Annex A: Introduction to Environmental and Social Safeguards – agenda 22.2

1. What are Environmental and Social Safeguards?

Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS) are the policies, standards, and operational procedures used by development institutions, organisations, and agencies to first identify and then try to avoid, mitigate, and minimise adverse environmental and social impacts that may arise from the implementation of development projects or programmes.

Frameworks, policies and systems are created to guide the implementation of safeguards across the project cycle — from identification to completion (including operation). Examples of safeguards frameworks and policies include the SPREP Environmental and Social Management System (ESMS) Policy, the World Bank's Environmental and Social Framework, ADB’s Environmental and Social Framework (ESF) and Operational Standards. Some Pacific Countries also have their own safeguard policies, such as Fiji and Niue.

Implementing safeguards involves assessing the environmental and social risks of an activity (development) and minimizing (mitigating) those risks to protect people and the environment.

2. ESS Standards

ESS standards set out the requirements for identifying and assessing environmental and social risks and impacts associated with projects. During the environmental and social risk screening process, these standards also serve as the basis for impact identification, categorisation of impact levels, and determination of the specific safeguard instruments to be developed (see section 3).

The standard risk areas covered by the ESS frameworks are listed below:

- Assessment and management of environmental and social risks and impacts.
- Labour and working conditions, including occupational health and safety.
- Resource efficiency and pollution prevention.
- Community health and safety.
- Land acquisition, restrictions on land use, and involuntary resettlement.
- Biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of living natural resources.
- Indigenous peoples and culturally distinct communities.
- Cultural heritage (tangible and intangible).
- Stakeholder engagement and information disclosure.

3. Safeguard Instruments: Overview

Safeguard instruments are documents prepared to assess and/or set out the material measures and actions required to address the potential environmental and social risks and impacts of a project. The instruments applied to any given activity depend on the screening outcome and the specific risks identified. Screening follows a standard sequence: The types of safeguard instruments are listed below.

i. **Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF)**
An ESMF examines the risks and impacts of a project that consists of a programme and/or a series of subprojects, and the risks and impacts cannot be determined until the programme or subproject details have been identified. The ESMF sets out the principles, rules, guidelines, and procedures for assessing environmental and social risks and impacts, and contains the measures and plans to reduce, mitigate, and/or offset adverse risks and impacts.

ii. **Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA)**
An ESIA is an instrument that examines the risks and impacts of a single project or a subproject. It covers a broader site than a project-level management plan and is used when the risks and impacts warrant an in-depth, site-specific assessment.

iii. **Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP)**
An ESMP is a smaller version of the ESIA that examines a project's risks and impacts, assesses site-specific impacts, and provides an assessment similar to that of an Initial Environmental Examination (IEE). ESMPs are appropriate where risks are well understood, site-specific and manageable through standard mitigation measures.

iv. **Resettlement Plan / Framework**
A Resettlement Plan or Resettlement Framework includes measures to address: economic displacement — such as loss of land, assets, access to assets, income sources, or means of livelihoods; physical displacement — such as relocation, loss of residential land, or loss of shelter as a result of involuntary acquisition of land; and involuntary restrictions on land use.

Other Safeguard Instruments (Triggered Case by Case)

A number of additional safeguard instruments may be triggered depending on the nature of the activity. These typically include:

- **Stakeholder Engagement Plan.** Identifies project-affected people and other stakeholders, outlines how and when they will be consulted, sets out a grievance mechanism.
- **Labor Management Plan.** Sets out how project workers will be recruited, managed and protected, covering terms and conditions of employment, occupational health and safety, non-discrimination and grievance handling.
- **Waste Management Plan.** Identifies the waste streams generated by the activity, sets out segregation, storage, transport and disposal arrangements, and addresses hazardous and marine waste where relevant to the Pacific context.
- **Traffic Management Plan.** Sets out how construction traffic, road occupancies and community safety will be managed, particularly on shared roads, near schools and in communities with high pedestrian use.

- **Health and Safety Plan.** Covers arrangements for worker and community health and safety during construction and operation, including incident reporting, emergency preparedness, and communicable disease control.

4 Benefits of Environmental and Social Safeguards

Environmental and social safeguards provide a range of practical benefits for projects, communities, implementing agencies and development partners. Key benefits include:

- Better project design and decision-making by identifying environmental and social risks early and integrating mitigation measures into planning and implementation.
- Protection of people, livelihoods and ecosystems by reducing harm to communities, workers, biodiversity, cultural heritage and natural resources.
- Stronger community trust and participation through stakeholder engagement, information disclosure and accessible grievance mechanisms.
- Improved legal and policy compliance by helping projects align with national requirements and donor safeguard standards.
- Reduced delays, disputes and costs by proactively managing issues such as land access, labour conditions, pollution, health and safety, and community concerns.
- More sustainable and inclusive development outcomes by ensuring project benefits are delivered in ways that are socially equitable and environmentally responsible.