

# Plan Vivo Procedures Manual:

for the registration and oversight of Plan Vivo projects  
and issuance of Plan Vivo Certificates

*Version May 2017*



Plan Vivo

Improving livelihoods, restoring ecosystems

**People and livelihoods**

Ethical climate services

**Ecosystems**

Watersheds

**PES**

Native species

**Biodiversity**

Adaptation

Poverty Reduction

Community Rights

**Participation**

Transparency

Habitats

## Acknowledgements

Development of the Plan Vivo Standard is driven by the needs and priorities of its stakeholders. We acknowledge the input of all Plan Vivo projects, coordinators, developers and supporters in driving the development of the Standard.

## Version control

This version of the procedures manual came into effect in June 2015 and updated in May 2017 and will ensure consistency with all aspects of the latest version of the Plan Vivo Standard (December 2013). The procedures laid out here supersede all previous versions including any versions of procedures described in the earlier 2008 version of the Plan Vivo Standard.

## Accessing more information

If you are interested in developing a Plan Vivo project, it is advisable to contact the Plan Vivo Foundation to discuss whether the Plan Vivo Standard is appropriate for the project. The Plan Vivo Standard and supporting materials can be found on the Plan Vivo website ([www.planvivo.org](http://www.planvivo.org)) or by contacting the Plan Vivo Foundation.

## Contact the Plan Vivo Foundation

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## Using this manual

This manual describes the rules and procedures for registering and overseeing Plan Vivo projects and issuing Plan Vivo Certificates in respect of ecosystem service benefits (typically based on climate services) generated. It should be used together with the December 2013 version of the Plan Vivo Standard. Information on the governance of the Plan Vivo Standard, the background and the guiding principles is contained in the Plan Vivo Standard itself.

## Stages of project registration and review

Figure 1 summarises the stages of project registration and oversight during a Plan Vivo project's lifetime. Plan Vivo projects commit to a continuous cycle of review and improvement - recognising that projects evolve and change over time.

The first stage of project registration is the submission of a **Project Idea Note (PIN)** to ensure that the Plan Vivo Standard is applicable in principle. After acceptance of the PIN by the Plan Vivo Foundation, a **Project Design Document (PDD)** including Technical Specifications for each project intervention is prepared during the project **design stage**. During the **validation stage** these are independently reviewed (desk based review and field review). If the project is found to meet the Plan Vivo Standard it results in **project registration**.

Once registered, Plan Vivo projects can generate **Plan Vivo Certificates** in respect of ecosystem service benefits (typically climate services) generated. Certificate issuance follows the approval of **project annual reports**, which track progress. In addition, projects are required to undertake verification by an approved auditor at least once every 5 years after validation.

**Figure 1: Summary of the Plan Vivo Process**

## Note on *ex-post* & *ex-ante* crediting

Plan Vivo Certificates can be issued either *ex-post* or *ex-ante*. *Ex-post* credits are issued after activities to sequester Green House Gases (GHGs) or the reduction / avoidance of emissions of GHGs have occurred. In contrast, *ex-ante* credits are issued once participants have entered an agreement to implement a plan vivo and have met their first performance target(s), but before the climate services have actually been delivered. Most projects use one or the other method, but some use a combination of both, using *ex-post* for one activity and *ex-ante* for another. The choice as to which will be used by a project will depend on the availability and terms of other funding streams and the type of intervention: the Plan Vivo Foundation can provide advice. *Ex-ante* credit provision is the only way to successfully fund some projects, but the increased uncertainty will lead to more conservative estimates of emission reductions, and thus a lower number of credits being generated, compared to *ex-post*. The choice of crediting type will affect the project period. See below.

## **Project Periods**

This section aims to summarise the different periods that need to be considered when developing a project under the Plan Vivo Standard. Often activities will begin in a project site before a PIN and PDD can be written and approved, but payments for ecosystem services cannot normally be claimed until the PDD has been validated. Ideally all periods would have the same start date, but that is often not possible. The three periods are defined separately as:

### **The project period**

The time period over which project interventions take place. This can include initial activities, e.g. for developing pilot studies, registering a community forest or for seeking various approvals from relevant authorities. The start of the project may therefore be earlier than the date on which approval was received or when a certificate was issued. Since the project start date is the actual date when project activities began, it may occur before the project has been validated by Plan Vivo. The end of the project period may not need to be defined precisely because it is assumed that activities may continue indefinitely (even if external project support ceases).

### **The quantification/crediting period**

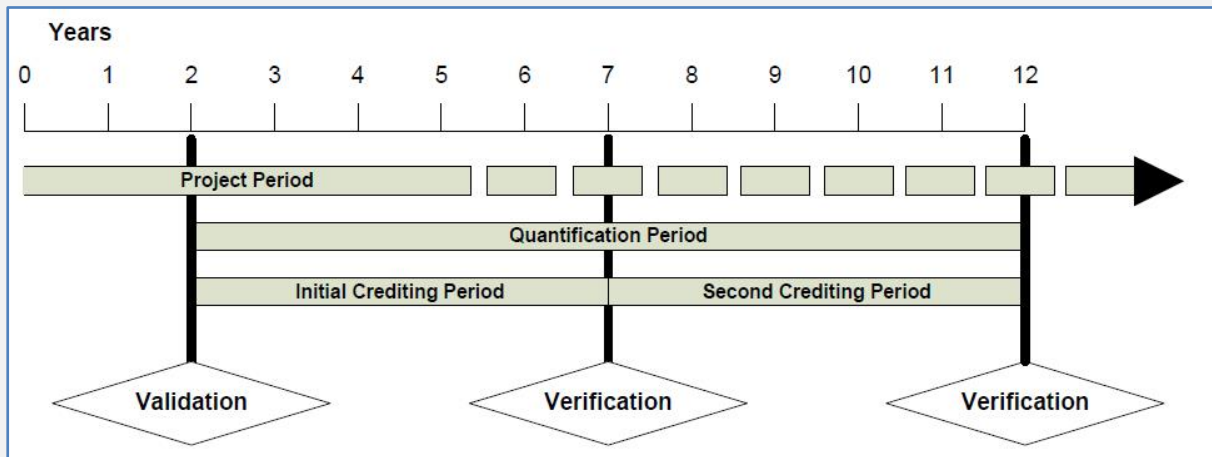
The period over which ecosystem service benefits from a project intervention are quantified (*ex-ante* or *ex-post*). Plan Vivo Certificates are only calculated over the quantification/crediting period, and can only be issued during the crediting period (if different). Normally quantification and crediting periods are the same, and the terms can be used interchangeably. However, with avoided deforestation-type projects, the crediting periods may be shorter renewable periods, e.g. two 5-year crediting periods, within an overall 10-year quantification period.

### **The payment period**

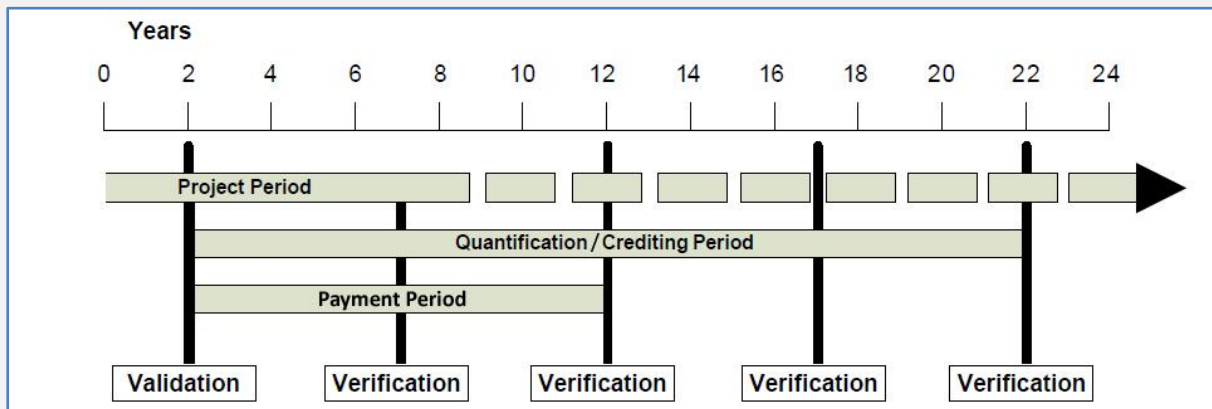
The period over which payments for ecosystem services (PES payments) are made to project participants. With *ex-post* projects this will be in line with the quantification/crediting period. With *ex-ante* projects, these two periods may differ. E.g. in smallholder agroforestry projects, payments typically take place over 8-10 years in line with key monitoring targets.

Selection and definition of all these critical periods and their starting dates must be fully justified with an explanation of how they were decided upon and by reference to the activities that were taking place at different times.

**Figure 2: example ex-post project (e.g. avoided deforestation with 5-year crediting periods)**



**Figure 3: example ex-ante project (e.g. intercropping or boundary planting with 20-year crediting period)**



Ideally the project start date will be the same as for the start of the quantification period and crediting period. However, in some situations an argument can be made for an earlier project start date, in which case a formal request should be made to the Plan Vivo Foundation, as well as documenting this in both the PIN and PDD submissions.

Backdating the start of the quantification period may be possible under exceptional circumstances with prior approval from the Plan Vivo Foundation, and separate agreement from the validator after visiting the site and examining the evidence on the ground. This might occur for example where clear impacts in terms of reduced deforestation can be identified as having been achieved after the intention to apply for credits for climate services was agreed by the project proponents, and evidence to back this up is provided. Under no circumstances can the quantification period be backdated more than 3 years before project validation.



## 1. Project Idea Note

The first stage towards registering a Plan Vivo project is to submit a Plan Vivo Project Idea Note (PIN or concept note) to the Plan Vivo Foundation. The PIN must define the main elements and objectives of the proposed project, the organisations involved and the communities being targeted, as well as an indication of the likely activities.

The purpose of the PIN is to determine whether the proposed project adheres to the Plan Vivo principles and meets the eligibility criteria of the Plan Vivo Standard - particularly requirements 1 & 2 of the Plan Vivo Standard. The PIN is not a detailed document but it should contain sufficient information to enable the Plan Vivo Foundation to assess whether it is worthwhile continuing to the more detailed design process in the next stage.

The PIN will only be approved if the proposed project has demonstrable potential to generate quantifiable ecosystem service benefits (typically based on climate services), livelihoods and other ecosystem benefits, and where it plans to work with smallholders and/or community groups that have assured land tenure or user rights.

On submission of the PIN to the Plan Vivo Foundation, projects are expected to pay the non-refundable review fee. For current rates see [www.planvivo.org/develop-a-project/costs](http://www.planvivo.org/develop-a-project/costs).

Feedback will be provided by the Plan Vivo Foundation within 1 month of receipt of the PIN. This will consist of: (i) advice on whether the proposed project appears to meet the applicability criteria for the Plan Vivo Standard, (ii) any changes that may be required in the PIN for resubmission including any additional information that may be required at this stage, (iii) whether the project is eligible to proceed to the next stage of project design and (iv) advice on next steps and development of the PDD and work plan/timescales. If changes are required, the PIN should be resubmitted to Plan Vivo for approval. Revised versions or reiterations of the PIN submitted within 6 months of formal feedback being provided will not trigger additional review fees.

Approved PINs are uploaded to: [www.planvivo.org/project-network/project-pipeline/](http://www.planvivo.org/project-network/project-pipeline/)

### Supporting documentation:

Plan Vivo PIN Template available at:

[www.planvivo.org/project-network/project-resources/](http://www.planvivo.org/project-network/project-resources/)

## 2. Developing a Project Design Document

The Project Design Document (PDD) describes in detail the project and its objectives. It defines the project area and location, its timescale, the implementing communities and other organisations involved and their roles, the expected ecosystem service benefits (typically climate services, quantified in the technical specification section of the PDD), the additional biodiversity and livelihoods benefits, the project monitoring procedures and the procedures for the administrative, financial, technical and social aspects of project implementation and reporting.

The purpose of the PDD is to enable Plan Vivo to evaluate the soundness of project design, ensure transparency of procedures and to avoid over-reliance on key staff members through maintaining an up-to-date set of procedures and reference to supporting documents. Once approved, the PDD becomes the basis for reporting and reviewing the project annually resulting in issuance of Plan Vivo Certificates.

For ease of review, to ensure that all elements of the Plan Vivo Standard are covered, and to ease comparisons between projects, a template has been developed for the PDD that we expect all projects to follow.

*Table 1: Outline of PDD*

<b>Part</b>	<b>Indicative size</b>
Executive summary	2 pages
Part A: Aims & Objectives	1 page
Part B: Site Information	2 pages
Part C: Community & Livelihoods Information	2 pages
Part D: Project Interventions & Activities	1 page
Part E: Community Participation	2 pages
Part F: Ecosystem Services & Other Project Benefits	4 pages
Part G: Technical Specifications	10 pages
Part H: Risk Management	1 page
Part I: Project Coordination and Management	5 pages
Part J: Benefit Sharing	1 page
Part K: Monitoring	3 pages
Annexes	As required

The PDD is reviewed by the Plan Vivo Foundation. Additionally, the Technical Specification(s) (Section G) undergo rigorous peer review from two independent experts, overseen by a member of the Technical Advisory Committee, though this review requirement may be simplified if an Approved Approach is followed (see below).

#### Supporting documentation:

Plan Vivo Project Design Document (PDD) Template available at:

[www.planvivo.org/project-network/project-resources/](http://www.planvivo.org/project-network/project-resources/)

### Technical specifications

Technical specifications form a critical part of the PDD (Part G). They cover each project intervention that will generate quantifiable ecosystem service benefits (typically based on climate services). A project may have several technical specifications covering each proposed intervention, e.g. mixed species woodlots, an improved agricultural system, and an intervention to control local deforestation. **As the project expands further, technical specifications can be added for new or expanded project interventions.** Additional technical specifications added to an existing PDD will be subject to a further peer review process and may require a further validation visit (see end of Section 3 for further details).

Technical specifications describe:

- The **methodology** used to quantify the ecosystem service benefits (typically based on climate services).
- The **management** and **monitoring activities** required e.g. patrolling requirements, fire management plans, irrigation, pest control, planting density checks.
- Analyses of **additionality, leakage** and **other risks** to successful delivery of quantified ecosystem service benefits (climate services) and identification of risk management and mitigation measures and the risk buffer level.
- An assessment of wider ecosystem impacts.

For a list of previously approved Technical Specifications, please consult the technical sections of individual project pages on the Plan Vivo website. Alternatively contact the Plan Vivo Foundation.

## **Approved approaches for preparing technical specifications**

The Technical Specification (Part G) of the PDD can be prepared by using an approved approach, and are encouraged to do so should an applicable approach exist. An approved approach is a protocol, methodology or tool, approved by Plan Vivo, which is used to estimate the reference emissions levels and the project's emissions, and to calculate the expected emissions reductions taking into account leakage and risks.

Plan Vivo is in the process of developing additional guidance documents and approved approaches covering different project interventions that give details of the steps and approaches to be taken in order to complete the technical specification. Please consult the Plan Vivo website: [www.planvivo.org/](http://www.planvivo.org/).

Following this guidance will ensure that the requirements of the Plan Vivo Standard are met for that type of intervention. In addition, examples of approaches used by other project developers, and already approved by Plan Vivo, are provided on the Plan Vivo website and can be used by other projects for information and guidance.

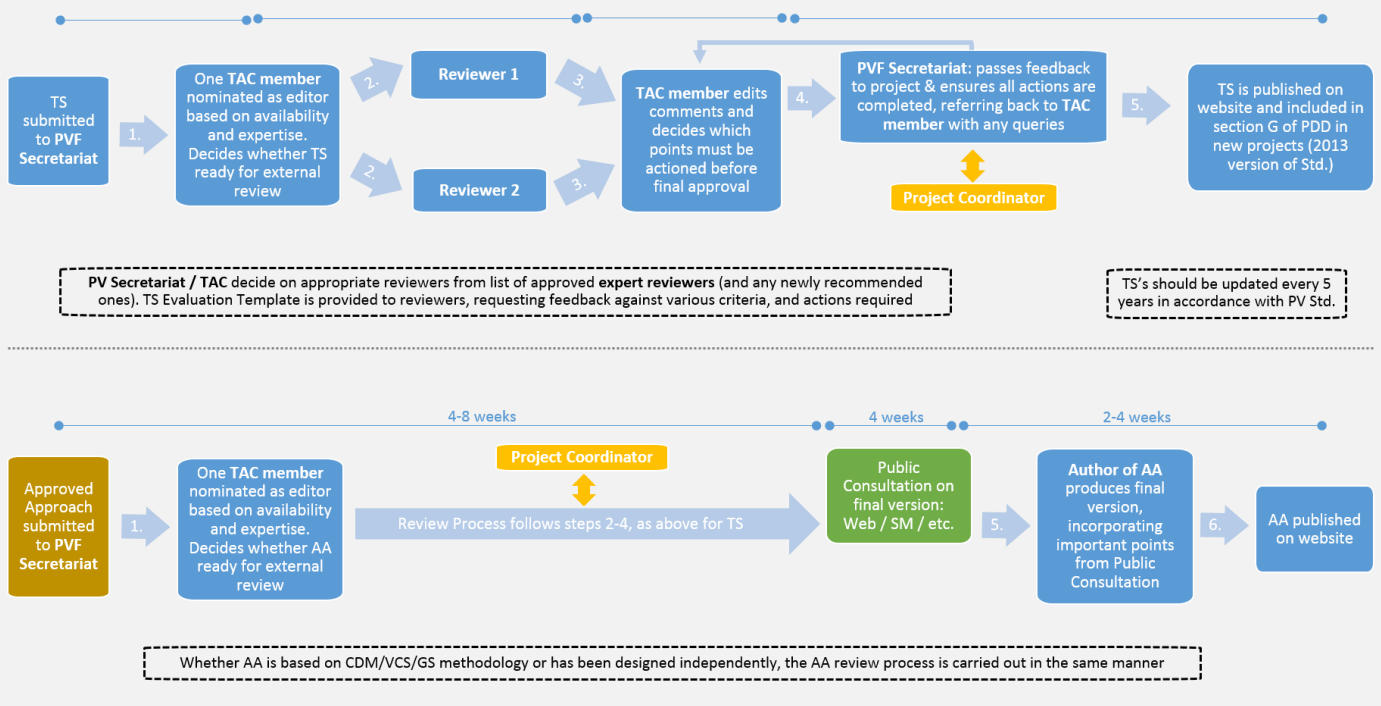
Alternatively, projects may wish to develop their own approach to fulfilling the requirements of the Technical Specification of the PDD – for example where a Plan Vivo approved approach is not yet available or for situations where an existing approved approach is not applicable e.g. for new types of project intervention or a new ecosystem type. Projects are encouraged to do this and innovative approaches are welcomed – but in this case the approach taken by the project will in all likelihood take longer to review than would be the case if an existing approved approach was followed, as the approach itself will need to be reviewed. Project developers may also use approaches that have already been developed and approved by other standards e.g. VCS: again this may save time in the review process, but the Technical Specification will still be tested only against the Plan Vivo standard. Therefore adherence to a methodology developed for another standard will not necessarily meet Plan Vivo requirements (in the case of a VCS methodology for example, a Plan Vivo project will require additional community and biodiversity activities and monitoring).

Whatever approach is used to develop Technical Specification of the PDD – it must be fully described and justified in the PDD and will be subject to review and approval by the Plan Vivo Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).

## Technical specification review

Technical specifications are reviewed as part of the overall PDD review process. Plan Vivo will seek the support of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) to ensure that expert peer reviewers are identified to provide additional opinion and critique on the methodologies used, on the suitability of the project interventions and on the supporting project management activities. PDDs and technical specifications are also made available on the Plan Vivo website.

*Figure 4: Technical Specification Review Process*



Technical approaches are reviewed using the following guiding principles:

- **Accessibility and flexibility:** Plan Vivo should be accessible to developing country organisations, and flexible enough to apply in a range of ecological and socioeconomic contexts
- **Balancing precision and conservativeness:** Technical requirements should enable the accurate quantification of ecosystem service benefits (typically climate services) generated. However, where technical precision is likely to lead to significant barriers for projects and inhibit cost-effective development

of activities, conservative estimates, and conservative default values, will be accepted

- **Transparency:** Technical information should be publicly available and open to scrutiny
- **Cost-effectiveness and technical transfer:** Cost-effectiveness, and the scope for community participation in technical roles (e.g. monitoring) should be considered in recommending technical requirements. Over-reliance on consultancy should be avoided where possible, in particular for long-term technical roles. Projects should consider community-based and activity-based monitoring where possible.
- **Scalability and replication:** Technical requirements should be developed with a view to scalability and replication across landscapes
- **Balancing carbon, livelihood and ecosystem objectives:** Technical requirements should be informed by the need for projects to benefit livelihoods and ecosystems as well as generate climate services

### **PDD review procedure**

The process to be followed by project developers and Plan Vivo for each PDD received is:

- i. Project coordinator (developer) submits draft PDD to Plan Vivo (including the Technical Specification – Part G)
- ii. Project developer pays review fee to Plan Vivo
- iii. Draft PDD sections F, G, H, K, which are all relevant to the *Technical Specification(s)*, are externally peer reviewed by at least 2 members of the Plan Vivo Technical Advisory Group, comprised of entirely independent reviewers. External reviewers are commissioned and coordinated by Plan Vivo, and the peer review process coordinated by a member of the TAC, who is responsible for arriving at a consensus decision in the case of any areas of disagreement.
- iv. All other sections of the Draft PDD are reviewed internally by Plan Vivo Secretariat with support/advice from TAC where necessary.
- v. Draft PDD placed on Plan Vivo website for public comment
- vi. Compiled feedback/comments sent to project developer by Plan Vivo with request for revisions
- vii. Revised PDD resubmitted to Plan Vivo.
- viii. Upon final approval, Plan Vivo will publish it on the Plan Vivo website.

**Table 2: Technical specification review process and actors**

Process	Development	Submission	Review	Approval
Actor				
Communities	<b>X</b> <i>Assisted by project coordinator</i>			
Project coordinator	<b>X</b> <i>In consultation with communities</i>	<b>X</b> <i>By project coordinator to Plan Vivo</i>		
Plan Vivo and TAC			<b>X</b> <i>Review coordinated by Plan Vivo with support from TAC members</i>	<b>X</b> <i>Final decision communicated to project coordinator</i>
External experts			<b>X</b> <i>For specific aspects of the technical specification. Feedback to Plan Vivo</i>	
Public			<b>X</b> <i>Comments invited</i>	

### **PDD Amendments**

For projects that scale-up over time via various project interventions, the PDD provides a structure for presenting technical information that reflects the multi-site and multi-activity nature of Plan Vivo projects and a structure for updating information as the Plan Vivo project develops. The PDD is a living document and it can be updated (subject to Plan Vivo approval) over the period of project implementation to reflect the realities and experiences on the ground.

The PDD should be periodically reviewed (at the very least every 5 years) by the project and amended as the project progresses to reflect any changes. All changes must be documented in the subsequent annual report submission. Projects are advised to track changes and archive out-of-date versions. All revised versions should be submitted to the Plan Vivo Foundation for approval.

**Supporting documentation:**

Plan Vivo Guidance Documents and Approved Approaches used by other Plan Vivo projects are available at: [www.planvivo.org](http://www.planvivo.org)

### 3. Project Validation

The purpose of project validation is to ensure a thorough, independent assessment of project design against the Plan Vivo Standard. This includes confirmation that the project area is physically as described in the PDD and other project documentation, that project partners have sufficient capacity and understanding to achieve the stated project objectives by implementing the planned activities, and that the intended project impacts are likely to be delivered. The validation also makes observations and recommendations based on field visits to the project area and identifies any corrective actions necessary before the project can be approved under the Plan Vivo Standard.

Projects should apply to begin the validation process when:

- The PDD is complete, including technical specifications for each project intervention to be implemented in the project from the outset <sup>1</sup>
- The community group, or initial group of individual participants, have submitted *plan vivos* which have been evaluated by the project coordinator
- All necessary legal permissions, agreements with local governments, land tenure documents, etc., are complete, with originals available for inspection by the Validator.
- A standard PES agreement template has been developed for transacting climate services from participants and participants have either signed PES agreements or have been made aware of and agreed to the key benefit-sharing and monitoring terms

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<sup>1</sup> 'From the outset' is written here because a project may become registered and begin with one or more project interventions, but later add project interventions by submitting new technical specifications for review.



## Validation procedure

- i. Identification by the project of a potential validator, selected either: (a) from the Plan Vivo list of approved validators (see [www.planvivo.org](http://www.planvivo.org)) or (b) if suitable local candidates are not available, then alternatively from a newly identified individual. If the project coordinator organisation prefers to use the services of a dedicated Validation and Verification Body (VVB) for project validation, a list of pre-approved VVBs is available on the Plan Vivo website (see [www.planvivo.org](http://www.planvivo.org)). The specific individual(s) selected for the validation must nevertheless fulfil the validation selection criteria (see next page), and be approved by Plan Vivo:
  - If (a), contact is established between the project and an approved validator from the Plan Vivo list to ascertain their availability and/or interest and the result forwarded to Plan Vivo if the validator is available.
  - If (b), submission by the project of potential CV(s) in English and a covering letter to Plan Vivo for each individual proposed (note that projects may submit several CVs to Plan Vivo for consideration at the same time)
- ii. Submission of CV(s) and covering letter(s) for potential validators by Plan Vivo to the Chair of TAC for decision on approval or non-approval (see criteria for validator selection). This should take no longer than 2 weeks in normal cases
- iii. Further communication (if required) between Plan Vivo/TAC and proposed validator e.g. by phone, Skype or email and normally including a Skype interview
- iv. If proposed validator is approved by the TAC, formal notification by Plan Vivo to project of 'no objection' decision. It may be that the TAC approves the Validator, but can see a lack of experience in one area of the Project; alternatively it may be that a project has particularly novel or complex technical elements that require specific validation on the ground. If this is the case, the 'no objection' decision may also state that the validator must, prior to the validation, have a telephone conversation or internet call with a member of the TAC to address these issues (normally either the Chair of the member of the TAC that led the review process of the Technical Specification).
- v. If non-approval, notification to project of this decision with explanation. If non-approval, return to step (i) to select another validator

- vi. Preparation of validator ToR and draft contract between project and validator (based on outline terms of reference available from Plan Vivo).
- vii. Final contractual arrangements confirmed between project and validator including agreement on timing of validation visit and a copy of final ToR forwarded to Plan Vivo for information. Note that the validator is always contracted by the project under terms of reference that are approved by Plan Vivo. However, the validator must be approved by Plan Vivo before contractual arrangements are finalised.
- viii. Timeline of validation visit communicated to Plan Vivo (by project)
- ix. Approved validator visits the project and carries out the validation as per ToR including assessing the accuracy of project documents, capacity of the organisations involved and determines that project participants are engaged on a voluntary and informed basis
- x. Submission of draft validation report to Plan Vivo by validator (in format provided in ToR) and copied to project
- xi. Where corrective actions are identified in the draft validation report – preparation of an agreed timeline (approved by Plan Vivo) to address these
- xii. After the period agreed for necessary corrective actions or responses, a final validation report is provided to the project and the Plan Vivo Foundation by the validator, advising whether the project has met the requirements of the standard
- xiii. Plan Vivo closes any corrective actions and inserts any resolutions into the validation report. Agreements on any unmet actions may be made on a case-by-case basis

### **Validator selection criteria**

Selection of independent validators will be based on the following criteria.

- Experience and knowledge of the Plan Vivo standard and Plan Vivo projects
- Familiarity with the project area, region or country
- Fluency in the language(s) used by the project participants
- Technical expertise of participatory/community-based processes, local institutions, the intervention(s) proposed, and the approaches employed to enable a full assessment of the ecosystem service benefits (typically climate services) generated.
- Ability to prepare the validation report in English (or other language approved by the Plan Vivo Foundation in advance)

- Independence from the project development process i.e. having no previous involvement with the project or without any potential conflict of interest with the validation process.

**Supporting documentation:**

Terms of Reference for Plan Vivo validator – this lays out the tasks, approach and provides a template for the validation report.

Available upon request from Plan Vivo Foundation

**What happens if significant changes are made to the project post validation?**

If material changes are made to a project's design post validation – in particular the PDD and specific technical specification(s) – the Plan Vivo Foundation reserves the right to insist that any new issuances can only be made subsequent to a further external validation of the new/modified areas and interventions. The Plan Vivo TAC shall be responsible for any final decisions relating to the need for further validations. Where possible, the Foundation will endeavour to balance the needs of the project, in particular where this will have a large financial impact on project finances, however this assessment will be made on a case-by-case basis. Please discuss all such matters with the Plan Vivo Foundation well in advance of making any material changes.

## 4. Registration

When the project is found to conform to the Plan Vivo Standard, it is entered into the Plan Vivo Projects Register on the Plan Vivo website and receives a Project Registration Certificate. The Plan Vivo Foundation and the project coordinator then sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). In this the project coordinator commits to following the Plan Vivo Standard and to providing accurate information in good faith via annual reports, and the Plan Vivo Foundation agrees to review the project and issue Plan Vivo Certificates according to its procedures.

The Project coordinator must then register with the Markit Environmental registry. Project coordinators are required to set up an account with the registry in advance of registration documents being submitted. This will normally be free of charge, however will depend on the number of projects being run by Project Coordinator organisation, and under which Standard they are certified. See [www.markit.com/Product/Registry](http://www.markit.com/Product/Registry)

The timing of project registration can be independent of the start date (though must not be before the project has completed validation). Projects may submit for Plan Vivo registration after they have begun operation (subject to the eligibility restrictions in the retroactive crediting section below).

### **Retroactive registration and crediting**

Projects typically use the Plan Vivo Standard from the outset. However, it is possible for a project to register as a Plan Vivo project at a later date i.e. where communities have already begun their activities. In this case, no retroactive issuance of Plan Vivo Certificates is possible for project interventions that have already been implemented, unless:

- Project documentation clearly shows that project interventions were implemented with a view to generating Plan Vivo Certificates or other certified climate or ecosystem services
- Project interventions were implemented no more than 3 years prior to the Plan Vivo Foundation being notified of a project's intentions, and no more than 5 years prior to the date of validation

Projects that do not meet these criteria may still use the Plan Vivo Standard and generate Plan Vivo Certificates in respect of new project interventions or those that do fall under the above criteria.

If the project coordinator considers that smallholders or communities already carrying out sustainable land-use activities ('early actors') are unfairly excluded from project benefits because of this exclusion, it may be possible to organise benefit-sharing within the project to mitigate the situation. This may be approved by Plan Vivo on a case-by-case basis as part of the normal project validation process.

## 5. Annual reporting & issuance of Plan Vivo certificates

### Annual reports

Projects submit annual reports to the Plan Vivo Foundation, demonstrating that the project is continuing to operate effectively and transparently and continues to comply with the Plan Vivo Standard. Project reporting periods should be agreed between the project coordinator and Plan Vivo and are included in the MoU. The annual reporting cycle normally starts at registration but can be adapted to fit in with operational cycles, such as planting seasons. A reporting date for submission of the annual report is selected by the project coordinator and agreed with Plan Vivo at the time of registration.

Annual reports include information on:

- New *plan vivos* and PES Agreements signed with participants, including a breakdown of activities, location and areas under management
- Ongoing activities
- Monitoring results
- A breakdown of project operational costs including payments made to participants (benefit-sharing information)
- A summary of community participation and capacity-building measures
- Updates to the project design or operation
- Other project developments, achievements or challenges

A template for annual reports is available. This gives details of the type of information that is required in each part. This is summarised in Table 3 below. Additional information may be requested by the Plan Vivo Foundation before an Annual Report can be approved. This includes, but is not limited to: an updated copy of the main project database; payments and monitoring data (in its original format, e.g. Microsoft Excel), copies of any relevant tools employed; as well as audited financial accounts and those of associated bank accounts.

**Table 3: Annual Report Outline**

<b>Annual Report Structure</b>
Summary Table
Part A: Project Updates
Part B: Project Activities
Part C: Plan Vivo Certificate Issuance Submission
Part D: Sales of Plan Vivo Certificates
Part E: Monitoring Results
Part F: Impacts
Part G: Payments for Ecosystem Services
Part H: Ongoing Participation
Part I: Project Operating Costs
Annexes

### **Annual reporting procedure**

- i. Annual reporting period ends
- ii. Annual report is submitted to Plan Vivo by the project coordinator not more than 2 months after the end of the agreed reporting period
- iii. Plan Vivo provides feedback on the report to the project coordinator, normally within 3 weeks of submission
- iv. Annual report is finalised by the project coordinator, based on feedback received
- v. Plan Vivo issues the requested number of Plan Vivo Certificates onto the Markit registry (normally within 7-10 days of receipt of approval of finalised Annual Report)
- vi. Annual report is uploaded on to the Plan Vivo website

#### **Supporting documentation:**

Annual Report Template

Please contact the Plan Vivo Foundation for the most up-to-date version

### **Plan Vivo Certificates**

Climate services generated by project interventions are certified in the form of Plan Vivo Certificates. A Plan Vivo Certificate represents the reduction or avoidance of one

tonne of carbon dioxide emissions equivalent, plus associated livelihoods and ecosystem benefits.

Plan Vivo Certificates may be issued on either an *ex-ante* or *ex-post basis* for each project intervention, according to the crediting system selected by the project at the time of validation.

***Ex-ante Plan Vivo Certificates*** – represent emissions that will be reduced or avoided by future activities at the point of issuance. *Ex-ante* Plan Vivo Certificates can be issued where climate services relate to an approved and implemented *plan vivo*, where the participant has entered a PES Agreement with the project coordinator and has been monitored and found to successfully meet their first performance target.

***Ex-post Plan Vivo Certificates*** – represent emissions already reduced or avoided by activities at the point of issuance. *Ex-post* Plan Vivo Certificates can be issued where the final performance target has been reached indicating delivery of the total expected climate services from the *plan vivo*.

Different crediting systems may be selected for different project interventions e.g. *ex-ante* certification may be more suitable for assisted natural regeneration or reforestation and *ex-post* certification for avoided deforestation projects. *Ex-post* certification is possible for all intervention types. *Ex-ante* may not be appropriate in all circumstances, but with suitable (short) crediting periods, conservative Technical Specifications, and rigorous monitoring commitments, most projects that wish to use *ex-ante* crediting will be able to do so.

Where the intention is for the ecosystem service benefits generated not to be based upon climate services, i.e. carbon quantification, an alternative type of Certificate may be produced, in response to the particular requirements of the project. It should be noted that it may not be possible to list such Certificates on the Markit Environmental Registry. Please contact the Plan Vivo Foundation during the initial stages of project design to discuss this more fully.

### **Number of certificates that can be issued**

Where a registered project has met the requirements for Certificate Issuance and also secured the PES funding necessary for the activities (normally via a purchaser of Plan Vivo Certificates), there is no explicit limit on the volume of Plan Vivo Certificates that can be issued.

Plan Vivo may limit the quantity of Plan Vivo Certificates that can be issued where PES finance has not yet been secured either through a buyer or other source. This is to avoid the possibility of projects expanding too quickly and entering into large numbers of PES agreements with communities without having secured a funding source for those PES commitments. It is a measure to reduce financial risk in projects.

Up to 20,000 Plan Vivo Certificates can be issued to projects at any one time without any additional specific information on funding being provided, for example information about purchasers. If a project submits a request for issuance of more than 20,000 Plan Vivo Certificates the project coordinator must demonstrate that they have the resources and marketing capacity for that scale of issuance, meaning the issuance does not pose a risk to the project. Where the project has already identified PES funding either via purchasers or other sources, there is no limit to the quantity of Plan Vivo Certificates that may be issued.

### **Issuance of certificates between annual reports**

Projects may occasionally request an issuance of Plan Vivo Certificates between annual reporting cycles. Normally would typically occur when a buyer exists, the project has completed all of the necessary steps to generate certificates, and as such it is in the project's best interests to make the certificates available for transfer.

An interim request form is available that contains all the core information required to issue Plan Vivo Certificates that would otherwise be included in an annual report:

- Purchase information for Plan Vivo Certificates that have been forward purchased
- Evidence of allocation of sales to participants with *plan vivos* and PES agreements
- Monitoring information showing participants have met relevant performance targets
- Benefit sharing information

#### **Supporting documentation:**

Interim Issuance Request Form - giving details of the information required by Plan Vivo to issue Plan Vivo Certificates between Annual Reports

Available upon request from Plan Vivo Foundation



## Recording and managing credits (PVCs): the Plan Vivo registry

Plan Vivo Certificates provide buyers with proof of ownership of the climate services generated. A unique serial code is included on each PVC to ensure traceability, connecting each Certificate to the project that generated it. All Plan Vivo Certificates are independently issued and tracked on [the Markit Environmental Registry](http://www.markit.com/registry).

Detailed information on the Registry's operating procedures, including step-by-step instructions for creating accounts, transacting and retiring Plan Vivo Certificates, and communicating the registry's functions can be found on the Plan Vivo website: [www.planvivo.org/plan-vivo-certificates/markit-registry](http://www.planvivo.org/plan-vivo-certificates/markit-registry)

### What information is included in Plan Vivo Certificate serial numbers?

Each Plan Vivo Certificate has a unique serial number automatically generated by the registry, using the following system. The verification period start and end dates correspond to a) the delivery date for *ex-post* projects, and b) for *ex-ante* projects the reporting year corresponding to the issuance of the certificate.<sup>2</sup>

*Table 4: System used to describe the unique serial number*

Identifier	Detail
Primary Certification name	PV (Plan Vivo)
Asset Type	PVC (Plan Vivo Certificate)
Project country code	ISO 3166 Country Codes
Project ID	Unique numeric ID, generated by the system for this project
Verification Period Start Date	ddmmyyyy for the beginning of the verification period
Verification Period End Date	ddmmyyyy for the end of the verification period
Serial block start	Numeric values assigned from where the last issuance ends
Serial block end	Numeric values stopping where the block ends
Issuing registry	MER (Markit Environmental Registry)
Additional certification info	To identify additional certifications associated with the units
<i>Ex-post vs. Ex-ante</i>	To denote if units are <i>ex-post</i> (P) or <i>ex-ante</i> (A)

<sup>2</sup> Format under review. Please ensure the latest version of this Manual is used at all times.

### Example Serial Number

The below serial number denotes a block of 30,000 Plan Vivo Certificates from a project in Rwanda, where the total climate services will be delivered over a 10-year period and activities were implemented in 2017:

**PV-PVC-RW-10000000000136-01012017-31122026-1539717-1569716-MER-0-P**

**RW:** Rwanda

**10000000000136:** Project ID

**01012017-31122026:** Period over which climate services are generated

**1539717-1569716:** Block number denoting 30,000 credits.

### Printed Plan Vivo Certificates

Copies of Plan Vivo Certificates will be distributed to Project Coordinators in pdf format upon request, free of charge. Please contact the Foundation to confirm buyers' details shortly after issuance of the respective PVCs. An example certificate is shown in figure 5 below.

*Figure 5: Example Plan Vivo Certificate*



## 6. Verification

The purpose of project verification is to periodically evaluate registered projects against the Plan Vivo Standard. This is aimed at ensuring continued compliance with the Standard and successful implementation of planned activities; delivery of projected ecosystem service benefits and impacts – especially climate services where this is the means of quantification – as well as assessing whether project partners have sufficient capacity to administer and implement the project going forward.

Plan Vivo projects must undertake third party verification within 5 years of validation and at least every 5 years thereafter. The Plan Vivo Foundation may recommend a shortened period of 3 years, for example if a project scales up significantly.

Projects can choose to be verified by an existing approved verifier, or they can request Plan Vivo to accredit a verifier where one is available whom they wish to engage and who is not on the approved Plan Vivo list. Verifiers are approved on an institutional basis, i.e. as members of, or accredited by, a recognised Verification and Validation Body.

The Plan Vivo Foundation will approve verifiers that:

- Have appropriate experience and expertise in community forestry and carbon sequestration projects;
- Have appropriate experience working in developing countries;
- Have documented experience in verifying GHG reductions and using sustainability metrics;
- Hold an appropriate accreditation by an international certification authority such as the CDM, ISO 14065, International Accreditation Forum (IAF) members, California Climate Action Registry, or similar land-use certification programmes;
- Can demonstrate there exists no conflict of interest with the project, for example through previous involvement, family/friendship/previous business partners of any of the project proponents, or connection with the institutions.

Verifiers are advised to contact the Plan Vivo Foundation prior to a verification audit to ensure they have an up to date terms of reference and verification report template.

Verifiers will be contracted by Plan Vivo project coordinators (using the appropriate terms of reference available on request from the Plan Vivo Foundation Secretariat), and projects are expected to pay for the costs of verification at the current rates. Typical fees are detailed on the plan vivo website: [www.planvivo.org/develop-a-project/costs/](http://www.planvivo.org/develop-a-project/costs/)

### Verification Procedure

- i. Identification by the project coordinator of a potential verifier from a list of approved VVBs (Validation and Verification Body). Available at: <http://www.planvivo.org/develop-a-project/validation-and-verification/>
- ii. Approval of the potential verification organisation by the TAC of Plan Vivo
- iii. If approved for verification, a contract agreement between Plan Vivo and the verifier on the basis of the outline verification ToR
- iv. Project verification visit by verifier (in consultation with project coordinator)
- v. Preparation of the verification report and submission by the verifier to project and Plan Vivo Foundation

The verification report may identify one or more Corrective Action Requests (CARs) or Forward Action Requests (FARs) – these will be summarised at the start of the report. Both types are actions that need to be taken by the project in order to continue to comply with the Plan Vivo Standard. They may be identified as major or minor depending on their seriousness. Based on the verification report, Plan Vivo will formally request that the project address the requests according to a timetable mutually agreed between project coordinator and Plan Vivo. Having addressed any identified Action Requests, Plan Vivo will issue a statement indicating that this has happened, that Action Requests have been closed and that the project can continue.

If major CARs are identified that substantially affect the project's ability to comply with the Plan Vivo Standard then Plan Vivo may opt to temporarily suspend the project whilst these are being addressed. During the suspension period the project will not be issued with Plan Vivo Certificates and will not be able to sell any unsold certificates that have already been issued. If a project fails to address major CARs – despite having been formally requested by Plan Vivo to do so – Plan Vivo may choose to remove the project from the Plan Vivo registry.

#### Supporting documentation:

Terms of Reference for Verification

Available upon request from Plan Vivo Foundation

## 7. Management of the Plan Vivo Buffer

Each project is required to apportion at least 10% (typically 20%) of the carbon services generated as a non-permanence risk buffer, which guarantees the integrity of Plan Vivo projects in the face of inevitable risks to permanence from factors such as a catastrophic loss event (force majeure), e.g. a severe drought or forest fire. The non-permanence risk buffer credits are held in a dedicated account held on the Markit Environmental Registry and administered by the Plan Vivo Foundation. This is in keeping with best practice at all major standards in the voluntary carbon market.

The level of risk buffer is documented in the PDD using an approved approach (please contact the Foundation for advice) and submitted for approval as part of the validation process. Plan Vivo administers the buffer account <sup>3</sup> and may in exceptional circumstances – such as a force majeure event – make cancellations from the risk buffer in the case of an unavoidable shortfall of carbon services from a project.

Cancellations will be made from the risk buffer where:

- A project ceases to operate and support communities in their PES activities, before completion of their PES agreements and monitoring commitments, or
- A project verification confirms a shortfall in the project, and the project is not able to reasonably make up the shortfall with substitute climate services

Cancellations will **not** be made from the risk buffer where project participants choose not to honour their contracts, or a shortfall is identified due to poor management practices on the part of the project coordinator. With projects involving individual participants, e.g. smallholder farmers, it is likely that a small number of contracts will become unviable in the first few years of a project's life, due to participant migration, illness or other unforeseen events. Prudent management and early detection of such events is critical, with reallocations made to cover any losses affecting the climate or other ecosystem service benefits underpinning issued Plan Vivo Certificates. The buffer account is not designed to cover such eventualities and is the responsibility of each project coordinator.

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<sup>3</sup> A dedicated account held on the Markit Environmental Registry was formalised in March 2017 for all buffer credits. This account is split into *ex-ante* and *ex-post* pools and can be consulted via the public view. The associated credits are denominated 'Plan Vivo Certificate Reserve Units' (or PVC-R).

Buffers should be regularly and formally re-assessed: at least every 5 years when a project undergoes verification, and ideally during each annual reporting cycle. **Furthermore the Plan Vivo Foundation may request a revision of the project's buffer contribution at any point.** Decisions may be made that risks have increased or decreased: if risks have increased then this should immediately be reflected in the next Annual Report.

Most projects will start with a risk buffer significantly greater than 10%. However, in time new evidence may emerge to suggest that a lower risk buffer could be justified. If this is the case, buffer credits beyond the minimum 10% buffer level are eligible to be converted and subsequently issued as Plan Vivo Certificates. To instigate such a 'payback' of credits from the Plan Vivo pooled risk buffer account, projects must:

- Submit a verification report demonstrating they are progressing towards expected climate services and successfully managing risks
- Resubmit the relevant technical specification containing an updated risk assessment, describing how risk factors can be shown to have decreased or are being successfully managed, and that these factors represent a revised risk to permanence of no less than the 10% required by the Plan Vivo Standard

Decisions on whether a lowering of the risk buffer is appropriate is entirely the decision of the Plan Vivo Foundation, supported by information from the Plan Vivo TAC, where thought necessary, independent reviews, and an independent verification report. A verification report suggesting a lower risk buffer could be appropriate is necessary but not sufficient to initiate a payback of credits from the buffer.

Exactly how a project's ongoing contribution to the risk buffer account is managed may depend on individual circumstances. In practice, where the risk is proven to have reduced, e.g. from 25% to 15%, it may be easier to halt further contributions at the time of annual issuance (from approved Annual Reports) until the net risk buffer contribution balances to this reduced level – in this example balancing to 15%.

The Plan Vivo Buffer Pool is ultimately the responsibility of the Plan Vivo Foundation. Having evidence of a robust and suitably sized buffer pool underpins the credibility of all Plan Vivo projects. The Plan Vivo Foundation reserves the right to, with justification, increase the buffer contributions above those indicated in individual PDD's, if it views that to be necessary to preserving the credibility of the buffer pool.

## 8. Using the Plan Vivo Standard with no issuance of Plan Vivo Certificates

A project may wish to use the Plan Vivo Standard to demonstrate good project design and implementation, to demonstrate climate, ecosystem and livelihood benefits and to access the Plan Vivo network – without generating Plan Vivo Certificates in respect of climate (or other ecosystem) services generated.

This may be the case where:

- The PES funder does not wish to receive Plan Vivo Certificates for any offsetting purposes and does not wish the project to generate climate service certificates for any other PES funder, e.g. a project may be funded as part of a climate adaptation programme and there are rules preventing the generation of credits
- The project is generating another kind of climate or ecosystem service certificate e.g. Certified Emissions Reduction, Verified Carbon Unit and wishes to use the Plan Vivo Standard to guide PES project design and demonstrate additional benefits

Projects wishing to use the Plan Vivo Standard in this way are encouraged to do so and should contact the Plan Vivo Foundation to agree an oversight and fee structure, e.g. for Annual Report reviews, as fees are otherwise based around issuance of certificates. Fees are designed to cover costs and will be aligned with the project's size and ability to pay, against a guiding principle that certification fees should aim to equal no more than 8% of project income.

## 9. Project Expansion

Plan Vivo projects normally expand over time and may develop new project interventions over time. Usually projects scale-up by gradually engaging more smallholders and community groups into the project via *plan vivos* using approved technical specifications. The Plan Vivo Foundation strongly advises projects to pilot activities with an existing small group of participants. As project design and functioning is demonstrated in this way and as further community buy-in is secured and the project secures adequate resources, it can be scaled up by engaging more participants.

### Scaling-up procedure

- i. Project coordinator identifies new target groups/areas (communities that are willing to engage in a project and whose land falls within the applicability conditions laid out in technical specifications)
- ii. Communities receive information and discuss whether they wish to participate in the project
- iii. Smallholders and groups that choose to participate submit *plan vivos* which are evaluated by the project coordinator
- iv. Additional participants enter 'PES agreements' with the project coordinator

For new project areas where conditions and procedures fall within existing project applicability conditions (defined in the technical specifications) and where they can be covered by the existing governance framework of the project as described in the PDD, no further validation is required. Details about new areas and new participants are provided to the Plan Vivo Foundation in each annual report, and independently checked during Verification, which takes place at most every 5 years.

### Updating and making revisions to the PDD

Minor revisions and updates to the PDD can be made by the project coordinator. Plan Vivo projects are expected to be flexible and evolve as experiences develop. Revisions may be required for various reasons including when:

- Roles in the project change and/or new organisations become involved, particularly if the project scales up into a new region or district
- Monitoring procedures are modified over time due to project experience or technological advancements, or as roles become devolved to communities over time;
- Benefit sharing mechanisms change if different payment options become available or socioeconomic conditions change significantly.

Where projects make changes to procedures, these must be reflected in the PDD and an updated version submitted to the Plan Vivo at the time of annual reporting, indicating what changes have been made to the project and why. This enables Plan Vivo to check that the project continues to meet the Plan Vivo standard, and also to collate and share lessons between projects and wider stakeholders.



## **Adding new project interventions**

Projects wishing to implement new project interventions should inform the Plan Vivo Foundation via the annual reporting process, or directly if the project wishes to implement activities before the next report is due.

New technical specifications can be added by a project at any time. For every new intervention added, an accompanying technical specification needs to be prepared by the project and added to the PDD. Where a new intervention is similar to existing project interventions and where the Plan Vivo TAC considers that the project coordinator has demonstrated capacity to support new activities, and where baseline conditions for the new intervention have already been validated in the initial field visit, a further validation visit may not be required.

Where the project intervention involves significantly different support and management systems, and/or different baseline conditions in the form of different land use have been identified, a further validation field visit will be required to validate the baseline conditions and project coordinator's capacity to support the activity. Where a project is approaching a periodic 3<sup>rd</sup> party verification, projects may request that this validation process is performed as part of the wider verification visit. Please contact the Plan Vivo Foundation Secretariat to discuss - The Plan Vivo TAC will have the final decision on all such matters.

## **10. Project Completion**

Project completion procedures will be applicable to all projects executing a planned project closure or completion, regardless of whether ex-ante or ex-post crediting is used by the project coordinators.

### **Project completion procedure:**

- i. Notice of project completion made, in writing, at least 6 months before planned completion date, by the project coordinator to Plan Vivo
- ii. Evidence provided to Plan Vivo of the full consultation of project participants regarding project completion
- iii. A statement provided confirming the following have been concluded:
  - Any outstanding CARs have been resolved,
  - All PES agreements have been honoured or concluded and a schedule of any outstanding PES agreements submitted with reasons why they have not been resolved,

- Voluntary Emissions Reductions Purchase Agreements (VERPAs) made throughout the project have been honoured or concluded,
  - The monitoring of activities supporting all issuances to date (ex-ante or ex-post) has been completed in line with the relevant technical specification or a schedule with details of any outstanding monitoring and reasons for the non-completion given. It may be necessary to show that non-completion has been communicated to buyers.
- iv. A final statement or schedule must be submitted to confirm the status of any funds held in trust by the project coordinator on behalf of project participants. Should the funds not be concluded, a report should be made on the transfer of these funds to a suitable institution and evidence of this transfer being approved by participants provided
  - v. A short validation visit (see selection criteria in Section 3) should be contracted by the project coordinator in order to validate the closure activities of the project coordinator
  - vi. Plan Vivo will issue a project completion confirmation

## 11. Fees

Certification fees are designed to cover costs only and are designed to be spread across the duration of the project (not frontloaded) so project registration remains a cost-effective option for developing country organisations, particularly taking into account the needs of small projects with limited up-front resources. As a guiding principle, the Plan Vivo Foundation seeks to set fee levels so they represent no more than 8% of project income from sales of Plan Vivo Certificates.

The Plan Vivo Foundation may review its fee structure from time to time. For the latest fee structure please see: [www.planvivo.org/develop-a-project/costs/](http://www.planvivo.org/develop-a-project/costs/)

The Plan Vivo Foundation will accept review and issuance fees in either USD or GBP. Issuance fees are typically invoiced in USD. Kindly make review and issuance fee payments in one of these currencies. Please contact the Plan Vivo Foundation for details.

## 12. Use of other standards and funding

Projects wishing to use any other certification standard in addition to the Plan Vivo Standard in respect of the same target areas must inform the Plan Vivo Foundation, and ensure that any additional certifications and additional reporting requirements do not lead to a double-counting, double-selling or any other duplicate claims to ecosystem services or other benefits generated by the project.

## 13. Additional Guidance

### 1. Plan Vivo ESCROW Facility - Management and Rules

Projects may wish to direct payments in relation to forward sales of Plan Vivo Certificates to the Plan Vivo ESCROW facility, maintained on behalf of all projects that require this service. Funds can be held for up to year, in accounts held at Triodos Bank, in anticipation of forthcoming issuances. It should be noted that Plan Vivo solely acts as a holder of funds and in no way benefits from, nor charges any fees for, providing this service.

This facility is used to provide assurances to both Project Coordinators and Buyers of Plan Vivo Certificates and is provided to Plan Vivo projects in order to:

- i. Ensure funds are ring-fenced from normal operational funds, thus preventing them from being used by Project Coordinators until the underlying ecosystem services (climate services) are delivered and issued;
- ii. Ensure funds are secured and in place before Project Coordinators sign PES agreements with individual project participants. This is often advisable given PES agreements are legally binding, and must be honoured regardless of whether sales materialise as expected.

If you would like to use the ESCROW facility, please first contact the Plan Vivo Foundation Secretariat for a copy of the terms of use and associated documentation.





[www.planvivo.org](http://www.planvivo.org)



Plan Vivo

Improving livelihoods, restoring ecosystems