



Social and Environmental Strategic Assessment

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Acronyms

CAT	Convention Against Torture
CBOs	Community-Based Organizations
CCA	Community Conservation Area
CCAP	Climate Change Adaptation Plan
CDCCC	Community Disaster and Climate Change Committee
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DARD	Department of Agriculture & Rural Development
DOCC	Department of Climate Change
DEPC	Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation
DLA	Department of Local Authorities
DoWR	Department of Water Resources
DOF	Department of Forestry
DWA	Department of Women Affairs
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
DSPPAC	Department for Strategic Planning, Police & Aid Coordination
ECARE	Expanding Conservation Areas Reach and Effectiveness in Vanuatu (IUCN project funded by GEF)
ESIA	Environmental and Social Impact Assessment
EWS	Early Warning System
FAD	Fish Aggregating Device
FPIC	Free Prior and Informed Consent
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH
GOV	Government of Vanuatu
GRM	Grievance Redress Mechanism
IAS	Invasive Alien Species
ICCPR	International Convention on Civil and Political Rights
ILO	International Labour Organization
KBAs	Key Biodiversity Areas
LDC	Least Developed Country
LDCF	Least Developed Country Fund
LDN	Land Degradation Neutrality
MALFFB	Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry, Fisheries and Biosecurity
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation



MCCAMGEEDM	Ministry of Climate Change Adaptation, Meteorology, Geo-hazards, Environment, Energy and Disaster Management
MJCS	Ministry of Justice and Community Services
NAB	National Advisory Board (on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction)
NAPA	National Adaptation Program of Action
NBSAP	National Report on National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
NDCs	Nationally Determined Contributions
NDMO	National Disaster Management Office
NGEP	National Gender Equality Policy
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NSDP	National Sustainable Development Plan 2016 – 2030
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety
VMGD	Vanuatu Meteorology and Geo-Hazards Department
PA	Protected Area
PAA	Priorities and Action Agenda 2006 – 2015
PMU	Project Management Unit
PNG	Papua New Guinea
SECU	Social and Environmental Compliance Mechanism (UNDP)
SES	Applicable Social and Environmental Standards
SESP	Social and Environmental Screening Procedure
SPREP	Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme
SRM	Stakeholder Response Mechanism



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment (SESA) was prepared to support the implementation of the Vanuatu Coastal Adaptation Project – Phase II (VCAP-II), with a specific focus on identifying policy-level conditions, risks and safeguards considerations relevant to project delivery. The assessment responds to areas of VCAP-II implementation that require engagement with existing legal, policy and guideline frameworks, particularly those related to climate adaptation planning, forest and landscape restoration and community conservation. It also examines the institutional conditions that influence the application of safeguards and the effectiveness of implementation at national, provincial and community levels.

The SESA reviews three policy instruments that directly frame the implementation context of VCAP-II: the Climate Change Act, the Forest and Landscape Restoration Strategy (FLRS), and the Community Conservation Area (CCA) Guidelines. Together, these instruments influence how climate adaptation, conservation and restoration activities are planned, coordinated and overseen and how safeguards are articulated.

The analytical core of the SESA examines how the Climate Change Act, the FLRS and the CCA Guidelines define objectives, roles, procedures and safeguards requirements, and identifies the key gaps that affect implementation conditions in practice. The analysis shows that, while these frameworks establish relevant mandates and policy objectives, they provide limited operational guidance on coordination, safeguards application, accountability, reporting and feedback provisions. These gaps have direct implications for how VCAP-II activities are implemented and overseen across governance levels.

Under the Climate Change Act, the analysis finds that there is a comprehensive institutional architecture for climate governance, focused on coordination, information functions and high-level mandates. These are not accompanied by binding procedural requirements that translate climate risk and resilience considerations into sectoral and sub-national decision-making. As a result, climate adaptation functions remain weakly anchored in planning and regulatory processes beyond the climate sector, creating reliance on project-based arrangements and limiting the institutionalization of adaptation-related safeguards and accountability mechanisms.

In the case of the Forest and Landscape Restoration Strategy (FLRS), upstream impacts relate primarily to governance and coherence constraints. The Strategy sets ambitious restoration objectives, but provides limited operational guidance on how climate risk, ecosystem resilience, safeguards and inclusion principles should be systematically integrated into restoration planning and implementation across sectors and levels. This creates risks of fragmented implementation, uneven coordination between national and sub-national actors, and limited capacity to assess restoration outcomes beyond biophysical targets.

For the Community Conservation Area (CCA) Guidelines, the analysis identifies impacts linked to the partial formalization of community-level governance functions. The Guidelines enable legal recognition of CCAs, but they provide limited direction on safeguards application, accountability arrangements, gender equality and livelihood risk management once CCAs are established. This



constrains the consistency of safeguards implementation across sites and places significant responsibility on community structures without corresponding procedural support or resourcing.

Across the three frameworks, these impacts are reinforced by the limited articulation of how accountability and safeguards-related responsibilities are expected to operate across governance levels. In particular, community-based arrangements—such as Community Conservation Areas—are addressed largely as individual or standalone units, rather than as part of a connected and coordinated governance landscape. This results in variable implementation conditions across sites and impacts the risk profile of VCAP-II.

The policy analysis is complemented by consultations and questionnaires with national, provincial and community-level stakeholders involved in VCAP-II implementation. These engagements sought concrete evidence on how the Climate Change Act, the FLRS and the CCA Guidelines are interpreted and operationalised across governance levels, and where implementation relies on project-based practices rather than on formalised procedures.

Consultations confirmed that community-level bodies play a central role in delivering climate, conservation and restoration activities under VCAP-II. At the same time, stakeholders highlighted that these roles are not consistently supported by standardised procedures, reporting pathways or verification functions within existing policy and guideline frameworks. This contributes to variability in safeguards application, monitoring practices and coordination across sites.

Stakeholders also emphasized that many safeguards practices already exist in practice, including community consultations, FPIC-related processes, women’s participation and biodiversity monitoring. However, these practices are largely project-driven and unevenly applied across institutions, reflecting the absence of shared protocols, common indicators and harmonised monitoring arrangements.

Across institutions, capacity constraints—particularly related to staffing, technical skills, budgets and field presence—were identified as a cross-cutting factor shaping coordination, safeguards oversight and monitoring. At the same time, institutions expressed strong willingness to adopt more formalised tools and procedures, including FPIC protocols, grievance mechanisms, gender and biodiversity indicators, and coordinated monitoring systems.

Based on these findings, the SESA identifies a set of upstream environmental and social impacts that influence how safeguards, coordination and accountability function in practice across governance levels:

Impact 1: Fragmented integration of the Climate Change Act within adaptation-related decision-making.

While the Climate Change Act establishes institutional mandates and coordination functions for climate governance, its provisions do not consistently translate into binding procedural requirements across sectors and sub-national planning processes. This limits the institutionalisation of climate adaptation considerations beyond the climate sector and contributes to reliance on project-based arrangements.



Impact 2: Governance, coordination and institutional capacity constraints across implementation levels.

Across the three frameworks, roles and coordination mechanisms are defined unevenly, with limited procedural articulation of how responsibilities are expected to operate across national, provincial and community levels. Capacity constraints related to staffing, resources and field presence further affect the consistency of coordination and safeguards oversight.

Impact 3: Limited integration of climate risk and ecosystem resilience into planning and management frameworks.

The analysis identifies gaps in how climate risk, ecosystem resilience and biodiversity considerations are systematically incorporated into planning and management processes, particularly under the FLRS and related sectoral instruments. This constrains the ability to assess and manage cumulative risks and long-term resilience outcomes.

Impact 4: Insufficient formal recognition and resourcing of community-level governance functions.

Community-based arrangements, including CCAs, Village Councils and related bodies, are central to VCAP-II implementation but are addressed largely on a site-by-site basis within existing frameworks. Limited guidance on their coordination, reporting and oversight roles constrains consistent safeguards application and monitoring across sites.

Impact 5: Weak integration of gender equality and protection of vulnerable groups.

Although gender equality and social inclusion commitments are recognised at policy level, they are not consistently operationalised through procedural guidance, defined responsibilities or shared indicators across the reviewed frameworks. This results in variable consideration of gender-differentiated risks and impacts during implementation.

Impact 6: Limited policy-level accountability and monitoring arrangements.

The reviewed frameworks provide limited direction on how accountability, reporting and safeguards-related information should be consolidated across governance levels. This affects the consistency of oversight and the ability to track safeguards performance and implementation conditions across VCAP-II-supported activities.

The recommendations respond to the structural governance constraints identified through the SESA analysis and focus on strengthening the conditions under which VCAP-II is implemented across governance levels. Specifically, the recommendations seek to: (i) strengthen policy and legal coherence across climate, environmental and natural resource frameworks to reduce fragmentation and reliance on project-based arrangements; (ii) reinforce governance and coordination mechanisms, including the articulation of roles and responsibilities across national, provincial and community levels; (iii) improve the integration of climate risk, ecosystem resilience, gender equality and protection of vulnerable groups within planning and management frameworks; and (iv) enhance accountability and oversight arrangements to support more consistent application of safeguards across sites.

The Action Matrix operationalizes these recommendations by translating them into indicative actions within the scope of VCAP-II. For each action, the matrix identifies responsible institutions, resource



needs and risks if not implemented. In doing so, it provides a practical tool to support coordination, prioritization and monitoring of follow-up actions.

All proposed measures are framed within the scope and mandate of VCAP-II and are designed to be achievable within a single project cycle, while contributing to more durable improvements in governance and safeguards application over time.



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to VCAP-II and rationale for SESA

1. The *Vanuatu Coastal Adaptation Project – Phase II (VCAP-II)* is a six-year national initiative implemented by the Government of Vanuatu with technical support from UNDP and financing from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF). It builds on the achievements of VCAP-I (2014–2020), which supported community-based adaptation measures in vulnerable coastal areas. As VCAP-II seeks to expand these approaches to additional provinces and strengthen national systems, the project’s success increasingly depends on the coherence and adequacy of the policy and institutional frameworks that govern climate-resilient development.

2. VCAP-II promotes integrated management of terrestrial, freshwater, and coastal resources, recognizing the strong interlinkages between ecological systems and livelihoods in Vanuatu. In a context where most settlements and public infrastructure are located near the coast, pressures on forests, watersheds and catchments have direct implications for marine and coastal environments. The project therefore links ecosystem restoration, natural resource management, and livelihood sustainability under a coherent adaptation framework.

3. The project supports a wide range of adaptation measures, including community-led planning processes, integration of climate-risk profiling into infrastructure design and local development planning, establishment of early-warning systems, creation and operationalization of Community Conservation Areas (CCAs) and capacity-building at community and institutional levels. Because these interventions interact directly with national and provincial governance systems, their effectiveness depends on the adequacy and coherence of the policy and legal frameworks that regulate climate change adaptation, resource management and community conservation. This interaction creates the need for an upstream safeguards assessment.

4. Under Component 3¹, VCAP-II provides targeted policy and institutional support to clarify and strengthen the national frameworks that influence project implementation. This includes improving coordination mechanisms, enhancing institutional mandates, and supporting the development or revision of strategic and operational instruments.

5. The Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment (SESA) acts as the instrument through which upstream risks related to these frameworks are examined and safeguards are integrated across the normative and institutional dimensions of Component 3. While the project’s ESIA addresses site-specific impacts, the SESA takes a broader, policy-level perspective to ensure that upstream frameworks support environmentally sound, inclusive and climate-resilient outcomes.

1.2 Objectives of the Assessment

6. A Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment (SESA) is a tool to bring environmental and social considerations into the design of policies and plans. The approach was developed through international safeguard frameworks such as those of UNDP, to promote sustainability and inclusion from the earliest stages of policymaking.

7. UNDP’s *Social and Environmental Standards (SES)*² and national regulatory frameworks are the reference points to screen and analyses the three policy instruments object of this SESA. The process combines document review, institutional analysis, and consultations with key stakeholders to

¹ VCAP-II Project Document, Output 3.1.1 “conduct a review to ensure the policies and process outlined are adequately supported by appropriate legislation and policies”.

² [Social and Environmental Assessment and Management. July 2022](#)



build a shared understanding of how governance systems can better support inclusive and sustainable adaptation. It also serves as a participatory diagnostic tool that supports evidence-based decision-making and strengthens the long-term sustainability of policy outcomes.

8. More specifically, the SESA aims to:
- **Identify and assess environmental and social risks** associated with the policy and guideline frameworks relevant to VCAP-II.
 - **Identify gaps in institutional roles, procedures and capacities** that may affect the consistent application of environmental and social safeguards.
 - **Analyse how the design and operational clarity of these frameworks influence implementation conditions**, including coordination, accountability and the application of safeguards.
 - **Capture stakeholder perspectives and institutional practice** related to safeguards application.
 - **Inform policy-level recommendations and enabling conditions** to improve coherence, learning and adaptive management within the scope of VCAP-II.

1.3 Approach

9. The SESA applies a structured recognized approach around four sequential stages:
- Establishing the context – reviewing national and UNDP safeguards to find the gaps and establishing a safeguards integration matrix;
 - Review of policy instruments, their institutional mandates and the broader socio-environmental setting in which the project operates;
 - Consultation and institutional analysis - undertaking consultations and using the inputs and desk-based review to identify roles, overlaps, and level of coherence in safeguards planning and implementation;
 - Analytical synthesis – organizing findings to identify patterns, gaps and enabling conditions that influence long-term monitoring, compliance and the effective application of safeguards;
 - Action-oriented synthesis and follow-up – translating the analytical findings and recommendations into a structured Action Matrix that guides implementation, clarifies institutional responsibilities, and supports coordinated responses to identified governance and safeguards risks.

1.4 Scope and limitations

10. The scope of this SESA responds directly to the assessments required under Risks 7 and 12 of the VCAP-II Social and Environmental Screening Procedure (SESP). These risks relate to the adequacy of upstream policy and planning frameworks to support inclusive, safeguards-compliant implementation of VCAP-II, particularly in relation to community conservation, forest and landscape restoration, and institutional capacity for compliance and monitoring.

11. The SESA focuses on those aspects of VCAP-II implementation that depend on the adequacy of existing legal, policy and guideline frameworks and may give rise to upstream risks. These include outcomes related to climate adaptation planning, integration of biodiversity conservation and sustainable land management into decision-making at national and local levels, and institutional



capacity for compliance, enforcement and monitoring. Reviews of individual project components and site-specific activities fall within the scope of the ESIA and associated ESMPs.

12. Within this scope, the SESA examines three upstream frameworks that shape implementation conditions for these outputs:

- (a) the Meteorology, Geological Hazards and Climate Change Act (Climate Change Act);
- (b) the Forest and Landscape Restoration Strategy 2020–2030 (FLRS); and
- (c) the Community Conservation Area (CCA) Guidelines under the Environmental Protection and Conservation Act (EPCA).

13. ***Meteorology, Geological Hazards and Climate Change Act***, referred as Climate Change Act³ This legal instrument has already undergone revision by VCAP-II, assessing current gaps in the institutional arrangements and functional mandates. The Act defines the mandate of the Department of Climate Change (DOCC) and the National Advisory Board on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction (NAB). The ongoing review seeks to clarify roles and coordination mechanisms, strengthen the regulatory base for adaptation planning, and ensure consistency with related legislation and international commitments.

14. At the programmatic level, the ***Forest and Landscape Restoration (FLR) Strategy 2020-2030*** provides the national framework for forest and landscape restoration in Vanuatu. It sets restoration targets, defines restoration options, and outlines institutional roles across the forestry, environment and land sectors. The Strategy also foresees the development of supportive instruments and coordination mechanisms—such as FLR coordination groups, policy reviews, ROAM assessments, nursery systems, and restoration planning tools—to enable large-scale implementation.

15. The ***Community Conservation Area (CCA) Guidelines*** is the operational framework for the registration of locally managed protected areas under the *Environmental Protection and Conservation Act (EPCA)*. The guidelines outline the procedural steps for application, assessment, governance, and the legal declaration of CCAs. A revised version of the CCA booklet is under preparation through the ECARE⁴ Project (IUCN), with technical contributions from VCAP-II and other partners.

16. The assessment therefore focuses on the following interrelated analytical domains, insofar as they influence governance conditions relevant to VCAP-II implementation:

- **Safeguards integration:** the extent to which the principle underlying SES requirements—such as FPIC, gender equality, grievance mechanisms, biodiversity monitoring, and right-holder participation—are articulated across frameworks.
- **Policy coherence:** the degree to which these frameworks implicitly support the consistent application of safeguards across climate adaptation, biodiversity management, and community engagement.
- **Institutional coordination:** whether mandates, roles, and collaboration mechanisms provide a clear basis of accountability to support effective application of safeguards.

³[Meteorology, Geological Hazards and Climate Change Act 2016, Republic of Vanuatu](#)

⁴ The [GEF-6 IUCN Expanding Conservation Areas Reach and Effectiveness \(ECARE project\)](#) commenced in 2022. ECARE develops comprehensive management planning guidelines for the PAs into a standard monitoring and evaluation system with supportive legal frameworks.



- **Monitoring and sustainability:** the adequacy of systems for tracking environmental and social outcomes to ensure safeguards remain functional adaptive over time.

17. The scope of the SESA is shaped by the availability of current policy drafts and by the fact that several instruments are still under revision. The analysis focuses on upstream policy and institutional frameworks and does not extend to site-level verification. Insights from VCAP-II operational areas are used to contextualise the review.

18. The assessment covers three policy frameworks of different purpose, legal hierarchy and implementation modality. A common analytical framework is applied but the depth and specificity of recommendations vary according to each instrument.

19. Engagement with institutions was undertaken through targeted consultations within the available timeframe. Given the geographical dispersion of agencies and delays in receiving their feedback, full validation of findings could not be completed. Responses were obtained from most key ministries; however, engagement varied depending on staff availability and the internal coordination structure of each department.

1.4 Structure of the report

20. This SESA report is structured in eight chapters followed by annexes. Each section builds progressively from the contextual and methodological foundations to the analysis of upstream activities, environmental and social risks, and final recommendations for institutional and policy strengthening under VCAP-II.

21. **Chapter 1 – Introduction** outlines the background and rationale of the SESA, its objectives, scope, and limitations. It explains how the SESA complements VCAP-II by identifying opportunities to strengthen the enabling environment for climate-resilient and inclusive development.

22. **Chapter 2 – Policy and Institutional Review** set out the legal and institutional context for safeguards in Vanuatu and the UNDP SES framework. It presents the safeguards integration matrix linking SES principles and standards with national laws and policies and summarizes the institutional landscape and mandates relevant to environmental and social safeguards.

23. **Chapter 3 – Environmental and Social Policy Review** examines how three key frameworks—the Meteorology, Geological Hazards and Climate Change Act, the Forest and Landscape Restoration Strategy, and the Information Booklet on the Registration of CCAs—reflect safeguard requirements. For each instrument, it compiles the policy context and objectives, key measures, stakeholders and institutional roles, and the main gaps and limitations from a safeguards perspective.

24. **Chapter 4 – Results of the Assessment of Social and Environmental Potential Risks** identifies upstream impact pathways and potential risks emerging from the way the three frameworks are designed and implemented. It analyses issues such as misalignment between policies, governance and coordination constraints, gaps in the integration of climate and ecosystem-based approaches, weaknesses in community processes, uneven attention to gender and protection, and limited transparency and accountability.

25. **Chapter 5- Stakeholder Engagement Process and Results** presents the results of the stakeholder engagement conducted as part of the SESA process. It summarizes the consultations and inputs gathered from national and provincial institutions, community-level bodies and implementation partners involved in VCAP-II. It also synthesizes the key weaknesses issues and recommendations to address them.



26. **Chapter 6– Synthesis of Gaps and Enabling Conditions** consolidates the findings into a cross-cutting analysis of policy and institutional gaps, alignment with UNDP SES, and enabling conditions for the implementation of forest and landscape restoration and community conservation frameworks. It includes a summary matrix of key gaps to inform subsequent recommendations.

27. **Chapter 7- Recommendations** proposes measures for policy reform, institutional strengthening, stakeholder engagement (including FPIC processes), gender mainstreaming and adaptive management. It also sets out an Action Matrix to support follow-up, monitoring and iterative improvement under VCAP-II.

28. **Chapter 8 – Conclusions** summarises the key findings of the SESA and highlights strategic priorities to guide future implementation of VCAP-II and related national climate adaptation and natural resource governance policies.



2. SAFEGUARD FRAMEWORK ANALYSIS

29. This chapter presents the legal and strategic context of the SESA and the safeguard framework in Vanuatu. The national legal landscape provides a number of entry points for embedding environmental and social safeguards at the strategic level. The next paragraphs summarize those.

2.1 Legal context of safeguards in Vanuatu

30. The **Constitution of Vanuatu**⁵ affirms fundamental rights and establishes the legal basis for land ownership and governance. Articles 73 and 75 recognize customary land tenure and restrict permanent land ownership to Ni-Vanuatu citizens. Article 81 enables redistribution of land to indigenous groups, reinforcing collective rights and access. These provisions are particularly relevant in contexts where safeguards related to land rights, customary governance, and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) are applied.

31. Complementary instruments such as the Custom Land Management Act (2013)⁶, Citizenship (Amendment) Act (2013)⁷ and international conventions ratified by Vanuatu—including CEDAW, CRPD, CRC, ICCPR and ILO Conventions—reinforce obligations on non-discrimination, women’s rights, labour conditions and the protection of vulnerable groups.

32. Provisions for **Indigenous Peoples and Customary Law** are embedded in various legal instruments. Article 95 of the Constitution affirms the role of customary law, and the **Island Courts Act (1983)**⁸ allows for local dispute resolution in accordance with custom, provided it does not conflict with written law or public interest. These frameworks recognize the importance of traditional knowledge, institutions and decision-making practices, and are relevant for safeguards that seek to align modern governance with customary structures.

33. Additional national instruments, including the Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Culture Act (2019)⁹ and the Preservation of Sites and Artefacts Act (Cap. 29), strengthen the protection of cultural heritage and Indigenous governance systems. Institutional safeguards relating to coordination, transparency and accountability are supported by the Right to Information Act (2016)¹⁰.

34. The **National Gender Equality Policy (NGEP) 2020–2030**¹¹ establishes the overarching framework for promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment across all sectors in Vanuatu, including climate change, environmental management and community governance. It defines five strategic areas—leadership and governance; economic empowerment; elimination of gender-based violence; climate and disaster resilience; and institutional strengthening—that are directly relevant to the implementation of VCAP-II. The Policy recognizes differentiated vulnerabilities and capacities among women, men, youth and persons with disabilities, and sets clear expectations for inclusive participation and equitable access to project benefits.

35. The NGEP mandates the integration of gender analysis, sex- and age-disaggregated data, and gender-responsive institutional arrangements within government planning and decision-making. Alignment with the NGEP is essential to ensure that safeguards obligations related to participation,

⁵ [Constitution of Vanuatu](#)

⁶ [Custom Land Management Act 2013](#)

⁷ [Citizenship \(amendment\) Act 2013](#)

⁸ [Australian National University \(2004\), *Beyond Case Law: Kastom and Courts in Vanuatu*](#)

⁹ [Protection of traditional knowledge and expressions of culture Act no. 21 of 2019](#)

¹⁰ [Right to information Act](#)

¹¹ [National Gender Equality Policy \(2020-2030\)](#)



protection, social inclusion and accountability—are consistent with Vanuatu’s national commitments on gender equality.

36. **Environmental safeguards** relating to biodiversity protection, pollution control, waste management and natural resource oversight are grounded in the Environmental Protection and Conservation Act (EPCA, 2002), Water Resources Management Act (2002), Forestry Act (2019), Pollution Control Act (2013) and Waste Management Act (2014). These legal obligations are complemented by the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) 2018–2030 and the National Environment Policy and Implementation Plan (NEPIP) 2016–2030, which set national targets for terrestrial and marine biodiversity protection, invasive species control, sustainable ecosystem management and the mainstreaming of environmental considerations across sectoral policies.

37. Climate- and disaster-related safeguards are anchored in the Meteorology, Geological Hazards and Climate Change Act (2016) and the **National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement** (2018)¹², which establish obligations on climate risk reduction, early warning systems, displacement safeguards and community safety. These requirements are operationalized under the broader **Vanuatu Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2016–2030**¹³ and through the National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA, 2007), which promotes climate resilience, sustainable land use and the integration of climate risks into national and local planning.

38. Social safeguards related to labour standards, workplace safety and community well-being are established under the Employment Act (Cap. 160), the Minimum Wage Regulations (1987) and the Health and Safety at Work Act (Cap. 195). These legal instruments define minimum working conditions and protections for workers. Their strategic alignment is reflected in the National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP) 2016–2030, which provides an overarching national vision and policy priorities under three pillars: society, environment and economy.

39. Land- and resource-related safeguards, including customary governance, land rights and forest restoration, are grounded in the Customary Land Management Act (2013) and the Forestry Act (2019). These Acts regulate customary land decision-making, forest management and community-based resource use. Their strategic articulation is provided by Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets under the **Forest and Landscape Restoration Strategy** (FLRS) 2020–2030, which support land rehabilitation, forest restoration and sustainable soil management in alignment with customary systems and community priorities.

2.2 UNDP Safeguards

40. The UNDP Social and Environmental Standards (SES) provide the overarching policy framework guiding how environmental and social considerations are integrated into VCAP-II. As a mandatory reference for UNDP-supported initiatives, the SES establish principles, standards, and procedural requirements that inform the assessment, coordination, and decision-making processes associated with policy and institutional frameworks relevant to the project. Within this SESA, the SES provide the normative reference for assessing the extent to which safeguards are reflected and operationalized within the national context.

41. UNDP SES were approved in June 2014 by UNDP’s Organizational Performance Group and revised in 2019, with the revised version effective as of January 2021. The SES require that all UNDP Programmes and Projects enhance positive social and environmental opportunities and benefits as

¹² [National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement \(2018\)](#)

¹³ [Vanuatu Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2016–2030](#)



well as ensure that adverse social and environmental risks and impacts are avoided, minimized, and mitigated.

42. UNDP Programmes and Projects adhere to the objectives and requirements of the SES, which are to:

- Strengthen the quality of programming by ensuring a principled approach;
- Maximize social and environmental opportunities and benefits;
- Avoid adverse impacts to people and the environment;
- Minimize, mitigate, and manage adverse impacts where avoidance is not possible;
- Strengthen UNDP and partner capacities for managing social and environmental risks;
- Ensure full and effective stakeholder engagement, including through a mechanism to respond to complaints from project-affected people.

43. UNDP’s SES includes an **Overarching Policy and Principles, Project-Level Standards, and the Policy Delivery Process**. UNDP Programming Principles are to support governments to adhere to their human rights obligations and empower individuals and groups, to realize their rights and to ensure that they fully participate throughout UNDP’s programming cycle.

44. SES will ensure that compliance review and stakeholder response (or grievance) mechanisms are in place so that individuals and communities potentially affected by UNDP Programmes and Projects have access to effective mechanisms and procedures for raising concerns about the social and environmental performance of the UNDP Programme and/or Project. UNDP will ensure that its Implementing Partners and its own Programme and Project managers provide clear and constructive responses to potential grievances, correct non-compliance where it has occurred, and share the results of grievance processes. The grievance and stakeholder response mechanisms will not impede access to judicial or administrative remedies as may be relevant or applicable.

45. Most UNDP Programmes and Projects involve partners that contribute in-kind resources or parallel funding and apply their own policies and procedures to achieve common objectives. Therefore, while UNDP does not ensure compliance with the SES beyond those activities funded through UNDP’s accounts, UNDP reviews the entire Programme or Project for consistency with the requirements of the SES. All partners are bound to their respective commitments made within the partnership agreement (e.g. Country Programme Action Plan, Annual Work Plan, Project Document, Joint Programme Document, Letter of Agreement).

2.2.1. Overarching Policy and Principles

46. **Principle 1: Human Rights.** UNDP recognizes the centrality of human rights to sustainable development, poverty alleviation and ensuring fair distribution of development opportunities and benefits and is committed to supporting “universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all”.

47. **Principle 2: Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment.** The promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women are central to the mandate of UNDP and intrinsic to its human rights-based approach to development programming. This effort includes advocating for women’s and girls’ human rights, combating discriminatory practices, and challenging the roles and stereotypes that create inequalities and exclusion.

48. **Principle 3: Environmental Sustainability** - Sustainable management, protection, conservation, maintenance and rehabilitation of natural habitats and their associated biodiversity and ecosystem functions are fundamental to UNDP’s efforts to develop and implement sustainable



development pathways. UNDP seeks to address poverty and inequality while maintaining and enhancing natural capital.

49. **Principle 4: Accountability** - UNDP promotes accountability to programme and project stakeholders by (i) enabling active local community engagement and participation in decision-making, particularly those at risk of being left behind; (ii) ensuring transparency of programming interventions through provision of timely, accessible and functional information regarding supported activities, including on potential environmental and social risks and impacts and management measures; (iii) ensuring stakeholders can communicate their concerns and have access to rights-compatible complaints redress processes and mechanisms; and (iv) ensuring effective monitoring—and where appropriate, participatory monitoring with stakeholders—and reporting on implementation of social and environmental risk management measures.

2.2.2. Project Level Standards

50. At the Project level, UNDP Standards 1-8 further support implementation of UNDP's commitments to promote respect for human rights, gender equality, and environmental sustainability. The Standards set out specific requirements relating to different social and environmental issues.

51. **Standard 1. Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Natural Resource Management.** Standard 1 includes provisions regarding biodiversity that are relevant to the Project. It states that as an integral part of the social and environmental assessment process, UNDP will ensure that direct and indirect impacts on natural resources, biodiversity and ecosystem services in the Project's area of influence are identified and addressed. The assessment process will consider, (i) risks of habitat and species loss, degradation and fragmentation, invasive alien species, overexploitation, hydrological changes, nutrient loading, pollution, and (ii) differing values (e.g. social, cultural, economic) attached to biodiversity and ecosystem services by potentially affected communities. Potential cumulative and induced impacts will be assessed. Project-related impacts across potentially affected landscapes or seascapes should be considered.

52. **Standard 2. Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation.** Standard 2 requires that Project components must be assessed for climate change-related risks and impacts. The climate change risk assessment will examine:

- Potential Project-related increases in emissions that may exacerbate climate change, such as GHG emissions and black carbon emissions.
- The viability or longer-term sustainability of Project outcomes due to potential climate change. This will involve the identification of components that are sensitive or vulnerable to emerging or anticipated manifestations of climate change.
- Risks that a Project may increase exposure to climate change. Project components must be assessed for potential unintended or unforeseen increases in vulnerability to climate change.
- Potential social, gender, and age risks, based on the differentiated impacts of climate change.
- Opportunities for (i) facilitating adaptation via synergies with existing or planned activities, (ii) combining mitigation (e.g. reduction in GHG emissions) and adaptation measures, and (iii) exploiting potentially beneficial changes in climatic or environmental conditions to deliver developmental benefits.

53. **Standard 3. Community Health and Safety Working Conditions.** Standard 3 acknowledges that the project activities, equipment and infrastructure can increase community exposure to risks and



impacts. This standard addresses the need to avoid or minimize the risks and impacts to community health, safety and security, with particular attention given to disadvantaged and marginalized groups.

54. **Standard 4. Cultural Heritage.** Standard 4 applies to activities that may adversely impact Cultural Heritage, including Projects that meet any of the following criteria: (i) located in, or in the vicinity of, a Cultural Heritage site; (ii) involving significant excavations, demolitions, movement of earth, flooding, or other environmental changes; (iii) proposes to utilize tangible or intangible forms of Cultural Heritage for commercial or other purposes.

55. **Standard 5. Displacement and Resettlement.** Standard 5 applies to all Project activities that may involve physical displacement (i.e., relocation or loss of shelter), whether full or partial and permanent or temporary, or economic and occupational displacement (i.e., loss of assets or access to assets that leads to loss of income sources or means of livelihood) as a result of Project-related land or resource acquisition or restrictions on land use or access to resources.

56. Furthermore, the standard also applies to displacement activities occurring for associated facilities (i.e., components that are not funded as part of the Project but whose viability and existence depend on the Project), displacement activities significantly related to the Project, and displacement activities that have occurred in anticipation of a UNDP Project

57. **Standard 6. Indigenous Peoples.** This standard is relevant in Vanuatu in a contextual manner. While the national population is broadly indigenous and shares customary land tenure and traditional governance structures, there is no distinct minority group that meets the definition of and Indigenous Peoples subgroup in contrast to a non-indigenous majority. Accordingly, the standard applies through its requirements on collective rights, culturally appropriate engagement, and respect for customary decision-making, rather than through the identification of a specific IP group.

58. **Standard 7. Labour and working conditions.** Standard 7 comply with national labour and occupational health and safety laws, with obligations under international law, and that it be consistent with the principles and standards embodied in the International Labour Organization (ILO) fundamental conventions, including freedom of association, elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation, elimination of forced or compulsory labour, and elimination of the worst forms of child labour.

59. “Occupational health and safety” refer to protecting workers from accident, injury or illness associated with exposure to hazards encountered in the workplace. Hazards can arise from materials (including chemical, physical and biological substances and agents), environmental or working conditions (e.g. oxygen-deficient environments, excessive temperatures, improper ventilation, poor lighting, faulty electrical systems), or work processes (including tools, machinery and equipment). UNDP will ensure that workers¹⁴ are provided with a safe and healthy working environment, taking into account risks inherent to the particular sector (including gender bias) and specific classes of hazards in the work areas. Where relevant, UNDP will ensure steps are taken to prevent accidents, injury, and disease arising from, associated with, or occurring during the course of work and will ensure the application of preventive and protective measures consistent with international good practice, as reflected in internationally-recognized standards such as the World Bank Group’s Environmental, Health, and Safety Guidelines.¹⁵

¹⁵ World Bank Group, “Environmental, Health and Safety Guidelines”, available at <http://www.ifc.org/ehsguidelines>. Risk prevention and reduction measures should include identification and minimization of potential hazards, use of appropriate equipment, training and workers, documentation and reporting of accidents and incidents, and emergency preparedness and response measures.



60. **Standard 8. Pollution prevention and resource efficiency.** Standard 8 outlines a project-level approach to pollution prevention and resource efficiency. The Standard apply to Projects that: (i) aim to improve existing waste management practices; (ii) generate or cause generation of solid, liquid or gaseous waste; (iii) use, cause use of, or manage the use, storage or disposal of hazardous materials and chemicals, including pesticides; and (iv) that significantly consume or cause consumption of water, energy, or other resources.

2.2.3. UNDP Guidance Notes on SESA

61. UNDP has prepared a set of operational guidance materials for each of the SES Overarching Principles, Project-Level Standards, and elements of the Project Delivery Process. The target users for the guidance notes are staff, consultants, stakeholders and partners who are involved in developing and implementing projects that invoke UNDP’s SES.

62. The Guidance Note on Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment¹⁶ indicates that a SESA should identify key social and environmental priorities, assess risks associated with the policy or program, analyze institutional capacities, and propose measures and recommendations to manage anticipated impacts.

2.2.4. UNDP Project Category and public disclosure

63. UNDP categorizes projects according to four categories – Low, Moderate, Substantial and High – that reflect the level of review, assessment and resources required for addressing and managing the project’s potential social and environmental risks and adverse impacts.

64. **Substantial Risk** projects (as the case of VCAP-II) will require assessment methodology and tools that will depend on the nature of the potential risks/impacts and the type of project. Typically and appropriately scoped ESIA may be needed. A range of targeted assessment tools may also be incorporated. Similarly, a scoped SESA may be utilized to assess the potential risks and impacts of supported plans and policy reforms.

65. UNDP is committed to ensuring meaningful, effective participation of stakeholders in its projects. For projects with potential adverse social and environmental impacts, stakeholders need access to screening reports, draft and final assessments and management plans. This information is to be disclosed in a timely manner, in an accessible place, and in a form and language understandable to affected persons and other stakeholders.

66. For projects classified as Substantial Risk, the UNDP SES requires that relevant documents be publicly disclosed at least 60 days prior to final project approval. This disclosure period allows stakeholders to review and comment on potential impacts and mitigation measures before the project moves forward.¹⁷

2.2.5. Grievance Redress and Stakeholder Response

67. As required in the SES, stakeholders who may be adversely affected by the project need to be able to communicate their concerns about the project’s social and environmental performance. UNDP needs to ensure that an effective project-level GRM is available. The grievance mechanism should not impede access to judicial or administrative remedies. Affected communities need to be informed about the mechanism as part of the stakeholder engagement process.

¹⁶ [Social and Environmental Assessment and Management. July 2022](#)

¹⁷ [Social and Environmental Assessment and Management. July 2022](#)



68. In addition, for all projects stakeholders should be made aware of UNDP’s Accountability Mechanism, which has two key components:

- a Compliance Review to respond to claims that UNDP is not in compliance with applicable environmental and social policies (SECU); and
- a Stakeholder Response Mechanism (SRM) that ensures individuals, peoples, and communities affected by projects have access to appropriate grievance resolution procedures for hearing and addressing project-related complaints and disputes.

2.3 Safeguards Integration Matrix (aligned to UNDP SES and Vanuatu National Frameworks)

69. This matrix consolidates all safeguards requirements across SES Principles and Standards and the National laws and Policies of Vanuatu. It identifies thematic safeguard areas, links them to SES and national frameworks, classifies the safeguard type, and summarizes the expected obligations and key gaps to inform the risk analysis.

Table 1. Safeguards Integration Matrix

Integrated principle/standard	Expected requirements for VCAP-II	Observed Gaps/Issues
<p>A1. Human Rights & Non-Discrimination</p> <p>Relevant SES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Principle 1: Human Rights</i> <p>National Instruments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitution of Vanuatu • CEDAW, CRPD, CRC, ICCPR, CAT • ILO Conventions ratified by Vanuatu • National Sustainable Development Plan 2016-2030, the “People’s Plan” (overarching national plan) • Decentralisation Act 1994 <p>Type of Safeguard</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Substantive + Procedural + Institutional</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure non-discrimination in access to project benefits. • Guarantee meaningful participation of all groups, including vulnerable groups, persons with disabilities, women, minorities and rural communities. • Promote transparency and inclusive decision-making. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National laws recognize rights but do not operationalize participation, inclusion, or safeguards processes at project level. • Weak mechanisms to ensure <i>informed</i> participation, inclusive access, or redress for discrimination in rural areas. • Limited integration of human rights considerations into natural resource decision-making processes.
<p>A2. Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment</p> <p>Relevant SES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Principle 2: Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment</i> <p>National Instruments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitution of Vanuatu • Custom Land Management Act (2013) • Citizenship (Amendment) Act (2013) • National Gender Equality Policy 2020-2030 (NGEP) <p>Type of Safeguard</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Substantive + Institutional</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of gender analysis in planning and implementation. • Meaningful participation of women in CCA governance and project committees. • Address structural barriers to women’s agency and land-related decision-making. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National legislation recognises gender equality only formally, not procedurally. • Customary systems still limit women’s participation in land and resource governance. • No standardised national requirements for gender mainstreaming in CCA planning.
<p>A3. Accountability, Transparency, and Grievance Mechanisms</p> <p>Relevant SES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Principle 4: Accountability</i> <p>National Instruments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Right to Information (RTI) Policy (2013) <p>Type of Safeguard</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Procedural + Institutional</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active stakeholder engagement. • Timely disclosure of project documents and risks. • Establishment of a project-level GRM consistent with SES. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RTI Policy supports transparency but does not establish procedures for project-level disclosure or GRMs. • No clear accountability pathways at community level, especially in remote islands.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring and reporting of safeguard compliance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weak culture of documentation and communication in national agencies.
B. ENVIRONMENTAL SAFEGUARDS	Expected requirements for VCAP-II	
<p>Standard 1: Biodiversity</p> <p>B1. Biodiversity Conservation and Natural Resource Management</p> <p>Relevant SES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Standard 1: Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Natural Resource Management</i> <p>National Instruments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental Protection and Conservation Act (2002) Water Resources Management Act (2002) Forestry Act (2019) <p>Type of Safeguard</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Substantive</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integration of biodiversity assessment into ESIA. Identification of sensitive habitats and species. Sustainable use of water, forests and land. Compliance with permitting requirements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observed Gaps/Issues National ESIA processes exist but are not consistently implemented or enforced. Limited integration of ecosystem-based adaptation and biodiversity offsets. Weak monitoring and reporting systems within government agencies.
<p>B2. Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management</p> <p>Relevant SES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Standard 2: Climate Change and Disaster Risks</i> <p>National Instruments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meteorology, Geological Hazards and Climate Change Act (2016) National Disaster Act 2006 and National Disaster Risk Management Bill 2016 Vanuatu Climate Change Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2016-2030 Vanuatu National Adaptation Plan for Action (NAPA) 2007 <p>Type of Safeguard</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Substantive + Procedural</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Climate-proofing of project interventions. Avoiding increasing disaster risk. Integrate climate hazard data and modelling into design. Ensure no maladaptation results from infrastructure or land-use decisions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Act focuses on service provision, not on project-level climate risk screening. No national framework for integrating climate risk into local planning. Limited institutional capacity at provincial level.
<p>B3. Pollution Prevention and Resource Efficiency</p> <p>Relevant SES</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use pollution prevention technologies. 	<p>National rules set thresholds but not preventive or efficiency measures.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Standard 8: Pollution Prevention and Resource Efficiency</i> <p>National Instruments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pollution Control Act (2013) • Waste Management Act (2014) <p>Type of Safeguard</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Substantive</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimise waste generation and emissions. • Comply with permit requirements. • Apply good international practice for construction and waste management. 	<p>Limited enforcement capacities in outer islands.</p> <p>No monitoring of pollution from small-scale rural infrastructure generated by the facilities to the environment.</p>
<p>C. SOCIAL SAFEGUARDS: COMMUNITY HEALTH, CULTURE, LAND & INDIGENOUS RIGHTS</p>	<p>Expected requirements for VCAP-II</p>	<p>Observed Gaps/Issues</p>
<p>C1. Community Health, Safety and Security</p> <p>Relevant SES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Standard 3: Community Health, Safety and Security</i> <p>National Instruments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and Safety at Work Act (Cap. 195) • National Health Plan for Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management, 2016 –2020 <p>Type of Safeguard</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Substantive + Procedural</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of community-level risks (labour influx, communicable diseases, road safety). • Certification of structural works by qualified professionals. • Implementation of worker health and safety measures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National framework focuses on workers, not on community safety. • No specific provisions for labour influx or public safety during community-based projects. • Limited technical oversight capacities in rural areas.
<p>C2. Cultural Heritage</p> <p>Relevant SES</p> <p><i>Standard 4: Cultural Heritage</i></p> <p>National Instruments</p> <p>Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Culture Act (2019)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preservation of Sites and Artefacts Act (Cap. 29) • Preservation of Sites and Artefacts Act <p>Type of Safeguard</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Substantive + Procedural</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid impacts on tangible and intangible heritage. • Obtain FPIC when cultural heritage is used. • Integrate customary practices into design. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customary systems play significant roles but have no formal monitoring mechanisms. • No unified national inventory or mapping of cultural heritage. • FPIC not systematically required under national law.
<p>C3. Displacement, Access to Land, and Livelihoods</p> <p>Relevant SES</p> <p><i>Standard 5: Displacement and Resettlement</i></p> <p>National Instruments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid physical and economic displacement. • Conduct meaningful consultations. • Prepare livelihood restoration measures when needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No national requirement for resettlement planning. • Land issues governed by custom; disputes are frequent and undocumented.



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement (2018) Customary Land Management Act (2013) <p>Type of Safeguard</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Substantive + Procedural + Institutional</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a project-level GRM for displacement issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procedures for planned relocation exist only at policy level.
<p>C4. Indigenous Peoples' Rights and FPIC</p> <p>Relevant SES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Standard 6: Indigenous Peoples</i> <p>National Instruments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditional Knowledge and Expressions of Culture Act (2019) Custom Land Management Act (2013) <p>Type of Safeguard</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Substantive + Procedural</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full participation of Indigenous right holders. FPIC where rights or lands may be affected. Culturally appropriate benefit-sharing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National law protects traditional knowledge but does not ensure FPIC for land/resource decisions. Customary processes vary greatly by island and are uneven in inclusiveness. Weak documentation of right holders and customary boundaries.
<p>C5. Labour and Working Conditions</p> <p>Relevant SES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Standard 7: Labour and Working Conditions</i> <p>National Instruments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employment Act (Cap. 160) Minimum Wage Regulations (1987) <p>Type of Safeguard</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Substantive</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safe and healthy working conditions. Prevention of child labour and GBV in labour settings. Fair treatment and equal opportunity. Alignment with ILO conventions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National legislation does not cover sector-specific risks, nor women's safety or GBV risks. In remote islands, informal labour is common and rarely regulated. Lack of monitoring of contractors' compliance.

2.4 Institutional framework

70. The effective implementation of national policies depends on the administrative capacity of public institutions to organise, coordinate and execute functions across sectors and levels of government. This section describes the mandates, organisational structures and implementation capacities of the principal government bodies involved in climate governance, environmental protection, landscape management and community-level resource administration. The information presented provides a basis to understand how national institutions are positioned to support future policy implementation.

2.4.1. Ministry of Climate Change, Meteorology, Geo-Hazards, Environment, Energy and Disaster Management (MCCAMGEEDM)

71. Established in 2014, the Ministry consolidates the core technical functions require for national climate and environmental policymaking and hosts the departments responsible for implementing the Climate Change Act and related frameworks. DOCC, DEPC and NDMO and VMGD are under this Ministry.

2.4.2. Department of Climate Change (DOCC)

72. DOCC plays a central role in coordinating and supporting climate change adaptation frameworks, such as the Climate Change Act and the FLRS. It operates primarily as coordination body rather than an operational agency and works through other departments and sectors for implementation. The Department has a small permanent workforce (PSC, 2024¹⁸), which indicates a lean administrative structure focused on policy guidance and cross-government coordination rather than field-level delivery. DOCC's capacity lies in policy organization and inter-agency alignment, making it the primary institution for coordinating climate-related policy frameworks. The DOCC works around thematic functions covering Adaptation and Mitigation, Loss and Damage and Carbon Markets.

2.4.3. Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation (DEPC)

73. DEPC holds national responsibility for environmental regulation, biodiversity conservation and protected areas. It provides the technical framework for CCAs and functions as the institutional point facilitating registration and support in management plans and awareness campaigns. It is also the institution of reference for environmental standards in nature-based solutions related to FLRS. With a moderate technical team (thirteen staff; PSC, 2024), DEPC operates through national coordination and relies on provincial authorities and community structures for local implementation. It serves as the main link between national policy and community conservation.

2.4.4. National Disaster Management Office (NDMO)

74. NDMO, operating under the Ministry, leads national disaster preparedness, early warning and emergency response. It acts as an operational coordination body during disaster events and supports national systems linked to climate-related risks. The Office has a small-to-medium permanent team (seventeen staff; PSC, 2024) and combines national-level leadership with field deployment during response activities. NDMO contributes logistical and coordination capacity relevant to the implementation environment of climate-related policies.

2.4.5. Vanuatu Meteorology and Geohazards Department (VMGD)

75. VMGD provides meteorological and geohazard monitoring services and generates the technical data required for forecasting and climate information systems. With the largest workforce among the Ministry's departments (sixty-three staff; PSC, 2024), VMGD has the most substantial

¹⁸ [Office of the Public Service Commission \(OPSC\), 2024](#)



operational capacity. It delivers continuous nationwide information services that underpin policy implementation and decision-making related to climate and disaster risk.

2.4.6. Department of Local Authorities (DLA)

76. DLA is responsible for the administrative link between national policy and subnational governance. Its mandate focuses on Area Councils and provincial structures, making it the primary mechanism through which national policies reach local decision-making arenas. The Department does not implement policies directly but supports local planning processes and administrative functions. Its capacity lies in coordination rather than technical delivery, meaning implementation of national frameworks depends on the ability of provincial and Area Council structures to absorb guidance and translate it into action. DLA's institutional position makes it relevant for aligning national policies with local governance processes, particularly where community participation and local planning are required.

2.4.7. Vanuatu Fisheries Department (VFD)

77. VFD oversees fisheries management and marine resource use at the national level and operates under the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry, Fisheries and Biosecurity (MALFFB). Its mandate includes regulation, technical guidance and community engagement related to sustainable fisheries. The Department operates through national structures with limited direct presence in remote areas, relying instead on outreach and collaboration mechanisms. Its capacity is primarily technical, oriented towards resource assessment and regulatory support, rather than large-scale field implementation. VFD contributes sector-specific expertise relevant to marine components of community conservation and coastal resource management, making it a specialized but narrowly focused institutional actor in policy implementation.

2.4.8. Department of Forests (DOF)

78. DOF is responsible for forest management, land rehabilitation and tree-based restoration initiatives under MALFFB. It holds the sector mandate most closely aligned with the Forest and Landscape Restoration Strategy and works with DEPC in facilitating and promoting CCAs. The Department combines technical functions such as forest monitoring and nursery development with advisory roles to other agencies and communities. While its national mandate is broad, implementation capacity depends on coordination with provincial authorities and landholding structures. DOF therefore operates as a technical institution whose contribution to policy implementation is primarily through guidance, standards and expertise rather than extensive operational deployment.

2.4.9. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD)

79. DARD leads national agricultural policy and provides technical support for land management, crop systems and rural livelihoods under MALFFB. Its mandate intersects with environmental management where agriculture impacts land use, soil conservation and ecosystem resilience. The Department operates mainly through national coordination and sector advisory functions, with limited direct implementation capacity in remote areas. DARD's role in policy implementation is therefore linked to its ability to provide technical direction to farmers, communities and provincial structures, positioning it as a supporting institution for landscape-related policy components.

2.4.10. Department of Women's Affairs (DWA)

80. DWA is the national authority for gender policy and is responsible for leading, coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the National Gender Equality Policy 2020-2030 (NGEP)¹⁹. It

¹⁹ [National Gender Equality Policy 2020-2030](#)



provides policy guidance and technical advice on gender equality and social inclusion, including women’s participation in decision-making and access to benefits. Under Strategic Area 4 on gender mainstreaming, and Strategic Area 5 on gender-responsive and community-driven climate and disaster resilience, DWA is mandated to provide technical guidance to national institutions and to ensure that climate-related legislation, policies and programmes address the differentiated needs, risks and capacities of women, men, youth and persons with disabilities.

81. The Department functions as a specialised policy unit rather than an implementation body, and its contribution to national policies depends on collaboration with other ministries and local governance structures. DWA’s institutional relevance lies in its capacity to inform policy coordination processes where gender considerations are required, rather than in field-level delivery.

82. In the context of climate adaptation (CCA), forest and landscape restoration (FLR) and broader climate planning, this mandate entails supporting sector agencies to apply gender analysis, identify differential vulnerabilities, and monitor whether climate and environmental interventions reduce or exacerbate inequalities.

2.4.11. Provincial Governments

83. Provincial governments serve as the main subnational administrative tier responsible for reviewing and endorsing local development plans and supporting policy execution within their jurisdictions. Their role is facilitative and supervisory, enabling coordination between national directives and community-level actions. Provincial capacity varies and generally relies on limited staffing and resources, meaning their involvement is more administrative and procedural than operational. Provincial governments provide the governance gateway through which national policies interface with communities and local landholding structures.

2.4.12. Area Councils

84. Area Councils represent the lowest formal administrative level and act as the immediate point of contact between government structures and communities (villages). They do not hold technical mandates but support local planning, information dissemination and community coordination. Their capacity is constrained by limited staffing, resources and formal authority, particularly in remote areas. Area Councils function primarily as coordination and engagement platforms, making them important for community-level uptake of national policies but not for technical implementation. Their effectiveness depends on the support they receive from provincial and national institutions.

85. Village Councils and their CCA and Community Disaster and Climate Change Committee (CDCCC)²⁰ share their updates, concerns and monitoring results with the Area Council, which then forwards this information to provincial and national authorities. The Area Council does not direct supervise these committees; its role is simply to ensure that community-level information is transmitted upward and considered in broader planning and decision-making.

Table 2. Institutional Overview Table

Institution / Ministry	Core Role	Type of Institutional Capacity	Administrative Level
DOCC / MCCAMGEEDM	National climate policy and adaptation planning; Secretariat to NAB	Central policy coordination with a small administrative structure	National

²⁰ [Community Based Disaster Risks Reduction Handbook \(CBDRR\)](#)

DEPC / MCCAMGEEDM	Environmental regulation, protected areas, biodiversity conservation; CCA framework	Technical guidance and national oversight; implementation via provincial mechanisms	National
NDMO / MCCAMGEEDM	Disaster preparedness, early warning, emergency coordination	Operational coordination during emergencies	National → Field Deployment
VMGD / MCCAMGEEDM	Meteorological forecasting and geohazard monitoring	Technical service delivery; largest operational unit within the Ministry	National → Nationwide Service Delivery
DLA / Ministry of Internal Affairs	Administration and support to Area Councils and provincial governance mechanisms	Coordination and administrative support; no direct policy implementation	National → Subnational Interface
VFD / MALFFB	Fisheries regulation and marine resource management	Sector-specific technical expertise; limited direct implementation capacity	National
DOF / MALFFB	Forest management, land rehabilitation, restoration initiatives	Technical standards and sector advisory functions; relies on provincial engagement	National
DARD / MALFFB	Agricultural policy, land-use guidance and rural livelihoods	Sector advisory capacity; limited operational deployment	National
DWA / MJSC	Gender policy, women's participation and rights	Policy guidance and technical advice; depends on cross-government collaboration	National
Provincial Governments / Ministry of Internal Affairs	Review and support of local planning; interface with national directives	Administrative and supervisory functions; limited operational capacity	Subnational
Area Councils / Ministry of Internal Affairs via DLA	Local governance interface and community coordination	Community engagement and information pathways; minimal technical capacity	Local

3. ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL POLICY REVIEW

3.1 Climate Change Act

86. The *Meteorology, Geological Hazards and Climate Change Act No. 25 of 2016* is the principal legislation governing climate change, meteorological services and geological hazard management in Vanuatu. Enacted in 2016 and operational since February 2017, the Act establishes the legal framework for domains of meteorology, geological hazards, and climate change. It defines key terms, establishes roles and responsibilities and sets out the objectives and functions of relevant departments and advisory bodies for climate governance and risk management.

3.1.1. Policy Context and Objectives

87. The Climate Change Act was introduced to bring together meteorology, geological hazards, and climate change under a single national framework. Its purpose is to improve coordination, avoid overlaps between institutions, and strengthen the country's collective response to environmental and climate-related risks. The Act, composed of 38 sections, defines the mandates of the Department of Meteorology, the Department of Geological Hazards, and the Department of Climate Change. Although the Act establishes two separate departments- Meteorology and Geological Hazards- these functions are currently integrated operationally under the Vanuatu Meteorology and Geo-Hazards Department (VMGD).

88. Beyond establishing an institutional structure, the Act defines in section 2 the following overarching policy objectives: **(i) reliable weather, climate, and hazard information; (ii) strengthen the capacity of institutions and communities to manage related risks; and (iii) promote the use of forecasts and warnings to protect people, their livelihoods, and the environment.**

89. The Act explicitly incorporates the precautionary principle (Section 3), requiring action even when full scientific certainty is lacking. This principle is highly relevant in Vanuatu's context, where frequent climate- and hazard-related risks demand early and preventive action.

90. The Act establishes a technical and operational framework focused on meteorological observation, geo-hazard monitoring, data management and early warning systems, assigning functional mandates supported by a coordination mechanism through the National Advisory Board (NAB).

91. There is no introduction of strategic provisions commonly found in climate legislation such as national mitigation targets, strategic and sectoral adaptation obligations or climate finance mechanism. It does not mandate other sectors to integrate climate considerations into planning, policy or budgeting processes, nor does it assign enforceable responsibilities beyond the Ministry.

92. Although it is common for primary legislation to operate without explicit cross-references to other Acts, the Climate Change Act interacts in practice with the Environmental Protection and Conservation Act (CAP 283), the Disaster Risk Management Act (CAP 267) and the Decentralization Act (CAP 230). Because the Climate Change Act does not establish formal coordination mechanisms with these frameworks, implementation tends to occur in parallel or through project-based arrangements rather than through an integrated governance system.

93. Time-bound targets or measurable outcomes or performance indicators are not established. This limits its value as a results-based policy tool. Instead, it focuses on establishing institutional mandates and setting operational standards for monitoring and response.



94. VCAP-II interacts with the Act primarily through technical functions related to monitoring, early warning and climate information. Its relevance is indirect to most components, with the strongest linkage in the provision of data and institutional coordination rather than infrastructure, governance or community-based implementation.

3.1.2. Key measures outlined

95. This section summarizes the main institutional and legal measures established by the Climate Change Act.

96. The Act is divided into ten parts that form the legal and institutional basis for managing weather, climate, and geological hazards. It assigns clear mandates to the Directors of the three technical departments and formalizes the National Advisory Board on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction (NAB) as the coordinating body for national climate governance. The NAB's functions (Part 3, Section 9) include advising, endorsing, and setting requirements for climate and disaster risk reduction projects.

97. The DOCC is responsible for supporting and promoting adaptation and mitigation projects (Section 23(h)). In practice these projects are implemented mainly through external support, such as VCAP-II, under DOCC coordination and with NAB endorsement.

98. Section 4 defines the obligations of each Director but provides no explicit mechanism for coordination among departments. The Director of Meteorology (Part 4) is responsible for developing observation networks, early-warning systems, data management strategies, public alerts, and awareness programs.

99. Part 5 establishes the functions of the Director of Geological Hazards, which include hazard mapping, forecasting, and public education. The Director is also authorized to issue warnings and regulate the dissemination of information.

100. The Act provides for climate change education and awareness through formal curricula and public outreach (Sections 23(d) and 23(e)). The DOCC leads these efforts in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and other partners.

101. Part 7 (Sections 25–27) addresses the implementation of international conventions. Directors act as focal points for conventions such as the UNFCCC²¹, appointing technical experts, facilitating information exchange, and reporting to the Council of Ministers.

3.1.3. Stakeholders and Institutional Roles

102. The NAB is designated as the central coordinating and decision-making body. As defined in Sections 7 to 10 of the Act, the NAB is chaired by the Director General of the Ministry of Meteorology, Geological Hazards and Climate Change and includes Directors from different technical and sectoral departments and different Ministries such as Meteorology, Geological Hazards, Climate Change, Forestry, Energy, Environment, Finance, Public Works, Women's Affairs, Local Authorities, Strategic Management, and the National Disaster Management Office, along with a representative of the Vanuatu Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (VANGO).

103. The NAB reviews and endorses climate and disaster projects, advises the Council of Ministers, and ensures coherence among sectoral policies. It also holds the mandate to promote capacity building, coordinate the development of policies and guidelines, and facilitate whole-of-government monitoring and evaluation through its Secretariat, as detailed in Section 14 of the Act. The Act further

²¹ [United Nations Climate Change Convention](#)



specifies that the Director of the Department of Geological Hazards must support **National Disaster Management Office (NDMO)** in developing and implementing protocols for emergencies and crisis response related to geological hazards (Section 20 (1)(b)).

104. The Act does not specify the roles of provincial or community structures, even though both the Department of Local Authorities (DLA) and the NDMO are represented within the NAB (Section 8). In practice, the National Disaster Act [CAP 267] guides contingency planning, early warning, and community preparedness. It establishes provincial and community disaster committees under the NDMO's authority.

105. As a result, **climate-related functions at community level rely on disaster management structures, project-based interventions and customary governance rather than on statutory arrangements under the Climate Change Act. This leads to variability in implementation and limits the institutionalization of climate functions at the local level.**

3.1.4. Policy review

106. The independent review of the *Meteorology, Geological Hazards and Climate Change Act No. 25 of 2016*, conducted in 2024 with the support of the VCAP-II Project, highlights institutional, legal, and operational challenges that affect the effectiveness of the current legislation in addressing climate change matters. The review identifies multiple structural issues and proposes a shift toward a more focused legal framework. The following paragraphs are a summary of the key findings.

107. **Need for a Dedicated Climate Change Act.** The review emphasizes that the integration of climate change with meteorology and geological hazards in a single piece of legislation dilutes focus and operational clarity. It recommends the development of a separate Climate Change Act to address mitigation, adaptation, and resilience in a comprehensive manner.

108. The review **recommends that the DOCC, rather than NAB**, should be clearly designated as the coordinating authority for implementing the Act. This clarification is intended to prevent overlapping functions, especially in areas like data management, international representation, and project oversight.

109. **Creation of Sustainable Financing Mechanisms.** The current Act lacks explicit provisions for long-term, predictable funding. The review proposes the establishment of a national climate change fund and suggests exploring options such as reallocating existing levies or establishing trust funds, as seen in the PNG and Fiji frameworks.

110. **Strengthening of Enforcement and Compliance Provisions.** The review identifies the absence of robust legal enforcement mechanisms. It recommends introducing penalties for non-compliance, as well as reporting obligations and clearer accountability provisions for institutions.

111. **Improved Data Governance and Monitoring Systems.** Gaps in data collection, submission, and dissemination are identified as major barriers to evidence-based climate action. The review proposes the introduction of legal obligations to support timely and accurate reporting.

112. **Mainstreaming Climate Change into Development Planning.** While integration efforts are underway, the review notes a lack of consistency across sectors. It recommends making the integration of climate change considerations into national and sectoral plans a legal requirement.

113. **Enhanced Stakeholder Engagement and Private Sector Participation.** The review notes the absence of clear provisions for private sector involvement and recommends establishing frameworks for public-private partnerships and participatory mechanisms.



114. These findings form the basis for the recommendation to revise the current legal framework and to initiate the drafting of a standalone Climate Change Act aligned with Vanuatu’s national priorities and international obligations.

3.1.5. Gaps and Limitations

115. The table below summarizes areas of alignment between the Act and the applicable social and environmental standards (SES). The table also highlights institutional responsibilities, stakeholder engagement pathways and the status of monitoring and compliance arrangements.

116. Under Principles 1 (Leave No One Behind) and 2 (Human Rights), the Act supports public welfare and access to information. Detailed planning instruments or participatory procedures will be defined through policies, regulations or project-based tools. In practice, community-based adaptation planning occurs through initiatives such as VCAP-II, which enable participatory identification of local priorities. While these plans operate outside the scope of the Act, **integrating them into the broader climate governance framework**—through policy or guidelines rather than through legislation—could strengthen the application of social inclusion and human-rights principles in a consistent and institutionally coherent manner²².

117. Gender equality considerations are represented through the Department of Women’s Affairs in the National Advisory Board (NAB), but there **are no gender-specific functions or reporting obligations**. The Papua New Guinea Climate Change Management Act (2015) offers a useful example, as it requires gender-balanced representation on its National Climate Change Committee and mandates gender-sensitive reporting in national communications. Introducing a similar reporting duty could ensure that women’s roles and priorities are systematically considered in adaptation and mitigation measures.

118. Principle 4 (Sustainability and Resilience) is reflected in the Act through the precautionary principle and its emphasis on early warning and disaster risk reduction. As with most framework laws, the Act does not prescribe monitoring systems. Strengthening resilience monitoring—through regulations or sector policies that link technical data with social and livelihood indicators—could enhance the practical application of the Act. Regional examples, such as the Tonga Climate Change Policy (2016), demonstrate how resilience metrics can be integrated into planning processes without requiring legislative amendments.

119. The NAB and its Secretariat already provide coordination and reporting functions, but external transparency remains limited. The Fiji Climate Change Act (2021)²³ establishes obligations for government reporting on the implementation of the Act, including the tabling of progress reports in Parliament and the public availability of key information, promoting both transparency and learning. Introducing a simplified annual climate report in Vanuatu—produced by the NAB—could achieve a similar purpose without creating additional administrative burden.

120. Although relevant to climate resilience, biodiversity management, cultural heritage and Indigenous governance sit largely outside the scope of the Act. Existing sectoral frameworks continue

²² As an example, [section 76 of Papua New Guinea’s Climate Change \(Management\) Act](#) establishes a formal sector-based planning mechanism: it requires the Board to appoint planning committees with representation from all regulated sectors, and mandates that these committees, following public consultation, submit a report within 12 months outlining regulatory principles for adaptation, the cost implications for sector participants, and proposed arrangements for cost-sharing or compensation.

²³ [Fiji Climate Change Act 2021 \(Act No. 43 of 2021\), Parliament of the Republic of Fiji, 23 September 2021](#). Section 10. “Obligation to report on and review the implementation of this Act”.

to operate independently, as the Act does not define mechanisms that would integrate ecosystem-based adaptation with conservation mandates or customary land arrangements.

121. Overall, the Climate Change Act (2016) establishes a strong institutional base for coordination and risk management, consistent with Vanuatu’s national context. **Addressing these limitations would not require expanding the scope of the Act, but rather clarifying mandates, establishing reporting obligations, and creating explicit linkages with existing laws and policies. Such adjustments would enhance the effectiveness, transparency and accountability of the national climate framework, ensuring that resilience-building efforts are both socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable.**

Table 3. Alignment of the Act with Environmental and Social Safeguards

Principle / Standard	Policy Coherence	Institutional Roles	Stakeholder Engagement	Monitoring & Compliance
Principle 1 – Leave No One Behind	Act objectives promote public safety & access to info (s.2); precautionary principle (s.3).	NAB established for cross-gov’t advice & endorsement (ss.7–10); Secretariat in Corporate Services (s.14).	Public information & awareness functions via Meteorology & Climate Change Depts (ss.17(i),(q); 23(d)).	Secretariat to support whole-of-gov’t M&E & reporting on CC/DRR (s.14(g)) ²⁴ .
Principle 2 – Human Rights	Environment includes ‘people and culture’ (s.1); aims to protect welfare of community (s.2(e)).	Board includes Women’s Affairs, Local Authority, Finance, etc. (s.8).	Advisory/endorsement processes via NAB; observers incl. youth & academia (ss.8(2),9).	Enforcement powers & penalties (ss.31–33) support rights protection.
Principle 3 – Gender Equality & Women’s Empowerment	Women’s Affairs represented on NAB (s.8(m)).	Institutional seat but no gender mainstreaming duties defined.	No explicit gender procedures; space to integrate under NAB practice.	No gender indicators or reporting requirements stated.
Principle 4 – Sustainability & Resilience	Precautionary principle mandated across functions (s.3). Early warning & risk reduction central (ss.17(e),20(g)).	Directors responsible for forecasting/alerts & DRR support (ss.17,20,23).	Awareness & education mandated (ss.17(i),23(e)).	Data archiving & national databases (ss.17(f),(g); 20(d),(h); 23(k),(r),(s)).
Principle 5 – Accountability	NAB governance, quarterly meetings, endorsement role (ss.9,12).	Chair: Director General; members are Directors across key ministries (ss.8,11–13).	Observers: culture, business, youth, academia (s.8(2)).	M&E/reporting coordination (s.14(g)); offences &

²⁴ [Republic Act No. 9729, also known as the Climate Change Act of 2009 in The Philippines](#), establishes a Climate Change Commission in the Philippines and mandates the integration of civil society organizations, local communities, and vulnerable groups into the formulation and implementation of climate change actions and policies

Principle / Standard	Policy Coherence	Institutional Roles	Stakeholder Engagement	Monitoring & Compliance
				penalties (ss.31–33).
Standard 1 – Biodiversity Conservation & Sustainable NRM	Act scope is meteorology, hazards, climate; biodiversity/NRM not core policy content.	No lead agency for biodiversity under this Act; linkage via Forestry/Environment reps on NAB (s.8).	—	—
Standard 2 – Climate Change & Disaster Risk	Objectives explicitly on climate & hazards services, alerts, info use (s.2).	Directors’ functions on forecasting, warnings, DRR support (ss.17,20,23). ²⁵	Common strategies & public info dissemination (ss.17(q); 20(q)).	National networks, data centres, databases; reporting to Board (ss.17,20,23(u)).
Standard 3 – Community Health, Safety & Security	Community safety embedded in objectives (s.2(e)).	Directors issue warnings; restrict unsafe operations (ss.17(e); 18(a); 20(g)).	Public advisories & education (s.17(i)); crisis protocols via NDMO support (s.20(b)).	Offences for false warnings; enforcement powers (ss.31–33).
Standard 4 – Cultural Heritage	‘Environment’ definition includes culture (s.1).	Observer seat: Vanuatu Cultural Centre (s.8(2)(a)).	Recognition of traditional knowledge in weather/climate (ss.17(p); 23(l)).	No specific CH registry/impact procedures in Act text.
Standard 5 – Displacement & Resettlement	No resettlement policy content in this Act.	—	—	—
Standard 6 – Indigenous Peoples	No explicit FPIC language; Act recognises traditional knowledge (ss.17(p); 23(l)).	Community roles not defined; engagement via NAB/observers. ²⁶	General awareness; no consent procedures in Act.	No FPIC tracking; add via project frameworks.
Standard 7 and 8 are not addressed in this Act.				

²⁵ Coordination across sectors and government levels—especially between disaster risk management, adaptation, and land-use planning—is not sufficiently articulated. This institutional ambiguity undermines Standard 2, which calls for integrated approaches and clearly defined mandates for managing climate and disaster risks.

²⁶ Despite the strong presence of Indigenous governance systems in Vanuatu, the Act does not address customary land tenure, Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), or the role of traditional knowledge in climate adaptation. This represents a missed opportunity to align the law with Standard 6, which emphasizes the recognition, inclusion, and safeguarding of Indigenous Peoples' rights in all phases of programming.



3.2 Vanuatu Forest and Landscape Restoration Strategy (FLRS)

3.2.1. Policy context and objectives

122. Under Component 3.2.2, VCAP-II supports the implementation of selected FLRS actions, including the establishment and maintenance of forest plantations in three pilot sites, the launch of Restoration Opportunities Assessments (ROAM) in each province, and the training of forestry and environmental authorities in Forest and Landscape Restoration (FLR) planning, implementation and monitoring.

123. Through these interventions, the project serves as a catalyst for FLRS implementation, strengthening institutional coordination, demonstrating practical restoration models, and generating technical evidence to guide future policy and field-level investments in forest and landscape restoration.

124. Forest and Landscape Restoration Strategy (FLRS) is widely recognized as a holistic approach to restoring degraded and fragmented landscapes, combining ecological, social and economic objectives. Originated in the early 2000s and promoted by organizations like the IUCN and the Global Partnership on Forest and Landscape Restoration, FLR seeks to restore the functionality and productivity of landscapes in ways that benefit both local communities and the environment. This strategy has been integrated into various multilateral frameworks, and in the context of Vanuatu, it aligns with broader efforts to support sustainable ecosystem management and community resilience²⁷.

125. **The Vanuatu Forest and Landscape Restoration Strategy 2020-2030 (VFLRS) was developed in response to extensive forest degradation caused by decades of unsustainable land use, population pressure and repeated cyclones.** According to the UNFCC approximately 12% of the country forest of Vanuatu was degraded between 2008 and 2018²⁸. The Government of Vanuatu launched the *Decade of Reforestation* in 2016 and began developing the FLRS as a national framework to guide reforestation, enhance ecosystem services, and integrate forest restoration into sustainable development.

126. The initial version, delivered in 2019, sought to advance the goals of the *National Forest Policy (2013–2023)* but was primarily focused on tree planting, without fully addressing the broader landscape and livelihood dimensions of restoration. In 2020, the FLRS was revised with technical support from FAO to align with international *Forest and Landscape Restoration* principles and to promote a more holistic, participatory, and sustainable approach.

127. **The updated strategy (2020–2030) emphasizes integrated land-use planning, multi-stakeholder engagement, and community-driven restoration across all six provinces, with an ambitious target to restore 25,000 hectares of degraded land.**

128. The Vanuatu FLRS includes an indicative ten-year budget of approximately USD 10.6 million and combines ecological, social, and economic objectives—supporting sustainable livelihoods, gender inclusion, improved governance, and long-term carbon sequestration—while contributing to global restoration commitments such as the Bonn Challenge and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

²⁷ [The Global Partnership on Forest and Landscape Restoration \(GPFLR\)](#)

²⁸ [Integrated land use planning, a center piece for a successful forest and landscape restoration planning and implementation in Vanuatu, FAO Vanuatu 2022](#)



129. The FLRS is not a legally binding instrument²⁹ but a strategic policy framework that operates within Vanuatu’s existing legal and institutional architecture. The FLRS explicitly references seven national policy instruments and thirteen international or technical frameworks. These norms provide the legal foundation and the methodological standards guiding restoration planning, monitoring, financing and alignment with Vanuatu’s international environmental commitments.

130. The current implementation of the Vanuatu FLRS has progressed through a combination of institutional initiatives supported by FAO³⁰, UNDP, SPREP³¹ and other partners. Concrete actions under FLRS framework include community-led restoration in Santo (over 4,000 ha registered under Community Conservation Areas), establishment of nurseries and agroforestry plots in Efate and Tanna, and capacity building for local “climate rangers,” with ongoing projects under the Adaptation Fund and PEBACC+ translating the FLRS framework into field implementation³².

131. The FLRS is consistent with Vanuatu national policy framework and international commitments. It builds on key national instruments such as the National Forest Policy (2013-2023), the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan NBSAP (2018-2030), and the National Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction 2016-2030 (NCCDRR)³³. The FLRS also supports international goals under the UNFCCC, CBD, UNCDD and the Bonn Challenge. The following sections outline the key measures defined to operationalize these commitments.

3.2.2. Key measures outlined

132. Section 7 of the FLRS outlines six strategic outcomes, which are further operationalized in the Logical Framework (Table 1). These outcomes structure the intervention logic of the Strategy and set out the institutional, ecological and socio-economic results required to scale up Forest and Landscape Restoration (FLR) in Vanuatu.

133. The first outcome focuses on **strengthening the enabling environment for restoration at national and provincial levels**. It emphasizes an improved understanding of the value of ecosystem services and the consolidation of inclusive governance arrangements that facilitate stakeholder participation in decision-making processes on conservation and restoration.

134. The second outcome addresses the **restoration of degraded land and forests** through participatory planning, the establishment of public and private nurseries, the enhancement of technical capacities among forestry officers and communities, and the promotion of diverse native species to increase ecological resilience.

135. The third outcome relates to **forest restoration linked to watershed protection** and biodiversity conservation. It includes the rehabilitation, expansion and identification of protected areas, in alignment with the objectives of the NBSAP and the EPC Act.

136. The fourth outcome integrates the social and economic dimensions of restoration by promoting **sustainable forest and land management practices** that strengthen rural livelihoods. It

²⁹ As of November 2025, the 2020-2030 is publicly issued by the MALFB as a guiding document and efforts are underway to establish related enabling policies, however, there is no publicly available record of its formal endorsement by the Council of Ministers of publication in the Official Gazette.

³⁰ [Enhancing Livelihood Resilience in Vanuatu through Forest and Landscape Restoration, 2021](#)

³¹ [Pacific Ecosystem-based Adaptation to Climate Change + Project](#)

³² [How climate adaptation in Vanuatu is protecting forests, oceans and communities](#)

³³ [National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement](#)



highlights the importance of communities recognizing tangible benefits derived from restoration as a condition for sustained engagement.

137. The fifth outcome concerns the **mobilization of human and financial resources** required to expand restoration efforts. It includes specialized training, recruitment of technical personnel and the development of a financing strategy that combines public allocations, private-sector participation and innovative mechanisms such as Payments for Ecosystem Services.

138. The **sixth outcome** establishes a monitoring and evaluation framework designed to track ecological, social and economic progress. The framework supports adaptive management and encourages knowledge exchange among communities, provincial governments and national partners, contributing to continuous improvement of policies and programs.

3.2.3. Stakeholder mapping

139. The FLRS identifies a wide range of social and institutional stakeholders, including communities and customary leaders, youth and women’s groups, non-governmental organizations, private-sector representatives and provincial governments. These actors are presented primarily as target groups for engagement rather than as components of a structured governance system. Each group is described through a dedicated “programme” that outlines indicative roles and responsibilities. However, no comprehensive coordination mechanism is defined to connect these stakeholders across governance levels or to link them effectively with the institutional core of the Strategy.

140. The DOF is identified as the lead implementing agency under MALFFB. The Strategy does not specify how DOF will collaborate with other ministries to serve as an integrating framework, or with the Malvatumauri (the National Council of Chiefs). This absence of a structured coordination strategy creates a gap between the participatory ambition of the FLRS and its operational feasibility. The relationship between traditional authorities, civil society and government institutions remains conceptual rather than procedural, limiting inter-institutional coherence and accountability.

141. The FLRS stakeholder structure places communities at the center of restoration efforts. Young people are encouraged to participate in tree planting and environmental activities, while women are supported to take on leadership roles and participate equally in project implementation. Schools and training centers contribute by raising awareness, establishing nurseries and demonstration plots, and integrating forest and climate-related topics into learning activities.

142. Faith-based organizations, workers and entrepreneurs are also mobilized as partners in restoration. Churches are encouraged to use their networks to promote environmental stewardship and facilitate community-led planting initiatives. Workers and private-sector actors are invited to invest in restoration-related enterprises—such as small nurseries, timber processing, or non-timber forest product value chains—that generate employment and contribute to sustainable land-use practices.

143. Local NGOs and community-based organizations are recognized as key technical partners that bridge national policy objectives with local implementation. Overall, the assessment finds that the FLRS demonstrates a clear commitment to inclusiveness by acknowledging the contribution of communities, traditional authorities, civil society and the private sector to advancing restoration targets. The approach reflects an understanding that ecological recovery and social development are interdependent and require shared ownership. Nonetheless, the absence of an strategic coordination mechanism weakens the coherence and functionality of the overall governance network.



3.2.4. Gaps and Limitations

144. From the content and key measures, the FLRS embodies many of the SES principles, particularly national ownership, participatory intent and commitment to environmental sustainability, but it does not have a clear strategy in operationalizing them within existing institutions and social structures. **The gaps lie in the absence of governance model.**

145. This limitation reflects the broader structural context of Vanuatu’s forest and land governance, characterized by institutional fragmentation and overlapping mandates. The Strategy acknowledges these constraints but does not articulate a strategic pathway to improve coherence, creating a gap in the alignment between national vision and institutional capability.

146. Although the FLRS highlights women, youth, chiefs and vulnerable groups as key contributors, the Strategy does not define strategic mechanisms that ensure equitable participation in decision-making. Existing programs offer engagement opportunities, but they do not constitute a governance model. Strategically, this limits the translation of SES principles of inclusion and equity into the architecture of the FLRS.

147. Customary governance provides legitimacy and local ownership, but the Strategy does not address how cultural norms may constrain participation by women and youth. Without acknowledging these dynamics, the FLRS risks reinforcing existing inequalities and does not provide guidance on how inclusive participation should be promoted within culturally mediated systems.

148. Consultation practices are implicitly recognised but not defined. The FLRS does not outline principles for coordination, documentation or incorporation of stakeholder inputs into strategic decisions. **The absence of a strategic position on FPIC—despite its relevance in customary land and resource settings—constitutes a key gap in aligning the FLRS with SES requirements for inclusion and rights-based engagement.**

149. Coordination tends to occur through temporary, project-based arrangements rather than through a permanent inter-ministerial platform. This limits accountability and weakens the ability to apply social and environmental safeguards consistently. Moreover, SES-related functions—such as safeguard screening, reporting, and grievance monitoring—are not yet embedded within the DOF’s structure or budgeted activities, leaving their implementation dependent on external donor support.

150. From a social and environmental safeguards perspective, the FLRS sets strong ecological goals but does not articulate principles for identifying sensitive areas, managing risks to cultural heritage, or integrating traditional ecological knowledge into planning. This absence reflects a gap in the Strategy’s conceptual alignment with SES Standards on biodiversity, cultural heritage and Indigenous governance.

151. **Monitoring and grievance considerations are acknowledged indirectly through references to community engagement, but the Strategy does not define a direction for tracking restoration outcomes, social inclusion or equity.** Nor does it position any institutional body as responsible for receiving or addressing concerns related to restoration.

152. As a national strategy, the FLRS is not designed to function as an operational plan. Its purpose is to provide a policy framework that defines a shared vision, establishes roles and responsibilities, and sets directions for implementation. In this sense, the absence of detailed safeguard procedures is consistent with its nature. What is required from a SES perspective is not operational guidance, but clear institutional entry points through FPIC protocols, monitoring systems, gender-responsive measures, GRM, that can be later developed and embedded in program or project-level instruments.

153. In conclusion, the FLRS demonstrates strong conceptual alignment with SES principles but remains limited by weak institutional capacity and the lack of formalized processes for safeguard application. Its participatory focus, ecological ambition, and foundation in customary governance provide a solid basis for future alignment. The focus moving forward should be on strengthening coordination between the DOF and provincial structures, institutionalizing safeguard procedures, and building technical and human capacity so that the strategy’s social and environmental commitments can be translated into effective and accountable practice.

154. The comparative table below summarizes how the Strategy aligns with each Programming Principle and Project-Level Standard, identifying areas of coherence and key operational gaps. **It also serves to position VCAP-II as a practical vehicle for translating the FLRS into implementation—through the establishment of biodiversity and climate baselines, gender-responsive participation mechanisms, FPIC operationalization, and culturally sensitive restoration planning.**

Table 4. Alignment of the FLRS with Environmental and Social Safeguards

Principle / Standard	Conceptual alignment	Operational Gaps	Nature of Gap	Implications
Principle 1 – Leave No One Behind	Promotes social inclusion through community-based forest restoration and livelihood diversification.	No structured mechanisms for equitable participation; no disaggregated monitoring.	Operational – to be developed during implementation.	Risk of exclusion of vulnerable groups; need for tools to operationalize inclusive participation.
Principle 2 – Human Rights	Acknowledges the customary ownership system governing land and forest resources, implying respect for local tenure and decision-making rights.	No explicit rights-based procedures; no institutional role assigned for rights oversight.	Operational – expected at implementation instrument level.	Need to integrate rights-related safeguards in operational frameworks.
Principle 3 – Gender Equality & Women’s Empowerment	Promotes gender-sensitive actions promoting equal participation of women and youth in restoration and awareness activities.	Gender focal points not defined; DOF staff and partners facilitate inclusion in practice.	Operational – not required at strategic level.	Requires development of gender action measures in downstream tools.
Principle 4 – Sustainability & Resilience	Fully aligned with NSDP, NAP, and REDD+ for sustainability and resilience goals.	No detailed coordination procedures; no TEK integration mechanism.	Strategic–Operational	Need for detailed coordination and screening guidance.
Principle 5 – Accountability	Accountability implied through DOF oversight and coordination structures.	No GRM; no SES reporting framework; no disclosure processes.	Operational – to be addressed in project or programme instruments.	Accountability mechanisms must be developed for safeguard compliance.
Standard 1 – Biodiversity Conservation &	Explicitly focused on biodiversity restoration and sustainable resource management.	No critical habitat screening; unclear DEPC coordination; no	Operational – belongs to detailed planning and screening	Biodiversity safeguards must be operationalised

Principle / Standard	Conceptual alignment	Operational Gaps	Nature of Gap	Implications
Sustainable NRM		cumulative impact assessment.	tools, not to a strategy.	in subsequent guidelines.
Standard 2 – Climate Change & Disaster Risk	Strengthens climate mitigation and adaptation through forest restoration and carbon sinks.	No risk screening; no SES-compliant indicators.	Operational – expected in lower-level instruments.	Need for climate-risk screening protocols in implementation.
Standard 3 – Community Health, Safety & Security	Contributes indirectly to community safety and resilience through erosion control and slope stabilisation measures.	No health/safety protocols; no monitoring.	Operational – outside the scope of the strategy	Requires safety procedures in operational planning.
Standard 4 – Cultural Heritage	Acknowledges the cultural importance of forests and plant species.	Absence of mapping of cultural sites; collaboration with cultural, monitoring.	Operational – cultural heritage safeguards require site-level instruments.	Risk of unintentionally affecting culturally significant areas; need for cultural-heritage screening tools.
Standard 5 – Displacement & Resettlement	Focuses on degraded lands; no resettlement anticipated.	No screening for economic displacement; no monitoring or mitigation framework.	Operational – consistent with strategic nature of FLRS.	Displacement safeguards must be included in implementation frameworks.
Standard 6 – Indigenous Peoples	Engagement grounded in customary consent practices ('kastom'), though FPIC not formalized nor systematically documented.	No FPIC framework; no documentation of consent; no inclusive participation (women/youth) requirements.	Operational – FPIC is an implementation instrument.	High need for FPIC guidelines and documentation processes.
Standard 7 – Labour & Working Conditions	Promotes local employment through community-based restoration.	No labour standards; no OHS protocols; no monitoring of labour conditions.	Operational – labour standards belong to programme or project guidelines.	Need for simple labour and OHS guidance in implementation.
Standard 8 – Pollution Prevention & Resource Efficiency	Encourages sustainable land and resource management, indirectly supporting pollution prevention and resource efficiency objectives.	No pollution-prevention measures; no erosion or waste management guidance.	Operational – not expected in a national strategy.	Environmental operational procedures required for implementation.

3.3 Information Booklet on the registration of CCAs

3.3.1. Objective of the booklet

155. The Information Booklet on the Registration of CCAs³⁴ was developed in 2013 by the Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation (DEPC) to provide practical directions for the establishment and registration of CCAs under the Environmental Protection and Conservation Act [CAP 283].

156. The CAP 283³⁵ establishes the principal legal framework for environmental governance in Vanuatu. It provides the basis for environmental impact assessment (EIA), biodiversity conservation, and the creation of protected areas, defining the mandates of DEPC as the lead implementing authority. Under Part 4, Division 2, CCAs are defined as areas of biodiversity significance, registered by the Director of the Department when custom landowners agree to establish a CCA.

157. The booklet defines CCA in section 4 as *“areas of land and/or sea that are protected and managed by communities under the Environmental Protection and Conservation Act [CAP 283]. These can include tabu areas, protected areas, MPAs, reserves, sanctuaries and conservation areas that currently exist and are managed by communities in Vanuatu, which may be recognised as Community Conservation Areas once registered with the Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation (DEPC).”*

158. **The handbook describes the legal mechanism for recognizing and registering these areas that will be voluntarily managed by customary landowners for conservation purposes. It includes the legal procedures of registration, amendment, effects of registration and deregistration if management plan is not implemented.** While the handbook includes basic templates for annual reporting and site assessments, it does not provide broader guidance or tools to support day-to-day governance, community-based monitoring, or adaptive management.

159. Under Outcome 1.1, VCAP-II provides the field-level implementation and institutional strengthening required to operationalize the national management planning guidelines for Protected Areas and CCA under CAP 283. VCAP-II also supports DEPC in revising the existing CCA Information Booklet.

3.3.2. Key measures outlined

160. The CCA Information Booklet functions as a procedural and awareness-raising tool to support communities in formalizing CCAs. Although drafted in 2013–2014, it remains the principal guidance document currently used by DEPC, provincial authorities and communities for the registration of CCAs. As a non-binding guideline, it does not have formal legal status. Its main guidance elements include:

161. **Formal registration and legal recognition.** Provides a step-by-step description of the process for obtaining official recognition of CCAs by DEPC. The booklet includes an application form (Appendix I), a basic guide for preparing a management plan (Appendix II), and mapping instructions (Appendix III). It does not establish quality criteria, verification procedures, consent protocols, or detailed administrative responsibilities for DEPC. Registration becomes effective only when the Director approves a complete application and records the site in the National Environmental Registry. From

³⁴ The booklet on the Registration of CCA is the precursor for the forthcoming Planning Guidelines for CCAs intended to expand beyond registration (ECARE Project Vanuatu).

³⁵ [Chapter 283. Environmental Management and Conservation. Act 12 of 2002.](#)

that moment, CCA rules acquire legal force, providing communities with statutory recognition that complements customary governance.

162. **Eligibility and governance standards.** Eligibility is based on clear conservation objectives, verified boundaries, full consent of stakeholders and the submission of a management plan. The booklet recognizes varied governance structures—landowners, chiefs, family groups and organizations—and requires signatures from community governing bodies and management committees, ensuring internal legitimacy and minimum governance standards. Formal consent procedures of right-holder identification are not detailed.

163. **Management planning and enforcement.** The booklet provides guidance for preparing locally developed management plans and by-laws, which become legally enforceable once the CCA is registered under Sections 37–40 of the EPC Act. Enforcement remains primarily within the customary governance system, with enforcement action under the EPC Act only after local dispute-resolution mechanisms have been applied. A management plan is mandatory and must outline site characteristics, objectives, activities and rules.

164. **Participatory and inclusive procedures.** Emphasizes community consultation, public endorsement, and collective decision-making through village councils and provincial governments, it encourages women and youth to be part of participatory planning. It does not mention FPIC or other mechanisms of accountability.

165. **Reporting and monitoring mechanisms.** Includes an Annual Report template (Appendix 11) and requires CCAs to submit annual reports to DEPC as part of the registration requirement. Registered CCAs must submit annual reports and participate in periodic site assessments. Templates require updates on governance, habitats, species and activities, providing a structured basis for environmental monitoring. Annexed lists of ecosystems, species and threats support communities in tracking biodiversity conditions and environmental changes relevant to climate impacts.

166. **Support and capacity building.** Section 7 outlines DEPC’s commitment to provide technical assistance, training, awareness materials, and opportunities for CCAs to participate in national networks, workshops, and conservation awards. No specific strategy, budget allocation, or institutional responsibility is defined to ensure sustained technical assistance to communities.

167. **Flexibility and adaptive management.** The booklet provides formal procedures for the cancellation or amendment of CCA registration, but it does not outline broader adaptive management processes (e.g. periodic revision of objectives, indicators and management measures beyond the cancellation/amendment route).

3.3.3. Stakeholder mapping

168. CCA’s may be proposed by a wide range of right-holders, including customary landowners, chiefs, family groups, tribes, village governing bodies, organisations or private individuals, even though the booklet does not provide a structured approach for right-holder mapping. Instead, participation is assumed from the requirement that all persons with rights and interests in the land give consent, and that supporting letters come from village councils, surrounding communities and councils of chiefs.

169. Monitoring and management responsibilities lie primarily with the community. The CCA management committee is responsible for implementing the management plan, enforcing rules and providing annual reports. Although the booklet encourages involvement from different community members, it does not define criteria to ensure representation of women or vulnerable groups.



170. DEPC reviews and approves applications, validates documentation and oversees the registration and reporting cycle. Provincial governments, councils of chiefs and neighbouring communities contribute by issuing supporting letters to confirm boundaries, legitimacy and absence of disputes. NGOs may provide awareness-raising or technical support but have no decision-making authority within the formal governance structure.

171. In addition to CCAs registered under the EPC Act, the booklet notes that other departments also offer forms of community-based protection—such as Forestry Conservation Areas, Marine Reserves and sacred or cultural sites registered through the Vanuatu Cultural Centre—each governed by separate requirements and processes. A single site may hold multiple designations, yet the booklet does not establish mechanisms to coordinate governance or align management plans and stakeholders

3.3.4. Gaps and Limitations

172. The CCA Information Booklet focuses on the procedural steps for obtaining legal recognition, but it does not clarify the ongoing responsibilities, governance demands or monitoring efforts required once a CCA is established. This narrow scope limits communities' ability to assess what long-term management entails, particularly in remote areas where any type of support is scarce. Without clear guidance on operational commitments, the decision to register a CCA cannot be fully informed, and the framework risks creating recognized areas that lack the practical foundations needed for effective stewardship. This limitation reflects and reinforces a broader pattern identified across the other two frameworks reviewed in this SESA.

173. **Consultations conducted during the month of March 2025**, which included representatives from government agencies and community representatives, perceived the functionality and effectiveness of CCAs in practice as rather weak. Stakeholders reported that many CCAs lose momentum once external facilitation (done at registration level) ends. **Implementation of CCAs has often been perceived as inefficient and insufficient responsive to customary governance systems. Several gaps were identified, particularly concerning community empowerment, access to finance, monitoring of participatory processes and long-term sustainability of outcomes.** The word registration has been controversial among communities as it is already mentioned in the booklet.

174. The booklet contains the necessary written elements for registration—such as forms, signatures and written requests—but these focus on administrative compliance rather than community governance. Expanding this written guidance to include simple mandates, role definitions or agreed procedures would help communities organize decision-making more transparently and avoid community elite capture. Such tools would strengthen participation and support accountable management, especially in settings where clear internal agreements enhance environmental and livelihood outcomes.

175. **The booklet outlines how a CCA is created but does not show how locally generated information will connect to national conservation systems or climate planning.** In other island contexts, simple reporting loops allow community observations to feed into national monitoring. Establishing similar linkages in Vanuatu would prevent CCAs from operating in isolation and would strengthen their long-term sustainability by aligning local management with national biodiversity priorities, climate adaptation frameworks and broader policy coherence.

176. Continuing with monitoring, the annual report included in Appendix 11 focuses primarily on administrative updates—such as changes in committees, rules, activities or habitats—without providing structured ecological or social indicators to track trends over time. As a result, monitoring relies on general descriptions rather than measurable observations. Strengthening this section with

simple indicators or low-tech monitoring practices would enable communities to detect early changes, adjust management actions and demonstrate progress more clearly.

177. The booklet briefly notes that CCAs may seek external funding without further detail. In practice, CCA activities cannot be planned or sustained without predictable income to cover basic governance and management costs. In other island settings, small community funds, church-based stewardship or modest tourism levies provide predictable and locally managed resources that keep governance active over time. Without similar mechanisms, the reference to external funding remains too limited to guide long-term practice.

Table 5. CCA Guidelines analysis of gaps and limitations

Principle / Standard (UNDP SES)	Policy Coherence	Institutional Roles	Stakeholder Engagement & Participation	Monitoring, Enforcement & Compliance
Programming Principle 1 – Leave No One Behind, Programming Principle 2 – Human Rights–Based Approach	The booklet operationalizes community-based conservation under CAP 283, promoting inclusion of customary landowners and recognition of traditional governance. It indirectly supports equitable access to conservation benefits.	DEPC oversees registration, providing technical guidance to ensure all right-holders are represented in applications. Ongoing institutional responsibilities are not defined.	Participatory approach ensures inclusiveness of landowners and resource users. No reference to vulnerable or marginalized groups.	No procedures exist for verifying whether right-holder engagement, FPIC or inclusion mechanisms function effectively after registration.
Programming Principle 3 – Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment	Women, youth and vulnerable groups are not enough referenced, limiting their role in decision-making and coherence with national gender policies.	The policy framework does not define gender-related roles or responsibilities.	The booklet does not require women’s participation in decision-making.	No mechanisms exist for monitoring gender participation or gender-differentiated impacts.
Programming Principle 4 – Resilience and Sustainability	Strong coherence with CAP 283, but no integration with climate adaptation planning.	Integration with climate-adaptation institutions is missing.	The booklet does not offer guidance on adaptive management approaches.	Annual reports exist, but lack structured indicators for resilience or ecological change.

Principle / Standard (UNDP SES)	Policy Coherence	Institutional Roles	Stakeholder Engagement & Participation	Monitoring, Enforcement & Compliance
Programming Principle 5 – Accountability	Accountability is not explicitly referenced, limiting alignment with national standards on transparency and redress.	Responsibilities for conflict resolution and complaint handling are not clarified within the institutional framework.	The booklet does not outline accessible community-level mechanisms for grievance or feedback.	No procedures are provided for DEPC to verify that accountability or grievance mechanisms function effectively.
Standard 1 – Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Natural Resource Management	Fully coherent with CAP 283 biodiversity objectives; provides the procedural basis for site registration and management.	DEPC validates management plans, approves maps, and registers CCAs in the Environmental Registry.	Communities define conservation objectives and management strategies through participatory planning.	Ecological assessment methods are not articulated. Annual reports lack sufficient detail and structured indicators.
Standard 2 – Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation	Climate change is not mentioned, affecting coherence with national climate frameworks.	Coordination roles with climate authorities are undefined.	Communities manage natural resources, but no guidance exists for community-based adaptation.	No explicit climate indicators.
Standard 3 – Community Health, Safety, and Working Conditions	Not directly addressed, but participatory planning and community governance support safe practices and local by-laws.	DEPC may provide technical guidance to avoid unsustainable or hazardous practices.	Community management plans define local rules to prevent environmental and social risks.	No explicit provisions for occupational or community health; low relevance unless physical works are introduced.
Standard 4 – Cultural Heritage	The booklet does not establish procedures for identifying heritage sites, affecting coherence with cultural-heritage protections.	DEPC collaborates with cultural institutions when heritage sites overlap with conservation areas.	Community consultations integrate kastom values and traditional knowledge but tools for cultural-site mapping are not provided.	Incorporate procedures to identify, report and address management of cultural sites and practices.

Principle / Standard (UNDP SES)	Policy Coherence	Institutional Roles	Stakeholder Engagement & Participation	Monitoring, Enforcement & Compliance
Standard 5 – Displacement and Resettlement	No physical or economic displacement foreseen; registration is voluntary and ownership is retained by landowners.	Roles for addressing contested land and resource claims are not detailed.	Guidance on contested land and resource claims is limited.	Compliance checks on restrictions impacting livelihoods, and grievance pathways for affected groups.
Standard 6 – Indigenous Peoples	Alignment with kastom governance, Indigenous rights frameworks and representation norms.	Roles of customary institutions in management and enforcement are not detailed.	Focus is on landowners; inclusion of customary users, women and youth is not articulated.	No mechanisms to monitor traditional knowledge use or safeguard Indigenous governance practices.

4. RESULTS OF ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL POTENTIAL RISKS

4.1 Overview of Upstream Impact Pathways

178. The analysis of the three frameworks identifies gaps related to governance arrangements, institutional capacity and legal coherence. In this section, upstream impact pathways are used to explain how such gaps shape implementation conditions before project activities begin. Where these conditions are not clearly defined, climate, restoration and conservation objectives may be applied unevenly. This may create exposure to risks related to coordination, accountability and the application of social and environmental safeguards.

179. **Under the Climate Change Act, upstream impacts are shaped by how climate functions are related to environmental and natural resource frameworks,** how responsibilities are allocated across institutions, and how accountability mechanisms are articulated. Together, these elements influence how SES are applied across sectors and how climate considerations are taken into account in sectoral decisions.

180. **The FLRS establishes national restoration** priorities in response to ongoing ecosystem degradation, including pressures on land and forest resources linked to livelihoods. At the upstream level, risks relate to how these priorities are expected to be taken forward across institutions with different mandates, planning instruments and sectoral responsibilities. Where links with climate policy and natural resource management frameworks are not clearly articulated, restoration objectives may be interpreted and applied differently across institutions, limiting their consistent integration within institutional mandates.

181. These upstream conditions also shape how restoration interventions interact with livelihoods that depend on land and forest resources. The Strategy acknowledges the role of livelihood pressures as drivers of degradation, but it does not set out how social safeguards, participation standards, FPIC processes or livelihood considerations are expected to be addressed across different contexts. This leaves space for variation in how trade-offs between restoration objectives and resource-dependent livelihoods are approached, which is relevant for understanding risks related to safeguard application, access and use rights, and territorial consistency.

182. **Under the CCA Guidelines, upstream impacts are shaped by their narrow operational focus on registration.** The Guidelines establish procedures for formal recognition, but they do not define governance arrangements beyond the initial administrative step. As a result, decision-making, conflict resolution and oversight mechanisms are not clearly framed once a CCA is formalized, which affects how conservation arrangements work in practice over time.

183. These upstream impacts are reinforced by the absence of clearly defined roles after registration. The Guidelines do not assign supervisory responsibilities to national or provincial authorities, nor do they establish mechanisms for monitoring compliance or supporting local governance and activities. This limits continuity and weakens the connection between CCAs and broader environmental and climate governance mandates.

184. In addition, the CCA Guidelines don't operate alongside other policies without shared definitions, procedures or data systems. This lack of legal and procedural integration affects how community-level conservation initiatives align with national climate objectives and restoration priorities. These conditions shape how impacts may develop through uneven governance practices, variable protection of rights and fragmented ecosystem management.



185. Weak interfaces between governance levels, limited institutional capacity and insufficient legal integration create the conditions for inconsistent safeguard application, uneven participation, variable protection of rights and fragmented management of ecosystems across the country. Based on this analysis, the resulting upstream social and environmental risks are presented below.

4.2 Fragmented Integration of the Climate Change Act with Adaptation Efforts

186. The Climate Change Act provides Vanuatu with a solid technical and institutional basis for forecasting, early warning and climate-related risk management. However, its scope is narrowly focused on meteorology, geological hazards and the functions of technical departments. As a result, the Act does not create the statutory conditions necessary for climate change to be integrated across environmental management, land-use regulation, biodiversity protection or natural resource governance—domains that are essential for delivering adaptation outcomes on the ground.

187. Because the Act does not impose adaptation obligations on other ministries or sectors, **climate change considerations enter planning processes inconsistently and often only where project-based initiatives make it possible.** Ministries responsible for land, environment, forestry or water management are not required to apply climate-risk screening under the Act, ecosystem-based adaptation principles or resilience criteria, even though some of these practices may be adopted under sectoral policies. In practice, adaptation planning is guided by the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) process and emerging Provincial Adaptation Plans led by the Ministry of Climate Change through the Department of Climate Change (DOCC). These instruments provide strategic direction but are not legally binding, meaning their uptake depends on institutional initiative and available capacity, resulting in uneven integration of adaptation across environmental management, land-use planning and natural resource governance.

188. This misalignment also affects the national architecture for disaster risk reduction. While early warning and forecasting functions are well defined under the Act, the broader responsibilities for preparedness, contingency planning and community-level risk management fall under the Disaster Risk Management Act. Because the two laws do not formally interact, information flows, preparedness protocols and communication pathways depend heavily on institutional goodwill or project support rather than on predictable statutory procedures. This weakens the capacity of communities to receive, interpret and act upon climate information in a timely and equitable manner.

189. At the implementation level, the lack of integration between the Climate Change Act and land or resource management frameworks limits opportunities for ecosystem-based adaptation. Planning decisions continue to rely primarily on environmental, forestry or land legislation without systematic consideration of climate risk, even where the resilience of ecosystems directly influences community safety, livelihoods or biodiversity outcomes. Without explicit requirements for cross-sectoral coordination, ecosystem conditions and climate risk remain treated as separate issues rather than as mutually reinforcing drivers of vulnerability.

190. Institutionally, the Act establishes the NAB as the central coordination body, but does not require other ministries to mainstream climate change into their policies, budgets or monitoring systems. As a consequence, coordination remains advisory rather than enforceable. The absence of shared performance indicators, reporting duties or joint planning mechanisms further weakens the ability of the national system to monitor adaptation progress, assess cumulative risk or guide resource allocation.

191. Overall, the limited integration between the Climate Change Act and environmental, land, DRR and sectoral planning frameworks creates an upstream impact that constrains Vanuatu's capacity

to implement climate adaptation coherently. Without explicit linkages, mandates or procedures requiring sectors to consider climate risk and ecosystem resilience, adaptation remains fragmented, uneven and heavily dependent on projects rather than on predictable institutional practice. This reduces long-term resilience, increases exposure to compounded hazards, and limits the effectiveness of national climate governance.

4.3 Governance, coordination and institutional capacity constraints

192. The implementation of the Climate Change Act, the FLRS and CCAs takes place within a governance system in which roles are defined on paper but are not consistently supported through operational mechanisms. The absence of shared procedures, reporting requirements and decision-making protocols across different levels of governance means that coordination remains largely advisory rather than operational, limiting its ability to drive joint planning or harmonised implementation.

193. The FLRS provides a coherent strategic vision for restoration and explicitly recognises the need for multi-stakeholder engagement across all provinces. As a policy framework, it strengthens national ownership of restoration and gives direction to public and donor investments, which is a positive governance impact. At the same time, the absence of a formal coordination mechanism between the Department of Forests with other ministries, Malvatumauri and provincial governments means that restoration responsibilities can remain dispersed or project-driven. This raises the risk that decisions are taken in an ad hoc manner, with limited institutional accountability.

194. The CCA Information Booklet offers a clear procedural pathway for registration, providing communities and DEPC with a practical tool to give legal recognition to community-based conservation. This has a positive governance effect by linking customary governance with statutory recognition. The community committees are referenced in the CCA Guidelines as part of the registration process, their composition, mandate and accountability are not defined and left to customary governance. This can lead to weak internal governance, loss of momentum after registration, and limited capacity to coordinate with other protected-area or sectoral instruments.

195. Institutional capacity varies considerably across ministries and provincial authorities. Departments such as Climate Change, Environment, Forestry, Land and Local Authorities operate with different levels of staffing, technical expertise, fiscal resources and presence in the provinces. As a result, the ability to manage climate information, apply environmental and social safeguards, undertake risk screening or support community-level governance structures differs markedly across institutions. These disparities create uneven implementation of climate and environmental frameworks and reduce the consistency of monitoring and enforcement.

196. Coordination between national and subnational levels is further constrained by fragmented reporting pathways. Information generated at community level does not consistently flow into provincial or national systems, and feedback from national agencies does not always reach local structures in a timely or accessible manner. The lack of unified templates, indicators and data-sharing protocols affects the quality of environmental monitoring, climate-risk assessments and safeguards application. This reduces the ability of institutions to build a coherent national evidence base for decision-making.

197. These governance and capacity constraints produce upstream impacts that influence the effectiveness of the three frameworks assessed in this SESA. Without predictable coordination mechanisms, shared indicators or consistent institutional capacity, climate information, environmental monitoring and safeguards considerations are not systematically incorporated into



decision-making. This affects the coherence of planning processes, the quality of implementation at local level and the overall ability of institutions to address cumulative environmental and climate risks.

198. All three frameworks rely heavily on customary governance. The Climate Change Act recognises the importance of people and culture in its definition of environment and includes cultural actors in the NAB through observer roles. The FLRS acknowledges traditional authorities and customary consent practices as an entry point for restoration. The CCA booklet is explicitly grounded in custom ownership and community stewardship. This reliance on *kastom* creates a strong positive impact in terms of local legitimacy, social cohesion and respect for Indigenous decision-making.

199. At the same time, the way customary governance is integrated remains largely implicit. The Climate Change Act does not set out procedures for engaging customary institutions in climate decisions, nor does it create explicit safeguards for Indigenous knowledge or land-related rights within climate planning. The FLRS references customary systems but does not formalise FPIC or set out how traditional ecological knowledge should inform site selection, species choice or monitoring. The CCA booklet assumes that consent is obtained through signatures and letters but does not require a procedure for rights-holder mapping or culturally sensitive dispute solution or FPIC protocols. These gaps create a risk that climate and restoration decisions bypass some right-holders, or that external actors rely on a narrow set of leaders without fully understanding internal tenure arrangements.

200. Cultural heritage is mentioned in general terms in the Climate Change Act and conceptually in the FLRS, but neither framework provides detailed procedures for identifying or managing sacred sites, burial grounds or other culturally important areas. The CCA booklet allows CCAs to encompass tabu and cultural sites, but it does not require cultural-site mapping or specific measures to prevent unintended disturbance. The upstream impact is that, without additional guidance, restoration works or conservation rules could affect areas of high cultural significance or restrict access to sites that are important for identity and spiritual practices.

4.4 Limited integration of climate risk and ecosystem resilience into planning and management frameworks

201. Planning and management tools used in FLR, CCA governance and local development processes focus primarily on land-use categorisation, ecological condition and community priorities but do not systematically incorporate climate-risk assessments, projections or ecosystem-based adaptation principles. This limits their ability to guide decisions that reduce vulnerability and strengthen long-term resilience.

202. FLR prioritisation often relies on indicators of ecosystem degradation or implementation feasibility rather than on structured analysis of climate exposure, hydrological function or ecosystem thresholds. As a result, restoration investments may deliver ecological benefits but not necessarily optimise resilience outcomes or reduce climate-related hazards.

203. CCA management plans tend to emphasize governance arrangements, permitted activities and conservation objectives, with limited explicit consideration of climate hazards or alignment with national frameworks for climate change adaptation or disaster risk reduction. This constrains their potential to function as climate buffers or to safeguard critical ecosystem services under changing environmental conditions.

204. The absence of widely applied methodologies for combining climate data, ecological information and community priorities leads to uneven practice across provinces and sectors. Tools

introduced through projects like VCAP-II are applied inconsistently and are not yet embedded in statutory planning systems.

205. This results in fragmented resilience outcomes: some areas integrate ecosystem-based approaches effectively, while others rely on traditional management models that do not account for climate pressures. Over time, this reduces coherence across the three frameworks and limits their contribution to ridge-to-reef resilience and adaptive natural resource management.

4.5 Insufficient formal recognition and financing of community-level governance functions

206. The FLRS and CCA rely heavily on community-level structures—Village Councils, CCA Committees, CDCCs and Rangers—to monitor environmental conditions, manage resources and support climate and disaster preparedness, and to do so with limited access to predictable or sustained financing. These roles are not supported by standardized procedures that define how monitoring, reporting or decision-making should be carried out, nor do they specify how these functions should be financed or linked to public or project-based funding stream.

207. In the absence of formalised processes, community bodies depend on local practices, individual initiative or project-specific guidance. This produces considerable variation across islands and communities, with many locations lacking consistent methods for documenting observations or managing resource-use decisions.

208. Because monitoring, reporting and planning processes are not institutionalized, many of the initiatives introduced through projects or local committees are difficult to maintain once external support ends. Practices evolve informally, and the continuity of governance arrangements depends on personnel availability rather than on established systems.

209. The lack of standard templates, procedures and guidance for CCA management plans, community bylaws, right-holder mapping or FPIC-aligned consultations also leads to inconsistent application of safeguards. Without clear norms, communities may face uncertainties regarding roles, enforcement and representation, and practices vary significantly across locations.

210. These inconsistencies hinder the ability of provincial and national authorities to consolidate information, provide targeted support or compare results across sites. Reporting pathways become fragmented, limiting opportunities to scale up successful approaches or to use community-generated information to guide higher-level planning.

211. Overall, the absence of standardized and institutionalized community procedures represents a substantive upstream impact. It weakens the durability and coherence of local governance arrangements, reduces the likelihood that practices will persist beyond project cycles, and constrains the long-term effectiveness of environmental and climate resilience initiatives.

4.6 Weak integration of gender equality and vulnerable groups protection measures

212. Across CCAs, FLR and climate governance, gender equality and protection commitments are recognised at policy level but are not institutionalised through binding mandates, standard procedures or accountability mechanisms. As noted by the Department of Women’s Affairs (DWA), this results in partial and inconsistent reflection of National Gender Equality Policy (NGEP) commitments within governance arrangements, rather than their systematic application across frameworks.

213. The absence of explicit mandates or standing coordination mechanisms linking DWA to DEPC, Forestry, DoCC, DLA and provincial authorities means that gender and protection considerations rely on ad hoc contributions, individual initiative or project-based arrangements instead of clear pathway



for engagement. Gender integration is often limited to those projects where DWA is directly and financially involved.

214. Monitoring systems across the three frameworks do not consistently generate or apply sex-, age- or disability-disaggregated data, nor do they rely on shared gender or protection indicators. This limits the ability of institutions to assess differential participation, benefits and adverse impacts associated with conservation, restoration and climate actions, and constrains evidence-based responses to social risks.

215. Participation of women and vulnerable groups in governance bodies—such as CCA committees, CDCCCs or FLR planning structures—has improved in some locations but does not translate into decision-making power. Roles, voting arrangements and responsibilities are not defined through standard procedures. This perpetuates existing social norms that constrain women’s influence in natural resource management and climate governance.

216. Protection risks and GBV considerations—central to NGEP Strategic Area 5—are not yet embedded in CCA bylaws, FLR oversight processes or climate legislation. As a result, there are no defined requirements to identify gender protection risks in conservation or climate change vulnerability, nor clear mechanisms linking community grievances to formal GBV and protection referral pathways. Where DWA or the Gender & Protection Cluster have developed tools, their application depends on project presence rather than on statutory or policy obligations.

217. These structural gaps have upstream implications for policy effectiveness and accountability. Limited use of gender analysis and the absence of systematic protection screening weaken the ability of CCAs, FLR and climate frameworks to identify social risks, adjust implementation approaches and ensure that interventions deliver equitable and safe outcomes. As a result, decision-making processes remain insufficiently informed by the realities faced by those responsible for implementation at community level.

218. Overall, the fragmented and non-standardised integration of gender and protection across CCAs, FLR and climate governance represents a substantive social impact. It undermines the durability and legitimacy of these frameworks, restricts equitable participation, and limits the ability of national institutions to meet NGEP commitments or to ensure that resilience-building efforts are socially just and effective across all provinces and communities.

4.7 Limited accountability and feedback mechanisms

219. The Climate Change Act assigns monitoring and reporting functions to the NAB Secretariat and includes offences and penalties, which can support accountability for certain obligations. However, it does not mandate public reporting on the implementation of the Act or require systematic disclosure of climate actions and results. This limits transparency and restricts opportunities for public oversight or learning.

220. The FLRS establishes a monitoring and evaluation framework at strategic level but does not define specific indicators for participation, equity, biodiversity status or resilience outcomes. Monitoring tends to be project-based and focused on outputs (such as hectares restored or trees planted). The upstream impact is that policy-level learning remains limited, and it becomes difficult to assess whether restoration is contributing to SES-aligned outcomes such as reduced vulnerability, improved ecosystem condition or reduced inequality.

221. The CCA Information Booklet includes an annual reporting template and requires CCAs to submit reports to DEPC, which provides a basic level of oversight. However, reporting focuses primarily on descriptive information and lacks simple, measurable indicators of social and ecological change. In



addition, there is no formal grievance redress mechanism linked to CCAs. Accountability therefore relies largely on customary dispute-resolution systems and DEPC’s administrative powers, which can result in inconsistent handling of conflicts and limited documentation of complaints, lessons learned or corrective actions.

222. Across the three frameworks, these gaps in monitoring, data management and grievance handling create a common risk: impacts—positive or negative—are not systematically captured, analysed or used to inform policy adjustments. This weakens feedback loops, reduces accountability and limits the ability of VCAP-II to link its site-level safeguards performance to broader policy-level improvements.

5. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PROCESS AND RESULTS

223. As part of the SESA process, targeted consultations were undertaken in March 2025 with key technical staff, institutional focal points and implementation partners of VCAP-II. The consultation was designed to inform the safeguards assessments by approaching systemic risks, clarifying institutional roles and exploring how environmental and social safeguards are currently applied in practice.

224. Stakeholders consulted were representative from DEPC, DEC, DOF, DOWA, the Project Management Unit as well as development partners such as FAO and ECARE. The discussions highlighted structural challenges relevant to the SESA, EISA and ESMPs including limited formalisation of Community Conservation Areas (CCAs), lack of legal recognition of customary tabu areas, variability in FPIC application, and coordination gaps across institutions involved in safeguards oversight. Key issues raised included access restrictions associated with CCAs, unclear land boundaries, and potential impacts on traditional practices. Women and youth emphasized the importance of inclusive decision-making, gender-responsive grievance mechanisms, capacity building and community participation in monitoring.

225. The consultation provided insights that informed the SESA analysis, reinforcing the need for institutionalized stakeholder engagement, clearer FPIC pathways and stronger linkages between policy frameworks and community-level realities.

226. Later consultation was carried out through a structured questionnaire (included in Annex I), with focal points from DOF, DEPC, DCC, DLA, DARD, DWA, Provincial Governments and Area Councils. The questions were oriented towards (i) identification of key challenges and gaps in implementing the three frameworks, (ii) implementation of safeguards within the institution, and (iii) practical proposal for improving coordination, compliance and monitoring mechanisms (see Annex II).

227. Responses were analyzed thematically to identify common issues across institutions—such as overlapping mandates, capacity constraints and limited monitoring—and to extract concrete recommendations. The results directly informed the synthesis of findings and the formulation of actionable measures in subsequent sections.

228. Coordination across institutions is viewed positively, although it depends on staff availability and project support. Where limitations were noted, they relate to practical constraints such as workload, finance resources, logistics or limited presence in outer islands—not to unclear mandates. Existing mechanisms allow institutions to work together, even if collaboration is not always regular. In the case of gender mainstreaming, a clear institutional mechanism is needed that formally links the provisions of NGEP with the implementation of the three frameworks.

229. Gender and protection issues are increasingly recognized across climate and environmental initiatives, with existing tools under the NGEP providing a solid foundation for inclusive planning; however, gender considerations are being applied inconsistently. While institutions often draw on DWA's technical guidance, the absence of structured coordination mechanisms, shared indicators and dedicated involvement in field or policy work limits the systematic integration of women, youth and vulnerable groups in decision-making and monitoring in these three frameworks.

230. Among the actions identified, a set of priorities emerges from community level implementation. The priorities highlights: (i) strengthening communication and reporting between Village Councils and Area Councils; (ii) building capacity of CCA Committees, CDCCCs and Rangers; and (iii) integrating climate and FLR activities into village and provincial planning processes. These measures are seen as realistic and immediately actionable.

231. On safeguards, several institutions already apply relevant practices such as community consultations using FPIC principles, rights-holder mapping, women’s participation in decision-making and biodiversity monitoring. However, these practices are mostly project-driven and not across standardised at any level.

232. The main safeguards gaps identified are procedural: lack of uniform FPIC protocols, absence of accessible grievance mechanisms, inconsistent documentation of rights-holder mapping, limited integration of climate-risk screening, and lack of shared indicators. Institutions recognize these gaps and express readiness to adopt more formalized approaches.

233. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) systems vary significantly. Some institutions use partial MEL tools developed under projects, especially for biodiversity and gender, while others report no existing system. There is no centralized mechanism for collecting data or tracking progress across CCA, climate or FLR activities. Strengthening MEL is considered a common priority.

234. All institutions expressed openness to adopting new tools. They indicated willingness to join working groups, pilot FPIC procedures, test grievance mechanisms and apply gender or conservation indicators. This collective readiness provides a strong foundation for operationalizing the SESA recommendations.

235. Overall, the engagement results highlight a consistent set of structural findings across institutions. Capacity constraints was reported as the strongest cross-cutting issue at national, provincial and community levels, with institutions reporting insufficient human resources, limited technical skills and minimal budget allocations for field activities. Area Councils and provincial authorities have insufficient means to effectively support or monitor local implementation through community-level bodies.

236. The engagement identified systemic gaps in safeguards application, monitoring and policy integration. Safeguards are inconsistently and weakly integrated across institutions, with no standardized FPIC procedures, incomplete documentation of right-holders, limited inclusion of women, youth and marginalized resource users, and grievance mechanisms that are either absent or not functioning.

237. Monitoring and reporting systems are scarce, resulting in community-level information failing to reach provincial or national levels. Respondents consistently described weak integration of guidance on ecosystem-based indicators. Despite these constraints, stakeholders across institutions converged on a set of practical priorities—including strengthening communication and reporting channels, developing simple operational guidance, building technical capacity, integrating climate and FLR actions into village planning, and clarifying safeguards procedures and integration.

Table 6. Consultations summary table

Topic /Name of the weakness	Weakness identified	Recommendations
Coordination mechanisms are functional but limited by operational capacity	Coordination across institutions is generally positive, but effectiveness varies depending on staff availability, workload, logistics and limited presence in provinces. Collaboration mechanisms exist, but are not consistently applied or regularly convened.	Formalize periodic coordination meetings at national and provincial levels; strengthen logistical support; ensure minimum staffing and budget allocations for cross-institutional work; integrate coordination tasks into annual workplans.

Topic /Name of the weakness	Weakness identified	Recommendations
Gender and protection integration remains inconsistent	Institutions recognize gender and protection priorities, but application is uneven. NGEF tools exist but are not systematically used. Coordination with DWA is informal; indicators are not standardized; and field-level inclusion of women, youth and vulnerable groups depends on individual staff initiative.	Establish a formal mechanism linking NGEF implementation with the Climate Change Act, FLRS and CCA frameworks; define shared gender indicators; include DWA in relevant technical groups; ensure gender and protection tasks have dedicated roles and resources.
Community-level governance bodies lack clear roles and adequate capacity	Village Councils, CCA Committees, CDCCCs and Rangers are recognised as central to implementation but lack clear mandates, structured support and consistent training. Their reporting to Area Councils is not uniform.	Clarify roles and responsibilities in guidelines; provide targeted training (CCA management, FPIC, climate risk); strengthen reporting channels between Village and Area Councils; integrate climate and FLR tasks into local planning processes.
Safeguards practices exist but are not standardized across institutions	Institutions apply elements of FPIC, rights-holder mapping, women’s participation and biodiversity monitoring, but practices are project-driven, inconsistent and undocumented. National and provincial frameworks do not offer uniform procedures.	Develop standard FPIC protocols, rights-holder mapping templates, participation guidelines and biodiversity monitoring procedures; adopt shared tools across sectors; provide training and pilot implementation in selected provinces.
Gaps in procedural safeguards (FPIC, GRM, screening, documentation)	Common weaknesses include lack of a uniform FPIC procedure, absence of accessible grievance mechanisms, inconsistent rights-holder documentation and limited integration of climate-risk screening. Institutions recognise these gaps and are open to improvements.	Establish national FPIC guidelines; develop a simplified, accessible GRM model for community and provincial use; produce standard documentation formats; integrate climate risk screening into planning tools; assign clear responsibilities for each safeguard.
MEL systems are fragmented or absent	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning frameworks differ widely. Some institutions rely on project-based tools; others have no system. There is no centralized data mechanism for tracking progress in CCA, climate or FLR activities.	Create a harmonized MEL framework with shared indicators; establish a central database accessible to DOCC, DEPC, Forestry and DLA; train staff on data collection and reporting; align MEL with national legislation and policy priorities.
Strong willingness to adopt new tools but limited enabling structure	Institutions show high readiness to join working groups, pilot FPIC, apply indicators and test GRMs. However, they lack formal	Formalise working groups; assign institutional leads; allocate budgets for pilots; incorporate new tools into guidelines and



Topic /Name of the weakness	Weakness identified	Recommendations
	mandates, resources and guidance to operationalise these tools consistently.	annual plans; ensure follow-up and documentation of pilot results.

6. SYNTHESIS OF GAPS AND ENABLING CONDITIONS

6.1 Introduction to gap analysis and enabling conditions

238. This chapter explains how the upstream impacts identified in Chapter 4 can be addressed by strengthening the conditions under which existing policies and guidelines are implemented. The gap analysis presented in this chapter builds directly on the policy-specific assessments already conducted for the Climate Change Act, the FLRS and CCA Guidelines gap analysis chapter 3. The chapter consolidates the findings to provide a clear overview of the key systemic gaps that shape upstream implementation conditions.

239. Building on this consolidated gap analysis, the chapter introduces the concept of *enabling conditions*. These refer to the institutional, procedural and capacity-related conditions that need to be in place for existing policies and guidelines to function as intended. Identifying these conditions does not in itself resolve the impacts, but it clarifies where change is required and provides the analytical basis for formulating realistic and targeted recommendations.

6.2 Map identified gaps

240. The analysis of the Climate Change Act, the Forest and Landscape Restoration Strategy (FLRS) and the Community Conservation Area (CCA) framework identify a consistent set of gaps related to governance, safeguards, coordination and implementation. These gaps emerge from the detailed analysis within the earlier sections and are summarized below to provide a consolidated overview.

241. **Gaps in governance beyond policy adoption or registration.** Across the three frameworks, governance arrangements are defined at the point of policy approval or CCA registration, but ongoing governance responsibilities are not clearly articulated. The Climate Change Act establishes national coordination bodies but does not define downstream governance roles. The FLRS sets strategic direction without defining an operational governance model. The CCA Guidelines focus on registration and do not clarify post-registration governance, oversight or support.

242. **Gaps in coordination across institutions and levels.** Although coordination mechanisms exist, they are not formalised or sustained across national, provincial and community levels. The three frameworks operate largely in parallel, with limited procedural linkage between climate, forestry, environment and land administration. Coordination often depends on projects rather than on permanent institutional arrangements.

243. **Gaps in the operationalization of social inclusion and gender.** Principles of inclusion, gender equality and participation are acknowledged across the frameworks, but they are not translated into operational requirements. Gender representation exists at institutional level, but gender-specific mandates, indicators and reporting obligations are absent. Customary governance dynamics that may constrain participation by women, youth and vulnerable groups are not explicitly addressed.

244. **Gaps in safeguards, FPIC and grievance mechanisms.** Safeguard-related provisions are uneven and incomplete. FPIC is not explicitly articulated in the Climate Change Act or strategically addressed in the FLRS. The CCA framework relies largely on customary practices without formal procedures for consent documentation, grievance handling or escalation. Across the three frameworks, safeguards are not supported by standardised procedures or clear institutional responsibilities.



245. **Gaps in monitoring, reporting and accountability.** Monitoring arrangements focus primarily on technical or administrative reporting and lack indicators for social inclusion, safeguard performance or resilience outcomes. Public reporting on implementation is not required. There is no consolidated mechanism for tracking performance across climate, FLR and CCA activities, and accountability responsibilities are not clearly assigned.

246. **Gaps in implementation capacity and sustainability.** The frameworks assume implementation capacity but do not address staffing, technical skills, operational resources or long-term financing. Core functions such as coordination, safeguards application and monitoring depend heavily on project-based support, particularly at provincial and community levels. Community governance bodies are central to implementation but lack clear mandates, tools and sustained support.

6.3 Enabling conditions

247. For the Climate Change Act, the FLRS and the CCA Guidelines to function effectively as implementation frameworks, a set of enabling conditions needs to be in place. These conditions relate to resourcing, institutional capacity, operational arrangements and the routine application of safeguards and monitoring processes.

248. **Minimum resourcing for implementation.** Effective implementation requires predictable operational resources. This includes adequate staffing, budget allocations for field activities, and logistical capacity to maintain a regular presence in provinces and outer islands. Without minimum resourcing, coordination, oversight and monitoring functions remain intermittent and vulnerable to workload pressures. In the case of CCAs, this is reflected in limited follow-up after registration, irregular technical support to communities, and reliance on project-based resources to sustain governance and monitoring functions.

249. **Technical and operational capacity.** Effective implementation depends on the availability of basic technical and operational capacities. These capacities are currently uneven and often insufficient. Gaps are evident in areas such as ecosystem monitoring, consideration of climate risk, documentation practices and the practical application of safeguards instruments. This highlights the need for sustained capacity-building efforts in all levels, but particularly at provincial and area council level.

250. **Functional roles at community and subnational level.** Implementation depends on the existence of clear, functional roles for community and subnational governance bodies, including Area Councils, CCA Committees, CDCCCs and Rangers. These roles need to be defined in a way that supports day-to-day implementation, local oversight and consistent reporting, with practical guidance on responsibilities and minimum operating procedures.

251. **Structured communication and reporting channels.** Effective operation requires structured channels for communication and reporting across levels of governance. This includes simple and consistent reporting templates, defined reporting routes from communities to Area Councils and provinces, and feedback loops that ensure information is received, validated and used for decision-making rather than remaining local or informal.

252. **Standardized safeguard tools and procedures.** The consistent application of SES principles requires standardized procedures that can be applied across institutions and locations. Enabling conditions include practical tools for FPIC and rights-holder documentation, minimum standards for inclusive participation, accessible grievance mechanisms, and clear responsibilities for maintaining records, follow-up and corrective action.



253. **Harmonized monitoring and learning arrangements.** Implementation requires monitoring arrangements that move beyond administrative updates and enable tracking of social, ecological and resilience-relevant change. This includes harmonised indicators aligned with the three frameworks, defined responsibilities for data collection and consolidation, and basic systems for storing and using information to support learning and adjustments over time.

254. **Formal structures for coordination and piloting.** Finally, effective implementation requires formal structures that can sustain coordination and allow operational tools to be introduced, tested and scaled. This includes designated institutional leads, regular coordination forums at national and provincial levels, and the ability to resource and document pilots so that successful approaches can be mainstreamed into routine practice.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

255. The recommendations set out in this chapter address the upstream environmental and social risks identified through the SESA, with particular attention to governance arrangements, policy coherence, safeguards integration, institutional capacity and accountability conditions that may influence the implementation of VCAP-II.

256. The recommendations focus on strengthening the coherence, clarity and operationalisation of the three frameworks, enhancing institutional capacity and accountability mechanisms, and supporting the consistent application of safeguards, across climate adaptation, community conservation and forest and landscape restoration processes.

257. Each recommendation is operationalized through the Action Matrix, which translates the strategic directions set out in this chapter into indicative actions, identifies responsible institutions, and supports sequencing, coordination, monitoring and adaptive management over the life of the project.

7.1 Policy-level recommendations

258. **R1. Strengthening policy and legal coherence across climate, environment and natural resource governance.** Strengthening statutory and procedural coherence across climate, environmental, land, biodiversity and natural resource governance frameworks to require systematic integration of climate risk, ecosystem resilience and safeguards in sectoral planning and decision-making.

Operationalised through Action Matrix – Climate Change Act (Actions CCA-1, CCA-3).

259. **R2. Anchor adaptation planning requirements beyond non-binding instruments.** Introduce binding policy or regulatory provisions to ensure that adaptation planning requirements apply consistently across sectors and territories, reducing reliance on project-based implementation.

Operationalised through Action Matrix – Climate Change Act (Actions CCA-1, CCA-2).

260. **R3. Improved data governance and monitoring systems.** The review of Climate Change Act recommends formalizing the interface between climate information systems and disaster preparedness, through defined institutional procedures and mandates. This would support coordinated, inclusive and accountable dissemination of climate and early information, consistent with disaster risk management frameworks and community-level preparedness arrangements.

Operationalised through Action Matrix – Climate Change Act (Action CCA-3).

261. **R4. Embed safeguards, FPIC and grievance requirements across policy instruments.** Embed minimum safeguard standards—including FPIC, gender-responsive and inclusive participation, biodiversity and climate risk screening, labour and resettlement safeguards, cultural heritage protection, right-holder mapping, and accessible grievance mechanisms—within relevant policy and guideline frameworks. This would reduce reliance on ad hoc or project-based practices and support more consistent application of safeguards across community-based conservation and adaptation interventions.

Operationalised through Action Matrix – Information booklet, action 12.

262. **R5. Establish policy-level accountability and outcome-oriented monitoring.** Introduce policy-level requirements for public reporting and monitoring frameworks that capture social inclusion,



safeguards performance and resilience outcomes, enabling transparency, learning and adaptive management.

Operationalised through Action Matrix – Climate Change Act (3), FLRS (1 and 7), Information booklet (10)

R6. Strengthen the policy architecture for Forest and Landscape Restoration governance. Review and consolidate the existing national policy framework for Forest and Landscape Restoration, clarifying multi-level governance arrangements, coordination mechanisms, inclusion principles, and accountability requirements. This should be based on the existing forestry and other relevant regulations, integrating them into a coherent framework that goes beyond individual project logic.

Operationalised through Action Matrix – FLRS policy actions

7.2 Institutional strengthening and capacity building

263. **R7. Strengthening institutional capacity for safeguards implementation across governance levels.** Strengthen institutional capacity within the VCAP-II framework at national, provincial and community levels to support the practical and consistent application of environmental and social safeguards. This includes reinforcing the ability of institutions and governance bodies to apply safeguards screening, manage FPIC and community engagement processes, address livelihood-related risks, and ensure basic health, safety and inclusion requirements are integrated into decision-making.

Capacity strengthening should prioritise procedural clarity, coordination between institutions, and the application of safeguards within community-based governance arrangements.

Operationalized through the Action Matrix – FLRS (5)

264. **R8. Guide VCAP-II in developing coherent guideline frameworks to enable effective capacity building.** Support VCAP-II in strengthening and harmonizing guideline frameworks that provide clear, coherent and practical reference points for safeguards implementation and capacity-building activities at provincial and community levels. These frameworks should consolidate existing guidance and clarify minimum expectations related to environmental sustainability and biodiversity management, FPIC and community governance, livelihood impacts, social inclusion, community health and safety, and safeguards monitoring and reporting.

Strengthened guideline frameworks should be aligned with existing governance systems and local contexts, and serve as operational tools to support consistent application of safeguards across VCAP-II-supported interventions

Operationalised through the Action Matrix – CCA booklet (12), FLR (6,7), Annex II

7.3 Gender mainstreaming and social inclusion

265. **R9. Integrate NGEP requirements into climate and resilience policy reform processes supported by VCAP-II.** Ensure that VCAP-II systematically integrates the requirements of the National Gender Equality Policy (NGEP 2020–2030) into policy reform and review processes related to the Climate Change Act, the CCA Guidelines and the Forest and Landscape Restoration Strategy. This includes providing gender analysis and technical inputs during drafting and revision processes to ensure that climate governance frameworks explicitly address gender-differentiated vulnerabilities, unequal exposure to climate risks, and barriers to women’s participation in decision-making.

Operationalised through the Action Matrix – Climate Change Act, FLRS and CCA policy alignment actions.



266. **R10. Strengthen gender-responsive communication, consultation and feedback mechanisms in climate and DRR systems.** Support the integration of gender-responsive communication and consultation procedures within climate information systems, early warning mechanisms and disaster risk governance structures supported by VCAP-II. This includes promoting consultation formats, communication channels and feedback mechanisms that are accessible, safe and appropriate for women and marginalised groups, in line with NGEP commitments on participation and inclusion. VCAP-II should ensure that project-supported systems move beyond gender-neutral dissemination approaches and actively address structural barriers that limit women’s access to information, voice and feedback in climate and disaster preparedness processes.

Operationalised through the Action Matrix – CCA (3=

267. **R11. Support the integration of gender-responsive data, indicators and monitoring frameworks.** Support the incorporation of gender, livelihood and social vulnerability indicators into climate, biodiversity and resilience monitoring frameworks supported by VCAP-II. This includes promoting the collection and use of sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data and the integration of NGEP indicators related to participation, leadership, protection and access to benefits.

VCAP-II should facilitate coordination between sector agencies to ensure that monitoring systems capture differential impacts and enable evidence-based assessment of whether adaptation, conservation and restoration investments effectively benefit women, youth and vulnerable populations.

Operationalised through the Action Matrix – monitoring, reporting and adaptive management actions.

268. **R12. Promote gender-responsive governance and livelihood safeguards in FLR and CCA processes.** Ensure that VCAP-II-supported FLR and CCA processes integrate gender-responsive participation rules, livelihood screening and monitoring mechanisms that reflect women’s differentiated roles, resource dependencies and economic contributions. This includes supporting safeguards to prevent unintended restrictions on women’s access to forests, land and natural resources and to mitigate risks of increased workload or economic displacement.

VCAP-II should support the application of gender-responsive approaches to customary governance and land-related decision-making, in line with NGEP commitments on human rights, equity and climate resilience.

Operationalised through the Action Matrix – FLRS governance, CCA guidelines and livelihood-related safeguards actions.

7.4 Safeguards, Accountability, Monitoring and Adaptive Management

269. **R13. Strengthen safeguards application and upstream risk management across VCAP-II-supported frameworks.** Strengthen safeguards accountability by ensuring that Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) and grievance redress mechanisms are formally embedded within policy instruments, technical guidelines and coordination arrangements supported by VCAP-II. FPIC and grievance processes should function as accountability pathways linking community-level decisions with provincial and national oversight, rather than as standalone procedural steps.

VCAP-II should support the clarification of minimum expectations regarding documentation, feedback, escalation and institutional follow-up of FPIC and grievances, in order to reduce reliance on informal practices and enable transparency, traceability and institutional learning.

Operationalised through the Action Matrix – FPIC, GRM and accountability-related actions.



270. **R14. Strengthen transparency and public accountability in climate and restoration governance.** Support the establishment of transparent and accessible reporting and disclosure arrangements for climate adaptation, disaster risk management, community conservation and forest and landscape restoration processes supported by VCAP-II. This includes promoting public reporting on implementation progress, safeguards performance and key decisions, in forms that are accessible to communities and relevant stakeholders.

VCAP-II should support accountability mechanisms that enable oversight, feedback and corrective action, thereby strengthening public trust, institutional legitimacy and accountability across governance levels.

Operationalised through the Action Matrix – reporting, disclosure and accountability actions.

271. **R15. Establish outcome-oriented monitoring and institutional learning systems to support adaptive management.** Support the development and use of outcome-oriented monitoring frameworks under VCAP-II that go beyond activity tracking to capture social, environmental, gender and resilience outcomes. Monitoring systems should integrate safeguards performance, participation, livelihoods and biodiversity indicators, and be designed to inform decision-making at community, provincial and national levels.

VCAP-II should strengthen institutional learning by supporting feedback loops that use monitoring results, grievance data and implementation experience to inform policy refinement, guideline updates and adaptive management over time.

Operationalised through the Action Matrix – monitoring, learning and adaptive management actions.

7.5 Action Matrix. Monitoring and adaptive management

272. The Action Matrix translates the recommendations set out in this chapter into a structured set of indicative actions to support their implementation by framework. The Action Matrix operationalises the priorities by translating them into indicative actions within the scope of VCAP-II and related national frameworks.

273. The matrix identifies priority actions, responsible institutions, resource needs and risks associated with no implementation in strengthening climate, environmental and restoration governance. In doing so, it supports a coherent and realistic approach to implementation, recognising current institutional capacities and the incremental nature of policy and governance reform.

274. The Action Matrix is intended to guide VCAP-II engagement with national, provincial and community-level institutions, inform sequencing and coordination of support, and support monitoring, learning and adaptive management over the life of the project. The matrix should be applied as a living tool, to be reviewed and updated as implementation progresses, institutional capacities strengthen and lessons emerge.

Table 7. Action Matrix for the Operationalization of SESA Recommendations

Action	Gap addressed	Responsibility parties	Resource needed	Risk if not implemented
Climate Change Act				
<p>1_ Introduce a statutory provision strengthening the alignment between the Climate Change Act and environmental, land and natural resource management laws, including the promotion of ecosystem-based adaptation approaches.³⁶</p> <p>Standards triggered: S1 Biodiversity & Sustainable NRM; S2 Climate Change & Disaster Risk; S5 Displacement</p>	Fragmentation between climate legislation and environmental, land and natural resource management frameworks, and absence of statutory provisions promoting ecosystem-based adaptation.	DOCC, NAB Secretariat, DEPC, DOF	Legal drafting support; inter-agency consultations; technical review of NRM legislation.	Continued fragmentation between climate and natural resource governance; maladaptation risks; reduced long-term ecosystem resilience; inconsistent implementation across sectors.
<p>2_ Clarify and strengthen statutory references to adaptation planning requirements, currently articulated through non-binding instruments.</p> <p>Safeguards triggered: Principles 4 Sustainability & Resilience; 5 Accountability. Standard 2 Climate Change & Disaster Risk</p>	While the Act provides a solid institutional and coordination framework, adaptation planning requirements are largely articulated through non-binding instruments, which constrain their systematic and enforceable application across sectors and territories.	Dept. of Climate Change + NAB + DEPC + Provincial governments	Technical legal support, inter-agency coordination resources, and staff time for implementation guidance.	Adaptation planning continues to be applied inconsistently across sectors and levels, relying on non-binding instruments and project-based arrangements, which limits enforceability, accountability and long-term institutionalization.
<p>3_ Introduce a statutory requirement for the NAB to produce an Annual Climate Report, publicly</p>	The Act provides coordination internally but lacks external transparency; no obligation for	NAB Secretariat, DOCC	Technical inputs for report structure; inter-agency data	Reduced public trust; limited transparency; inability to monitor implementation of the

³⁶ Several Pacific climate governance frameworks, including Fiji’s Climate Change Act (2021) incorporate ecosystem-based or ecosystem-resilience approaches central components of adaptation. These regional examples provide a coherent basis for integrating ecosystem-based adaptation and natural resource management into the revision of Vanuatu’s Climate Change Act.



<p>available and summarize implementation progress under the Act. Incorporate social, gender and livelihood dimensions with specific indicators to be defined through secondary regulations or technical guidelines.</p> <p>Safeguards triggered: Principles 1 – Leave No One Behind; 2 – Human Rights; 3 – Gender Equality & Women’s Empowerment; Principles 4 Sustainability & Resilience; 5 Accountability. Standards 2 Climate Change & Disaster Risk, Standard 3 Community Health, Safety and Security, Standard 6 Indigenous Peoples, Standard 1 Biodiversity and Sustainable NRM</p>	<p>public reporting. Climate monitoring systems remain focused on biophysical and hazard metrics, lacking statutory guidance for integrating social, gender and livelihood dimensions.</p>		<p>contributions; publication and disclosure resources. Development of social, gender and livelihood indicators; updated data collection templates; capacity-building for staff at national and subnational levels.</p>	<p>Act; weak institutional accountability and reduced capacity for adaptive management. Social and gender-differentiated impacts remain invisible or not reflected under the provisions of the Act.</p>
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Action	Gap addressed	Responsibility parties	Resource needed	Risk if not implemented
Forest & Landscape Restoration Strategy (FLRS)				
<p>4_ Establish a national multi-level governance framework for Forest and Landscape Restoration (FLR)</p> <p>Safeguards triggered: Principles 4 – Sustainability & Resilience 5- Accountability. Standards 1 – Biodiversity Conservation & Sustainable NRM; 6 – Indigenous Peoples.</p>	<p>The FLRS identifies stakeholders but does not define an architecture that connects national ministries, provincial authorities, customary institutions and communities in a coherent governance system.</p>	<p>MALFFB (lead), DOF, DLA, Provincial Governments, Malvatumauri.</p>	<p>High-level inter-institutional dialogue, customary governance consultations, development of a national coordination framework.</p>	<p>Fragmented implementation; inconsistent interpretation of roles; weak accountability; limited alignment between customary and government-led restoration priorities.</p>
<p>5_ Strengthening cross-sector alignment between FLR, biodiversity conservation, climate change and land-use policies,</p>	<p>Sectoral policies related to Forest and Landscape Restoration, biodiversity conservation, climate change</p>	<p>DOF, DEPC, DOCC, DARD, DLA.</p>	<p>Targeted capacity-building resources, including technical facilitation for inter-</p>	<p>Limited cross-sector coordination and institutional capacity to support integrated planning and safeguards</p>

Action	Gap addressed	Responsibility parties	Resource needed	Risk if not implemented
<p>including targeted institutional capacity-building to support coordinated planning, safeguards integration and implementation across sectors and governance levels.</p> <p>Safeguards triggered: Principles 4 – Sustainability and Resilience, 5 – Accountability. Standard 1 – Biodiversity and Sustainable NRM, 2- Climate Change.</p>	<p>and land-use operate through partially aligned mandates and planning processes, with limited institutional capacity and coordination mechanisms to support integrated implementation and consistent safeguards application across governance levels.</p>		<p>sector coordination, development of shared guidance materials, staff time across participating institutions, and limited training and workshop costs to support alignment and safeguards application.</p>	<p>implementation across FLR, biodiversity, climate change and land-use policies.</p>
<p>6_Define strategic principles for inclusive and gender-responsive governance in FLR</p> <p>Safeguards triggered: Principles 1 – Leave no one Behind, 2- Human Rights, 5- Accountability, Standard 6- IP.</p>	<p>Women, youth and vulnerable groups are recognised but not positioned as actors within decision-making structures; participation remains socially mediated rather than institutionally embedded.</p>	<p>DOF, DEPC, Department of Women’s Affairs (DWA), Ministry of Youth and Sports, Malvatumauri.</p>	<p>Development of high-level principles on equity and representation; advisory inputs from gender and social inclusion focal points.</p>	<p>Participation remains symbolic; exclusion of key groups in restoration governance; reinforcement of structural inequalities; reduced legitimacy of FLR processes.</p>
<p>7_Establish a high-level framework for monitoring and community feedback that recognizes culturally appropriate consent practices (FPIC) and strengthens accountability in FLR.</p> <p>Safeguards triggered: Principles 2 – Human rights, 5- Accountability; 4 – Sustainability & Resilience. Standards 4 – Cultural Heritage; 6 – Indigenous Peoples</p>	<p>The FLRS does not provide strategic direction for monitoring ecological and social outcomes, nor for incorporating community consent, feedback or grievances into restoration decisions.</p>	<p>DOF (lead), VNSO, DEPC, DLA, Provincial Governments, Malvatumauri.</p>	<p>Development of outcome categories, basic guidance on FPIC-aligned feedback pathways, and integration with existing national information systems.</p>	<p>Limited oversight of restoration outcomes; weak accountability; inconsistent community consent; unresolved grievances; reduced trust and legitimacy of FLR initiatives.</p>

Information booklet on the registration of CCA				
Action	Gap addressed	Responsibility parties	Resource needed	Risk if not implemented
<p>8_Strengthen coordination and reporting between Village Councils, CCA/CDCCC Committees and the Area Council.</p> <p>Principles 1 Leave No One Behind; 5 Accountability; Standards 1 Biodiversity; 2 Climate Change & Disaster Risk; 6 Indigenous Peoples.</p>	Reporting pathways are fragmented; no defined procedures to channel monitoring data and management decisions from villages to Area Councils and into provincial/national systems.	DEPC; Area Councils; Village Councils; CCA and CDCCC Committees.	Reporting templates; coordination protocols; basic training for Area Council officers.	Community decisions remain disconnected from higher-level planning; weak accountability; inconsistent monitoring; loss of information needed for national climate and biodiversity systems.
<p>9_Establish a capacity-building programme for CCA Committees, CDCCC Committees and Village Rangers (with specialised technical skills).</p> <p>Principles 1 LNOB; 4 Sustainability & Resilience; Standards 1 Biodiversity; 2 Climate Change & DRR; 3 Community Health & Safety.</p>	Committees and rangers lack technical capacity for environmental monitoring, climate-risk screening, enforcement and management planning.	DEPC; Provincial Governments; Vanuatu Cultural Centre; NGOs supporting field training.	Biodiversity monitoring, climate-risk assessment, enforcement procedures.	Low-quality monitoring; weak enforcement; inability to detect threats or climate impacts; reduced effectiveness of CCA governance.
<p>10_Integrate climate adaptation and landscape restoration (FLR) guidance into CCA management plan requirements.</p> <p>Principles 2 Human Rights; 4 Resilience; Standards 1 Biodiversity; 2 Climate Change & DRR.</p>	The booklet does not reference climate risks, adaptation needs or linkages to FLR and national climate frameworks; management plans lack resilience measures	DEPC; Department of Climate Change; Area Councils; Village Councils.	Simple climate-risk tools; guidance notes for ecosystem-based adaptation and FLR alignment.	CCAs fail to support climate resilience; unmanaged climate risks reduce ecological integrity; weak alignment with national climate and FLR strategies.
<p>11_Provide clear guidance on community bylaws, enforcement mandates and resource-use rules.</p>	Current bylaws are informal, inconsistent or unclear; enforcement roles are undefined; communities lack	Village Councils; CCA Committees; Area Councils;	Model bylaws; enforcement protocols; awareness materials; training for rangers.	Illegal activities persist; social disputes increase; compliance weakens; biodiversity declines; reduced legitimacy of CCAs.



<p>Principles 1 LNOB; 5 Accountability; Standards 1 Biodiversity; 3 Community Health & Safety; 6 Indigenous Peoples.</p>	<p>guidance to manage resource use and protect CCA areas.</p>	<p>DEPC (oversight).</p>		
<p>12_Establish standard FPIC, right-holder mapping and inclusion requirements for CCA registration.</p> <p>Principles 1 LNOB; 2 Human Rights; 3 Gender Equality; Standards 6 Indigenous Peoples; 1 Biodiversity.</p>	<p>No structured process to confirm representation of all right-holders and resource users (women, seasonal users, fishers), leading to incomplete participation and consent.</p>	<p>DEPC; Area Councils; Village Councils; Department of Women’s Affairs.</p>	<p>FPIC templates; right-holder mapping tools; community consultations; guidelines for inclusive participation.</p>	<p>Exclusion of vulnerable groups; legitimacy disputes; conflict over access; FPIC non-compliance; reduced sustainability of CCAs.</p>

8. CONCLUSIONS

275. This SESA was conceived to support the review of existing legal and policy frameworks for the effective and risk-informed implementation of VCAP-II. Several core areas of project intervention—particularly those related to the mainstreaming of Climate Change Adaptation Plans into provincial and Area Council planning processes, the integration of biodiversity conservation and sustainable land management into decision-making at national and local levels, and the strengthening of institutional capacity for compliance, enforcement and monitoring—require direct engagement with existing policy, legal and guideline instruments. In this context, the SESA provides the analytical basis to assess whether these frameworks are coherent, operational and safeguards-ready, and to identify gaps, inconsistencies or implementation constraints that could undermine project objectives or generate social and environmental risks during delivery.

276. The SESA focuses specifically on the Climate Change Act, the Forest and Landscape Restoration Strategy, and the CCA Guidelines. These three instruments frame the planning, implementation and oversight of climate adaptation, conservation and restoration activities supported by the project. The assessment examines how these frameworks address safeguards requirements, coordination arrangements and implementation responsibilities in practice. The SESA also identifies gaps, risks and enabling conditions that are directly relevant to the delivery of VCAP-II outputs under these frameworks. The findings presented in this section reflect this policy-anchored analysis and provide the basis for the conclusions and recommendations that follow.

277. As shown in the upstream impact pathway analysis presented in Chapter 4, the way in which the Climate Change Act, the FLRS and the CCA Guidelines define—or leave undefined—operational responsibilities, coordination mechanisms and safeguards requirements has direct implications for how VCAP-II activities are implemented in practice. Where policy objectives are articulated without clearly defined procedural requirements or implementation conditions, adaptation, community conservation and restoration measures are implemented unevenly, with limited oversight and weak linkages between community, provincial and national levels. These policy- and guideline-level gaps underpin the risks identified through the SESA and form the basis for the recommendations presented in this chapter.

278. The SESA identifies a set of interrelated potential upstream impacts arising from these three instruments shaping VCAP-II implementation. These include (i) fragmented integration of the Climate Change Act with adaptation efforts; (ii) governance, coordination and institutional capacity constraints across national, provincial and community levels; (iii) limited integration of climate risk and ecosystem resilience considerations into planning and management frameworks; (iv) insufficient formal recognition and financing of community-level governance functions; (v) weak integration of gender equality and the protection of vulnerable groups; and (vi) limited accountability, monitoring and feedback mechanisms. Taken together, these impacts create conditions for uneven implementation, reduced safeguards effectiveness and constrained learning across VCAP-II-supported activities.

279. The consultation process identified a limited number of concrete and recurring weaknesses affecting the application of safeguards across institutions. Stakeholders consistently reported the absence of standardized procedures for FPIC, grievance handling and right-holder documentation, as well as uneven consideration in Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) systems. Gender equality commitments are recognized at policy level but lack operational guidance and indicators for consistent application. These gaps directly inform the enabling conditions and recommendations set out in this SESA, particularly those related to standardization of safeguards procedures, institutional accountability and outcome-oriented monitoring.



280. VCAP-II implementation relies on community-level governance structures to carry out functions that are central to the project’s risk profile, including the application of FPIC, the management of Community Conservation Areas, the identification of livelihood-related risks, and the generation of information for monitoring and reporting. Consultations indicate that, while these governance arrangements are in place, their effectiveness in applying safeguards and contributing to monitoring and learning depends on the extent to which procedures, guidance and reporting pathways are formally articulated within the relevant policy and guideline frameworks. Where such articulation is partial or uneven, safeguards application, gender commitments and feedback mechanisms vary across sites.

281. Taken together, the conclusions of this SESA indicate that strengthening climate, conservation, and restoration outcomes for VCAP-II requires moving from fragmented, and action-based implementation to more coherent, accountable, and outcome-oriented governance. Within its scope, the recommendations are designed to support drive this shift by reinforcing enabling conditions, addressing critical risks, and grounding policy reforms in real implementation needs. The recommendations and Action Matrix in this assessment therefore propose realistic, step-by-step improvements that acknowledge what can be achieved within a single project cycle.



ANNEXES



Annex I: Questionnaire and Stakeholders consulted

Stakeholder Questionnaire –Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment VCAP-2

Purpose of this questionnaire

This questionnaire is part of the Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment (SESA) process that VCAP-2 is conducting in relation to the revision of the **Planning Guidelines for the Community Conservation Areas**, the revision of **Meteorology, Geological Hazard and Climate Change Act** and the enabling conditions of the **Forest and Landscape Restoration Strategy in Vanuatu**. It aims to collect feedback from government departments and provincial officers. The goal is to understand coordination, implementation challenges, and ideas for improvement.

The information collected will directly inform the SESA report. Responses will remain confidential and will be used only for analytical purposes.

Instructions for respondents

Please complete this questionnaire within one week of receipt and return it by email to the sender with CC to Elisabet Badia (elisabet@landcrea.org) and Watson Qalopui (watty14galo@gmail.com). For any clarification before completing the form, please contact the email above.

- You may fill it directly in this document (typed responses preferred).
- If a question does not apply, please indicate “N/A.”
- For open questions, provide short and clear explanations.
- Attach supporting documents if relevant (e.g., reports, guidelines, or data sources).
- Please ensure all sections are completed before submission.

Estimated completion time: approximately 30–45 minutes.

Target Respondents

1. Department of Forestry (DoF)
2. Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation (DEPC)
3. Department of Climate Change (DCC)
4. Department of Local Authorities (DLA)
5. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD)
6. Department of Women’s Affairs (DWA)
7. Provincial Governments (through Climate Change or Forestry Officers)



Persons with not only a strong technical capacity in their respective field, but also a decision-making or supervisory role within the department.

SECTION 1 – GENERAL INFORMATION

Institution / Department:

Position / Role:

Province (if applicable):

Date:

SECTION 2 – Institutional Roles and Coordination

1. What role does your department/organization currently play in implementing or supporting CCAs, the Climate Change Act, or the FLR Strategy?

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2. Do you see clear institutional coordination mechanisms between your department and other government actors (e.g., DLA, DCC, DEPC, Forestry) involved in CCAs or conservation governance?

- Yes No Partially

- If partially or no: What is missing?

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SECTION 3 – Implementation of Recommendations

3. Please list the top three priorities you think are most important to strengthen implementation of the frameworks mentioned and provide details about the following inputs:

a) Can realistically be implemented within your mandate or existing capacity?

b) Require new resources, training, or policy changes?

4. Would your institution be open to:

- Participating in a working group to operationalize any of these recommendations?

- Piloting new tools such as FPIC protocols, grievance mechanisms, or gender indicators?



SECTION 4 – Social and Environmental Safeguards

5. Has your team already integrated any of the following safeguards in practice? (tick all that apply and explain how)

- FPIC
- Right-holder mapping
- Gender-responsive governance
- Community-based grievance mechanisms
- Biodiversity monitoring
- Climate risk screening
- Safeguards for labor, resettlement, or cultural heritage

6. What types of capacity support would help your department better implement these safeguards? (e.g., field manuals, training, budget, coordination)

SECTION 5 – Monitoring, Accountability, and Sustainability

7. Do you have access to any MEL (Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning) systems or indicators for:

- Biodiversity or ecosystem services?
- Gender participation?
- Community satisfaction or grievances?
- Climate resilience?

8. How do you see your institution's role in ensuring the long-term sustainability (financing, staffing, oversight) of the CCAs, FLRS, or Climate Change Act implementation?

Annex II: Indicative Safeguards and Capacity-Building Guidelines Categories and Expected Outcomes

This annex provides an indicative set of safeguard and capacity-building guideline categories to support the operationalisation of the recommendations presented in Chapter 7, particularly those related to institutional strengthening, safeguards implementation and adaptive management.

The annex is intended to be used as a reference tool to inform the design of capacity-building programmes, technical guidelines and operational procedures at national, provincial and community levels.

The guideline categories are aligned with the Action Matrix and are presented together with indicative expected outcomes to support consistency, transparency and learning during implementation.

Table 8. Indicative Guideline categories to support capacity building and implementation

Guideline Category	Recommended Actions	Expected Outcome
Environmental Sustainability & Biodiversity Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop biodiversity screening lists for community-level interventions (identified gap in FLR & CCA Guidelines). • Establish clear screening procedures for sensitive habitats, protected species and IAS. • Require documented environmental review (checklist) before approving activities. • Introduce IAS management protocols where absent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced unintended ecological impacts. • Standardised and transparent decision-making. • Alignment with SES Standard 1.
Community Governance, FPIC & GRM Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalise community governance committees (roles, responsibilities, reporting). • Apply standardised FPIC procedures for all land/resource decisions. • Establish a single, accessible multi-level GRM. • Integrate GRM results into community and provincial decision processes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased governance legitimacy. • Lower risk of resource conflict. • Compliance with SES Standards 2 & 6.
Livelihoods, Resource Access & Climate Change Act Compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct livelihood impact screening before restricting access to forests, fisheries, mangroves or agricultural land. • Develop mitigation plans (alternative livelihoods, benefit-sharing). • Align livelihood planning with CCA adaptation and resilience requirements. • Document and communicate all decisions affecting livelihoods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection of community livelihoods. • Higher acceptance of conservation rules. • Compliance with SES Standard 5 & CCA obligations.

Guideline Category	Recommended Actions	Expected Outcome
Social Inclusion & Equal Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply minimum inclusion standards for women, youth, PWD and vulnerable households. • Collect gender-disaggregated participation data. • Use adapted engagement tools to reach underrepresented groups. • Issue guidelines for inclusive community decision-making. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved equity and participation. • Reduced exclusion risks. • Alignment with SES Standard 2.
Community Health & Safety (CHS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct CHS screening for all activities involving physical work or ecological interventions. • Apply safety protocols for fire, IAS removal, use of tools, and coastal operations. • Integrate climate-related health risks into local planning. • Establish emergency and incident-response procedures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced community health and safety risks. • Higher preparedness for climate hazards. • Compliance with SES Standard 4.
Monitoring, Reporting & Adaptive Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop simple monitoring templates for biodiversity, impacts, participation and GRM results. • Require regular reporting from community committees. • Establish feedback loops to adjust management based on monitoring. • Strengthen provincial capacity to verify safeguards compliance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger accountability systems. • Improved adaptive management. • Enhanced safeguard performance.
Institutional Capacity & Procedural Clarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver training on environmental screening, FPIC, GRM and biodiversity monitoring. • Develop operational manuals aligned with FLR & CCA Guidelines. • Strengthen coordination mechanisms between DEPC, DOCC, Provincial and community entities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced procedural ambiguity. • More consistent safeguard application. • Greater institutional readiness.



Annex III: References

1. International IDEA. (2023). *Climate change and democracy: Insights from Asia and the Pacific – Vanuatu*. <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/chapters/climate-change-and-democracy-insights-from-asia-pacific/ch11-climate-change-and-democracy-insights-from-asia-pacific.pdf>
2. Australian Agency for International Development. (2008). *Making land work. Volume 1: Reconciling customary land and development in the Pacific*. https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/MLW_VolumeOne_Bookmarked.pdf
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5. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2022). *Integrated land use planning: A centrepiece for successful forest and landscape restoration planning and implementation in Vanuatu*. Document presented at the XV World Forestry Congress. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/249d36ff-6250-4e70-a1a5-c3c37ee598d8/content>
6. Love, M. (2018). *Tabu, MPA and community: Nomenclature and the political ecology of marine conservation in Vanuatu*. *Journal of Political Ecology*. <https://journals.librarypublishing.arizona.edu/jpe/article/2301/galley/2521/view/>
7. IUCN & GEF. (2009). *Community conserved areas: A review of status and needs in Melanesia and Polynesia*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232767633_Community_Conserved_Areas_A_review_of_status_needs_in_Melanesia_and_Polynesia
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9. UNDP & Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation. (2019). *VCAP Phase I final evaluation report*.
10. World Bank. (2012). *Strategic environmental assessment in the World Bank*. The World Bank SEA Community of Practice. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/798361468332063446/pdf/804910WP0Strat0Box0379805B00PUBLIC0.pdf>



Annex IV: Meteorology, Geological Hazards and Climate Change Act 2016



Annex V: Vanuatu Forest and Landscape Restoration Strategy 2020-2030



Annex VI: Information Booklet on the registration of Community Conservation Areas (CCAs)