

# Every Job is a Nature Job

## Social Engagement Officer

April 2026

### Nature supports societal wellbeing and business resilience

All people have the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.<sup>1</sup> Realizing and maintaining this right relies on the integrity of nature. When nature thrives, so do communities because people are intrinsically connected to the natural world through livelihoods, recreation and culture. Indeed, economies and societies flourish when healthy ecosystems can regulate the environment and provide the food, water and materials that everyone depends upon.

Equitable access to natural resources is also a matter of social justice, with environmental degradation often disproportionately affecting marginalized groups and deepening social inequalities.

While social and environmental risks to businesses are often managed as separate issues, they are actually intertwined and require a holistic approach. For example, by using local water sources, a business may affect communities that rely on that source for subsistence farming. Failure to address social and environmental issues together can lead to adverse outcomes for people and nature.

### Integrating a nature lens is essential for effective social engagement

Social engagement professionals directly shape the relationships between organizations and those affected by their activities. Since the health of nature directly impacts the well-being of people, it often emerges as a pertinent topic throughout social engagement processes. These processes include

participatory dialogues, stakeholder engagement, community outreach and improving public relations. Their goal is to support development schemes, respect labour rights, enhance employee wellbeing, uphold Corporate Social Responsibility commitments, handle grievances and secure the social license to operate. By integrating an environmental perspective into their processes, social engagement professionals can design and implement more effective engagement strategies that better address the needs of people.

### This brief can help integrate nature into social engagement practices

Aligning existing social engagement processes with the steps described in this brief will help ensure that nature becomes a core part of how a business interacts with individuals, groups and communities that are directly or indirectly affected by a company's operations. These include marginalized or vulnerable groups that often experience disproportionate negative impacts from corporate activities. These groups include Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, young people, those with disabilities, migrant workers, smallholder farmers, ethnic minorities, religious minorities and many others.

This brief outlines recommendations for professionals in social engagement to integrate nature into their activities. These have been categorized under the following activity types: 1) identifying relevant stakeholders and rights holders and screening for nature-related social risks, 2) engaging with communities meaningfully, 3) collaborating with communities to co-create solutions and implement environmental projects and 4) communicating internally and building capacity to support a holistic, nature-integrated approach towards social engagement.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations General Assembly. (2022). The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment (A/RES/76/300). Available at: <https://docs.un.org/en/a/res/76/300>

# STEP 1: Research and Identify

Before engagement begins, identify relevant stakeholders and rights holders and evaluate nature-related social risks



## 1. STAKEHOLDER MAPPING

### Getting started:

- **Conduct desk-based stakeholder mapping,<sup>2</sup> including Indigenous Peoples, local communities and marginalized groups,** to identify those affected by the interactions between your business and nature (including direct operations and value chains) from available data sources.
- Ensure that the methodology for the mapping process is **documented and made available for review** by identified stakeholders.
- Ensure engagement aligns with **with international and national laws and standards** that concern each stakeholder group.<sup>3</sup>

### Advanced:

- **Apply cautious buffers to your Area of Influence,** with ensuring it encompasses important lands that may be affected, such as those governed by Indigenous Peoples, local communities and marginalized groups.
- **Apply an intersectional lens to stakeholder mapping,** ensuring that you capture the unique experiences of people with overlapping identities.

## 2. RISK SCREENING AND IDENTIFICATION

### Getting started:

- **Identify operations and value chains where your activities might threaten your social license to operate** or the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.<sup>4</sup>
- Building on the outputs of nature assessment tools, such as ENCORE,<sup>5</sup> **assess how Indigenous Peoples, local communities and marginalized groups are affected** by your nature-related impacts and dependencies.

### Advanced:

- **Research the potential dependencies and value systems of communities** regarding natural resources and their use, within your areas of influence.
- **Prepare to engage relevant groups to validate your findings,** following context-specific best practice standards.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Further details on stakeholder mapping in relation to nature can be found in Part 2 of the Science Based Targets Network's report on [Stakeholder engagement and science-based targets for nature](#) and in [TNFD guidance on engagement with Indigenous Peoples, Local Communities and affected stakeholders](#).

<sup>3</sup> Guidance on stakeholder engagement in relation to human rights issues is available in Section C2 of the UNGP Reporting Framework

<sup>4</sup> Further details on what this right includes can be found in the guide from [UNEP-UNDP-OHCHR](#)

<sup>5</sup> Please see the ENCORE [Natural Capital module](#) for further information

<sup>6</sup> Good practice includes following the [TNFD Guidance on engagement with Indigenous Peoples, Local Communities and affected stakeholders](#) and the [CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance](#)

# STEP 2: Engage and Listen

Undertake meaningful engagement through inclusive participatory assessments, agreement negotiations and transparent grievance mechanisms that support equitable outcomes for both people and nature.



## 1. PARTICIPATORY ASSESSMENTS

### Getting started:

- **Carry out stakeholder mapping workshops with local people** to identify any additional stakeholder groups that were not identified in the desk-based mapping exercise and validate those who were.
- Building on the risk screening, **identify nature-related concerns of Indigenous Peoples, local communities and marginalized groups linked to your activities**, using participatory methods and in-depth ESIA's.
- **Ensure that mapping is inclusive and accessible** across languages, racial groups, education levels, age groups, socio-economic statuses, abilities, genders and identities.

### Advanced:

- **Collaborate with identified Indigenous Peoples, local communities and marginalized groups in co-developing nature assessment metrics and methodologies** through participatory mapping that reflects indigenous, traditional and local knowledge and values.
- **Apply different lenses of nature-related values (e.g. cultural, economic and ecological)** when co-assessing with Indigenous Peoples, local communities and marginalized groups how activities in your operations and value chains create significant risks.

## 2. COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS AND CREATING SPACE FOR NATURE

### Getting started:

- **Establish community consultations** to discuss nature and community-related issues. These should take place **where stakeholders are physically based** and, where possible, become part of existing community gatherings.
- **Ensure dialogues reflect diverse and representative participation and create space for nature-related topics**, such as ties to the land, livelihoods and natural resources.

### Advanced:

- **Create specific sessions for people to share their historical relationship** with the land and its resources, through discussing traditional ecological knowledge and cultural stories.
- **Ensure that this information feeds into processes**, like nature assessments, strategy building, and co-design of solutions.
- **Allow for different forms of expression**, including oral histories, photographs, maps, artworks and songs to help convey values that are often intangible.

## 3. IDENTIFY CULTURAL CONNECTIONS TO NATURE

### Getting started:

- **Verify areas of overlap between operations and lands governed by Indigenous Peoples, local communities and marginalized groups** during consultation by reviewing existing datasets and community-generated maps together.<sup>7</sup>

### Advanced:

- **Overlay maps of cultural value generated from the consultation process with maps of biodiversity and ecosystem services**, to highlight sites of shared significance (e.g. historical hunting and fishing grounds or areas of subsistence farming).

## 4. AGREEMENT NEGOTIATIONS

### Getting started:

- **Uphold Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)<sup>8</sup> when negotiating with Indigenous Peoples, local communities and marginalized groups** and take active measures to address inherent power imbalances. This may include resourcing independent representation of their choosing, such as honest brokers, and documenting the mutually agreed terms of consent to maintain the social license to operate.

### Advanced:

- Go beyond FPIC and **treat Indigenous Peoples, local communities and marginalized groups as partners as well as stakeholders and rights holders** while co-developing agreements.
- **Incorporate biodiversity goals co-developed with Indigenous Peoples, local communities and marginalized groups into agreements**, with specific timelines and monitoring mechanisms.

## 5. RECORDING AND MONITORING GRIEVANCES

### Getting started:

- **Integrate nature considerations into the development of grievance mechanisms** to recognize where nature-related activities are linked to grievances. For example, through land claims, access to natural resources and impacts on nature.
- **Identify both social and environmental dimensions of registered grievances** and share with relevant teams to approach the solution holistically.
- **Monitor grievances to help address grievances and highlight actions that benefit both nature and people.**

### Advanced:

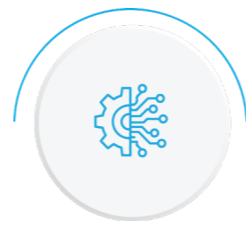
- Reach out to individuals who have submitted grievances to **invite their participation in co-designing nature-related solutions.**
- Involve independent nature and rights specialists that are approved by the community **as part of the grievance and solutions co-designing processes.**

<sup>7</sup>You can use the [IBAT](#), [Indigenous Navigator](#) and [LandMark](#)

<sup>8</sup>An overview of the FPIC process is available from [The Accountability Framework initiative](#)

# STEP 3: Co-Design and Innovate

Collaborate closely to co-create solutions and products, and to implement holistic environmental projects that support long-term sustainability and resilience.



## 1. SHARING RESULTS

### Getting started:

- **Share and discuss the results of your nature assessments with Indigenous Peoples, local communities and marginalized groups to help co-design solutions** using appropriate information-sharing and participatory mechanisms.
- **Create opportunities for input** that should be integrated into risk assessments and the creative design process.

### Advanced:

- With the appropriate safeguards applied, **invite the public to provide feedback and propose solutions** to your nature and social-related dependency, impact and risk assessments.

## 2. CO-CREATE SOLUTIONS AND COMMUNITY PROJECTS

### Getting started:

- **Involve communities in developing solutions** to identified issues and support projects in the community based on their potential to co-benefit nature and people.
- If key ecosystem services that communities and the business depend on are being depleted, **immediately transition to sustainable use, consider restoration options and support community-led management of their dependencies.**

### Advanced:

- **Set targets together and co-develop monitoring mechanisms** to measure the co-benefits of community development projects and the quality of nature-related impacts and dependencies management.

## 3. CO-CREATION OF NEW PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

### Advanced:

- Work with your Business Development team to **include Indigenous Peoples, local communities and marginalized groups in designing new products and services** that align with Indigenous practices and that promote the maintenance of nature.
- **Facilitate local hiring** by informing your hiring team of **ecological and social skills and expertise available within communities** and of any training needed to address skill gaps.

## 4. ACKNOWLEDGING AND CELEBRATING CULTURAL CONNECTIONS TO NATURE

### Getting started:

- **Highlight links to nature, seasonal changes or agricultural cycles**, when acknowledging and celebrating local holidays and festivals to strengthen community bonds and connection with nature.

### Advanced:

- **Establish projects together with Indigenous Peoples, local communities and marginalized groups that celebrate cultural ties to nature** and preserve intergenerational Indigenous, traditional and local knowledge. These can include initiatives that 1) recognize and pay tribute to Indigenous Peoples' connection to the land, 2) create intergenerational opportunities for traditional storytelling or 3) exhibit nature-inspired writing or artwork.
- **Involve demonstrations of traditional skills** such as agricultural techniques or handicrafts.

## 5. EXIT STRATEGY

### Getting started:

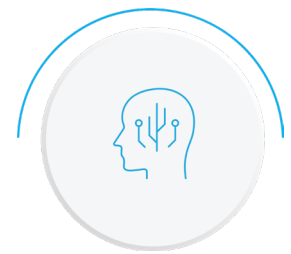
- Before commencing operations, **gather information on the expectations of communities on the post-operational landscape**, to ensure restoration or regeneration of the area meets local needs and priorities.
- **Regularly validate your exit strategy with communities. Revise it if necessary** to ensure appropriate and permanent post-closure land ownership and governance structures, especially when projects extend across generations.

### Advanced:

- **Coordinate with Indigenous Peoples, local communities and marginalized groups when** establishing long-term funds and investments in post-closure restoration and additional conservation action.
- **Co-create capacity-building and livelihood support initiatives** with them to ensure that sustainable livelihoods, ecosystem restoration and traditional ways of being are maintained after the project ends.

# STEP 4: Communicate and Transform

Strengthen internal communication and build capacity to embed a lasting, holistic, nature-integrated approach to social engagement within your organization.



## 1. INTERNAL COLLABORATION

### Getting started:

- To address risks and opportunities identified through social engagement, **collaborate internally with relevant functions**, such as Operations, Sustainability, Risk and Human Rights.
- **Create spaces and discussion opportunities** that bring together diverse values, insights and perspectives.

### Advanced:

- **Create a permanent cross-functional working group** to facilitate regular collaboration between teams and to build institutional memory.

## 2. COMMUNICATING WITH LEADERSHIP

### Getting started:

- **Regularly communicate the needs of both nature and people to internal leadership.** Highlight how addressing these considerations together can bring value by strengthening operational resilience, maintaining the license to operate and supporting alignment with corporate objectives and regulations.
- **Frame your messaging around the material business risks** that emerge from the combination of community- and nature-related risks, discussing trade-offs to be managed and opportunities to address them simultaneously.

### Advanced:

- **Highlight any collaborative business opportunities with Indigenous Peoples, local communities and marginalized groups** that leverage Indigenous, traditional and local knowledge.

## 3. CAPACITY BUILDING AND ESTABLISHING KPIS

### Getting started:

- **Advocate for training and internal capacity building** on topics including the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, the cultural and social importance of nature, cultural sensitivity and the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

### Advanced:

- **Standardize and integrate nature into KPIs linked to social performance throughout assets and projects**, linking them to management or executive remuneration.
- **Establish cross-cutting goals**, such as people having access to nature and being empowered to protect it.



---

## About UNEP-WCMC and the Proteus Partnership

The UN Environment Programme World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) is a global centre of excellence on biodiversity and nature's contribution to society and the economy. Proteus is a unique collaboration that provides companies with the biodiversity information needed for better informed decisions, and supports the development, improvement and dissemination of global biodiversity data and information. Proteus supports companies to recognize their responsibilities for nature in the context of global momentum to address the biodiversity crisis.

This brief was developed through interviews with Proteus partners and other multinational businesses and draws on the expertise of UNEP-WCMC experts in applying biodiversity knowledge in the context of a wide range of sectors.