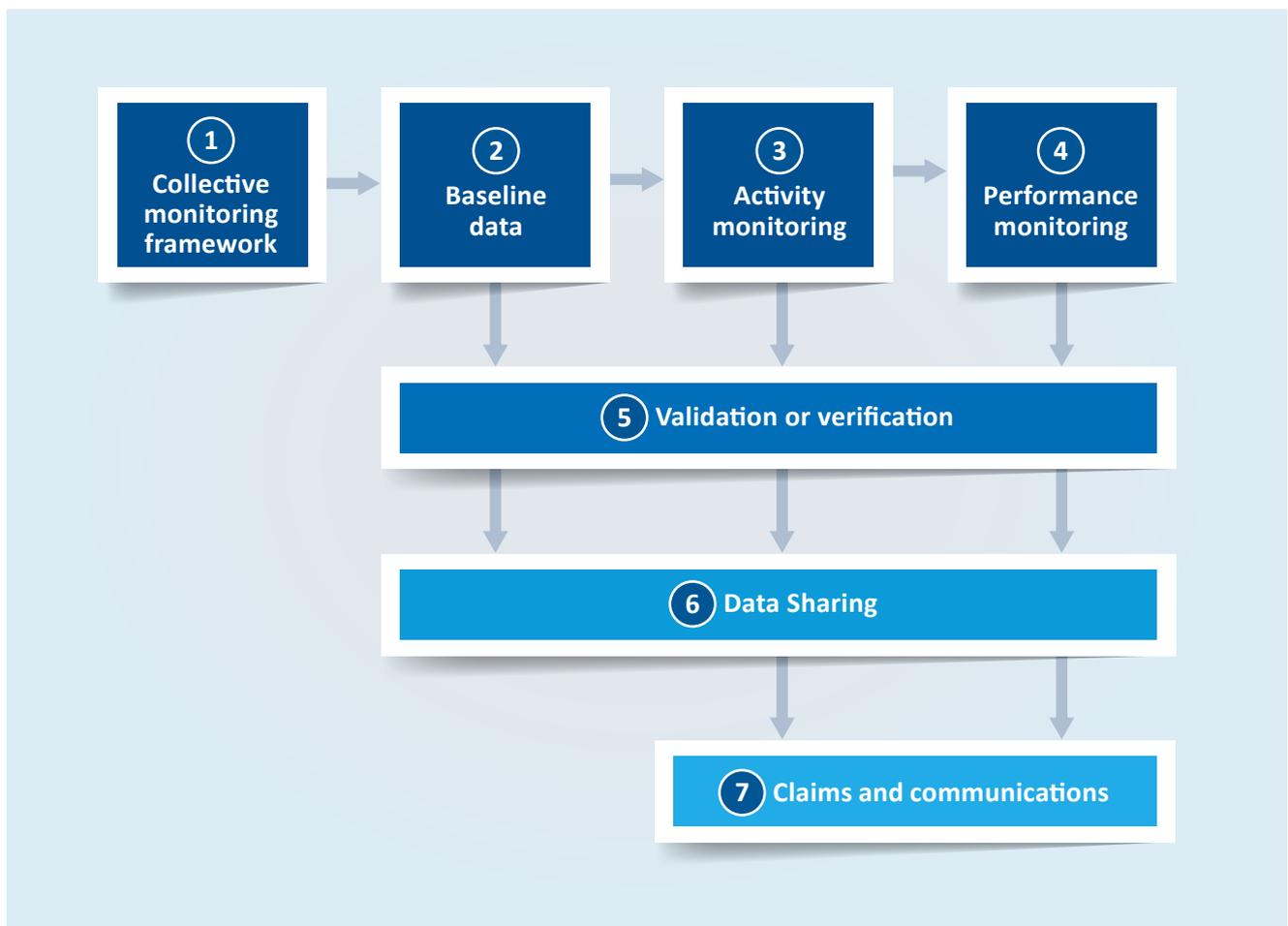
Companies share relevant, non-confidential data sets and data layers they have access to, including data they have collected from their suppliers, at least with the multistakeholder platform, aggregating and anonymising the data where necessary. Companies also share data insights with the communities from whom the data is collected.

- **Supplementary activities:** Where companies invest in supply chain action outside of a collective action plan, they are responsible for ensuring monitoring of the results of that action and integrating those results into the collective monitoring framework.

#### 7 Making claims

Companies recognise the collective monitoring framework as the authoritative source of data for claims and communications about landscape-scale performance.

Figure 1: Relationships between landscape monitoring system elements





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# How companies can support effective landscape-scale monitoring

The following sections provide an overview of good monitoring practices that companies should look for in each of the first six core steps in a monitoring process, as outlined above. Additional guidance on claims and communications (step 7) is available in the other collective position papers. The guidance will also be useful as a high-level reference for implementing partners and multistakeholder platforms who are carrying out the monitoring.

## 1 Collective monitoring framework

Companies investing in landscapes should look for the following elements in a credible monitoring framework:

- **Goals and targets:** sustainability goals and quantified SMART<sup>4</sup> targets and milestones are developed according to prioritised local needs and grounded in the platform's theory of change. Targets are set based on baseline performance information (see next section).
- **Metrics:** a set of metrics and accompanying monitoring methodologies is defined that will enable meaningful assessments of progress towards targets and milestones on each sustainability issue. This may involve prioritising a subset of metrics that are feasible to measure.
- **Data sources:** there is a set of high-quality data sources from which to derive insights about performance against each of the prioritised metrics, supported by a data acquisition procedure or protocol. This can include both primary and secondary sources of data. Where good quality data sources are lacking, a plan is in place to develop or improve the data.
- **Data management protocols and structures:** there are data management protocols and structures in place to credibly and consistently gather, integrate, store, analyse and use the range of data that is collected.

- **Data governance:** policies and procedures support effective operation and use of the monitoring platform. Clarity about who owns different datasets and how they will be used, including data use agreements, data sharing protocols, and managing data confidentiality, ensure effective sharing of results.

## 2 Baseline data

A critical early consideration for companies investing in landscape action is the establishment of a performance baseline. This is not just a nice to have but is necessary to establish a reference point against which performance improvement will be measured. This is a prerequisite for any performance claims and for emerging company reporting frameworks such as SBTN that require these baselines.

Companies should ensure that a baseline assessment takes into account the following considerations:

- **Sustainability scope:** The sustainability goals and targets prioritised in the collective action plan should inform which sustainability issues are included in the baseline assessment.
- **Geographic scope:** This should be aligned with the landscape or jurisdictional boundary. Where relevant datasets are only available at other scales, e.g. national or sub-national, performance should be extrapolated to the landscape scale if possible.
- **Date of baseline:** The baseline needs to represent performance at a point in time. Where activities are carried out before a baseline is undertaken, it may be possible to use datasets to retrofit the baseline to the starting date of the activities (e.g., annual deforestation data layers), though in many cases that historical data will not be available.

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4. Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound

- **Consistency of data:** The datasets that are used in the baseline assessment should be those that will be updated and available over time so there is consistency in the data that is collected from year to year, enabling a comparison in change over time.
- **Reconciling multiple baselines:** Multiple baselines are likely to exist at different scales within the landscape, e.g., from existing projects or government agencies. These baselines should be reconciled to the extent possible, seeking to align metrics, measurement methods, and datasets. For local acceptance and ownership, it is important to align with pre-existing public data such as national or sub-national datasets.

### 3 Activity Monitoring

Companies will often monitor progress on implementation of the actions they have been investing in, along with short-term outputs. This is primarily about determining whether an action is delivering expected results and how it can be improved over time. Activity monitoring can also be useful for gathering reach data, such as number of producers or enterprises reached or area of land impacted. While monitoring is focused on the results of individual actions, the data can also usefully contribute to aggregated outcomes at a landscape level, delivering insights related to landscape-level changes.

Companies can support activity monitoring by:

- **Aligning data:** Aligning the type of data collected with the multistakeholder platform and with other initiatives in the landscape so that the data can be aggregated at a landscape level by the multistakeholder platform;
- **Sharing data:** Sharing data about the actions taken and the results of those actions with the multistakeholder platform so that aggregated and anonymized data can be made available publicly, e.g., through a progress dashboard;
- **Linking to landscape goals:** Showing how landscape investments and actions contribute to agreed landscape goals and outcomes, e.g., through a results chain. Monitoring those outcomes can support claims that the activities are contributing to landscape goals; and
- **Validating data:** Seeking local stakeholder validation that activities have been implemented.

### 4 Performance Monitoring

The veracity of landscape performance outcome or impact claims is informed by the quality and relevance of the performance data, whether and how it is verified, how well it is managed and analysed, and the way that conclusions are drawn<sup>5</sup>.

Companies can support landscape-scale performance monitoring by encouraging:

- **The use of high quality performance data** that meets the following criteria:
  - **Relevance:** Data collected are good measures of the respective sustainability issue, targets, and metrics;
  - **Accuracy:** Data come from reputable and unbiased sources, are complete, and are of good quality;
  - **Spatial resolution:** The resolution of the data matches the landscape or jurisdictional boundaries and the resolution at which the related sustainability issue is meaningfully measured;
  - **Temporal resolution:** Data are up-to-date and are updated frequently enough to maintain the relevance of the data over time;
  - **Availability:** Datasets are accessible, so they can be validated.
- **Local applicability:** Data is consistent with the regulatory and policy frameworks of the countries and subnational regions in which the landscape or jurisdiction is located. For example, it is expedient to use geospatial data that is recognized by national governments.

- **Assessing validity of the results chain:** To make claims about contribution of activities to performance outcomes it is necessary to have data that backs up that connection. This means that, in addition to performance data, companies should support data collection about the short-term outcomes that one would expect to see as a result of the activities.

- **Collective efforts to improve data:** One of the challenges of landscape performance monitoring is that secondary data availability and quality is often limited. Companies should encourage stakeholders in a landscape or jurisdiction to share data they have access to. Where relevant high-quality data does not exist for a specific issue or metric or at the right scale, companies should support collective efforts to improve data collection or to employ appropriate interim proxy metrics and data sources.

### 5 Validation or verification

Verification is fundamentally about building trust in the reliability and accuracy of the data and of the resulting claims and communications. Verification can take a variety of forms including stakeholder validation<sup>6</sup>. The extent to which performance data and claims need to be verified or validated depends on how they are being used. For example, a company that uses data for internal assessments of progress against its targets may not require any verification, whereas reporting or disclosure, e.g., against an SBTN target, may require some form of stakeholder validation or external verification. Reporting against legal obligations like due diligence regulations would require the most robust means of independent verification.

5. LandScale is one example of a structured verification framework that can be used to assess landscape performance.

6. Validation of data by an organised group of stakeholders with knowledge of the landscape can be a novel and effective way to affirm that results have been achieved.

Factors that influence the rigour of validation or verification include:

- The end use or target audience of the claims being made;
- Level of risk associated with the sustainability issues being addressed;
- Track record of the landscape initiative and participating companies;
- Level of transparency of the performance data; and
- Trustworthiness of the data sources and of the data providers.

Validation or verification of the monitoring process, of the performance data quality, and of the data analysis is primarily a desk-based exercise. However, if the assessment identifies shortcomings in the data itself or in how the data was analysed or managed, then further interrogation may be required.

Companies can encourage effective verification by ensuring that it includes an assessment of the following:

- Quality and relevance of the baseline information;
- Implementation of data management protocols for data collection, storage, and analysis;
- Quality and integrity of the datasets;
- Relevance of the metrics and data as measures of the prioritised sustainability issues;
- Veracity of the data analysis in drawing conclusions about performance; and
- Accuracy in how the conclusions from the analysis are communicated.

## 6 Data Sharing

Sharing of activity and performance data within a landscape-scale multistakeholder platform is necessary to ensure a complete picture of progress in that landscape. The practical implication of shared data is lower individual costs of monitoring for participating companies. Companies that share their monitoring

data are also better positioned to communicate about their contribution to the overall landscape performance outcomes.

Companies can support data sharing by aligning with the following practices:

- **Non-confidential data:** Companies have access to certain kinds of data that would be very difficult for other stakeholders to collect. Companies should share with the multistakeholder platform any non-confidential data they collect or have access to that is relevant to the landscape goals and targets. This information can also be insightful for the communities to which the data relates.
- **Transparency of data:** Ultimately, performance claims are not credible unless there is enough data available to back them up. Companies need to be willing to share enough information that it can be validated by others, at least by the multistakeholder platform.
- **Public availability of data:** Companies should encourage the multistakeholder platform to make the following information publicly available, ideally through dashboards or other types of data visualisation, to improve accessibility and understanding of the information:
  - Performance metrics that are being measured;
  - The sources of data being collected;
  - Baseline performance data;
  - Progress in implementing activities, reported against the collective action plan;
  - Performance progress; and
  - Any verification or validation of the data.
- **Data governance:** Companies should ensure that good data sharing practices are followed, including data use agreements and data sharing protocols, respecting data privacy and confidentiality for sensitive data and ensuring producers and communities have access to their data.



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## Organisations and initiatives supporting this position



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## About ISEAL

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ISEAL  
The Green House  
244-254 Cambridge Heath Road  
London E2 9DA

+44 (0)20 3246 0066  
info@isealalliance.org  
[www.iseal.org](http://www.iseal.org)  
Registered Charity 1199607