LANDSCALE

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

OCTOBER 2020

# Overview

## What is LandScale, and why is it needed?

Current efforts to reverse declines in ecosystem health while improving a growing population's well-being are not advancing at the pace or scale needed. To succeed, we need to think bigger and collaborate.

LandScale is a new approach to drive improvements in sustainability at scales beyond a single community, farm, or project. It provides an impartial, holistic, and globally recognized system for assessing the cumulative impact of activities within landscapes dominated by natural resource-based industries.

NGOs, the private sector, donors, and governments working at the landscape level can use LandScale to track trends, make effective decisions, and credibly communicate impact. By making reliable information about landscape performance widely available, LandScale helps link financial and market incentives to improvements in sustainability at landscape scale.

## Who can LandScale help, and how?

LandScale can help organizations gain holistic, landscape-level insights that can inform sustainable management, investment, or sourcing decisions. Companies, industry initiatives, NGOs, governments, donors, and financial institutions can use

LandScale to measure the sustainability of any landscape with substantial natural resource-based economies and supply chains, including agribusiness, forestry, extractives, infrastructure, and tourism. Assessments can be conducted by a single organization, a group interested in developing a collaborative landscape program, or an existing multi-stakeholder landscape partnership.

### What are the key components of LandScale?

There are several components of LandScale. These include:

- **Assessment framework**: A set of goals related to improvements in ecosystem health, human well-being, governance, and production of key agricultural and forestry crops; indicators; and performance metrics to measure critical aspects of landscape sustainability status and trends
- **Assessment guidelines**: Step-by-step guidance for conducting a LandScale assessment, including direction on defining the boundary of a landscape, selecting relevant indicators and performance metrics, and collecting data and reporting results
- **Verification mechanism**: A process for evaluation of LandScale assessments, which includes checking that users have adhered to the assessment guidelines and have used suitable data
- **Claims guidelines**: Guidance on the type of claims users can make based on a LandScale assessment, including eligibility criteria for making claims
- **Reporting platform:** An online tool (available from mid-2021) that facilitates the assessment process for users and publicizes assessment results for decision-makers such as commodity buyers, investors, and governments

## How Does LandScale Work?

### What are the main differences between version 0.1 and version 0.2 of the assessment framework and guidelines?

In October 2020, we published v0.2 of LandScale, which included a second version of the LandScale assessment framework and guidelines and the first detailed guidance on verification and claims. The changes made between v0.1 and v0.2 of the assessment framework and guidelines were based on feedback from our first public consultation and the pilot assessments conducted by LandScale's partners.

The main differences between v0.1 and v0.2 of the assessment framework and associated guidelines include:

- New guidance on reporting the key attributes and progress of multi-stakeholder partnerships within a landscape (Annex 1. Sustainable Landscape Partnerships Reporting Module)

- Additional guidance for determining the applicability of landscape-dependent indicators
- New guidance on setting baselines and targets to measure improvement
- Additional detail on how to select or develop and evaluate data sources for LandScale performance metrics
- Ecosystems pillar: natural ecosystem and biodiversity protection indicator and connectivity indicator added; performance metrics expanded and revised
- Human well-being pillar: new indicators incorporating the most critical dimensions of multidimensional poverty assessments added to goal 2.1 to provide a more comprehensive measure of standard of living; new guidance for goal 2.2 developed to support the assessor in designing context-appropriate performance metrics for a human rights assessment at the landscape level
- Governance pillar: performance metrics refined and simplified to assess the indicators better, and guidance improved; a new optional indicator created for resource tenure; the Sustainable Landscapes Rating Tool featured as the recommended methodology to assess indicators 3.2.1, 3.2.2, and 3.2.3
- Production pillar: refined and clarified regarding its current focus on agricultural and plantation production (other natural resource-based production types may be added in the future)

## What skills and expertise are needed to conduct an assessment?

LandScale recommends that the individual or team conducting an assessment has access to the following technical expertise:

- General technical competence in sustainable rural development or integrated landscape management, including social and environmental expertise
- Ability to interpret research and data relating to a broad range of sustainable development issues, including topics such as ecology, land-use change, poverty, human rights, local governance, and commodity production
- Competence in identifying, acquiring, and analyzing data
- Expertise in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to obtain, evaluate, process, and analyze spatial data

If there is an ongoing landscape-scale partnership or initiative, LandScale recommends that the assessor directly involve or work closely with the project's staff to identify information sources, access data, and get stakeholder feedback.

## How much will it cost to do an assessment?

The main cost associated with conducting a LandScale assessment is time. Pilot experience suggests that approximately 40-60 person-days are needed to conduct a baseline assessment. This time will likely decrease for repeat assessments because identifying and evaluating suitable data-sources is often the most time-consuming

part of the process. The cost of labor will vary depending on the country, and whether or not there is in-house capacity to conduct the assessment or external support is needed.

## At what stage in the development of a landscape initiative is it appropriate to conduct an assessment?

LandScale can be used at any stage in the development of a landscape initiative. We encourage conveners of landscape initiatives to conduct a LandScale assessment as early as possible in the process to help stakeholders better understand the critical issues in the landscape and generate a valuable baseline for measuring future improvements.

Mature landscape initiatives can also benefit from using LandScale to inform adaptive management and credibly communicate impact, which can secure long-term support and investment for the initiative.

## Who determines which landscape-dependent and optional indicators should be included in the assessment?

Landscape-dependent indicators represent issues that are critical to landscape sustainability but may not be relevant in all landscapes. All landscape-dependent indicators should be included in the assessment unless the assessor can justify why a specific landscape-dependent indicator is not relevant.

LandScale users can assess their own sustainable landscape objectives or add issues important to stakeholders using optional indicators. Therefore, the inclusion of optional indicators is at the discretion of the assessor.

LandScale recommends that users conduct outreach with landscape stakeholders through an established multi-stakeholder platform or direct outreach for both types of indicators. The organization leading the assessment process should take responsibility for ensuring that these guidelines are followed and that key stakeholders are consulted during the process of selecting the indicators.

## Can an assessment be conducted using only existing secondary data or does it also require the collection of primary data?

To reduce cost and increase standardization, LandScale recommends the use of existing secondary data if available. However, primary data collection is likely to be needed for some indicators — this varies between landscapes. If data are not available, the LandScale guidelines allow for a certain proportion of the core and landscape-dependent indicators to be deferred from the first and second assessments to later assessments.

## If data is gathered at landscape level, who "owns" this data, and how is that data governance managed?

Data ownership is determined by those that collected or are the primary distributors of the data. LandScale guidelines encourage the use of freely available and shareable data when possible. LandScale assessors should work with partners and stakeholders to establish data governance policies consistent with data ownership and use agreements.

## How frequently should assessments be conducted?

LandScale recommends updating the assessments at least once every three years to maintain an up-to-date landscape performance profile and detect critical trends. 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.

## What is the recommended size of the landscape that can be assessed using LandScale?

In general, the optimal area for applying LandScale ranges from hundreds to thousands of square kilometers. This size is generally appropriate to provide meaningful insights into landscape sustainability performance and facilitate actions to improve it. If the landscape is too small, it may not sufficiently capture the breadth of land uses that influence, or are impacted by, sustainability within the landscape. If the landscape is too large, assessment results might not provide useful information for driving action to make improvements.

LandScale guidance provides three options for selecting the landscape boundary used for the assessment: a jurisdiction, a catchment, or a user-defined landscape. For the latter, the chosen landscape area should reflect the inter-connectedness across the ecological, social, and economic dimensions. For example, a landscape should not include a production area that excludes downstream areas impacted by agrochemical runoff. The v0.2 guidelines include information on conducting an adjacency analysis to ensure these aspects are taken into account when setting the landscape boundary.

## Can the results of assessments be used to compare the performance of different landscapes?

The primary focus of LandScale is to compare the performance of the same landscape over time, rather than the performance of different landscapes at a single point in time. However, assessments may allow users to compare trends in different landscapes in relation to a specific issue. If different landscapes have used the same performance metric for a particular indicator, then a more direct comparison of sustainability performance may be made, depending on the type of data used to measure the metric.

## When will the reporting platform be ready to use, and how will it help me?

The reporting platform will be available in mid-2021. The platform will combine our step-by-step guidelines with functionality that makes it easier to access and compile relevant data, ultimately making the process quicker and more cost-effective. The platform will also showcase LandScale assessment results, serving as a global hub for investors, donors, and commodity buyers looking to invest in landscapes demonstrating sustainability improvements.

## What level of verification is required in order for the results of an assessment to be featured on the reporting platform?

A completeness check by the LandScale team (level 1 verification) must be undertaken for the results of an assessment to be featured on the platform. This check assures the assessment has been completed according to the assessment guidelines. A completeness check is also a prerequisite for level 2 verification, which is designed to provide independent quality assurance of the assessment results. Level 2 verification is only required for indicators that are intended to be subject to claims regarding the performance of the landscape. However, the extent to which the results of the assessment have been independently verified (level 2 verification) will be clearly indicated on the platform. Level 2 verification must be conducted by an independent third-party verifier, who will check that the quality of the data sources and methods used to interpret, analyze, and synthesize the data are sufficient.

## What claims can be made concerning assessment results?

LandScale provides guidance on credible claims that can be made based on the results of an assessment. Claims focus on the status or trends in the landscape in relation to specific indicators or metrics covered by the assessment. Landscape performance claims may be combined with information about a specific actor(s) contribution to or association with the landscape.

Example claims:

- Company X sources 20% of its cocoa from landscape Y, which has been deforestation-free since 2018
- Between 2015 and 2020, sedimentation in the landscape's three rivers decreased by 21%

## How can LandScale catalyze market and financial incentives for improvements in landscape sustainability?

There are several different ways in which LandScale can catalyze market or financial incentives for improvement at landscape scale. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Unlocking opportunities for performance-based financing by providing a measurable quantitative change in critical indicators of sustainability performance to underpin green bonds or blended financial structures that include sustainability-linked concessionary finance
- Increasing the likelihood of attracting repeated and longer-term financing for landscape-scale interventions by reporting the return on investment to donors or impact investors or private or public sector organizations in terms of quantitative improvements in critical issues aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals
- Differentiating credits from projects that target climate and sustainability benefits, such as credits from commercial carbon sequestration or reforestation projects, in the market by providing evidence of benefits beyond the boundary of the project to a broader range of issues, such as biodiversity, soil, or water conservation, improved livelihoods or increased productivity
- Differentiating a commodity producer or trader in the market by providing credible information about sustainability trends beyond their supply chain — additional reassurance about the resilience of the supply chain and reduced reputational risk may result in longer-term contracts, improved pricing structures, or demand from new buyers.

# How Does LandScale Relate to Other Initiatives?

## Commodity or farm focused certification systems

Complementarities or similarities:

- Like many commodity or farm focused certification systems, LandScale aims to drive improvements in ecosystem health, human well-being, governance and production.
- Both systems include mechanisms to verify sustainability performance, albeit at different scales, and enable performance to be communicated via credible claims.

Key differences:

- LandScale is designed to drive improvements across entire landscapes, whereas most commodity or farm certification schemes focus on an individual management unit within a landscape.

- Traditional sustainability standards tend to prescribe best management practices or set threshold performance levels that must be met to achieve and retain certified status. In contrast, LandScale does not define minimum required practices or performance levels to participate in the program. Instead, LandScale focuses on driving improvements in sustainability performance by providing reliable information about the status of ecosystems, human well-being, governance, and production at landscape scale.
- Many certification systems provide insights about sustainability performance that are specific to a single commodity or management unit. In contrast, LandScale assesses the cumulative impact of all natural resource-based economic activities within the landscape, including agribusiness, forestry, extractives, infrastructure, and tourism. The results of a single assessment can therefore be relevant to a wide variety of sectors and stakeholders.

## IDH's Verified Sourcing Area (VSA) Program

Complementarities or similarities:

- Both initiatives share the common aim of harnessing the power of markets to drive improvements in sustainability at landscape scale
- Both initiatives are collaborating with organizations leading landscape approaches to provide tools and guidance to enable them to enhance and demonstrate their impact
- Both initiatives will be developing online platforms that serve to provide the private sector with information about the progress of efforts to drive improvements in sustainability at landscape scale.
- The two systems are considered complementary. Both initiatives are still under development, and joint piloting in the same landscape is being explored to test the application of the models in practice.

Key differences:

- LandScale may be used to assess and communicate sustainability performance and trends in landscapes where there is no sustainable landscape partnership (SLP) is in place, or to conduct a baseline assessment where an SLP is incipient. In contrast, VSA's focus is to connect stakeholders and help them to formulate sustainability goals and monitor progress, by establishing a collaboration known as a "Compact".
- In terms of geographic scope and boundaries, VSA is designed to apply to jurisdictions whereas LandScale may be applied to jurisdictions, catchments, or other user-defined landscape boundaries.

## The Commodities Jurisdictions Approach (CJA)

Complementarities or similarities:

- Both initiatives aim to make independent and credible information about landscape sustainability performance more easily available to companies sourcing agricultural commodities. This will enable landscapes

demonstrating improvements (eg., reduced deforestation) to be rewarded for this effort by companies with commitments to support the sustainable production of agricultural commodities.
- Both initiatives offer a verification mechanism and online platform to showcase the sustainability performance of landscapes that have been assessed using the LandScale or CJA assessment framework respectively.

Key differences:
- CJA is primarily focused on government-led programs to reduce deforestation at sub-national or national level. In contrast, LandScale can be applied at a smaller-scale and using a jurisdiction, catchment or user-defined landscape boundary.
- CJA is primarily focused on highlighting jurisdictions which are making progress in reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in line with the provision for REDD+ institutionalized in the Paris agreement, whereas LandScale provides a more holistic assessment of progress in relation to a broader range of sustainability issues, many of which are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals
- CJA is aiming to connect jurisdictions with commodity buyers, whereas the results of LandScale assessments are intended to inform a broader range of decisions, including management, investment and sourcing decisions.

## Conservation International's Landscape Assessment Framework (LAF)

Complementarities or similarities:
- Both initiatives provide a tool to assess and communicate landscape sustainability across ecosystems (called natural capital in the LAF), human well-being, production and governance dimensions
- Both initiatives aim to support adaptive management by stakeholders in the landscape and to facilitate partnerships and investment in support of landscape sustainability

Key differences:
- The LAF does not provide a standard set of goals, indicators, and metrics but is designed to be used as part of a sustainable landscape approach based on the Open Standards in which actors in the landscape identify sustainable landscape goals and interventions that address the specific drivers and actors of landscape change. The indicators can be tailored to show progress towards the identified landscape sustainability goals and will be different for each landscape.
- The LAF does not include a verification and assurance mechanism.

# How Is LandScale Being Developed and Tested?

## Who is involved in developing 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.

## Who is funding the development of LandScale?

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. A range of different donors are funding efforts to pilot LandScale in various landscapes, including USAID in Mexico and the Packard Foundation in Indonesia.

## Where is LandScale being piloted?

The first cohort of pilots, led by LandScale partners, are located in:

- The Juabeso Bia and Kakum Hotspot Intervention Areas in Ghana, led by NCRC
- The Greater San Jose metropolitan watershed in Costa Rica, led by IUCN and Fundecor
- Lamas province, San Martin Region, Peru, led by the Rainforest Alliance
- The Sierra de Tapalpa landscape in Jalisco state, Mexico, led by the Rainforest Alliance
- The Ocosito watershed in Guatemala, led by the Rainforest Alliance and Solidaridad

From late 2020, a new group of pioneers in landscape sustainability will pilot v0.2 of the assessment framework in landscapes around the world. Learn more about their innovative applications of LandScale and the landscapes they are working in at www.landscape.org/pilots/.

## When will LandScale be available for wider use?

The full version of the LandScale assessment framework and guidelines, verification mechanism, claims guidelines, and online platform will be available for wider use in

the second half of 2021.

## How can I find out more about LandScale?

Sign up to our mailing list to stay up to date on the latest developments or contact info@landscale.org for more information.