

# Claims Guidelines

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Version 0.2 | October 2020



**LANDSCALE**

# CLAIMS GUIDELINES

VERSION 0.2 | OCTOBER 2020

## About version 0.2

LandScale version 0.2 incorporates feedback received on version 0.1 during the first public consultation period and field-testing from August to October 2019. Responses and key changes to version 0.1 are available in a [summary of the version 0.1 public comments](#).

Version 0.2 will have a piloting phase conducted in more than 10 landscapes around the world and is [open for public comment](#) until November 30, 2020. The pilots' experience and input, as well as feedback from the second public consultation, will be incorporated into version 1.0, available in 2021.

Version 0.2 includes the following resources:

- [LandScale overview](#): a brief description of what LandScale is, how it works, who can use it, and where it is being piloted
- [Summary of the assessment framework](#): a brief description of the assessment framework including pillars, goals, and indicators
- [Assessment Framework](#): goals, indicators, and performance metrics that constitute the scope of an assessment
- [Assessment Guidelines](#): detailed guidance on the process of conducting a LandScale assessment
- [Verification Mechanism](#): the system for evaluating adherence to the LandScale guidelines and verifying the reliability of assessment results
- [Claims Guidelines](#) (this document): information on the type of claims that may be made based on LandScale assessment results and the process for communicating such claims
- Supplementary resources including:
  - [Annex 1. Sustainable Landscape Partnership Module](#)
  - [Annex 2. World Ecosystem Map and IUCN Typography](#)
  - [Annex 3. Human Rights Assessment Guidance](#)
  - [Annex 4. Human Rights Enabling Conditions](#)
  - [Annex 5. Terms & Definitions](#)
  - [Annex 6. Restoration Typology](#)
  - [Various appendices](#)

# 1 Overview

This document describes the types of *claims* supported by LandScale. LandScale defines claims as proactive messages used to communicate status, trends, or achievements in sustainability at landscape scale, based on the results of a LandScale assessment. Claims can be either public (e.g., an NGO communicating to their supporters) or private (e.g., at business-to-business level).

All claims are based on assessments that are properly conducted in accordance with the assessment guidelines and verified through the LandScale verification mechanism. References in this document to verification levels and processes are explained further in the [Verification Mechanism](#) document.

LandScale is designed to help those working to drive sustainability improvements at landscape scale to assess and communicate progress and achievements to key stakeholders. These stakeholders include, but are not limited to, donors or investors financing the improvements, companies or consumers buying products from the landscape, and civil society stakeholders with an interest in the sustainability of the landscape. For such communications and claims to result in increased support for landscape sustainability initiatives from these stakeholders, evidence of progress and achievements must be credible and verifiable.

LandScale provides two ways to communicate the results of assessments in a credible manner. The first is publishing the assessment results on the LandScale reporting platform, which is due to be launched in the second half of 2021. The online platform will facilitate presentation of results in a clear and consistent manner that provides a holistic overview of sustainability performance and trends in the landscape.

Assessments must pass a *completeness check* (level 1 verification<sup>1</sup>) before their results may be published. This provides assurance to those viewing the results that the assessment was conducted in accordance with key LandScale requirements regarding assessment scope and process.

The second option for communication is via claims pertaining to specific aspects of landscape performance documented through an assessment. LandScale intends to support the following types of claims:

1. **Complete assessment claim:** A claim that an assessment has been completed in a specific landscape.
2. **Landscape performance claim:** A claim that highlights sustainability status at a specific point in time or trends over time in relation to one or more

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<sup>1</sup> See LandScale Verification Mechanism section 2.



indicators or metrics in the assessment framework for a specific landscape. Such claims may be used to convey both progress and achievements.

3. **Contribution to landscape performance claim:** A claim that recognizes the actions or investments that specific actor(s) are taking or have taken to drive improvements in specific aspects of sustainability at landscape scale.
4. **Association with landscape performance claim:** A claim that an entity is materially connected to the landscape and that their activities are associated with positive sustainability performance or trends in the landscape.

More information about each of these types of claims and the level of verification that is required to make them is presented in section 2.

LandScale does not intend to support the following types of claims at this time:

- **Attribution claims:** Attribution claims credit specific improvements in landscape performance to specific sets of actions taken by one or more actors (e.g., Company X's investment in the Water Fund was responsible for a 14% increase in water flow in the landscape's rivers and streams.). These claims are difficult to make in a credible manner because it is technically challenging – and in many cases impossible – to demonstrate cause and effect given the many factors that typically contribute to landscape performance outcomes. Attribution claims entail a much higher burden of proof than contribution claims and typically require research methodologies that are beyond the scope of LandScale currently.
- **Sustainable-landscape claims:** Claims that a whole landscape is sustainable (e.g., Company X sources from District Y because it is a sustainable landscape.) are not considered to be widely appropriate or practicable because they would require setting a threshold for what constitutes a sustainable landscape. This would entail making potentially arbitrary or context-insensitive decisions about sustainability thresholds. It would also require a level of data quality and completeness across all indicators that is likely to be impractical in many cases. While LandScale does not support sustainable-landscape claims, it does encourage users to communicate about the overall sustainability performance of the landscape based on the multiple landscape goals and indicators included in the assessment.

## 2 Types of LandScale Claims

### 1.1 Complete Assessment Claim

This type of claim can be made when an assessment has been conducted in accordance with the assessment guidelines and has passed the completeness check (level 1 verification), as described in section 2 of the Verification Mechanism.

*Quality assurance of assessment results* (level 2 verification) is not required to make a complete assessment claim. It will be clearly indicated on the reporting platform whether the results related to each indicator or metric have been quality-assured.

Sample claim:

- A LandScale assessment was completed for District X in October 2020, the results of which are available on the LandScale reporting platform.

Required verification:

- Completeness check (level 1 verification)

Once the results of the assessment have been published on the reporting platform, anyone may make a complete assessment claim. However, eligibility to use the LandScale logo as part of a complete assessment claim will be limited to the entities who contributed to the assessment.

Contributors to the assessment include, but are not necessarily limited to, the organization(s) funding the assessment, the organization(s) conducting the assessment, entities that contributed data to the assessment, and all stakeholders who were consulted as part of the assessment. As part of the completeness check, the assessor must submit a list of the contributors to the assessment, which should include entities in the groups just mentioned, and may include additional entities that the assessor identifies as having contributed.

The list of contributors will be publicly available alongside the results of the assessment on the LandScale platform. All contributors will be automatically eligible to apply to LandScale for permission to use the LandScale logo in association with a complete assessment claim. These originally designated contributors may also grant eligibility to use the LandScale logo to other entities. However, those to whom the originally designated contributors grant eligibility are not, in turn, permitted to grant eligibility to others.

### 1.2 Landscape Performance Claim

This type of claim pertains to sustainability status or trends in relation to one or more LandScale indicators or metrics, without regard to who might be responsible

for such results. Either trends or status claims may be stated relative to a baseline or target determined by a user (Assessment Guidelines section 1.3).

Claims may be made in relation to a single LandScale indicator or metric or a group of indicators or metrics within or across any of the four LandScale pillars. All claims must state the time period for which the given status or trends were measured. This time period is based on the date(s) of the underlying data. To help ensure that claims on specific aspects of landscape performance are contextualized relative to other dimensions of sustainability in the landscape, the full results of the assessment must undergo level 1 verification and be published on the reporting platform as a prerequisite for making performance claims.

Sample claims:

- **Trend:** From 2010 to 2020, the rate of deforestation in landscape X decreased 84% to a recent low of 144 ha (0.17% of the landscape) per year.
- **Trend:** From 2018 to 2020, access to electricity increased by 20%, resulting in 80% of the population in the landscape having access to electricity.
- **Status:** As of 2020, Landscape X has an extensive protected area network, with 37% of its total land area and 67% of its natural forests under effective long-term protection.

Required verification:

- Completeness check (level 1 verification)
- Quality assurance of assessment results (level 2 verification) for the indicator(s) and metric(s) about which performance claims will be made – LandScale does not require quality assurance of assessment results for indicators that will not be the subject of claims.

Once an assessment is published on the reporting platform, anyone may make claims in relation to indicators or metrics that have undergone level 2 verification. However, eligibility to use the LandScale logo as part of a landscape performance claim will be limited to the entities that contributed to the assessment (as specified in section 2.1) or that played a significant role in efforts to improve sustainability in the landscape (as specified in the next paragraph).

Significant contributors to improving sustainability in the landscape include, but are not necessarily limited to, active members of a sustainable landscape partnership (if present) and any entity establishing, implementing, or funding large-scale interventions designed to make a material contribution to improving sustainability in the landscape. As part of the completeness check, the assessor must submit a list of the significant contributors to improving sustainability in the landscape (as well as the list of contributors to the assessment, as noted in section 2.1). Both lists will be

publicly available alongside the results of the assessment on the LandScale platform.

All contributors to the assessment or to landscape sustainability will be automatically eligible to apply to LandScale for permission to use the LandScale logo in association with a landscape performance claim. These originally designated contributors may also grant eligibility to use the LandScale logo to other entities. However, those to whom they grant eligibility may not grant eligibility to others. For example, if a coffee cooperative contributed their production data to the LandScale assessment they would be considered a contributor. They could then grant eligibility to their buyer, a major international coffee brand, to make a landscape performance claim in association with the LandScale logo, even though they did not contribute to the assessment upon which the claim is based. The coffee cooperative may decide to make its granting of eligibility contingent on the coffee buyer agreeing to provide some reward or incentive for sustainability improvements relevant to the claim.

### 1.3 Contribution to Landscape Performance Claim

This type of claim recognizes the actions or investments that specific actor(s) are taking or have taken to drive improvements in sustainability performance of the landscape. Contribution claims are based on the idea of shared causality – that is, that observed sustainability improvements may be the result of inputs or contributions from multiple actors and, in some cases, also from exogenous causes, such as global market trends, technology improvements, or weather cycles. To substantiate a contribution claim, the *claimant* must plausibly link its actions with the observed trend, based on a results chain or similar logic.

Sample claim:

- In accordance with landscape X’s watershed restoration plan, company X planted 16,000 native trees and trained 1,400 farmers in the landscape on soil conservation practices between 2014 and 2017. This contributed to a 19% reduction in sedimentation in the landscape’s three main rivers between 2016 and 2020.

Required verification:

- The requirements outlined in 2.2 apply for the landscape performance component of the claim
- Description and suitable evidence of the named actor’s (or actors’) contributions towards the observed trends, provided as publicly available documentation alongside the claim
- Description of the way(s) in which the contribution is believed to support the observed trends, provided as a results chain or narrative explanation alongside the claim

- For version 0.2, only the above-mentioned documentation is required but LandScale is considering developing a mechanism to verify actors' contributions, as well as the plausibility of the linkages between the contribution and the observed trends.

Any entity that is eligible to make a landscape performance claim (see 2.2) and can demonstrate a plausible link between their contributions and the observed trend(s) in landscape sustainability can make a contribution to landscape performance claim.

## 1.4 Association with Landscape Performance Claims

This type of claim is available for entities with a material connection to a landscape who may or may not have played a direct role in causing or contributing to landscape outcomes documented in the assessment. For example, companies that are pursuing a strategy of preferential sourcing may wish to communicate that they are sourcing from specific landscape(s) where trends are improving or where absolute performance is meeting specific targets or thresholds.

Similarly, financial institutions that are providing capital for activities such as infrastructure development may want to communicate trends in the wider landscape to their shareholders or civil society organizations to demonstrate that their investment is not associated with negative impacts.

Sample claims:

- Company X sources 20% of its cocoa from landscape X, which has been deforestation free since 2018.
- Bank X provided capital to Government Y for the development of a hydro-electric dam, which began operating in 2016. From this time through 2019, there has been no decrease in the flow rate of the major water bodies in the watershed where the dam is located, which remained constant at an average of 750 m<sup>3</sup>/s.

Required verification:

- The requirements outlined in 2.2 apply for the landscape performance component of the claim.
- The claimant must provide suitable evidence of association with the landscape in question e.g., a traceability report, if it is sourcing from the landscape, or evidence of a relevant financial transaction. This information should be provided as publicly available documentation alongside the claim.

Any entity that is eligible to make a landscape performance claim (see 2.2) and can demonstrate that they are materially connected to the landscape that is the subject



of that claim, for instance through significant commodity sourcing, investment, or lending, can make an association with landscape performance claim.

### 3 Time Limitations on Claims

Claims must always be based on the most recent LandScale assessment for any given landscape. As a default, claims remain valid for a period of up to three years after this most recent assessment was conducted. The default three-year validity period for claims may be adjusted upward or downward on an indicator-by-indicator or metric-by-metric basis as part of the results verification process (level 2 verification) based on the expected rate of change of the indicator, the periodicity of data available in relation to the indicator, and the time period of the data set(s) used to evaluate the metrics for the given indicator.

## About LandScale

The Rainforest Alliance, Verra, and Conservation International are developing LandScale with support from a growing coalition of partners. To date, partners include the Climate, Community & Biodiversity Alliance, EcoAgriculture Partners, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Nature Conservation Research Centre (NCRC), Proforest, and Solidaridad.

An advisory group, representing both subject matter experts and potential LandScale users, provides strategic input and guidance on developing the LandScale initiative to help ensure it makes a significant contribution to driving improvements in landscape sustainability. The global initiative is supported by the International Climate Initiative (IKI) of the German Federal Ministry of the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU) and the BHP Foundation’s Environmental Resilience Global Signature Program. Visit [www.landscale.org](http://www.landscale.org) to learn more.

