

# SECTION 6 QUALITY CONTROL REVIEW: FINDINGS AND NON-CONFORMITIES REPORT

This report includes the findings and/or nonconformities identified during the quality control review of the project below. This review is being conducted in accordance with Section 6 of the *VCS Registration and Issuance Process, v4.3*. The validation/verification body must address the findings and/or nonconformities raised in this report,

For findings raised, the VVB must:

1. Address the findings for Verra’s review.
2. Attach supporting documentation as needed.
3. Confidential information may be provided as separate attachments.

For non-conformities raised, the VVB must:

1. Investigate the root cause of each nonconformity described in this report.
2. Document in this report the root cause of each nonconformity and the corrective action taken to prevent the nonconformity from reoccurring.
3. Attach supporting documentation as needed.

This document may be shared with the relevant accreditation body.

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<b>Accreditation body</b>	ANAB

<b>Project and related assessment</b>	1468 – Northern Kenya Grassland Carbon Project Northern Kenya Rangeland Trust 2017-2020 Verification Report issued on 09 December 2022
<b>Verra program(s)</b>	Verified Carbon Standard (VCS)
<b>References</b>	VCS Standard, v4.3; ISO 14065:2013

<b>Date of first issue</b>	19 April 2023
<b>Date of second issue</b>	15 August 2023
<b>Date of third issue</b>	13 November 2023
<b>Due date for responses to round 1</b>	12 July 2023
<b>Due date for responses to round 2</b>	07 November 2023
<b>Due date for responses to round 3</b>	24 January 2024
<b>Review conclusion</b>	Section 6 Quality Control Review Findings Closed
<b>Date of final issue</b>	22 November 2023

## FINDINGS

<b>Finding 1 – Insufficient demonstration of how the project design and distribution of benefits were communicated to local communities</b>	<b>Status</b>
<b>Round 1</b>	Closed
<b>Issue:</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The VVB has not sufficiently demonstrated how they assessed the project proponent has communicated the project design and carbon revenue benefits to all local communities that are part of the project.</li> <li>2. The VVB has not clearly demonstrated how they assessed whether all the local stakeholders understand which GHG benefits they are entitled to or the distribution thereof.</li> </ol>	
<b>Action Required:</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The VVB must clarify how it confirmed that inhabitants in the 13 conservancies who collectively have rights to the land’s resources understand and have no objections to the project design and the revenue-sharing structure proposed by the project proponent.</li> <li>2. The VVB must justify how it assured that the decisions made by community group</li> </ol>	

**Finding 1 – Insufficient demonstration of how the project design and distribution of benefits were communicated to local communities** **Status**

leaders represent the voice of the communities.

3. The VVB must justify why they did not interview community members outside of the conservancy representatives.
4. The VVB must explain how they have reached the conclusion that representatives of the conservancies were legitimate and sufficient representatives of all the inhabitants impacted by the project and what methods (including the identification of interviewees) were used to mitigate the risk of omission, misrepresentation, or bias.

**Program Rule(s):**

*VCS Standard, v4.3, Section 3.17.17*

*VCS Standard, v4.3, Sections 4.1.2 and 4.1.8(1)*

**VVB Response:**

1. The initial review and assessment of the project design was completed during the project's validation, which was carried out by a VVB other than RCE.

As part of the verification for this monitoring period (1 January 2017 to 31 December 2020), RCE confirmed that project information is routinely communicated to stakeholders and members of project conservancies via meetings; printed documents and public postings; emails, calls, and texts; and postings on the NRT website. See section 1.18.4 of the verification report for additional detail.

RCE reviewed documentation and conducted the site visits using a sampling approach. RCE reviewed evidence of information sharing and meetings conducted for a sample of project conservancies. Similarly, during the site visit, RCE visited a sample of project conservancies (3) to observe a conservancy-wide meeting and to interview community members in the conservancies about project impacts, project information communication, project revenue sharing, and general feedback on project implementation. During the verification process and verification site visit, RCE observed no evidence of objections to the project design and the revenue-sharing structure of the project during the monitoring period by inhabitants of the project conservancies. NRT confirmed that it received no project grievances from conservancies/conservancy members during the monitoring period.

2. All community conservancies, whether in community land or trust land, conduct democratic elections for their conservancy board of directors. Leadership changes every three years. Regular meetings are held at the conservancy and regional levels, including quarterly grazing meetings and annual general meetings (AGMs) in each conservancy during which information about livestock grazing plans and monitoring, project benefits, and general project information is communicated.

The voices of the community/conservancies are represented by the leaders they elect.

**Finding 1 – Insufficient demonstration of how the project design and distribution of benefits were communicated to local communities**
**Status**

3. RCE did interview community members outside of the conservancy representatives. RCE interviewed conservancy managers, conservancy committee members (e.g., grazing chairman, vice chairman, other chairs), conservancy board members, and general members of the conservancies (who did not hold positions on conservancy boards, management, etc.) as described in Section 1.8 of the verification report.

4. RCE concluded that the information collected during site visit interviews combined with the results of surveys (Social CoMMs) conducted during the monitoring period by the project proponent adequately represented the project impacts on inhabitants of the conservancies and included a representative sample of inhabitants of the conservancies.

- Site visit interviews/discussions took place in 3 conservancies with conservancy managers; conservancy committee members (e.g., grazing chairman, vice chairman, other chairs); conservancy board members; and general members of the conservancies (who did not hold positions on conservancy boards, management, etc.).
- Social CoMMs is a platform used by Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT) to capture community input and to collect data on socio-economic perceptions and program impacts within conservancies. A representative sample of households was selected using probability proportional to size sampling, which ensures that a representative subset of settlements is randomly selected for surveying from each conservancy. The household surveys included questions about demographics, education, livelihoods, security, grazing, wildlife, health, water, etc. Social CoMMs were conducted in 5 conservancies during the monitoring period, interviewing ~45% of total households in those 5 conservancies. RCE reviewed a sample of survey results. The Project Description (PD) does not specify an interval for conducting Social CoMMs surveys. As of 2022, baseline surveys and follow up surveys were conducted in all project conservancies.
- Results of Social CoMMs surveys in 5 conservancies indicated:
  - 60% of respondents believed conservancy leaders maintained good communication with conservancy members (9% believed no)
  - 59% of respondents believed their opinion is adequately represented in conservancy decisions (while 21% believed it was not)
  - 75% of respondents said they received information from the conservancy via conservancy board members and 44% said they received information via Annual General Meetings (AGMs).
  - 67% of respondents said they received information about AGMs and other meetings
  - 59% of respondents said they believed conservancy benefits were fairly distributed (21% said they were not)
  - 76% of respondents said they were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the work the conservancies are doing

**Finding 1 – Insufficient demonstration of how the project design and distribution of benefits were communicated to local communities****Status**

A total of 8 conservancies were represented by site visit interviews and surveys conducted by the project proponents.

**Verra Response:**

The VVB clarified that community leaders represented the conservancies, and the project communicated its design to them. The VVB also interviewed members beyond the representatives. However, it remains unclear how the project is addressing the concerns of 21% of conservancy members who feel unrepresented in decision-making and believe benefits are not fairly distributed.

**Round 2**

<b>Finding 1 – Insufficient demonstration of how the project design and distribution of benefits were communicated to local communities</b>	<b>Status</b>
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**Issue:**

1. The VVB has confirmed that, based on Social CoMMs surveys conducted in five conservancies, it was found that approximately 21% of conservancy members feel excluded from decision-making processes and have the perception that benefits generated by the project are distributed unfairly. However, the VVB did not assess how these concerns are being addressed by the project and whether the project lacks a detailed plan for effectively engaging stakeholders and ensuring their continued involvement and adherence to the project for the long-term success of the initiative.
2. It is understood that conservancies are an ad hoc governance entity that has been created for the purpose of project implementation. Other entities (e.g., traditional authorities) are present in the area and relevant representatives of the local communities. It is not clear whether the project has consulted with these stakeholders and whether the VVB has interviewed community members outside of the conservancies.
3. There is a lack of clarity regarding how the VVB ensured the accuracy of information from site visit interviews and project surveys. This is particularly concerning as the VVB relies on surveys conducted by the PP.

**Action Required:**

1. The VVB must assess what are the actions implemented by the project to improve community engagement over time and ensure effective stakeholder engagement for sustained involvement in the project.
2. The VVB must provide clear evidence of their interviews and the project's engagement with community members beyond the conservancies.
3. The VVB must evaluate the methodology, distribution process, and result analysis of the project proponent survey. They must also demonstrate the accuracy of the survey and explain how reliance on these results for verification avoids the risk of overlooking, distorting, or favoring certain information.

**VVB Response:**

General context and background:

It should be clarified that NRT conservancies exist independently of the Project and existed prior to project implementation. NRT conservancies are “local institutions run for and by indigenous people to support the management of community-owned land for the benefit of improving livelihoods”, per NRT’s website. They were created to support the management of community-owned land for the benefit of livelihoods and work to improve representation for members by building on traditional, indigenous cultural structures. The conservancies are created by members, and NRT is the membership organization owned and led by the community conservancies. For the 2017-2020 monitoring period, 13 conservancies are included in the Project; as of 2023, there were 43 total

**Finding 1 – Insufficient demonstration of how the project design and distribution of benefits were communicated to local communities**
**Status**

NRT community conservancies in Kenya and Uganda. RCE confirmed that clarifying language on this topic was added to the Monitoring Report in section 2.1.7.

It should be noted that the Social CoMMs surveys are conducted by NRT in all conservancies, not just those that participate in the Project. The questions are not intended to be specific to the Project but are intended to gauge household perception towards the conservancy, which for conservancies within the project area would be directly impacted by the Project. It is clear how closely intertwined the Project activities are with the existence and the objectives of the conservancies and every aspect of the day-to-day livelihoods of members of the conservancies. Project activities are influenced by conservancy activities and conservancy activities are influenced by project activities. Due to this close interconnection, the responses and trends from results of Social CoMMs provide valuable feedback on project activities.

RCE incorrectly reported results from 2021 surveys in our initial response above. During the 2017-2020 monitoring period, Social CoMMs were conducted in 2 conservancies in 2017, representing ~30% of households in those 2 conservancies, and in 5 conservancies in 2020, representing ~46% of households in those conservancies.

Based on the reporting of appropriate data collected during the 2017-2020 monitoring period, a total of 10 project conservancies were represented by site visit interviews and surveys conducted by the project proponents.

The table below provides a summary of the 2020 Social CoMMs surveys results, presented alongside 2017 and 2021 results.

Year	2017	2020	2021*
<b>Survey summary</b>	<b>2 conservancies surveyed</b>	<b>5 conservancies surveyed</b>	<b>5 conservancies surveyed</b>
Respondents believed conservancy leaders maintained good communication with conservancy members	48% good/somewhat good 20% no	54% good/somewhat good 9% no	74% good/somewhat good 9% no
Respondents believed their opinion is adequately represented in conservancy decisions	36% yes 34% no	53% yes 27% no	59% yes 21% no
Methods through which respondents receive information from the conservancy.	50% from friends 48% from conservancy board members 18% from conservancy management	34% from conservancy board members 20% via AGMs 16% from friends	75% from conservancy board members 44% via AGMs
Respondents received information about AGMs and other meetings	<i>Question not included in survey</i>	<i>Question not included in survey</i>	67% received information

**Finding 1 – Insufficient demonstration of how the project design and distribution of benefits were communicated to local communities** **Status**

Respondents believed conservancy benefits were fairly distributed	42% yes 31% no	59% yes 24% no	59% yes 21% no
Respondents were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the work the conservancies are doing	76% very satisfied or somewhat satisfied 17% not satisfied	76% very satisfied/ somewhat satisfied 16% not satisfied	76% very satisfied/ somewhat satisfied 13% not satisfied

\*2021 is after the monitoring period under verification (2017-2020)

When 31%, 24%, and 21% of respondents (respectively in 2017, 2020, and 2021) responded they believed conservancy benefits were not fairly distributed, the response is related to “conservancy benefits” in general (which could include any benefits such as those related to health, education, water, employment, etc.), rather than only being related to “project benefits” specifically. As noted above, the intent of the Social CoMMs surveys is to collect data to monitor, analyze, and manage the positive and negative social impacts of conservation and associated development activities implemented and facilitated by the conservancy. Results are used by the conservancy management and boards to inform strategic plans and operations and monitor impacts of their programs. Responses to questions in the Social CoMMs surveys serve as indicators of conservancy members’ perceptions of the Project; however, they are not exclusively related to the Project and could be impacted by other activities.

Social CoMMs results are shared with respective conservancy managers who are responsible for discussing the results with the conservancy boards. Results are also used to inform social development projects including access to water, education, and healthcare and are incorporated into 5-year Conservancy Management and Development Plans. RCE reviewed examples of these Management and Development Plans, most of which covered 5-year periods of 2016-2020 and 2017-2021.

Responses to specific actions requested above:

1. RCE assessed actions implemented by the project to improve community engagement over time and ensure effective stakeholder engagement including the following:
  - Holding quarterly grazing planning meetings, which include individual herders in conservancy zones; conservancy grazing committee meetings with representatives from each zone; and regional grazing planning meetings among neighboring conservancies.
  - Disseminating project information via routine meetings including grazing awareness meetings (educational visits to other project conservancies), conservancy board meetings, council of elders meetings, grazing committee trainings, monthly regional grazing meetings, and grazing planning (wet season) meetings.
  - Providing community employment opportunities either with one of the conservancies or with NRT.
  - Providing worker training, which includes training for grazing management and monitoring positions (surveys).

**Finding 1 – Insufficient demonstration of how the project design and distribution of benefits were communicated to local communities** **Status**

RCE assessed implementation of these and other actions through:

- Reviews of meeting agendas and minutes
- Regional summaries of meetings prepared by NRT personnel
- Documentation of trainings
- Photos of public announcements
- Interviews with the project proponent
- Interviews with conservancy leaders and community members
- Reviews of survey (Social CoMMs) data.

RCE found that these activities improve community engagement over time and continue to ensure effective stakeholder engagement for sustained involvement in the project.

In addition, the Social CoMMs results presented in the table above helped RCE to conclude that community and stakeholder engagement are increasing over time. Community perceptions of the conservancies are more positive as more time passes. Respondents increasingly believe conservancy leaders maintain good communication with conservancy members. Increasing numbers of community members are receiving information about the conservancy from board members and via Annual General Meetings (AGMs) which are annual meetings held in each conservancy to provide conservancy updates and receive questions and feedback from conservancy members.

2. RCE did not interview members of communities or conservancies outside of the project area as it was deemed not relevant to project activities and the verification of this monitoring period. The entire project area is made up of the 13 conservancies included in the Project. All communities and community members participating in project activities are part of one of the 13 conservancies. As discussed in section 4.3.3 of the PD “at least some conserved grazing land will be shared with offsite stakeholders in order to control livestock movements and provide agreements to move offsite when forage is available only off the project area”; however, the project benefits are intended to be only for the members of the conservancies within the project area. RCE’s assessment of communication of project design and distribution of benefits focused on members of the conservancies within the project area who are the people responsible for implementing and following grazing plans and are benefitting from the implementation of project activities.
3. Based on RCE’s assessment of the survey methodology, distribution process, and result analysis, which are statistically sound, it is reasonable to conclude that the results provide a representative sample of respondents in each conservancy for which Social CoMMs were conducted.

The methods for the Social CoMMs surveys were developed by social scientist Dr. Jessica Musengezi of The Nature Conservancy and supported by NRT staff. Methods were

**Finding 1 – Insufficient demonstration of how the project design and distribution of benefits were communicated to local communities** **Status**

statistically sound, and there was no indication that results were not accurate or that results were overlooked, distorted, or favored certain information. RCE’s assessment considered the following:

- Enumerators are members of the community and are provided with a comprehensive two-day training for Social CoMMs standard operating procedures. The training covers how to conduct the survey, administrative issues related to the survey, information about the conservancy and its impacts, as well as the purposes of the survey.
- The average sample size was determined using a confidence interval table which is a systematic approach that results in robust and reliable study outcomes. A level of confidence of 95% and a confidence interval of 5 were used. A high level of confidence requires a large sample size and ensures a high level of precision. A confidence interval of 5 also necessitates a large sample size and allows for greater precision in estimating population parameters.
- The use of the cluster sampling methodology allows for the systematic inclusion of all settlements and their household within the conservancy.
- Counting the total number of settlements in the conservancy to determine the number of clusters is a straightforward approach. Each settlement represents a cluster, which is a common practice in cluster sampling. Using a random number generator to pick a starting point for sampling is a common practice in systematic sampling. This random starting point helps to reduce potential bias that might arise if there’s any systematic pattern in the order of the household. Dividing the overall sample size by the number of clusters is a clear way to determine how many households should be sampled from each cluster (a settlement). This method ensures an equal distribution of the sample size across clusters, which can be useful for balanced representation.
- A mobile application platform called Kobo Collect is used to collect data in the field. Digital data collection ensures that survey responses are accurately recorded and transferred to a data management system for subsequent data analysis. These methods reduce the likelihood of survey errors, errors when recording data, leading respondents toward are particular answer, and/or distorting results. The project proponent provided the raw data sets collected via the app to RCE.

As described above, Social CoMMs are used independently from the Project by the project proponent to collect socio-economic data to track the impact of the conservancies on the people and to determine the perceptions of the conservancy by the community. None of the questions in the survey are specific to the Project itself, so results must be reviewed in this context; however, as noted elsewhere in this Section 6 Findings Report, Project activities are influenced by conservancy activities and conservancy activities are influenced by project activities. Due to this close interconnection, the responses and trends from results of Social CoMMs provide valuable feedback on project activities. The

**Finding 1 – Insufficient demonstration of how the project design and distribution of benefits were communicated to local communities****Status**

surveys were designed with questions to generally assess socio-economic conditions and therefore there is little risk that the questions themselves introduce bias on perceptions of the Project. Analysis of responses over time generally indicate positive trends in socio-economic conditions. There is no evidence that the survey methods or survey design would lead to overlooking, distorting, or favoring information as it relates to the Project.

**Verra Response:**

The VVB described how the project is implementing activities to improve community engagement over time and the accuracy and representativeness of the surveys conducted by the project proponent. However, it remains unclear how the VVB has verified that all stakeholders directly or indirectly affected by the project do feel unrepresented in decision-making and that benefits are not fairly distributed, without surveying all types of stakeholders.

**Round 3**

**Finding 1 – Insufficient demonstration of how the project design and distribution of benefits were communicated to local communities**
**Status**
**Issue:**

It is not clear how the VVB confirmed that the project proponent identified and took steps to mitigate any negative socio-economic impacts of project activities implementation, including impacts to stakeholders that are not part of the project but might be affected by it, whether they live inside or outside of the project zone.

**Action Required:**

1. The VVB must clarify how the project proponent engaged with stakeholders affected by the project implementation outside of the project zone, how they identified potential negative impact of the project on these groups, and if any negative impacts have been identified, what are the steps they took to mitigate them. This must include:
  - a. Off-site stakeholders with whom the project has negotiated grass areas outside the project area:
    - i. Communities outside the project area identified as stakeholders in the Project description section 2.1.8
2. The VVB must describe the steps they have taken to assess – against which evidence – that the project activities implementation does not negatively impact stakeholders, including stakeholders that are not part of the project, whether they live inside or outside of the project zone.
3. If negative impacts are identified by the project proponent or by the VVB, the VVB must ensure the proponent has developed a mitigation and remediation plan that targets off-site stakeholders.
4. Regarding the two opposing letters allegedly representing the Boran Council of Elders, the VVB must, with a reasonable level of assurance, articulate evidence of fair representation of this group’s consensus.
5. The VVB must raise a **Forward Action Request** in an updated verification report with the following specific requirements:
  - The VVB must ensure interviews with off-project stakeholders to meet requirements of section 3.19 - Safeguards.

**Program Rule(s):**

VCS Standard, v4.3, Section 3.17, 3.17.11 (6), 3.17.12, 4.1.2, 4.1.8(1)

**Background:**

- Section 2.1.8 of the PD: “Although some Conservancies are highly dominated by a particular ethnic group, many have mixed ethnic groups.” “...we identified four ethnic groups as key target stakeholders for improved governance, education about grazing management, and conflict resolution: Samburu, Borana, Rendille, and Maasai.”
- Verra has been provided two different letters presumably signed by the Borana Council of Elders. These letters contain contradictory feedback on the project. One letter is on Waso paralegal network letterhead, and the other is on Borana council of elder letterhead

**WVB Response:**

1. The project proponent described the process used to determine stakeholders affected by the project in section 2.1.8 of the validated PD. The project proponent completed this stakeholder identification through meetings completed in four different towns. The stakeholders that were identified are outlined in section 2.1.9 of the PD. These stakeholders include groups that are within the project areas (on-project) as well as outside of the project area (off-project). Off-project stakeholders identified include:
  - a. Off-project conservancies
  - b. Off-project ethnic groups
  - c. Off-project communities

A detailed map of these different stakeholders has been provided by the project proponent and has been included in section 4.5.5 of the verification report.

The project proponent made efforts to engage with stakeholders affected by the project implementation outside of the project zone. The engagement occurred through a variety of methods, including:

- a. Peace meetings, including participants from on and off-project areas (agendas and minutes provided by project proponent).
- b. County meetings to provide a forum for the discussion of negative impacts for off-project stakeholders due to the project activities.
- c. Council of Elders meetings (representatives of off-project conservancies and some representatives of non-participating communities were present).
- d. Regional and inter-conservancy grazing meetings
- e. Herder's engagement meetings with communities and conservancies

Potential negative impacts from the project on these stakeholders are identified in sections 2.1.8, 2.1.9, 4.3.1 and 4.3.2 of the PD, as well as section 4.3 of the Monitoring Report (MR) for this monitoring period. The main areas of potential impact to these groups are encroachment of animals on- or off-project and increasing historical tensions between on- or off-project ethnic groups.

The project proponent has made efforts to mitigate these potential negative impacts.

Efforts include:

- a. Implementation of a regional grazing plans (section 4.3 of the MR). Regional grazing plans can help mitigate impacts during droughts or long dry seasons and can also help with movements of herds from outside the project to limit encroachment.
- b. Shared grazing agreements have been put in place between on-project groups and off-project groups (communities and private landowners), which help limit encroachment and can provide compensation for any issues.
- c. Continuation of peace meetings between on- and off-project groups
- d. Improving communication between grazing coordinators and community rangers to limit conflicts and develop solutions

**Finding 1 – Insufficient demonstration of how the project design and distribution of benefits were communicated to local communities** **Status**

2. As noted in the validated PD and current MR, the project proponent has sought to ensure that the project does not negatively impact stakeholders or cause them net harm. The project proponent has provided a variety of evidence to support this assertion. This includes:
  - a. Council of Elders meeting minutes in which representatives of off-project conservancies and some representatives of non-participating communities were present
    - i. Minutes provided from meetings between 2012 – 2023.
    - ii. There were no objections or issues raised by these groups during these meetings.
  - b. Letter of No Objection from County Governments
    - i. These are the same four counties that were targeted during the initial stakeholder scoping meetings (Samburu County, Isiolo County, Marsabit County, Laikipia County).
    - ii. These counties include all stakeholders (off-project conservancies, non-participating communities, on-project conservancies and communities).
    - iii. The most recent letters are from February 2022.
  - c. A letter from NRT stating that neither NRT nor its member community conservancies have received any direct letter of complaint or grievance from any off-project stakeholder that would provide or suggest any evidence of harm resulting from the project, from project inception to the current date.
  - d. Regional and inter-conservancy grazing meeting minutes
    - i. Used as a means to communicate issues and mitigate any conflicts
  - e. Grazing agreements for utilization of grazing on private conservancies and/or ranches
    - i. To allow flexibility in grazing patterns and limit potential conflicts

It is also important to remember the larger context and goals of the project in the region. Without the project, livestock management in the region would likely continue to drive a cycle of impoverishment associated with continuous grazing, loss of soil organic matter and forage productive capacity. The project provides an incentivized and coordinating platform to mitigate the status quo; which is conflict over dwindling natural resources across a landscape much larger than the project boundaries alone. While there could be conflicts or issues that arise amongst stakeholders of the project, overall the project has provided net positive impacts across the region on a landscape scale. The project proponents also recognize the need for continuous improvement and assessment and have committed to improving their stakeholder consultation and monitoring process in the future.

3. Given the size and scale of the project and its stakeholders on and off-project, it is understood that negative impacts in some form are unavoidable. The project has sought and made numerous efforts to mitigate these potential negative impacts for both on- and

**Finding 1 – Insufficient demonstration of how the project design and distribution of benefits were communicated to local communities** **Status**

off-project stakeholders. RCE confirmed that the project proponent has implemented a variety of mitigation measures for off-project stakeholders. Mitigation measures include:

- a. Peace meetings, including participants from on and off-project areas (agendas and minutes provided by project proponent)
  - b. Herder’s engagement meetings with communities and conservancies
  - c. Grazing plans developed by on-project stakeholders to limit livestock movements onto off-project areas
  - d. Grazing by-laws signed by Community Land Management Committees to account for both on and off-project areas. Exhibits
  - e. Project conservancy grazing agreements with off-project private conservancies
  - f. County meetings to provide a forum for the discussion of negative impacts for off-project stakeholders due to the project activities
  - g. Developing county government rangelands bills (this is still in process). These bills will look at landscape approaches to natural resource management, covering both on- and off-project areas.
4. RCE has reviewed each of the letters, both supposedly representing the Borana Council of Elders. Based on RCE’s review of each letter, we believe that the first letter from the Waso Paralegal Network is not a fair representation of the actual Borana Council of Elders. While the letter has “Borana Council of Elders” at the top of the document, it does not state anywhere in the letter that the authors or signees of the letter represent the Borana Council of Elders. In fact, the first sentence of the Waso Paralegal Network letter states “We the undersigned member of the Waso Paralegal Network...”, clearly demonstrating who they represent. The second letter in response to the Waso Paralegal Network letter definitively refutes the original letter as not representing the actual Borana Council of Elders. Two of the signatories on the second letter are from conservancies that are members of the Borana Council of Elders, representing Garba Tulla in the Garba Tulla Community Conservancy and Iresaboru in Sericho Community Conservancy. In addition, based on the content of the letters, RCE’s opinion is that the second letter clearly refutes the very general statements found in the first letter, further leading credence to its authenticity and authority.
  5. A FAR has been added to section 2.6.1 of the verification report.

<b>Finding 1 – Insufficient demonstration of how the project design and distribution of benefits were communicated to local communities</b>	<b>Status</b>
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**Verra Response:**

The project proponent provided extensive evidence across the full project timeline demonstrating that efforts are made to identify stakeholders affected by the project implementation inside and outside the project zone. Additional evidence also demonstrates that efforts are made to mitigate any potential negative impacts they identified. The VVB reviewed the evidence and confirmed they have reached a reasonable level of assurance that the project complies with VCS rules and requirements.

A forward action request has been issued to ensure continual compliance at future verifications.

The response is sufficient to close the finding, no further response is required.

<b>Finding 2 - Grievance redress procedure not sufficiently assessed</b>	<b>Status</b>
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<b>Round 1</b>	<b>Closed</b>
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**Issue:**

The VVB does not provide evidence of how they assess local stakeholder grievances regarding land use conflicts and GHG benefits sharing.

**Action Required:**

1. The VVB must assess whether the grievance redress procedure is effective to resolve disputes with local stakeholders that may arise concerning GHG benefits sharing and how this has been followed and applied.
2. The VVB must justify how Section 2.3.12 of the PD has been followed to resolve land rights conflicts and animal raids reported by community members.

**Program Rule(s):**

*VCS Standard, v4.3, Section 3.17.18*

**VVB Response:**

1. As described in the Verification Report: "The project proponent maintains policies for complaints and grievances in its NRT Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual. These are also documented in the validated Project Description. During the site visit and review of Project documents and data, the verification team did not observe any evidence of grievances by any community members or other project participants with respect to the Project during this monitoring period. The verification team concludes that the grievance redress procedure has been implemented according to the validated Project Description."

Because NRT confirmed that there were no project grievances received during the project monitoring period, RCE was unable to assess application of the procedures as they relate to the project.

**Finding 2 - Grievance redress procedure not sufficiently assessed** **Status**

RCE reviewed examples of reports published by third parties during the monitoring period citing concerns about NRT and conservancies; however, RCE confirmed that none of these parties submitted project grievances to NRT. Specific to the Survival International report, RCE confirmed that Survival International is not a stakeholder, and the project is not required to make a grievance process available to them. In addition, the Boran Council of Elders report—*Fact Finding Report on the Northern Rangelands Trust’s Operations in Community Conservancies in Isiolo County*, by Boran Council of Elders & Waaso Professional Forum, April 2019—is not relevant to the project and does not mention the project.

2. NRT reported that it received no project grievances during the monitoring period and thus it did not implement the Feedback and Grievance Redress Procedure described in Section 2.3.12 of the PD. The occurrence of land rights conflicts and animal raids are not considered project grievances and thus are not relevant to section 2.3.12 of the PD. During the site visit RCE interviewed NRT’s Head of Peace and Security and another member of the peace department about their work with conservancies to educate and advise communities on how to reduce conflicts. RCE also reviewed minutes from peace meetings during the monitoring period which are held with the NRT Peace Department, conservancy members, local leaders, and government officials. The peace meetings are used to address conflicts over land, pasture, and livestock. These peace meetings took place both after conflicts occurred and as efforts to prevent future conflicts.

**Verra Response:**

The VVB has confirmed that the grievance redress procedure has been implemented according to PD. However, the actual effectiveness of the implemented procedure in receiving, addressing, and resolving grievances remains unclear.

**Round 2**

**Issue:**

Despite the project proponent indicating no grievances received during the monitoring period, the effectiveness of the grievance mechanism in addressing disputes with local stakeholders, especially related to benefit sharing and disputes over cattle raiding and unplanned grazing, remains uncertain. This uncertainty is supported by the fact that 21% of conservancy members feel unrepresented in decision-making and perceive unfair benefit distribution (Finding #1). Additionally, 51% of respondents identified disputes over livestock raiding as the main source of conflict in their conservancies (Finding #3).

**Action Required:**

The VVB must evaluate the current effectiveness (accessibility and functionality) of the project's grievance mechanism, ensuring that it includes the necessary steps to receive, hear, respond to, and resolve grievances within a reasonable timeframe. In assessing the effectiveness of the mechanism, the VVB must take into account that the following are covered:

**Finding 2 - Grievance redress procedure not sufficiently assessed** **Status**

- a. Cultural appropriateness: The VVB must assess whether conflict resolution methods are consistent with cultural values and norms, taking into account both the project context and the conservancies involved.
- b. Conflict avoidance: To avoid escalating ongoing or unresolved conflicts, the project should avoid activities that could intensify the situation. The grievance mechanism needs to address different types of conflict, including disputes over land rights and situations such as animal raids.

**Background:**

VCS *Standard*, v4.3, Section 3.17.16(1): “In the event there are any ongoing or unresolved conflicts over property rights, usage or resources, the project shall undertake no activity that could exacerbate the conflict or influence the outcome of an unresolved dispute.”

**VVB Response:**

RCE’s evaluation of the effectiveness of the Project’s formal grievance mechanism included discussions with the project proponent, discussions with project stakeholders, and reviews of documentation and evidence provided of meetings and information communicated to project stakeholders. It should be noted that during RCE’s assessment it was challenging to assess the effectiveness of the project’s grievance mechanism when no project grievances have been submitted. The grievance mechanism, as detailed in the validated PD, the Monitoring Report, and the NRT Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual includes steps to receive, hear, respond to, and resolve grievances within a reasonable timeframe. RCE determined the grievance mechanism to be accessible to project stakeholders because the first step in the process consists of the community member bringing the grievance to conservancy leadership (e.g. Rangeland coordinator or Conservancy manager). This first step occurs at the local level and does not appear to be onerous to community members either in accessibility or level of effort or time required to bring a grievance to conservancy leadership. Grazing committee meetings are held monthly and are open to all members of the conservancy. RCE observed no evidence that the mechanism is not or would not be functional.

While the grievance mechanism does not explicitly identify the types of grievances or complaints that may be submitted, it also does not limit what types may be submitted by project stakeholders, and thus RCE concluded that the mechanism has the potential to address different and all types of grievances. As described elsewhere in this Section 6 Findings Report and in the Verification Report, there are conflicts that exist within the project area which have neither been submitted as grievances during this monitoring period, nor are handled by the grievance mechanism since they are not caused by the implementation of the project or related to project activities. To be clear, no grievances were submitted during this monitoring period and the grievance mechanism was not enacted. Any illegal activities, such as cattle raiding, are handled by the appropriate national authorities and are not project grievances, nor are they caused by project activities.

**Finding 2 - Grievance redress procedure not sufficiently assessed**

**Status**

As stated above it is clear how closely intertwined the Project activities are with the existence and the objectives of the conservancies and every aspect of the day-to-day livelihoods of members of the conservancies. RCE understands that there are activities and incidents—including conflicts—that exist in the project area which would have occurred in the absence of the project. There is evidence that these conflicts occurred prior to the implementation of the Project. Thus, not all conflicts can be linked to the Project.

Through discussions with the project proponent, RCE also understands that there is an informal grievance or dispute resolution mechanism in place whereby a dispute is handled by community groups before it becomes an official grievance or complaint and is taken to the conservancy leadership. The project proponent explained that under the informal grievance mechanism, an issue is brought to the grazing committee. The grazing committees represent all herders within their respective zones within their conservancy. RCE considered the example of a dispute over unplanned grazing, which is handled by conservancy grazing committees and the community elders representing the involved communities. In this case, the involved parties and community elders meet to discuss the grazing plan. As discussed in more detail below, this mechanism is an example of a method that is culturally appropriate and is consistent with traditional practices and norms. In this way, the project and implementation of project activities support traditional cultures. If a dispute escalates and develops into a conflict with unlawful activity, it would be handled by relevant national authorities, and it would not be considered a project grievance by the project proponent. RCE confirmed that details about this process have been added to the Monitoring Report in section 2.3.12.

Disputes related to cattle-raiding within the project area predate the Project and have occurred historically in the project area well before the implementation of project activities. These disputes and conflicts are not considered grievances and are not handled as part of the complaints and grievances policy. Any illegal activities, such as cattle raiding, are handled by the appropriate national authorities. As described in the monitoring report, cattle-raiding is theft of property and is dealt with by official government procedures; however, the Project does also have mechanisms in place to report such incidents and address them using lawful means. As clarified in responses for Finding 1 and 3, when 79%, 67%, and 51% of respondents (respectively in 2017, 2020, and 2021) responded they believed the most common type of conflict in their community was livestock raiding, the responses are related to conflicts occurring within the geographic boundaries of the conservancies rather than “project-driven conflicts” specifically. The geographic boundaries of the conservancies which are part of the Project are included in the Project area. These responses do not indicate that livestock raiding is project driven. The intent of the Social CoMMs surveys is to collect data to monitor, analyze, and manage the positive and negative social impacts of conservation and associated development activities implemented and facilitated by the conservancy. Because conservancy activities and project activities are closely interconnected, the responses and trends from results of Social CoMMs provide valuable community perceptions on project activities.

**Finding 2 - Grievance redress procedure not sufficiently assessed**

**Status**

RCE found the conflict resolution methods in the project area to be consistent with cultural values and norms. Traditional conflict resolution methods involve informal negotiation, reconciliation, and mediation among parties involved, with third parties such as community elders facilitating the arbitration. The project’s informal dispute resolution mechanism is consistent with traditional conflict resolution methods as it provides for negotiations between disputing groups with elders acting as third parties. The project proponent also engages in activities to avert potential conflicts by using peace ambassadors and peace committees; educating members of the conservancies, especially youth, via peace training sessions; and facilitating dialogue between ethnic groups. It is likely that the project received no grievances via its formal grievance mechanism during this monitoring period because disputes were handled within communities using these traditional conflict resolution processes and resolved before they became grievances against the project.

RCE also found the formal grievance mechanism to be culturally appropriate. Phase 1 of the grievance procedure is verbal discussion whereby “Complainants are required to bring complaints to the attention of the Conservancy project authority, or grazing coordinator, or Conservancy manager in the case that the grievance is with the Conservancy grazing coordinator, for the Conservancy on which the grievance occurred in the first instance. The Conservancy authority is required to respond to the complaint within two (2) working days. A resolution is encouraged at this stage through discussion and negotiation.” The use of discussion and negotiation as phase 1 is consistent with traditional methods for conflict resolution.

RCE concluded that the formal and informal grievance mechanisms are accessible and that the procedures are designed to be effective and functional. The mechanisms employ processes that are consistent with traditional conflict resolution and are culturally appropriate. Project activities do not escalate ongoing or unresolved conflicts and furthermore, implement activities to reduce the conflicts which have occurred historically in the project area.

**Verra Response:**

While the VVB has determined that the grievance mechanism is operational and effective, there is still a lack of clarity and insufficient evidence to explain why some stakeholders have chosen to file grievances with external agencies (such as Survival International) rather than directly with the project, despite the existence of an effective mechanism.

Round 3

Finding 2 - Grievance redress procedure not sufficiently assessed	Status
<p><b>Issue:</b></p> <p>Lack of clarity about stakeholders choosing external channels over the project's functional grievance mechanism.</p> <p><b>Action Required:</b></p> <p>The VVB must raise a Forward Action Request in an updated verification report with the following specific requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The project proponent must conduct a comprehensive and independent assessment of their grievance mechanism, specifically examining why some stakeholders, like the Borana ethnic groups, resort to external channels for complaints. If the assessment reveals issues, the project proponent should create an improvement plan.</li> <li>• During the subsequent verification, the VVB must assess the grievance procedure and the project proponent's efforts to enhance it, ensuring all affected stakeholders can submit grievances.</li> </ul> <p><b>Program Rule(s):</b> VCS Standard, v4.3, Section 3.17.2, 3.17.4, 3.17.18</p>	
<p><b>VVB Response:</b></p> <p>A FAR has been added to section 2.6.1 of the verification report.</p>	
<p><b>Verra Response:</b></p> <p>The project proponent provided extensive evidence across the full project timeline demonstrating that efforts are made to identify stakeholders affected by the project implementation inside and outside the project zone. Additional evidence also demonstrates that efforts are made to mitigate any potential negative impacts they identified. The VVB reviewed the evidence and confirmed they have reached a reasonable level of assurance that the project complies with VCS rules and requirements.</p> <p>A forward action request has been issued to ensure continual compliance at future verifications.</p> <p>The response is sufficient to close the finding, no further response is required.</p>	

Finding 3 - Conflict resolution procedures not sufficiently justified	Status
<p><b>Round 1</b></p>	
<p><b>Issue:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. It is unclear whether the VVB sufficiently audited the risk of conflicts' exacerbation by the project, especially considering the existence of reports such as the '2019 Boran Council of Elders &amp; Waaso Professional Forum' report.</li> </ol>	

Finding 3 - Conflict resolution procedures not sufficiently justified	Status
<p>2. It is unclear how the VVB has assessed the project proponent’s management of the recurrent inter-ethnic conflicts (livestock rustling), and the ongoing unresolved conflicts or disputes over rights to lands.</p>	
<p><b>Action Required:</b> The VVB must justify how it confirmed that the project proponent has not undertaken activities that could exacerbate conflict or influence the outcome of any unresolved dispute.</p>	
<p><b>Program Rule(s):</b> VCS Standard, v4.3, Section 3.17.16</p>	
<p><b>VVB Response:</b></p> <p>As detailed in section 1.18.12 of the verification report, "There is a history of conflict between ethnic groups in the project area based on access and proximity to water leading to encroachment of herders from other conservancies and outside the project area and persistent livestock theft between groups. Conflicts are more likely to occur during droughts. The Project is unlikely to either cause or influence the outcome of these conflicts. Project activities involve movement of livestock according to conservancy or regional grazing plans and conflicts are more likely when herders are not following planned grazing activities." As a result of the Project, there are more elders scouting project conservancies for pastures in an effort to avoid conflicts and game scouts and rangers within the conservancies patrolling to mitigate wildlife conflicts.</p> <p>NRT categorizes conflicts as those with no carbon/project influence (ethnic incitement, internal family/community disputes, theft), limited carbon/project influence (livestock rustling, competition for land, retaliation), and carbon/project influence (competition for grazing and water). The history of conflicts is higher in project areas where multiple ethnic groups are present in the region, primarily occurring at county boundaries. For example, in the Samburu district there are more frequent raids and inter-tribal conflicts (which NRT categorizes as limited carbon/project influence and no carbon/project influence conflicts, respectively). These conflicts occurred prior to the implementation of the project, and they continue to occur during the project monitoring periods. NRT has strategically focused on areas with a history of conflict, including border areas, in an effort to mitigate conflicts, especially through the implementation of the planned grazing and other project activities. In the validated PD, NRT identified four ethnic groups as key target stakeholders for improved governance, education about grazing management, and conflict resolution: Samburu, Borana, Rendille, and Maasai. Members of these communities were judged to be the most likely sources of encroaching livestock based on historical accounts of elders from conservancies on the outer edge of the project area or with considerable dry season grazing range. Notably, representatives of some of these groups are those that have contributed—whether allegedly or genuinely—to reports/publications that cited concerns about NRT and conservancies, e.g., “Boran Council of Elders”.</p> <p>NRT has been monitoring and tracking conflicts in a database in more detail in recent years, starting in the final year of this monitoring period (2020). Data from 2020 through early 2023 shows that on average there are far more conflicts categorized as limited carbon/project influence than those categorized as direct carbon/project influence (a ratio of 8 to 1). The conflicts</p>	

**Finding 3 - Conflict resolution procedures not sufficiently justified**

**Status**

categorized as limited carbon/project influence are the types of conflicts that were already occurring prior to the implementation of the project, as described above. The monitoring of conflicts in future monitoring periods will be valuable information to help inform how the project impacts conflicts in the project area; however, for the 2017-2020 monitoring period, the data is limited, and due to gaps in reporting for pre-2020, there is no robust analysis for 2017 to 2019.

- As discussed elsewhere in response to other findings, the project proponent conducted surveys (Social CoMMs) during or after the monitoring period, which represent the project impacts on inhabitants of the conservancies. RCE reviewed the results of surveys in five project conservancies which indicated: 82% of respondents believed that, compared to 12 months ago, the security in their community improved (4% believed it worsened)
- 51% of respondents believed that disputes about livestock raiding were the top source of conflict in their conservancies. NRT categorizes this as a limited carbon/project influence conflict.

Interviews with community members—including peace ambassadors, community elders, and others—provided a general overview of the history of conflicts in the project area and how the project is providing valuable mechanisms and means of communication to help prevent some of the traditional conflicts between ethnic groups. Because all community members—from multiple ethnic groups in several conservancies—participate in the project activity, there are mechanisms in place to facilitate communication and relationships between the groups. An example cited more than once was that in the event of livestock theft, because of relationships existing between ethnic groups due to the project activity, rather than retaliating, livestock was able to be recovered.

NRT provided evidence of peace meetings that occurred during the monitoring period including in conservancies and between ethnic groups identified in the PD as target areas and stakeholders.

The implementation of the project is such that all conflicts—including those with limited carbon/project influence and direct carbon/project influence—should be reduced over time because of project activities. RCE's assessment concluded that the project proponent, because of the project activities has not exacerbated conflict.

**Verra Response:**

The VVB confirmed that the project has not engaged in any activity that could intensify a conflict or influence the outcome of an unresolved dispute. However, the actual effectiveness of the implemented procedure in receiving, addressing, and resolving grievances remains unclear. Therefore, this finding cannot be closed until Finding #2 is closed.

**Round 2**

**Finding 3 - Conflict resolution procedures not sufficiently justified**
**Status**
**Additional VVB Response:**

As noted above for Finding #1, RCE incorrectly identified results from 2021 Social CoMMs surveys in its response above as results from the 2020 Social CoMMs surveys. To correct the error above, the table below provides a summary of the 2020 Social CoMMs surveys results, presented alongside 2017 and 2021 results. Data was presented in RCE's initial response pertaining to the following questions from the Social CoMMs surveys:

- In your opinion, what are the 3 most common types of conflict in your community?
- Compared to 12 months ago, how is the security in your community?

Year	2017	2020	2021*
<b>Survey summary</b>	<b>2 conservancies surveyed</b>	<b>5 conservancies surveyed</b>	<b>5 conservancies surveyed</b>
Respondents believed, compared to 12 months ago, the security in their community improved	62% improved 9% worsened	78% improved 4% worsened	82% improved 4% worsened
Respondents believed the most common type of conflict in their communities	79% livestock raiding 12% grazing	67% livestock raiding 20% grazing	51% livestock raiding 23% grazing

**Verra Response:**

This finding cannot be closed until Finding #2 is closed.

**Program Rule(s):**

VCS Standard, v4.3, Section 3.17.2, 3.17.4, 3.17.16, 3.17.18

**Round 3**

Finding 3 - Conflict resolution procedures not sufficiently justified	Status
<p><b>Verra Response:</b></p> <p>The project proponent provided extensive evidence across the full project timeline demonstrating that efforts are made to identify stakeholders affected by the project implementation inside and outside the project zone. Additional evidence also demonstrates that efforts are made to mitigate any potential negative impacts they identified. The VVB reviewed the evidence and confirmed they have reached a reasonable level of assurance that the project complies with VCS rules and requirements.</p> <p>A forward action requests has been issued to ensure continual compliance at future verifications.</p> <p>The response is sufficient to close the finding, no further response is required.</p>	

Finding 4 – Incomplete assessment of the impact of deviations to monitored parameters $PN_{c,t}$ and $DN_{c,x}$	Status
Round 1	Closed
<p><b>Issue:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. It is not clear why the VVB has assessed the deviation to <math>PN_{c,t}</math> and <math>DN_{c,x}</math> monitoring process as PD deviations instead of methodology deviations.</li> <li>2. The VVB has insufficiently assessed how these deviations impact the project methane emissions and leakage quantification.</li> </ol> <p><b>Action Required:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The VVB must demonstrate how the deviation to estimate rather than monitor (i.e., once every five years) parameter <math>PN_{c,t}</math> (number of project animals of category <math>c</math> in the project area during year <math>t</math>) has no overestimation impact on the net emission reduction and removals calculations.</li> <li>2. The VVB must demonstrate how the estimation of parameter <math>DN_{c,x}</math> (number of livestock of each category <math>c</math> that were off the project area on day <math>x</math>) is still accurate given missing and incomplete monthly grazing reports.</li> <li>3. The VVB must ensure that deviations described in action items #1 and 2 are assessed as methodology deviations. Specifically, the VVB must clarify how it has been assessed that the deviations (1) do not negatively impact the conservativeness of the quantification of GHG ERRs or (2) result in increased accuracy of such quantification.</li> </ol> <p><b>Program Rule(s):</b>  VCS Standard, v4.3, Sections 2.2.1, 3.18 and 3.19  VM0032, Section 9.3.2</p> <p><b>VVB Response:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. RCE reviewed the methods and data involved with estimating <math>PN_{c,t}</math> and confirmed that these deviations do not overestimate GHG ERRs. The extrapolated values from the 2014 conservancy census data are likely over-estimating the increase in animals (for <math>PN_{c,t}</math>).</li> </ol>	

Finding 4 – Incomplete assessment of the impact of deviations to monitored parameters $PN_{c,t}$ and $DN_{c,x}$	Status
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During the monitoring period, specifically 2019 – 2020, the project area was affected by widespread drought, and it is likely that the total population of project animals decreased. The extrapolated projections did not consider the drought impacts and assumed population growth was stable. Project emissions from livestock for the monitoring period are calculated as 44% higher compared to the baseline.

While RCE agrees that during the monitoring period households have increased the number of animals owned (based on surveys), it is unlikely that they have increased herd sizes by 44%, especially given the drought conditions for 2019-2020.

In addition, during the site visit RCE confirmed that the same animal population types sampled in 2014 (cow, goat, sheep, etc.) are still being grazed in 2022. RCE did not see any other animal types being actively grazed besides what was originally sampled.

2. RCE confirmed that for the 3 months of missing reports, estimates for neighbouring months were evaluated and the month with the highest reported leakage was used to substitute for the missing report. RCE confirmed that this is a reasonable and conservative method. RCE also noted that the project was only missing 3 reports out of 624 during the monitoring period. The Responsible Party also used the maximum monthly values for livestock off project area ( $DN_{c,x}$ ) for substituting the missing animals off project.
3. RCE agrees that the deviation for  $PN_{c,t}$  should be noted as a methodology deviation and not a PD deviation. RCE will make this change to the verification report.

RCE agrees that this should have been reviewed as a methodology deviation because the monitoring requirements from the VM0032 were not met; namely, an animal census was not carried out during the current verification period. RCE confirmed that the requirements for a methodology deviation have been met; this deviation does not affect the baseline scenario or applicability conditions but rather monitoring frequency and does not impact conservativeness.

VM0032 requires that  $DN_{c,x}$  be, “Determined from records of livestock distributions, as recorded from interviews with grazing managers, coordinators, herders, or other administrative staff.” RCE concludes that this is not a deviation but a case of missing data. The Project was following the monitoring plan and simply missed 3 grazing reports out of 624 during the monitoring period. This update will be included in the verification report.

**Verra Response:**

The VVB has shown how the deviation to estimate rather than monitor parameter  $PN_{c,t}$  has no overestimation effect on the net ERRs for the assessed monitoring period. The VVB also showed

Finding 4 – Incomplete assessment of the impact of deviations to monitored parameters $PN_{c,t}$ and $DN_{c,x}$	Status
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how the estimation of the parameter  $DN_{c,x}$  is still accurate. However, the VVB did not assess how conservative and accurate the deviations are for future monitoring periods.

Further, the VVB has updated the deviation for  $PN_{c,t}$  as a methodology deviation, but not for the deviation for  $DN_{c,x}$ .

Round 2
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**Issue:**

1. The VVB's assessment of the conservativeness and accuracy of deviations for  $PN_{c,t}$  and  $DN_{c,x}$  is based on the conditions of the current monitoring period. Thus, the VVB did not assess the conservativeness and accuracy of these deviations for future monitoring periods.
2. It is unclear whether the deviation for  $DN_{c,x}$  monitoring is a PD deviation that applies only to the monitoring period 2017-2020 or to all the subsequent monitoring periods.

**Action Required:**

1. The VVB must demonstrate how the deviations to monitor parameters  $PN_{c,t}$  and  $DN_{c,x}$  will be conservative and accurate for the future monitoring periods of the project.
2. The VVB must ensure that an explicit description that deviation for  $DN_{c,x}$  is only valid for the monitoring period 2017-2020 or also for subsequent monitoring periods.

**Program Rule(s):**

VCS Standard, v4.3, Sections 3.18 and 3.19.3  
VM0032, Section 9.2.6

**Background:**

Section 3.18.3 of the VCS Standard, v4.3 states that methodology deviations, when approved, shall be reported in all subsequent verification reports. Since the deviation will be carried out, the VVB must assess the deviation's conservativeness and accuracy on future monitoring periods.

**VVB Response:**

It should be noted that RCE has not interpreted the requirement in 3.18.3, "...shall be reported in all subsequent verification reports" as meaning that, "...the VVB must assess the deviation's conservativeness and accuracy on future monitoring periods". This specific language regarding future monitoring periods could not be found the Standard.

RCE believes that this deviation will be conservative in future monitoring periods because of further compounding effects of climate change and because of continuing drought in the region.

RCE updated the verification report to include the following language under methodology deviation 2: "RCE believes that this deviation will be conservative for future monitoring periods because of compounding effects of climate change and continuing drought in the region will limit the actual growth of livestock populations well below what is currently modelled based on population growth." Native revised the Monitoring Report to identify the deviation for  $DN_{c,x}$  as a methodology

**Finding 4 – Incomplete assessment of the impact of deviations to monitored parameters P<sub>Nc,t</sub> and D<sub>Nc,x</sub>** **Status**

deviation, and RCE updated its assessment of the deviation in the verification report to be consistent with a methodology deviation.

**Verra Response:**

The VVB has updated the VR with reasonable reasons to consider the deviations of the monitoring parameters P<sub>Nc,t</sub> and D<sub>Nc,x</sub> as conservative for subsequent monitoring periods. The response is sufficient to close the finding and no further response is required.

**Finding 5 – Management of planned rotation grazing, monitoring and QA/QC processes not fully assessed** **Status**

**Round 1** Closed

**Issue:**

1. It is not clear how the VVB has assessed that existing inter-ethnic conflicts do not impact the implementation of the grazing management plan and its monitoring.
2. It is not clear how the VVB has assessed that field monitoring and QA/QC processes have been effectively implemented to demonstrate project climate impacts and benefits if:
  - a. Parameter P<sub>Nc,t</sub> is not being measured because many conservancies did not report actual livestock numbers or reported them very inconsistently – affecting project emissions and leakage calculations.
  - b. Monthly grazing reports are incomplete or missing – affecting leakage emissions calculations and the demonstration of successful implementation of grazing activities (i.e., throughout the use of NDVI index calibrated with observation of livestock numbers and movements).

**Action Required:**

1. The VVB must describe how they concluded rotational grazing is being implemented according to plan in all conservancies regardless of the existing conflicts.
2. The VVB must describe how they confirmed that the climate monitoring plan is being effectively implemented to demonstrate climate impacts.
3. The VVB must describe how no transcription errors or omissions exist in monitored leakage data (i.e., livestock numbers and movements) from rangeland coordinator reports across participating conservancies.

**Program Rule(s):**

VCS Standard, v4.3, Sections 3.15 and 4.1.8

VM0032, v1.0, Section 9

**VVB Response:**

1. During site visit interviews with on-the-ground personnel, RCE did not find evidence that conflicts were impeding rotational grazing. Please note that all grazing plans are developed by the conservancies themselves. Each conservancy interacts with neighbouring conservancies to form cohesive plans that are meant to avoid conflict. RCE

Finding 5 – Management of planned rotation grazing, monitoring and QA/QC processes not fully assessed	Status
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concluded that the major issue affecting planned rotational grazing is drought, not conflict.

VM0032 Section 9.3.2 states that, “Activities fall principally into three major categories: (1) manipulating animal numbers and grazing intensity...”. RCE confirmed via the site visit, through supporting evidence and by reviewing the monitoring report that this project is actively manipulating animal numbers in the project area.

RCE confirmed that the grazing intensity is reduced from the baseline intensity and there is scientific evidence through modelling (estimating the sequestration rate of carbon in soils beyond what would have occurred in the baseline activities) that project activities have been successful.

The method of assessing annual grazing plan implementation depends on comparing annual relative changes in NDVI ( $SUM\Delta NDVI_{rel}$ ) determined by summing monthly  $\Delta NDVI_m$  across the 24, 16-day intervals for each year,  $SUM\Delta NDVI_m$  (Eq. 2 above) at each MODIS pixel, as compared with mean annual sums of  $\Delta NDVI_m$  across the same time intervals ( $meanSUM\Delta NDVI_{REF}$ ) from reference polygons that are not grazed or only slightly grazed by livestock (see Eq. 2 above).

These reference locations are embodied in multiple polygons that span the project area, including “Core” areas of Il Ngwesi and Kalama Conservancies, the tops of plateaus in Kalama Conservancy that are relatively inaccessible to livestock, and a large ~1,000 ha fenced rhino sanctuary in Sera Conservancy. In most years, the mean annual relative change in NDVI ( $meanSUM\Delta NDVI_{REF}$ ) in these reference areas is relatively similar despite differences in mean annual rainfall. Consequently, the Google Earth Engine (GEE) calculations of annual relative change in NDVI ( $SUM\Delta NDVI_{rel}$ ) for individual pixels represent a good estimate of livestock impacts in drought years (2017, 2018).

However, in wet years following droughts, such as occurred in 2019 relative to 2018, the  $meanSUM\Delta NDVI_{REF}$  in Il Ngwesi Core area and Kalama Plateaus are much bigger than the values for Kalama Core and Sera Rhino Sanctuary reference polygons. Averaging in these higher  $meanSUM\Delta NDVI_{REF}$  from those reference polygons virtually guarantees that conservancies with lower mean annual rainfall will exhibit frequent pixels with high  $SUM\Delta NDVI_{rel}$  and thus be judged in error as unsuccessful. Therefore, reference polygons appropriate to the mean annual rainfall of the different Conservancies should be used for each year in the current monitoring period (2017-2020).

Based on site interviews, grazing reports and the NDVI analyses, RCE concluded that rotational grazing is being implemented according to plan in all conservancies regardless of the existing conflicts.

Finding 5 – Management of planned rotation grazing, monitoring and QA/QC processes not fully assessed	Status
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. The project goal is reducing grazing intensity from the baseline intensity of 95-99% to, on average 80% in the project scenario by implementing planned rotational grazing. The project monitors relevant carbon pools and non-CO<sub>2</sub> GHGs (CH<sub>4</sub> and N<sub>2</sub>O) including leakage through NDVI analysis and grazing reports. RCE confirmed that the project is implementing its climate monitoring plan and generating real climate impacts. The total verified emission reductions for the monitoring period 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2020 was 4,179,523 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e.</li>   <li>3. RCE sampled a representative number of grazing reports to confirm monitored leakage data. RCE reviewed the reports in detail with the Project Proponent to clarify any questions during RCE’s review. If there was any doubt on the accuracy of animal numbers, the Project Proponent was consistent in taking the most conservative approach that yields the highest project or leakage emissions. Based on our sampling and in combination from the NDVI analysis, RCE is reasonably sure that Project emissions from livestock, including leakage emissions, were conservatively overestimated, and resulted in lower emission reductions.</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Verra Response:</b></p> <p>The VVB described how rotational grazing is being implemented as planned in all conservancies, that the climate monitoring plan is being effectively implemented, and that there are no transcription errors or omissions. The response is sufficient to close the finding and no further response is required.</p>	

Finding 6 – Lack of assessment of grazing intensity calculation and NDVI scores	Status
<p><b>Round 1</b></p>	<p>Closed</p>
<p><b>Issue:</b></p>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. It is not clear how the VVB has concluded that grazing intensity calculations complied with the methodology given the R2 between NDVI and biomass (0.2801) that does not meet the methodology requirement (&gt;0.60). See Figure 3 of MR).</li> <li>2. The VVB has not sufficiently demonstrated how they assessed the mean NDVI scores calculated for the period 2017-2020.</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Action Required:</b></p>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The VVB must clarify how it has assessed that grazing intensity calculations comply with the methodology requirement, and do not lead to overestimating soil organic carbon calculations.</li> <li>2. The VVB must clarify how it has assessed the NDVI scores calculated for the 2017-2020 monitoring period and how they concluded that the values are conservative and represent the actual implementation of grazing activities and the reported increase in soil organic carbon. The VVB must also provide the mean NDVI scores and the interpretation of them.</li> <li>3. The VVB must demonstrate how it has assessed that the incompleteness of the monthly grazing reports (see Finding #5 above) does not negatively affect the calculation of the</li> </ol>	

**Finding 6 – Lack of assessment of grazing intensity calculation and NDVI scores**
**Status**

NDVI scores and then, the soil organic carbon increase.

**Program Rule(s):**

VM0032, v1.0, Section 9.3.4

**VVB Response:**

1. The NDVI analysis study was developed to determine whether NDVI analysis could reasonably determine whether a grazing event occurred within a certain time frame over a certain area. The analysis is used as a binary argument; either a grazing event occurred, or it did not occur. Importantly, this study cannot be used to determine the magnitude of grazing. Since RCE was not involved in the methodology assessment or development, we cannot make a statement as to whether the methodology over or underestimates soil organic carbon (SOC) calculations. RCE can confirm that the SOC calculations were performed correctly per the methodology.

The Project Proponent developed a method for monitoring grazing intensity which was validated by another VVB and approved by Verra. It was noted in the validation report: “The validation team reviewed the NDVI, and ground measurement analysis results and agrees with the reasonable correlation. The MODIS sensor, NDVI dataset, is generally suitable for determining grazing intensity over large areas where NDVI is considered surrogate for grazing intensity.”

RCE confirmed that the project followed the methodology requirements for the grazing intensity calculations/analysis and followed the methods that were approved during validation.

2. The goal of the NDVI analysis is to determine whether grazing has occurred to true-up the individual monthly grazing reports. The NDVI analysis cannot determine whether the values are “conservative”. The requirement for using satellite imagery is that the  $R^2$  be above a certain threshold. The regressions are related and are part of the “pre-study” (circa 2014) to calibrate clipped biomass (from field quadrats) with NDVI (satellite remote sensing) in areas of known livestock presence and absence. Both regressions are unrelated to the grazing reports from the current monitoring period (2017-2020). They simply indicate and justify the use of NDVI for detecting grazing events. The critical point for this justification is that livestock must be present to know if those livestock are successfully grazing or not. This is achieved with the monthly grazing reports produced by each conservancy.

The value noted above in Issue #1 (0.28) should not be compared to the  $R^2$  thresholds in the methodology. The 0.28 value shows the regression representing the relation between biomass and the difference in NDVI (as opposed to the difference before and after grazing). The data from figure 3 were used to calculate a change in NDVI between images, which serves as a measure of livestock impact on forage over 15 days in

**Finding 6 – Lack of assessment of grazing intensity calculation and NDVI scores**
**Status**

between composite images, as compared to the baseline and calibrated to un-grazed inaccessible areas to estimate grazing intensity. This relationship is biomass on the ground versus the difference in NDVI before and after grazing and is why the linear relation does not fit well in this case. This exercise was for plotting the difference between NDVI values and not simply NDVI values themselves.

To assess NDVI scores for the monitoring period, RCE began by rerunning the provided Google Earth Engine script that was originally used to determine the cumulative NDVI change and the proportion of each conservancy area that had unsuccessful implementation each year using a NDVI difference threshold of 0.1. These proportions of unsuccessful areas for each conservancy area were recalculated and assessed by RCE and its team. RCE confirmed that the proportional values produced by the script matched those originally given with no significant differences.

RCE then reproduced NDVI scores for each year. The “interpretation” of these scores is the fraction of successful grazing in each conservancy that is multiplied by total carbon stocks. The effect is adjusting carbon stocks by how successful grazing activities were based on the NDVI analysis described above and in detail in the monitoring report.

The remote sensing method was calibrated during a pre-study following baseline soil sampling and during baseline biodiversity sampling in April - June 2014. During the initial validation and verification, the Project Proponent demonstrated that measured biomass was strongly correlated with NDVI for each MODIS pixel before and after cattle and sheep herds moved through the area. In accordance with VM0032 and as validated by the initial VVB, the proponent took 30 Forage biomass samples from thirty 0.125 m<sup>2</sup> quadrats placed randomly inside 30 different pixels in August 2014 and estimated linear correlation between the biomass field measurements and pixel NDVI values. The adjustment of these models was  $R^2 = 0.6043$  for “before grazing” and  $R^2 = 0.5596$  for “after grazing” and concur with different scientific articles that assess grazing intensity.

In addition, the methodology conflicts with itself on what  $R^2$  value must be exceeded for compliance. In section 8.1.1 the  $R^2$  value is 0.35 and in section 9.3.4 the value is 0.60. RCE reviewed the analysis that produced an  $R^2 = 0.6043$  for “before grazing” and an  $R^2 = 0.5596$  for “after grazing” and concur with different scientific articles that assess grazing intensity. Both values meet the requirements under section 8.1.1 ( $R^2 > 0.35$ ) and the “before grazing”  $R^2$  meets the requirements of section 9.3.4. ( $R^2 > 0.60$ ). The “after grazing”  $R^2$  (0.5596) does not meet the requirements of section 9.3.4. ( $R^2 > 0.6$ ), but in RCE’s opinion, an  $R^2$  higher than 0.5 in a natural system is reasonably strong evidence of a correlation. The proponent uses the “difference in NDVI” to assess successful/unsuccessful grazing through a logistic model, where the threshold at 50% of probability to be successful or unsuccessful is 0.8. Instead of 0.8, the proponent is using 0.1 due to difficulties in detecting the growth of biomass in the dry season with MODIS resolution.

**Finding 6 – Lack of assessment of grazing intensity calculation and NDVI scores** **Status**

RCE’s overall conclusion is that NDVI scores meet the methodology requirements.

3. The missing grazing reports are not directly associated with the NDVI analysis. The analysis is used to determine whether a grazing event occurred or not. RCE is reasonably sure that these missing reports (note: as stated in the response to finding #4 only 3 reports out of 624 are missing) do not negatively affect the overall soil organic carbon increase because even without the missing reports, the Project Proponent can use the NDVI analysis to determine whether areas were grazed during the months of the missing reports. If the area was grazed and this was allowed, the NDVI score would show that a grazing event occurred but was allowed. If in the missing months grazing took place and it was not allowed, the NDVI analysis would be able to detect the grazing and that month would be listed as “unsuccessful”, which would reduce the overall emission reductions.

**Verra Response:**

The VVB provided clarification on the compliance of the grazing intensity calculations with the required methodology. They also explained their evaluation of NDVI values during the monitoring period and assured that the lack of grazing reports does not affect the NDVI values and the ERR calculation. However, the VVB did not provide evidence that the deviation in PD to adjust the threshold for determining successful or unsuccessful grazing is a more conservative and accurate approach compared to the validated method and that the deviation will be valid for future monitoring periods.

**Round 2**

**Issue:**

1. Lack of clarity of the change in the threshold value of the annual relative change in NDVI. The first monitoring report states the threshold as 0.05, while Section 2.2.4 of the latest monitoring report states the threshold as 0.05 and 0.08.
2. The PD deviation presented by the project to change the 50% probability threshold for detecting successful or unsuccessful implementation of grazing activities from 0.05 (at first verification: Section 5.4.3.1 of the first Monitoring Report) to 0.1. The VVB has not assessed using verifiable sources that 0.1 is an acceptable threshold and that this threshold can be applied to future monitoring periods.

**Finding 6 – Lack of assessment of grazing intensity calculation and NDVI scores**
**Status**
**Action Required:**

1. The VVB must clarify whether the change in  $\Delta$ NDVI was from 0.05 to 0.1 or from 0.08 to 0.1, as there is conflicting information between the first round of responses, the first and second monitoring reports.
2. The VVB must clearly demonstrate how the modified threshold for identifying successful or unsuccessful grazing implementation is acceptable. The VVB must submit the details of the NDVI analysis they used to demonstrate such acceptability of the new threshold. The VVB must demonstrate that the deviation to use the threshold of annual relative  $\Delta$ NDVI  $\leq 0.1$  is accurate, based on the project proponent's justification that this new threshold accounts for the variation of monthly relative NDVI for wet and dry seasons. This analysis must provide concrete evidence supporting the validity of the approach.

**VVB Response:**

1. Native's satellite analysis to determine successful implementation of the project activity underwent the following changes from the previous monitoring period:
  - The updated satellite analysis methods are used to determine livestock presence, rather than grazing success.
  - The threshold value is changed from 0.05 (previous methods) to 0.1 (updated methods).
  - Reference areas are categorized as wet or dry precipitation and these designations are used to more accurately assess NDVI changes of the project areas relative to the reference areas.

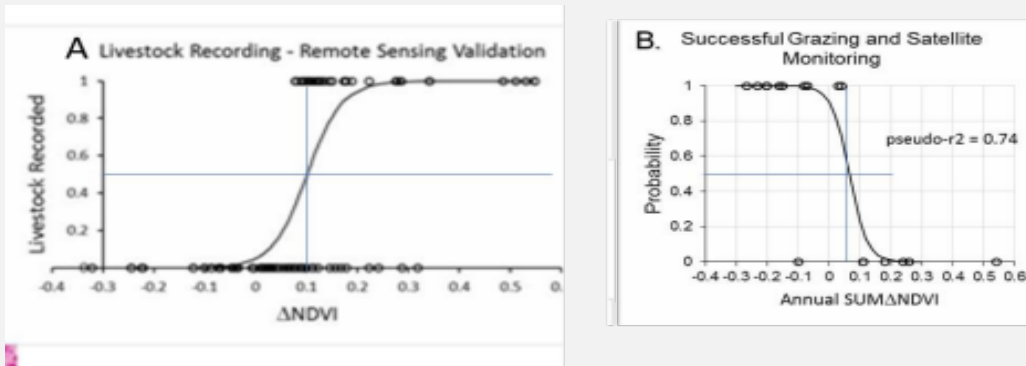
The  $\Delta$ NDVI change is from 0.05 to 0.1. The threshold value of 0.05 (previous monitoring period) was based on the test of the probability of successful grazing vs. change in NDVI. The new threshold value of 0.1 is based on the test of the probability of livestock presence vs. change in NDVI. The Project Proponent technical expert (Mark Ritchie) identified that livestock presence cannot be detected using NDVI until there is a change of at least 0.1 or greater. The justification for the threshold change is supported analytically rather than being an arbitrarily chosen value. In the initial monitoring report,  $\text{SUM}\Delta\text{NDVI}_{\text{rel}}$  (the annual relative change in NDVI for a MODIS pixel) was correlated with whether that pixel experienced successful implementation of project activities. Successful implementation of project activities is a single major grazing event each year. The new value of 0.1 (updated methods) is based on the test of the probability of livestock presence vs. change in NDVI. A single month (two consecutive 16-day composite images) in which  $\Delta\text{NDVI}_{\text{m,rel}} > 0.1$  indicates livestock presence and therefore, success of project activities. The updated threshold value, along with the use of reference polygons for wet and dry precipitation areas, more accurately identifies livestock presence in both areas which receive substantial precipitation and drier areas. The initial threshold value of 0.05, and the lack of wet and dry reference areas, was overly conservative and inaccurately identified substantial areas within low precipitation areas as unsuccessful.

2. The remote sensing methodology is employed to verify the degree of successful implementation of the project activity (planned rotational grazing) and subsequently adjust the modelled output of the SNAP soil organic carbon model, which is a process-based model. This remote sensing analysis determines change in annual relative NDVI derived from NASA's MODIS satellite. The NDVI change threshold used to determine successful grazing is based on a one-time calibration to ground-truthed livestock occurrence and once-per-year grazing data. NDVI within the project area is relativized annually according

**Finding 6 – Lack of assessment of grazing intensity calculation and NDVI scores** **Status**

to reference polygons (livestock exclusion zones outside the project boundary) that are attributed to conservancies based on precipitation. NDVI is not a direct input or parameter in the soil organic carbon model. The remote sensing analysis is an additional, conservative discount above and beyond VCS program or VM0032 methodology requirements, which is applied to the modelled predictions of changes in soil organic carbon after the fact, predictions that are completely distinct from the remote sensing analysis discussed herein. The use of both process-based models and the relation of species' occurrence (presence-absence) to biophysical covariates is commonplace in the environmental sciences.

The remote sensing analysis evaluates the annual changes in green biomass at grazing zones within the project area relative to expected changes under un-grazed conditions. This methodology uses the annual relative change in NDVI as a proxy for grazing impact from livestock. The key difference between the method for the previous monitoring period and the updated methods is that the threshold value of 0.05 (initial monitoring period) was based on the test of the probability of successful grazing vs. change in NDVI, whereas the new value of 0.1 (updated methods) is based on the test of the probability of livestock presence vs. change in NDVI. The Project Proponent technical expert identified that it is not possible to detect livestock presence using NDVI until there is a change of at least 0.1 or greater. Please refer to the logistic regression figures as evidence for this threshold value.



Logistic regressions to assess successful implementation of grazing plans in the Northern Kenya Grasslands Carbon Project. A. The logistic regression of livestock presence (livestock recorded = 1) and absence (livestock recorded = 0) versus calculated **monthly relative ΔNDVI**, the value of monthly relative ΔNDVI at which there was greater than a 50% probability (livestock recorded > 0.5) of recording substantial livestock present is 0.1 (intersection of two perpendicular lines). Livestock were only rarely encountered in map locations where ΔNDVI<sub>m,rel</sub> < 0.1. B. At 17 grazing blocks where presence/absence of livestock was monitored over an entire year, a logistic regression of the occurrence of only a single grazing event (probability = 1) or more than one grazing event (probability = 0) versus the relative annual sum of ΔNDVI for the 2014 calendar year.

This analysis provides reasonable estimates of areas that are unsuccessful only if the precipitation at the reference polygons matches the precipitation of the project polygons. For example, in wet years immediately following drought, using reference sites in Il Ngwesi and western Kalama will always overestimate unsuccessful grazing because the ΔNDVI in reference polygons in those conservancies is always extremely negative (lots of production compared to low green biomass in January). The Project Proponent technical

Finding 6 – Lack of assessment of grazing intensity calculation and NDVI scores	Status
<p>expert typically used only reference sites from the Kalama and Sera Core Area polygons in those years. In wet years following droughts, the meanSUMΔNDVIREF in Il Ngwesi Core area and Kalama Plateaus are much bigger than the values for Kalama Core and Sera Rhino Sanctuary reference polygons. Averaging in these higher meanSUMΔNDVIREF from those reference polygons virtually guarantees that conservancies with lower mean annual rainfall will exhibit frequent pixels with high SUMΔNDVIREF and thus be judged in error as unsuccessful. Therefore, reference polygons appropriate to the mean annual rainfall of the different Conservancies should be used for each year (2017-2020).</p>	
<p>Areas that have annual relative change in NDVI higher than the threshold are subtracted from the project area in determining total modeled estimates of soil carbon sequestration, thus making claimed removals more conservative. If the annual relative change in NDVI indicates more than once-per-year livestock grazing for a given pixel (250mx250m), the area of that pixel is not considered in the creditable project area in that year and thus not applicable for generating carbon credits; if the annual relative change in NDVI indicates once-per-year livestock grazing or less (for example, rested grazing areas) for a given pixel, the model-predicted accrual rate is applied to that area and the area is considered in the creditable project area for generating carbon credits.</p>	
<p>The updated methods and threshold are sufficient to assure that areas experiencing unsuccessful implementation of the project activity are not included in creditable project area. These methods are based on robust analyses and account for the dynamic nature of grazing and project implementation in this area. By differentiating project and reference polygons based on precipitation in this spatially heterogeneous region, the project proponent is adding further rigor to the analysis.</p>	
<p><b>Verra Response:</b></p> <p>The VVB has explained the change in the threshold for determining successful or unsuccessful implementation of grazing activities and has described demonstrated that the change is acceptable. The response is sufficient to close the finding and no further response is required.</p>	

Finding 7 – The non-permanence risk rating (15%) does not represent the project implementation status in all conservancies	Status
<b>Round 1</b>	Closed
<p><b>Issue:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The VVB has not assessed how the impact of inter-ethnic conflicts and unclear land tenure are captured in the project’s overall risk rating.</li> <li>2. The VVB has not assessed whether the references provided to justify the project longevity(a), project management risk (b), land tenure and resource access (C), and community engagement (a) risks are sufficient.</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Action Required:</b></p> <p>The VVB must justify how the assigned total internal and external risk ratings reflect the uncertainty in land access rights and the prevailing conflicts in the landscape.</p>	

**Finding 7 – The non-permanence risk rating (15%) does not represent the project implementation status in all conservancies**
**Status**
**Program Rule(s):**
*VCS AFOLU Non-Permanence Risk Tool, v4.0*
**VVB Response:**

1. Land Tenure and Resource Access/Impacts c)  
RCE believes that the Project Proponent entered score of “0” is appropriate. Each conservancy owns the land that the project activity takes place on. While there are access and use rights disputes related to grazing (water, foraging) in the project area, these are only temporary disputes not at the level of elders or conservancies and not related to longer term issues over land tenure or ownership.
  
2. Land Tenure and Resource Access/Impacts d)  
The inter-ethnic conflicts are related to disputes over cultural issues and accessing land. The disputes are typically related to 1) groups outside the project boundary seeking to migrate into the project boundary for grazing, 2) land set aside for rest (according to grazing plans created by conservancies using historical and cultural grazing patterns), and 3) land specified as ‘grass reserve banks’ in case of drought or other situations where emergency forage is needed. RCE believes that the Project Proponent correctly assigned a score of 5 for this category.
  
3. Project Longevity a)  
The Project has a crediting period of 30 years as allowed in the VCS Standard and confirmed during the validation. RCE reviewed the assessment documented by the validation team: that there are mechanisms in place to protect the project area from management activities that degrade land resources such as soil carbon, including Kenya’s constitution, its Wildlife Conservation and Management Act (2013), and its Community Lands Act. There have been no changes to any of these laws and they continue to apply as they did at the validation of the Project. Thus, RCE concluded that the project longevity remains 30 years.
  
4. Project management risk (b)  
The AFOLU Non-Permanence Risk Tool V4.0 issued September 2019 states that, “4) Ongoing enforcement refers to the need to protect carbon stocks in the project area from encroachment by outside actors; for example, where a REDD project faces risk from outside actors entering the project area for the purposes of illegal logging.”

RCE agrees with the value being assigned 0. The Project Proponent provided evidence that the conservancies in the project are, to the best of their ability, actively managing encroachment at the borders of the project, resulting in minimal encroachment from outside groups. Further, the project has a PD deviation related to EDC,t that the previous VVB and RCE have approved. This deviation demonstrates that project emissions from encroaching livestock are de-minimis (5% or less of all project methane emissions in

**Finding 7 – The non-permanence risk rating (15%) does not represent the project implementation status in all conservancies** **Status**

each year of the monitoring period) supporting that encroachment is not a significant issue.

5. Community Engagement (a)

RCE is reasonably assured that this risk score of 0 was appropriate based on the Project Proponent’s community engagement. Based on the evidence provided and discussed in other sections of this response, RCE is reasonably assured that greater than 50% of households in the project area have been consulted, noting that the tool specifics that “households can be determined as consulted and involved in participatory planning where there have been direct meetings and planning with associations or community groups that are legally recognized to represent the households”. In addition, the project clearly provides net positive impacts on the social and economic well-being of the local communities.

**Verra Response:**

The VVB has provided acceptable justification for most of the internal and external risk ratings; however, the justification for Land Tenure and Resource Access/Impacts and Project Longevity remains insufficient.

**Round 2**

**Finding 7 – The non-permanence risk rating (15%) does not represent the project implementation status in all conservancies** **Status**

**Issue:**

The project proponent refers to Kenya Constitution Article 60 (1) and Kenya Constitution, Article 69 (1&2), and the Kenya Wildlife Conservation and Management Act, 2013 (30) as evidence for mitigation (row f) of the Land Tenure and Resource Access/Impacts and row (b) of the Project Longevity sections, respectively. It is unclear how these can be considered legally binding agreements (i.e., between the participants and project proponents) to continue with the management practices. Therefore, the evidence is insufficient to demonstrate that the project has a legal agreement or commitment to continue the management practices for the entire life of the project (30 years) to support the risk ratings assigned to Land Tenure and Resource Access/Impacts (f) and Project Longevity (b).

**Action Required:**

1. The VVB must demonstrate how the Kenya Constitution Article 60 (1) and Kenya Constitution, Article 69 (1&2) qualify as legally binding agreements to continue with the management practices to justify the risk ratings assigned to Land Tenure and Resource Access/Impacts (f). The risk rating score must be updated as needed.
2. The VVB must demonstrate how the Kenya Wildlife Conservation and Management Act, 2013 (30) qualifies as legally binding agreements to continue with the management practices to justify the risk rating assigned to Project Longevity (b). The risk rating score must be updated as needed.

**Finding 7 – The non-permanence risk rating (15%) does not represent the project implementation status in all conservancies** **Status**

**VVB Response:**

RCE did not correctly understand the previous request and incorrectly stated that the Kenya Constitution Article 60 (1) and Kenya Constitution, Article 69 (1&2) qualify as legally binding agreements to continue with the management practices. RCE verified that the Project has a legal agreement to continue management practices for the entire life of the project (30 years). RCE reviewed samples of Letters of Intent and Consent and Waiver forms, which exist for each conservancy involved in the Project. The Letters of Intent are dated 5 May 2015 and are signed by a representative of each conservancy. The letters all include the following language:

“We intend to participate in these actions, with the expectation of revenues from the sale of carbon credits, for at least the next 30 years, as we recognize the importance of keeping stored carbon in the soil to slow climate change and help the land be more productive.”

These agreements were superseded by the Project Implementation Agreement (PIA) signed by NRT and each of the conservancies on 24 June 2021. The PIA includes the following language:

“Throughout the Project Longevity Period, Participating Conservancies shall use Commercially Reasonable Efforts to:

- (a) Continue the Project Activities substantially as contemplated in Exhibit A or as subsequently modified to enhance soil carbon sequestration potential and in compliance with all applicable laws, regulations, approvals, authorizations, and permits at all times;
- (b) Maintain in full force and effect such approvals and authorizations necessary to enable the Project Activities and to produce VERs according to the Approved Methodology;
- (c) Minimize soil carbon losses from any surface disruption howsoever arising.”

The PIA defines the Project Longevity Period as “the first thirty (30) years following the Project Start Date”.

RCE deemed this sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the project has a legal agreement to continue the management practices for the life of the project and that the current risk score is correct.

**Verra Response:**

The VVB has clarified the evidence that demonstrates that there is an agreement to continue with the management practices during the project crediting period and the NPRR has been updated accordingly. The response is sufficient to close the finding and no further response is required.

Finding 8 – Information required to assess how the project continues to comply with all applicable laws is insufficient	Status
Round 1	Closed
<p><b>Issue:</b> It is unclear how the VVB verified that the project continues to comply with laws, statutes, and other national regulatory frameworks since it was validated and first verified, including compliance with the Trust Lands Act and the Community Lands Act.</p> <p><b>Action Required:</b> The VVB must justify with relevant evidence how the project continues to comply with all national laws and regulations and meets all requirements under the latest amendments of the Trust Lands and Community Lands Acts.</p> <p><b>Program Rule(s):</b> <i>VCS Standard, v4.3, Sections 3.1.3 and 3.6</i></p> <p><b>VVB Response:</b> The communities' land rights and rights to conduct and benefit from the project activity in the project area were reviewed as part of the assessment of the project design, which was completed during the project's validation, carried out by a VVB other than RCE. Depending on the conservancy, grazing rights are conferred through the Kenya Land Act of 1968, the Kenya Trust Land Act of 2010, or the Community Land Act of 2016. At the time of validation, the project was confirmed as meeting the applicable law. RCE confirmed that there have been no changes to these laws or the structures of the conservancies. RCE also reviewed an attestation from NRT that it complied and remained in compliance with all national laws and regulations.</p> <p><b>Verra Response:</b> The VVB confirmed that no changes to laws and regulations have occurred since validation and that the project remains in compliance with national laws and regulations. The response is sufficient to close the finding, no further response is required.</p>	

Finding 9 – Insufficient assessment about AFOLU-specific safeguards	Status
Round 1	Closed
<p><b>Issue:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The VVB does not describe the steps taken to assess the following AFOLU-specific safeguards: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activities implemented by the project to mitigate risks faced by local stakeholders.</li> <li>Updates to the property and land use rights of the local stakeholders and the evidence provided that the project has not negatively impacted such rights.</li> <li>The processes used by the project proponent to communicate and consult with local stakeholders during the monitoring period, including any information about any conflicts that arose between the project proponent and local stakeholders and</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	

Finding 9 – Insufficient assessment about AFOLU-specific safeguards	Status
<p>whether any such conflicts were resolved via the established grievance redress procedure.</p> <p>2. The VVB has insufficiently assessed whether the project had negative impacts on local stakeholder, or whether such impacts have been mitigated.</p>	
<p><b>Action Required:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The VVB must describe the steps taken to assess status of the AFOLU-specific safeguards listed above.</li> <li>2. If property and land use rights are affected, the VVB must review existing letters of no objection to ensure that free, prior, and informed consent is obtained from those affected and that a transparent agreement is reached that includes provisions for just and fair compensation in all conservancies.</li> <li>3. The VVB must identify, discuss, and justify a conclusion regarding whether the project proponent has taken the appropriate measures to ensure that the project has not created negative impacts on local stakeholders, or mitigated such impact where necessary.</li> </ol> <p><b>Program Rule(s):</b> VCS Standard, v4.3, Sections 3.17.12 and 3.17.16</p>	
<p><b>VVB Response:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. As stated in the verification report, Risks to the Project include both short-term and long-term risks. Section 2.2.7 of the Monitoring Report describes natural and human-induced risks to the expected climate, community, and biodiversity benefits of the Project and measures to mitigate these risks. During the site visit, the verification team discussed several of these risks and the measures needed and taken to mitigate these risks with Project participants, stakeholders, and conservancy members. During these conversations, some of the steps to mitigate risks were particularly evident and appear to be successful during the implementation of the Project thus far including educating the conservancies on the community and personal benefits linked to continued participation in the project and implementing strategies to handle encroachment including training game scouts to handle and communicate about encroaching livestock herders and poachers. Project proponents have made routine efforts to educate and demonstrate the positive influence of improved rangeland conditions on biodiversity and the benefits of biodiversity to local conservancies. Climate change remains one of the largest external risks with the potential to cause irreversible degradation of rangeland; however, through implementation of the Project, project proponents seek to build climate resilience for conservancies and more management options to deal with impacts of climate change.</li> </ol> <p>During the site visit, RCE reviewed in detail with the project proponent and project stakeholders how information about project activities and project implementation is communicated. A verifier attended one of the routine meetings, an Annual General Meeting, in the Melako Conservancy and witnessed the communication of project</p>	

Finding 9 – Insufficient assessment about AFOLU-specific safeguards	Status
<p>information first hand. The project proponent also provided meeting minutes from several meetings including peace meetings held to discuss and resolve conflicts and develop strategies to avoid future conflicts. RCE concluded that these reviews and observations were adequate to assess the processes used by the project proponent to communicate and consult with local stakeholders.</p>	
<p>Refer to the response to finding 1, above which includes additional detail about responses received from community members during Social CoMMs surveys.</p>	
<p>There was no evidence of any changes to property and land use rights of the local stakeholders during the monitoring period. There were no changes to the laws under which some of the communities exist as group ranches. Furthermore, there was no evidence provided by NRT or gathered from other legitimate sources that the project has negatively impacted such rights. As stated in the verification report, “Aspects of the Project as they relate to the CCB indicators respect for rights to lands, territories, and resources and free, prior, and informed consent were reviewed and validated during the validation of the Project. The verification team interviewed NRT’s Director of Governance during the site visit. Based on that interview, interviews with other NRT personnel and project stakeholders, and a review of the validation report, the verification team confirmed there have been no changes to the Project since validation.”</p>	
<p>For information on the grievance process and stakeholder communication, please see our response to Finding 2.</p>	
<p>2. The review and assessment of property and land use rights was completed during the project’s validation, carried out by a VVB other than RCE. The validation report includes details on reviews of Letters of Intent by each conservancy.</p>	
<p>During the monitoring period under verification, communities exist as Group Ranches under the Kenya Land Act of 1968 or are located on Trust lands under the Kenya Trust Land Act of 2010 and the Community Lands Act of 2016. As noted above, there was no evidence that any changes to property and land use rights occurred during this monitoring period. The same 13 conservancies that have been part of the project since initiation and validation were still part of the project during this monitoring period.</p>	
<p>3. As noted in some of the responses above, it is well documented that the project is in a region with a long history of severe human rights issues including inter-ethnic conflicts, loss of property associated with livestock and cattle rustling, and Issues related to the rural nature of the communities in the project and lack of basic government services. This dynamic existed prior to the project and will continue to exist during the project crediting period. The project proponents did not cause these problems. However, as the number of conservancies in the region has grown, the project proponent has become more involved in these complex issues of governance and security. As a result, there</p>	

**Finding 9 – Insufficient assessment about AFOLU-specific safeguards** **Status**

have been debates and controversies surrounding the project proponent’s involvement. Given the region’s colonial past and perceived marginalization of some groups, public opinion of NRT by some factions within groups is negative. There is no evidence that these perceptions were caused by project activities.

As discussed above in responses to other findings, the project proponent conducted surveys (Social CoMMs) during or after the monitoring period, which represent the project impacts on inhabitants of the conservancies. RCE reviewed the results of surveys in five project conservancies which indicated:

- 82% of respondents believed the conservancies increased or slightly increased their wellbeing
- 5% of respondents believed the conservancies decreased or slightly decreased their wellbeing

NRT identified potential negative project impacts in the PD and has implemented measures through project activities to mitigate such negative impacts, as necessary. For example, a potential negative impact is that increased migration with livestock may increase conflicts with other ethnic groups and livestock theft. Project activities implemented to prevent and address these impacts include rapid response teams, regional grazing plans, facilitation of shared grazing agreements and peace meetings, and better communication between grazing coordinators and game scouts to facilitate conflict resolution. During the verification process, NRT provided evidence of these ongoing activities to mitigate these impacts.

RCE concluded that the project proponent has taken the appropriate measures to ensure that the project has not created negative impacts on local stakeholders or mitigated such impact where necessary.

**Verra Response:**

The VVB described the steps taken to assess the status of the AFOLU-specific safeguards; however, the actual effectiveness of the implemented procedure in receiving, addressing, and resolving grievances remains unclear. Therefore, this finding cannot be closed until Finding #2 is closed.

In addition, although the VVB has stated that the project has taken appropriate measures to ensure that the project does not have negative impacts on local stakeholders, concerns remain as to how the project does not consider having potential negative impacts due to the loss or alteration of traditional grazing practices.

**Round 2**

**Issue:**

1. The actual effectiveness of the implemented procedure in receiving, addressing, and resolving grievances remains unclear (see Finding #2).

Finding 9 – Insufficient assessment about AFOLU-specific safeguards	Status
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The potential negative social impacts of the project on local communities resulting from the loss or alteration of deeply rooted traditional grazing practices are overlooked, as do the measures to mitigate these potential impacts. As a result, the implications for property and land use rights remain unclear.</li> </ol>	
<b>Action Required:</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The VVB must address the additional issue raised in Round 2 for Finding #2.</li> <li>The VVB must demonstrate how the loss or alteration of deeply rooted traditional grazing practices is not resulting in negative social impacts of the project on local communities. If this is not the case, then a description of these potential negative impacts, together with mitigation measures, must be provided. In addition, if property and land use rights are affected, updated letters of consent must be obtained from all affected communities.</li> </ol>	

**WVB Response:**

As noted above for Finding #1, RCE incorrectly identified results from 2021 Social CoMMs surveys in its response above as results from the 2020 Social CoMMs surveys. To correct the error above, the table below provides a summary of the 2020 Social CoMMs surveys results, presented alongside 2017 and 2021 results. Data was presented in RCE’s initial response pertaining to the following questions from the Social CoMMs surveys:

- How has the general well-being of your household changed over the last 5 years?
- Considering all the positive and negative social impacts of your Conservancy that have just been discussed what is the overall impact of the conservancy on the well-being of your household over the last 5 years?

Year	2017	2020	2021*
<b>Survey summary</b>	<b>2 conservancies surveyed</b>	<b>5 conservancies surveyed</b>	<b>5 conservancies surveyed</b>
General change in well-being of household over the last 5 years	43% improved 17% worsened 40% same	56% improved 11% worsened 33% same	62% improved 12% worsened 26% same
Overall impact of the conservancy on the well-being of household over the last 5 years	74% increased or slightly increased  4% decreased or slightly decreased  23% same	83% increased or slightly increased  3% decreased or slightly decreased  14% same	82% increased or slightly increased  5% decreased or slightly decreased  13% same

1. See additional response above for Finding #2.
2. The structure of traditional grazing practices in the project area consists of elders who manage livestock movements and plan when and where to graze and water livestock. The implementation of planned grazing by the Project also relies on the use of elders to help communities design grazing plans for wet and dry seasons around historical migration routes and expected forage availability and access to water. Elders also help to increase compliance with grazing plans.

RCE reviewed NRT’s Rangelands Strategy for 2019-2022 whose purpose is to clearly establish the context of the NRT Rangelands Program and document any lessons learned, challenges, and key objectives and priorities for the program. Core principles of the Rangelands Strategy include “respect for traditional livelihoods, traditional governance systems and the coexistence of livestock, people and wildlife” as quoted from the document summary. By supporting the project conservancies, NRT helps the conservancies to incorporate these principles into their grazing plans. It is clear to RCE that the intent of the Project and the goal of the project proponent is to promote, improve, and,

**Finding 9 – Insufficient assessment about AFOLU-specific safeguards**

**Status**

in a sense, upgrade the traditional rangeland management strategies. Ultimately, NRT can only influence decisions made by the conservancies, since the conservancies each make their own decisions on where and when to graze.

Traditional strategies are adapted to the arid and semi-arid lands that make up the conservancies and have historically allowed for pastoralists to adapt to the variability of the rangelands due to fluctuations in resources and climate. In recent years, pastoralists have experienced a decrease in rangeland productivity as the climate has become more variable and both livestock and human populations have increased. Pastoralists have also faced a loss of traditional knowledge systems as younger generations seek a more modern and sedentary lifestyle to access water, healthcare, education, and other services. The Project implements planned grazing at the conservancy level to promote increased vegetation cover and improve livestock condition. This includes reverting to and re-establishing traditional practices which have been altered or lost, as well as incorporating new ideas for grazing management and rangelands rehabilitation.

Based on the verification activities, it is evident to RCE that it is a huge undertaking by the project to re-establish traditional practices to restore rangeland conditions. The project proponent’s methods include:

- Raising awareness and conducting grazing trainings in conservancies
- Designing governance structures to best support grazing management
- Implementing grazing plans and management activities
- Rehabilitating rangelands
- Conduct ongoing monitoring

NRT makes no declaration of control over the land within the project area. The members of the communities and the leaders they elected to represent the conservancies make decisions regarding where and when to graze. The implementation of planned grazing does not affect land use rights as communities within the project area exist as Group Ranches under the Kenya Land Act of 1968 or are located on Trust lands under the Kenya Trust Land Act of 2010 and the Community Lands Act of 2016.

Results from the implementation of project activities have not been. nor were they expected to be immediate; however, as discussed in responses to other Findings in this document and in the Verification Report, there are many indicators that the project activities are achieving results.

Based on RCE’s discussions with the project proponent, interviews with project stakeholders including conservancy leadership and members of the conservancies, and reviews of meeting minutes, trainings, videos and transcribed statements from community elders, and NRT’s Rangelands Strategy for 2019-2022, RCE concluded that implementation of project activities supports and is consistent with deeply rooted

**Finding 9 – Insufficient assessment about AFOLU-specific safeguards**
**Status**

traditional grazing practices in the project area. In fact, not only does the Project not contribute to the loss or alteration of traditional grazing practices, the Project seeks to return to traditional grazing practices, from which communities had been transitioning away. Thus, the Project is not resulting in negative social impacts on local communities because it is not contributing to the loss or alteration of traditional grazing practices.

The project proponent includes a description of potential negative impacts related to grazing and traditional grazing practices and mitigation measures implemented by the project in sections 4.2.2, 4.3, 4.5.1, and 5.3.2 of the PD.

Potential negative impacts as identified by the project proponent include:

- Greater migration with livestock to increase rest may expose herders to encounters with antagonistic ethnic groups or livestock theft.
- Family members away from home for longer time periods; however, many herders are already away from home for up to 9 months of the year in response to drought and low forage availability. With proper management and the accompanying recovery of vegetation on home Conservancies, herders may increase time at home due to implementation of the project.
- Carbon revenues may be converted into more livestock, creating little net positive benefit.
- Impacts from development in the northern Kenya region contribute to further privatization and sedentarization which threaten the traditional pastoral lifestyle and migratory movements, and
- Local increases in grazing pressures just outside project boundaries.

Mitigation measures implemented by the project proponent to address these potential negative impacts include:

- Rapid response teams,
- Anticipatory shared grazing agreements and peace meetings,
- Regional grazing plans,
- Improved communication between grazing coordinators and game scouts to facilitate conflict resolution,
- Use of project revenues to fund infrastructure to finish livestock for market, at the communities' request, which allows easier access to cash markets for yearlings, and
- Encouraging herders to manage herds for health and animal size rather than to maximize herd numbers.

RCE assessed the implementation of these measures through the following activities (many of which are discussed elsewhere in this Section 6 Findings Report):

Finding 9 – Insufficient assessment about AFOLU-specific safeguards	Status
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Interviewing the project proponent about peace and security activities, governance, and monitoring.</li> <li>● Interviewing conservancy leadership and members of the conservancy about implementation of project activities in their conservancies.</li> <li>● Reviewing evidence of grazing trainings provided in the conservancies.</li> <li>● Reviewing agendas and minutes from peace meetings.</li> <li>● Reviewing grazing plans.</li> <li>● Observing discussions and voting among community members on use of project revenues in conservancy zones.</li> </ul> <p>RCE concluded that mitigation measures are well designed and have been implemented in the project area to alleviate potential impacts to traditional grazing practices. Though, as discussed above, the project actually seeks to return to traditional grazing practices through the implementation of project activities.</p>	
<p><b>Verra Response:</b></p> <p>The VVB has described how the project aligns with traditional grazing practices and works with communities on grazing plans. However, it remains unclear if the project has any negative impact on communities outside of the project zone. Therefore, this finding cannot be closed until Findings #1 and #2 are closed.</p> <p><b>Program Rule(s):</b>  <i>VCS Standard, v4.3, Section 3.17, 3.17.2, 3.17.4, 3.17.11(6), 3.17.12, 3.17.18</i></p>	
<b>Round 3</b>	
<p>The project proponent provided extensive evidence across the full project timeline demonstrating that efforts are made to identify stakeholders affected by the project implementation inside and outside the project zone. Additional evidence also demonstrates that efforts are made to mitigate any potential negative impacts they identified. The VVB reviewed the evidence and confirmed they have reached a reasonable level of assurance that the project complies with VCS rules and requirements.</p> <p>A forward action requests has been issued to ensure continual compliance at future verifications.</p> <p>The response is sufficient to close the finding, no further response is required.</p>	

## 4. NON-CONFORMITIES

N/A