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Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture & Natural Resource Management (WOCAN)

W+ Standard™

Version 2.0

16 November 2023



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Executive Summary

The W+ Standard™ and the six W+ Domains and criteria have been developed by WOCAN through a consultative process with stakeholders. This included women’s groups and men within community development projects in Asia and Africa, as well as subject matter specialists in gender/women’s empowerment, carbon project development and certification systems.

WOCAN’s objective is to improve the lives of women in developing economies by incentivizing investments in projects that incorporate standards of women’s empowerment into the project development cycle. Using the W+ Standard, projects generate monetized W+ credits, or W+ Labeled Credits, which can be sold to compensate Project Implementers and return financial benefits to women in project communities. These “Credits” are either quantified women’s empowerment results, or labeled greenhouse gas emissions reductions. Credits associated with a project which has also successfully met the W+ Standard’s requirements for one or more of its six domains. Sale of these Credits and financial returns to women’s groups in project communities will in turn enable women’s empowerment so that women can contribute to climate resilience, sustainable development and poverty alleviation within their households and communities.

Just as the Fair Trade label has revolutionized consumer buying habits by raising awareness of the impacts of consumer’s purchases, WOCAN aims to accelerate investments in projects that support women’s empowerment. WOCAN believes that the use of the W+ Standard to measurably improve women’s empowerment will ultimately change business-as-usual in a variety of economic, environment and climate-related development projects.

To accomplish this, WOCAN has established the W+ Standard - a set of project design and implementation requirements that serves as a “stand-alone” standard or complements existing certification systems and standards, such as the Verified Carbon Standard (VCS), SDVISTA, the Gold Standard, Plan Vivo, OutcomesX or others. The W+ Standard specifically includes measures to integrate and measure women’s empowerment outcomes in relation to environment and community development projects.

The W+ Standard establishes the normative requirements for applying the W+ Standard to a project, described below.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In many regions of the world, women are the primary food producers and natural resource managers, as well as market actors. WOCAN (Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management) builds women’s leadership in agriculture and natural resource management through organizational and individual transformation. WOCAN’s vision is of a world where gender equality has been achieved within agriculture and natural resource management organizations, policies, programs and markets, resulting in food security and sustainable development.

Natural resource systems, international development projects and local economies benefit when women are included and empowered. An increasing number of governments, and international organizations understand the need to incorporate gender and women’s empowerment into climate change and food security policies, programs and budgets. For example, there are increasing references to gender and the need for gender equality in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) texts¹. The decision text on the Green Climate Fund also has strong references to gender.

Working at the intersection of gender equality, women’s social and economic empowerment, food security and climate change mitigation, WOCAN has developed the W+ Standard as a means of making positive contributions to each of these important issues. The W+ Standard is envisioned to be applied to projects such as economic development, agricultural development, public health, and climate change adaptation and mitigation projects.

One of WOCAN’s goals is to create additional value for these projects, through the application of the W+ Standard. The objective is to share a percentage of the revenues from the sale of W+ Credits or W+ Labeled GHG units, with women’s groups associated with the project, creating a sustainable circle of community development, environmental sustainability and support for women’s economic and social empowerment.

¹ Interested readers should consult the UNFCCC’s Gender and Climate Change resources.

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The W+ Standard measures positive outcomes according to indicators of success, represented by measurable activities within one or more of the six domains listed below:

- Income and Assets
- Time
- Education and Knowledge
- Leadership
- Food Security
- Health

The W+ Standard provides the normative requirements of implementation. The W+ Standard Guidance Document includes information for project design and implementation.

2. REASONS FOR USING THE W+ STANDARD

The use of the W+ Standard to promote women’s empowerment will improve women’s lives, the lives of their families and their communities.

Project Implementers and their investors can realize additional financial returns by incorporating the W+ Standard and methods into suitable existing or new projects.

Buyers of W+ Credits, or of W+ labeled carbon credits (e.g., Verified Carbon Units or similar GHG credits) are assured that their contributions toward women’s empowerment are measurable and certain.

The W+ Standard is grounded in these ideas:

- a) WOCAN enables women as agents for change and participants in the market and encourages this role by empowering women to be effective entrepreneurs, resource managers and leaders.
- b) The W+ Standard provides a transparent, rigorous, and realistic mechanism to promote women’s empowerment, creating verifiable results when the W+ Standard is applied to new or existing projects in ways that create new, additional, measurable benefits to women in project communities

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- c) The W+ Standard enables projects to monetize the social and economic values created for and by women, to sell W+ Credits, or W+ labeled carbon credits (e.g., VCUs or similar GHG credits), resulting in a compensation mechanism for Project Implementers and a direct benefit to women in project communities.
- d) Project Implementers and their investors can realize multiple beneficial impacts from the investment of their time and financial resources.

Companies and investors that wish to enhance their brand image or meet internal targets for women’s empowerment (SDG #5) – will find that W+ credits, or W+ labeled carbon credits generated from projects with verified outcomes are a sound investment. The application of the W+ Standard in carbon credit-generating projects generates GHG credits with a gender co-benefit, through joint certification by two standards that addresses both Net Zero and SDG 5 goals of corporates and investors.

3. WHO SHOULD USE THE W+ STANDARD

The W+ can be applied to a range of contexts. There are many possible underlying project types including but not limited to: economic development, education and literacy, public health, infrastructure, agriculture, forestry, renewable energy generation, water and sanitation and environmental protection or restoration. Potential W+ Standard implementers (Project Implementers) include:

- a) **Carbon Project Implementers** – Projects can integrate the W+ Standard from the initial phases of project design, or may choose to integrate the W+ Standard into existing projects. Carbon Project Implementers using any of the current Standards (e.g., Gold Standard, VCS, Social Carbon, Plan Vivo or OutcomesX) may find that increased value is created for credits by using the W+ Standard.
- b) **Community Project Implementers** – Working on their own or in collaboration with international development organizations, community-based or non-government organization (NGO) Project Implementers may consider implementing the W+ Standard to quantify the value provided to women and women’s groups and improve project sustainability and generate new streams of revenue for their organizations.
- c) **Governments and International Development Organizations** – As more governments and institutions recognize the importance of women’s inclusion and empowerment in

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natural resource management policies and programs, these organizations may decide (and may encourage others) to apply the W+ Standard to the climate and community development projects they fund, to measure results and assure long term viability of project benefits to women of their beneficiary groups

- d) **Companies** with Corporate Social Responsibility or sustainability portfolios are a natural impetus for the implementation of the W+ Standard to assist companies to meet their targets for women’s empowerment objectives and add value to their supply chains and brands.
- e) **Investors** who wish to make Gender Lens Investments will realize the value of the W+ metrics to assure transparency and results for investments that: increase access to capital for women entrepreneurs and businesses with women in leadership positions, promote gender equity in the workplace, increase the number of products and services that benefit women and girls by directing capital to socially responsible businesses, and that

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4. Safeguards

Requirements

No Net Harm

Project activities shall not negatively impact the natural environment or local communities. Project proponents shall identify and address any negative environmental and socio-economic impacts of project activities, and shall engage with local stakeholders during the project development and implementation processes.

Risks to Local Stakeholders

The Project Implementer shall identify likely natural and human-induced risks to local stakeholder well-being expected during the project lifetime and outline measures needed to mitigate these risks.

The Project Implementer shall identify the risks for local stakeholders to participate in the project, including project design and consultation. Risks should include trade-offs with food security, land loss, loss of yields and climate change adaptation. The project shall be designed and implemented to avoid trade-offs and manage the identified risks to local stakeholders.

The Project Implementer or any other entity involved in project design or implementation shall not be involved in any form of discrimination or sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment (SEAH).

The management teams involved in the project shall have expertise and prior experience implementing land management and development projects with community engagement at the project scale. Where relevant experience is lacking, the Project Implementer shall either demonstrate how they have partnered with other organizations to support the project or have a recruitment strategy to fill the identified gaps.

Local Stakeholder Consultation and Gender Analysis

The Project Implementer shall conduct a local stakeholder consultation and gender analysis prior to validation as a way to inform the design of the project and maximize participation from women stakeholders. Such consultations allow women stakeholders to evaluate impacts, raise concerns about potential negative impacts and provide input on the project design. Refer to Annex I of the [W+ Standard Guidance Document](#).

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Ongoing Consultation and Grievance Settlement

The Project Implementer shall establish mechanisms for ongoing communication with local women stakeholders to allow stakeholders to raise concerns about potential negative impacts during project implementation through a grievance mechanism, defined as follows:

The Project Implementer shall take due account of all and any input and allegations received during the local stakeholder consultation and through ongoing communications, which means it will need to either update the project design or justify why updates are not appropriate. The Project Implementer shall demonstrate to the validation/verification body what action it has taken in respect of the local women stakeholder consultation as part of validation, and in respect of ongoing communications as part of each subsequent verification.

If there have been allegations against a Project implementer or its associated entities for discrimination or sexual exploitation, harassment and abuse within three years prior to the W+ process, Project Implementers must demonstrate that they have taken appropriate action to respond and protect against the likelihood of discrimination, sexual exploitation, harassment and abuse occurring¹. A failure to do so will result in the termination of the W+ application

In case the grievances are not resolved through the above-described process, the local women stakeholders may reach out to the W+ Coordinator, and make W+ Standard aware of any concerns regarding the project or Project Implementing agency or any other entity involved in the Project.

Upon receiving this grievance, W+ will initiate an investigation and will put the W+ review and pause the issuance of W+ credits. If the W+ Standard is made aware of the grievance after the credits have been issued, the W+ Standard may temporarily suspend transactions on those credits pending the investigation outcomes.

f) HOW THE W+ STANDARD IS ADMINISTERED

WOCAN, a non-profit organization incorporated in the state of New York, administers the W+ Standard.

The W+ Standard Guidance Document contains details including documentation requirements, community coordination and engagement best practices, expectations for specificity and completeness and processes and procedures for administration of the W+ Standard. The W+ Program Guide and related documents can be found at <https://www.wplus.org/>. The point of

¹ For advice and support see for example the [FCDO PSEAH Resource Support Hub](#)

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contact for the W+ Standard is the W+ Standard Coordinator, who can be reached via the email address noted on the W+ Website: coordinator@wplus.org.

The W+ Standard, W+ Standard Guidance Document and associated program documents will, from time-to-time, be reviewed and revised. The schedule for review and revision will be published on the WOCAN and W+ websites and promoted via newsletters, social media channels and other means. Stakeholders and interested members of the public are encouraged to send questions and comments to WOCAN at info@wplus.org at any time. Questions and comments will be collected and taken into consideration during the next subsequent review and revision process. The review process will follow the ISEAL Alliance's requirement for two review periods, one of 60 days and one of 30 days for public comment.

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g) IMPLEMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

Please refer to the W+ Standard Guidance Document published in the W+ Standard website, <https://www.wplus.org/>.

h) W+ PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Please refer to the W+ Standard Guidance Document published in the W+ Standard website, <https://www.wplus.org/>.

i) VERIFIER AND VERIFIER ACCREDITOR REQUIREMENTS

For W+ Certification, Project Implementers are required to have the application of the W+Standard and associated project results independently verified by an accredited Verifier. Accredited Verifiers are identified on the W+ website, <https://www.wplus.org/validation-and-verification/>.

Please refer to the W+ Standard Guidance Document published in the W+ Standard website, <https://www.wplus.org/>

j) W+ LICENSE AGREEMENTS

Entities engaged in W+ project development and unit transactions shall abide by license agreements. These are applicable to:

- a. Traders/Brokers
- b. Registries
- c. Implementers
- d. Buyers

Implementers submitting PIN and PDD documents must acknowledge the license agreements within those documents.

All other entities buying, selling, listing or brokering W+ Credits or W+ labeled carbon credits must submit a signed acknowledgement of the applicable W+ license agreement to the W+ Standard Coordinator prior to initiating buying, selling, listing or brokering W+ Credits or W+ labeled carbon

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credits. The Licensing Agreement is found here: <https://www.wplus.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/W-Trademark-License.docx>.

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GLOSSARY/DEFINITIONS

Additionality – The concept that measured improvements arise from new or additional efforts, and would not have otherwise occurred.

Article 6 – To be added as another relevant GHG Program.

Assurance Provider – A term used in many other sustainability and development programs. Synonymous with “Verifier”. A verifier creates and issues findings and issues a verification decision based on its findings, which is documented in a verification report and/or statement (referred to as a Certification Statement). In some cases, “Assurance Provider” may also refer to the scheme-level reviewing body.

Carbon credits or units – A carbon credit is a reduction in or removal of emissions of carbon dioxide or greenhouse gases made to compensate for or to offset an emission made elsewhere. Carbon offsets are measured in metric tons of carbon dioxide-equivalent (CO_{2e}) and may represent six primary types of greenhouse gases. These include: carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), perfluorocarbons (PFCs), hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), and sulfur hexafluoride (SF₆).

Carbon Projects – Also, greenhouse gas emission reduction and removal projects. A carbon offset project refers to a business initiative that receives funding because of the reduction in emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs) that will result. To prove that the project will result in real, permanent, verifiable reductions in Greenhouse Gases, proof must be provided in the form of a project design document and activity reports validated by an approved third party.

Certification Statement – Issued by an accredited verifier, retained by a project implementer. Follows from an accepted Verification report. The certification statement is the basis for the issuance of W+ Credits or W+ labeled Credits.

Climate change mitigation – refers to the actions to limit the magnitude and/or rate of long-term climate change, for example, reduction of greenhouse gases.

Conformance – Compliance with the W+ Standard

Criteria – The activities, changes or events which are to be measured to apply the W+ Standard to a project.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) – “Corporate Social Responsibility is a management concept

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whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and interactions with their stakeholders. CSR is generally understood as being the way through which a company achieves a balance of economic, environmental and social imperatives.” (“Triple-Bottom-Line- Approach”), while at the same time addressing the expectations of shareholders and stakeholders. (United Nations Industrial Development Organization).

Direct Share Payments – Direct payment to women beneficiaries and groups, as required by the W+ Standard. Direct share payments are to be established and administered by the Project Implementer and must be auditable, reliable, timely, and secure.

Do No Harm Indicators (DNHI) - These are indicators that must be assessed during the project implementation to determine possible negative impacts on women’s empowerment. “Red light” indicates W+ cannot be applied to this project. “Yellow light” indicates the mitigating of action needs to be identified and applied before W+ Standard can be applied.

Existing Projects –Qualified projects which are already operating. This term can be used interchangeably with the term “underlying project”, which refers to any suitable existing or new project to which a W+ Standard is applied.

Fair Trade - an organized social movement whose stated goal is to help producers in developing countries achieve better trading conditions and to promote sustainability. It is a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency, and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade, as well as the payment of higher prices to exporters, as well as higher social and environmental standards.

GHG Credit – Equivalent to a Carbon Offset. A Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Credit is a unit of value ascribed to a specific reduction (or avoidance) in emissions. (Typically, one ton equivalent of CO₂). GHG Credits are used by purchasers to ‘offset’ their greenhouse gas emissions (thus ‘carbon offset’) either voluntarily or for compliance obligations.

GHG Crediting Program – A program operated by an independent organization setting out rules and requirements for the validation of GHG projects and/or programs, the verification of GHG emission reductions and/or removals and the issuance of carbon credits. Examples are: CDM, Gold Standard, VCS.

GHG Project – A climate change or greenhouse gas mitigation project.

Infrastructure Project – A project intended to provide or support communications, mobility, water, energy, or sanitation functions for a specified community.

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Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Plan – An element of the Project Design Document describing the Project Implementer’s plan for project data and information collection that will result in sufficient information to verify the project’s outcomes.

Monitoring and Results Report – The Monitoring and Results Report is compiled for each W+ application and is provided to project verifiers and the W+ Coordinator when a Project Implementer is seeking verification and certification.

New Projects – Any qualified project which is being initiated at the same time that the W+Standard is being initiated.

Non-double Counting Analysis –The comparison of a project to parallel projects in a community, taking credit for only what the original project has done. This is to avoid doublecounting, to take credit for results of other similar projects.

Outcome Indicators – Categories of activity outcomes which are used to measure the effectiveness of activities for women’s empowerment results.

Output Indicators – Indicators that result in short term numeric data.

PDD Lifetime: Validity– The PDD validity is the duration of time selected by the Project Implementer during which the women’s empowerment activities will be implemented and measurable benefits to women and the community will be created.

It must be a minimum of 3 years, which can be extended twice to cover the project duration. The starting date (which is the date on which the women’s empowerment activity started) and length of the PDD validity period must be determined before registration, and this information must be included in the PIN.

The PDD validity starts as soon as the project is registered or when the first women’s empowerment activity is implemented (whichever is later). The PDD must specify the duration of the period the PI is selecting. However, in some cases, retroactive validity may be allowed for up to two years prior to the registration date, provided the PI can meet all the W+ requirements.

Project Design Document (PDD) – The PDD describes in detail the planning of the application of the W+ Standard to another type of project, and how the Project Implementer plans to meet the requirements of the W+ Standard.

Pilot Phase – Test or demonstration projects, to test methods and find proof of concept.

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Project Implementer – Any business, organization or community, or its contracted designee, implementing and administering the W+ Standard. Also called “project developer”.

Project Idea Note (PIN) – A Project Implementer must submit an initial Project Idea Note which contains information about the intended W+ Standard application to a project.

Public Health Project – A project which is intended to provide health benefits for identified communities. These health benefits may include such things as: improved access to health care, improved air quality, water quality or waste management.

Qualified Project – Any project which the Project Implementer, in consultation with WOCAN, has determined will be a suitable project for the implementation of the W+ Standard.

Qualitative data – Describes data that is descriptive and not based on numbers.

Quantitative data – Defines data in numerical fashion, data that can be statistically analyzed.

Registry – A registry is a publicly available list of projects, verified project outcomes and W+ credits and W+ labeled GHG credits.

SEAH – Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment

Supply Chain – Systems of organizations, people, activities, information, and resources involved in moving a product or service from supplier to consumer.

Technical Experts Group (TEG) - The TEG is an independent ad hoc technical body of gender and monitoring and evaluation experts with experience in various sectors to which the W+ will be applied. The role of the TEG is to review and approve methods, review Project Design Documents (PDDs), and support the continuous improvement of the W+ Standard to respond to stakeholder needs.

The Gold Standard - The Gold Standard is an independent mechanism for creating high-quality emission reductions projects in the Voluntary Carbon Market. It was designed to ensure that carbon credits are not only real and verifiable but that they make measurable contributions to sustainable development worldwide. Its objective is to add branding, a label to existing and new Carbon Credits generated by projects which can then be bought and traded by countries that have a binding legal commitment according to the Kyoto Protocol.

Underlying Project – A new or existing qualified project where the W+ Standard and selected

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domain methods are to be applied.

Validation – The process of confirming an analytical test method, to show that it is suitable for the purpose it is used. All applied W+ domain methods must be validated by an independent external auditor. This is often done at the time of the auditor’s verification visit to the project.

Verifier - Synonymous with “Assurance Provider”. A verifier creates and issues findings and issues a verification decision based on its findings, which is documented in a verification report and/or statement (referred to earlier as a Certification Statement).

Verification – An independent assurance procedure that is used to check that a product, service, or system meets requirements and specifications and that it fulfills its intended purpose. The words “assurance”, "validation" and "verification" are sometimes preceded with "Independent" (or IV&V), indicating that the verification and validation is to be performed by a third-party with no conflicts of interest in the project, product or service.

Verified Carbon Standard Program (VCS) – The Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) Program is a GHG crediting program operated by the non-profit organization VCS which establishes rules and requirements that operationalize the VCS Standard to enable the validation of GHG projects and programs, and the verification and issuance of GHG emission reductions and removals.

VCU – Verified Carbon Unit. A carbon credit created via the application of the VCS.

W+ Labeled VCU - A carbon credit created via the application of the Verified Carbon Standard which has also applied one or more domains of the W+ Standard and has used the combined templates for the PDD and Monitoring and Results Reports. These credits are available on the VCS registry.

W+ Standard Guidance Document - describes such things as the principles, procedures, registration, execution, and practical application of the W+.

W+™ – A certification label that endorses projects that create increased social and economic benefits for women participating in projects or in project areas. Show website

W+ Domains – Time, Education & Knowledge, Income & Assets, Leadership, Food Security, and Health.

W+ Registry – The registry where projects and the W+ Credits they have generated are listed is the S and P Global Registry.

W+ Standard Coordinator – The staff person(s) responsible for the administration of the W+

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Standard, including the administrative issuance of W+ Credits and W+ labeled Credits.

W+ Standard– Specifies the requirements of how Project Implementers are to apply the W+ Standard.

W+ Credits– Monetized Credits of women’s empowerment improvements generated from W+ projects specific to the W+ Standard domain measures, such as W+ Time, W+ Health, etc.

WOCAN – Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (www.wocan.org). The owner of the W+ Standard. A non-profit organization registered in the USA as a 501 (c) 3.

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Revision History		
#	Date	Description
1	2015	Original
2	August 2017	Revisions and additions made to text based on input from two public comment periods, where comments were made on the W+ Standard and other program documents. Changes made include: removing language related to 'pilot phase', clarifications in terminology, consistent use of terms, reconciliations in terms used in all program documents, additional clarification regarding role of verifiers and verifier accreditation. Document set into document control format.
3	November 2023	Revisions to sections 5, 6 and 7 to reflect the W+ Standard Guidance Document 2.0 Revisions to Safeguards section. Additional requirements for No net harm have been included. Revisions to enable the use of the W+ Standard beyond carbon markets, included references to other social impact credits Fees have been updated

ⁱ Authorized Assurance Provider /Verifier accreditors are listed on the W+ website. At this time, the Social Auditors Network (SAN) is the sole authorized Assurance Provider (Verifier) accreditor.