

2022

Our Carbon Credit Ratings Framework For **ARR Projects**

Afforestation, Reforestation and Revegetation
(ARR)



Incentivizing investment in real climate action

Introduction

Sylvera carbon credit ratings are the most reliable and trustworthy in the market.

Sylvera has developed a rigorous bottom-up approach in order to produce the most accurate ratings and analyses for carbon projects in the VCMs.

What sets Sylvera apart

- **Unparalleled depth & accuracy:** We build robust and bespoke ratings frameworks and production systems for each project type. Our ratings are not generated by algorithms alone, but by a team of experts analyzing a variety of quantitative and qualitative data, who then distill it into detailed reports.
[Read our white paper for more information.](#)
- **Technical and scientific expertise:** We have a large and growing team of experts who hold advanced degrees, working across our Multi-Scale Lidar, Geographic Information System (GIS), Commodities, Finance, Policy, Ratings and Machine Learning disciplines.
- **Independence:** We don't sell carbon credits and we never have. We also aren't paid by developers to rate carbon projects. This means we avoid conflicts of interest, and you can trust that our ratings and reports are unbiased.

This document is the second in a series that will outline our approach to rating specific types of carbon credit projects. This document outlines our ARR (Afforestation, Reforestation, and Revegetation).

Key Terms and Concepts

Project types

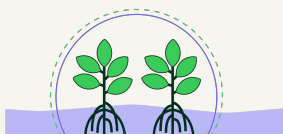
Afforestation	The conversion of land that has been non-forest for a period of 50 years to forested land.
Reforestation	The conversion of non-forest to forested land in an area that was once forested.
Revegetation	The process of increasing carbon stocks of woody biomass that does not meet definitions of afforestation or reforestation and covers a minimum area of 0.05 hectares.

Key accounting variables and concepts

Project area (PA)	The area in which activities are implemented by the ARR project to increase carbon stocks in woody biomass, and sometimes soil.
Canopy height	The height of trees, measured as the distance between the ground and top of the trees. Canopy height models utilise LiDAR data.
Deep learning model	A type of machine learning (ML) model that essentially learns by example. A model is trained using a large set of labeled data. These models and algorithms look at data in the context of their adjacencies, allowing for greater accuracy in estimation and analysis, and for generalised prediction across different geographies and time periods, resulting in lower error and noise rate in comparison to classical ML.
Over crediting risk	This refers to the risk that the project has sold too many credits.
Buffer pool	Registries mandate a share of verified gross emissions reductions be set aside in a "buffer pool," and not initially sold as carbon credits. This helps increase the integrity of issued carbon credits in the case of future forest loss and acts as an insurance policy for issued credits to mitigate the risk of previously issued credits being reversed. The share set aside is proportional to the non-permanence risk of carbon stored in the project.
Carbon credit	A tradable unit representing one metric ton of carbon dioxide (CO ₂), or an equivalent amount of another greenhouse gas (GHG), avoided or removed from Earth's atmosphere.

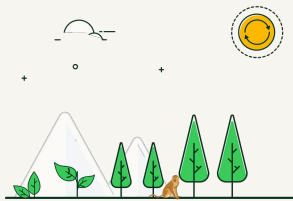
What are ARR carbon credit projects?

Afforestation, reforestation & revegetation (ARR) projects are one of several nature-based carbon credit types. They seek to implement activities to increase carbon stocks in woody biomass, and sometimes soil. Some examples of ARR project activities include: mangrove restoration, agroforestry, and reforestation of degraded lands.



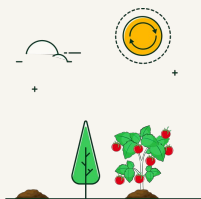
Blue carbon

Blue carbon refers to the carbon sequestration in oceanic and coastal ecosystems. The most prevalent kind of blue carbon we see in the Voluntary Carbon Markets (VCMs) is in relation to mangroves. In addition to acting as a carbon sink, mangrove systems deliver ecosystem services such as coastal protection and water quality improvements. Blue carbon ARR projects are increasing biomass and soil carbon by restoring and planting mangroves.



Reforestation

Reforestation projects implement activities to restore a previously forested area. Reforestation projects can range from single-species, monoculture plantation to reforestation activities utilizing multiple native species.



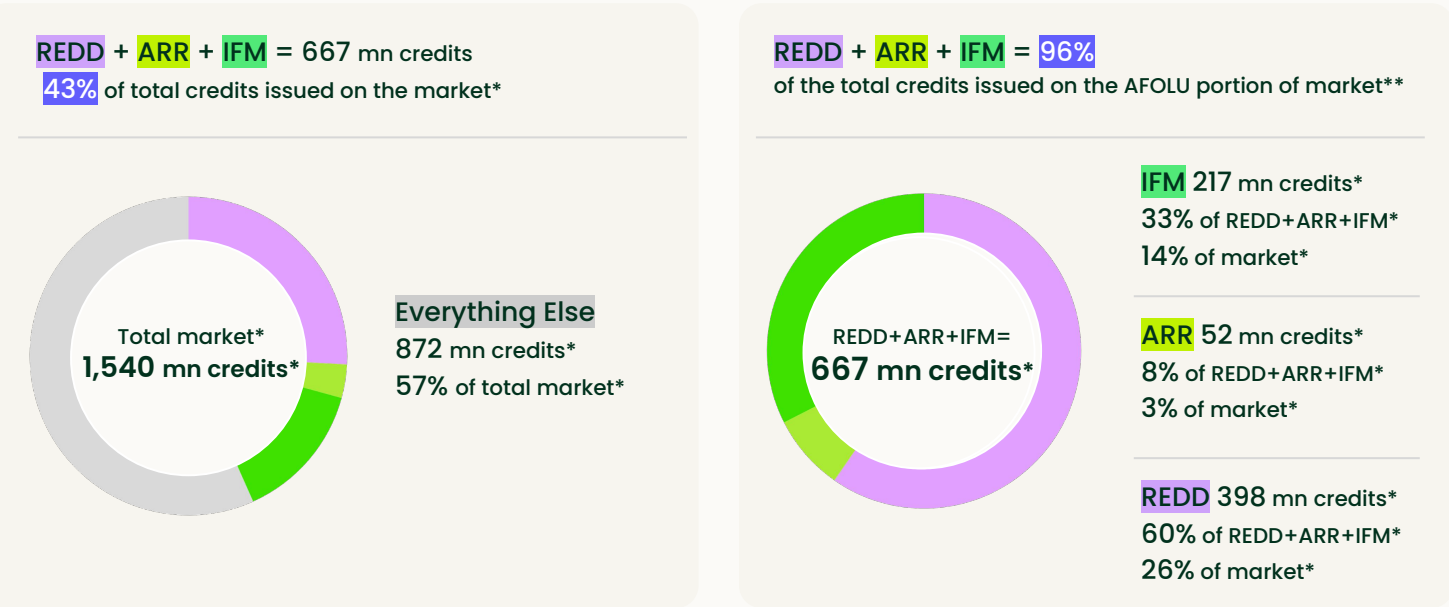
Agroforestry

Agroforestry projects integrate forest and agricultural systems to increase carbon stock. Agroforestry systems with diverse species selected for their complementary traits help to create more resilient and carbon rich ecosystems. In addition to increasing carbon sequestration, these projects can facilitate income diversification for local communities.

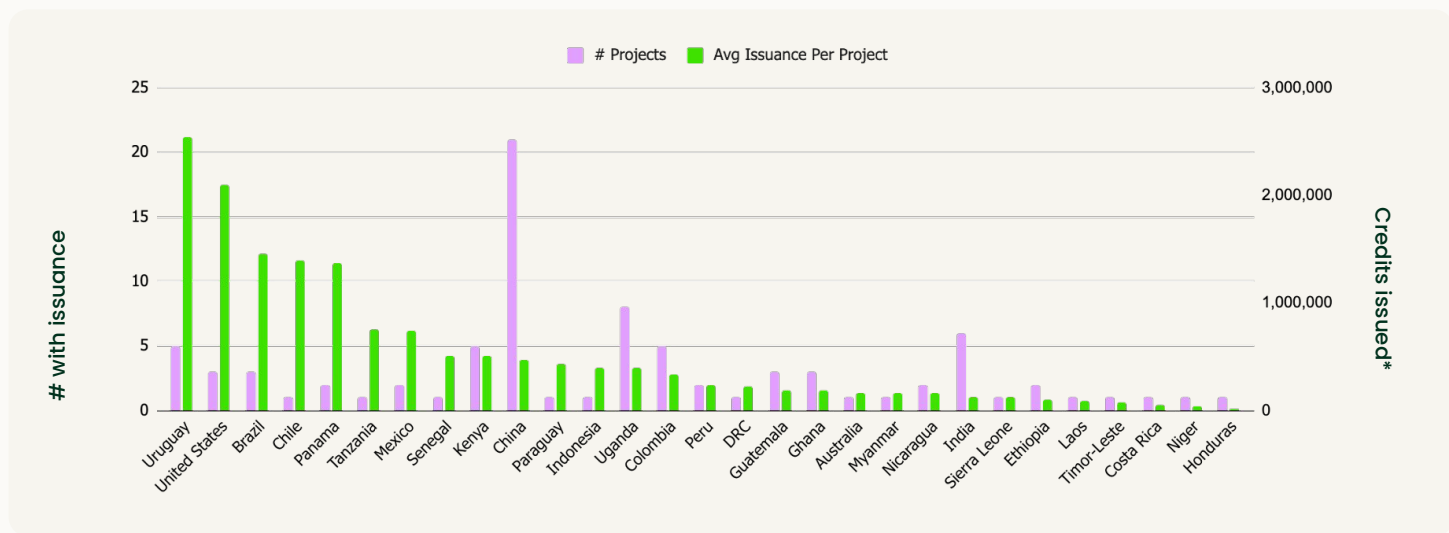
What is the composition of ARR credits like?

There are nearly double the number of listed ARR projects than REDD+ projects, but there are 7x the amount of REDD+ credits than ARR credits. ARR projects have much smaller issuances than other nature-based carbon credit types. ARR projects have much smaller project areas and a lower carbon stock value per hectare.

As of April 2022, over 52 million credits have been issued from ARR projects, making up 8% of nature-based credits and 3% of the total credits issued to date in voluntary carbon markets (VCMs).



There are 243 ARR projects listed in 49 countries. Of those 243, only 86 of those projects have issued credits to date. While China has many issuing projects, the projects have low issuance volume. The highest volume of credits exist largely on the South American continent.



*Total Issued credits by projects on Berkeley database last updated 04/05/2022
**Flagged as Forestry & Land Use + Agriculture under "Scope"

What we look for in high quality ARR projects

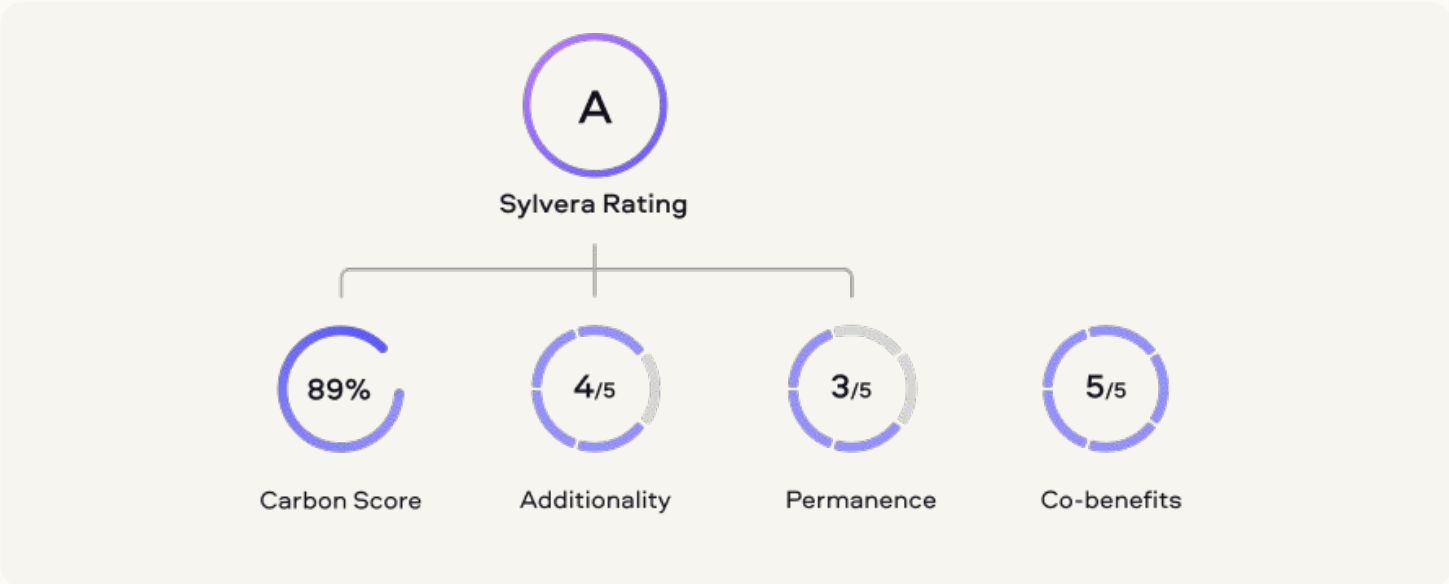
A reminder of our scoring pillars

We assess the quality of ARR projects using defined processes and frameworks, as outlined in our [whitepaper](#).

Our top level Sylvera Ratings span from AAA-D and reflect whether each credit associated with the project is likely to sequester 1 metric tonne of CO₂e.

This rating is derived from a combination of scores that assess the **carbon** performance, **additionality** and **permanence** of the project. The scores in these three core pillars are combined in a series of matrices to ensure that underperformance in one key area does not get overshadowed by high performance in others.

Co-benefits are also assessed but they do not feed into the Sylvera Rating as they do not have a direct bearing on the climate impact of carbon credits. Including them in the Sylvera Rating could lead to a high co-benefits score obscuring poor performance on carbon removals. Aspects of the project relating to co-benefits that could materially impact the project's ability to deliver its stated climate benefit are, however, reflected in the Sylvera Rating.



Carbon score	Additionality score	Permanence score	Co-benefits score
Sylvera's carbon score verifies whether the project has delivered on its carbon claims by comparing Sylvera detected tree coverage and loss events, using proprietary machine learning algorithms, with data reported by the project and verified by the registry.	Sylvera's additionality score assesses the likelihood that project activities would have been implemented in absence of the offset project. It also quantifies the likelihood and extent of any over-crediting risk (i.e., that the project has sold too many credits).	Sylvera's permanence score assesses whether the GHG removals made by the project are likely to be maintained for an atmospherically significant period of time. We use an additive risk model to quantify permanence risks.	Sylvera's co-benefits score assesses the scope and relative impact of project activities on local biodiversity and communities - which are linked to UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

How our REDD+ & ARR frameworks compare

We develop a proprietary framework for each type of carbon project, such as ARR or REDD+, to capture the unique quality characteristics of the project type at hand. When developing a new framework we consult the relevant carbon crediting methodologies, scientific literature, and project documentation to understand the nuances of project activities and incentives that impact credit integrity.

We design frameworks to be fair and impartial in their assessment of carbon projects, and provide consistent and comparable quality metrics that make up our scoring pillars, which apply to carbon projects across frameworks. Our frameworks are quantitatively driven and automation is built into the ratings production process where possible, helping eliminate analyst bias.

Carbon	REDD+	ARR
Forest non-forest	✓	✓
Leakage	✓	N/A
Canopy height	N/A	✓

Additionality	REDD+	ARR
Additionality of activities	✓	✓
Strength of baseline / over-crediting risk	✓	✓
Reference area analysis	✓	N/A

Permanence	REDD+	ARR
Human vs natural split	✓	N/A
6 pillars of loss*	N/A	✓

Co-benefits	REDD+	ARR
Biodiversity	✓	✓
Scoring distinctiveness of biodiversity	✓	N/A
Scoring overall impact of project on biodiversity	N/A	✓
Community	✓	✓

* The six pillars of loss used in the ARR permanence model include: pests & pathogens, fire, storm & wind, flood, drought, and anthropogenic. Further information on the permanence pillar can be found on page 14.

ARR red flags

Historic carbon prices have **not** been sufficiently high to incentivize truly additional projects, as they are associated with elevated capital and operating costs and have no, or limited, revenue streams beyond carbon revenue.

The red flags below typically manifest when projects are commercial plantations or plant with a monoculture structure.

Unlikely additionality

- Significant non-carbon revenue undermining additionality
- Conversion of native ecosystems (primary forests) undermining validity of credits

Tenuous permanence

- Use of species that are not adapted to localized natural risks
- Planting on unsuitable land undermines long-term sequestration
- Crediting cadence introduces risk of abandonment

ARR green flags

Strong demand signals and evolving market conditions are helping to drive the development of higher quality ARR projects that meet core quality criteria.

Additionality & design

- Diverse species, low impact planting
- Engaging local populations & diversifying income
- Resilient species structure & safeguards to maximize permanence

Robust modeling

- Clear definition of assumed mortality rates
- Utilizing most recent scientific literature when defining parameters for biomass growth model
- Carbon accounting and release of credits based on carbon sequestered in the sink at the time of issuance

Carbon score

What is it?

Sylvera's carbon score assesses whether the project has delivered on its carbon claims by comparing Sylvera's detected tree coverage and loss events using proprietary machine learning algorithms, with data reported by the project developer and verified by the verification entity and the registry.

***Note:** The carbon score must be considered alongside the additionality score, which considers the overcrediting risk, to understand the climate impact of the project.*

Why does it matter?

Accurate carbon accounting underpins the validity of a project's issuance and material under- or over-reporting of carbon sequestered will impact the number of credits that have been issued. This could either reduce the risk of overissuance or call into question whether too many credits were issued.

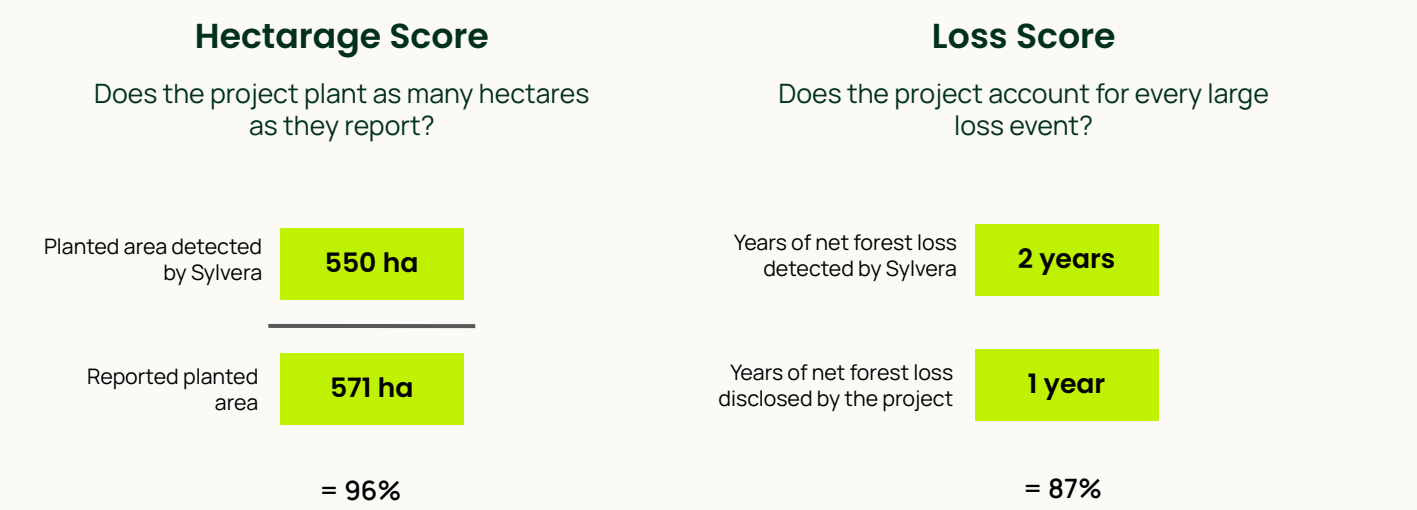
The current methods commonly used by ARR projects to monitor carbon stock can over or underestimate woody biomass growth and loss. These errors are introduced when labour intensive, in person monitoring of carbon stock changes in a number of sample plots is then extrapolated to the project area as a whole. Sylvera conducts an independent assessment of tree coverage and loss events using satellite data across the entire project to give buyers confidence that the carbon removals reported have actually been achieved by the project.

How do we calculate the carbon score?

To verify whether the project has delivered on its claims, we compare Sylvera detected tree coverage and loss events with data reported by the project. Our carbon score consists of two components, the hectareage score and loss score, that are combined using an equation highlighted below. As the hectareage score approaches zero, the loss score becomes less important because if a project has only planted 1 out of 100 hectares, any loss becomes less relevant.

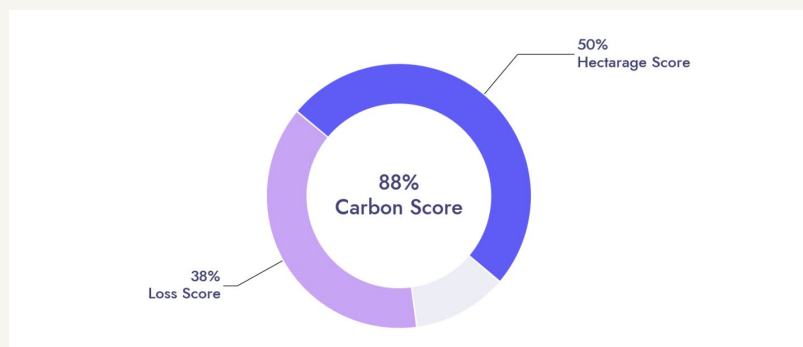
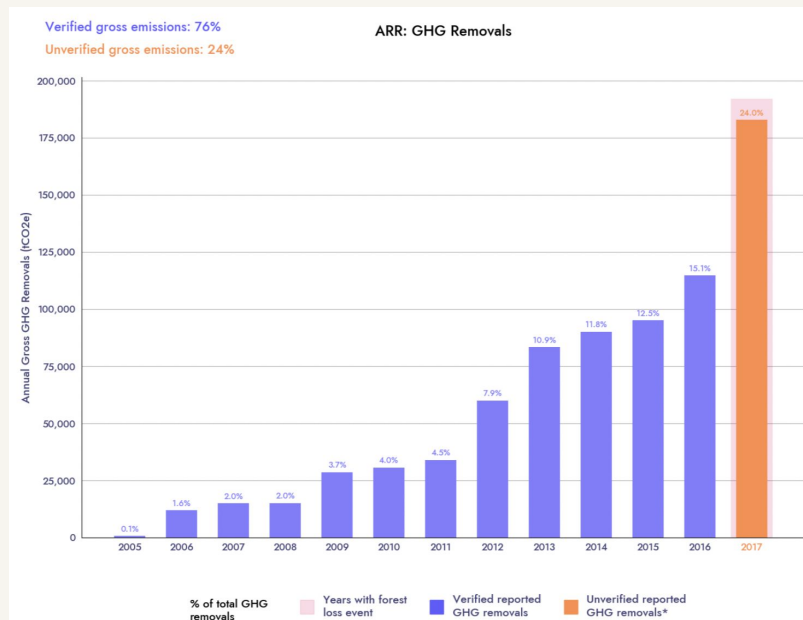
Carbon score = ((1-0.5*Hectareage score)*Hectareage score) + ((0.5*Hectareage score)*Loss score)

We use proprietary deep learning models to estimate canopy height to validate the growth and maintenance of carbon stock in a project area over time. Our models are trained to identify forest canopy height by feeding it tens of thousands of labelled data points. Data used in the carbon score are put through a human in the loop quality control process to ensure that they are representative of what is actually happening on the ground within the project area.



How we utilize tree canopy height to gauge carbon performance

Principle: High quality projects accurately report growth and loss events - both when they occur and the extent in hectares. Reported changes are verified by Sylvera using machine learning and multiple types of satellite data to estimate canopy height of all pixels with in the PA.



In action: The project has met its tree planting claims. However, deviations between Sylvera's analysis and project reporting in 2017 produced a Loss Score of 76%. Sylvera detected 522 ha of forest loss, which exceeds the 300 ha of growth detected. The loss was not taken into account in the gross sequestrations disclosed by the project for 2017. Gross sequestrations in 2017 amounted to 24% (182,822 tCO2e) of the total sequestrations claimed by the project to date. Where a deviation between Sylvera's analysis and the project's reporting occurs, all gross sequestrations from those years are considered unverified and are proportionately subtracted from the Loss Score.

Additionality score

What is it?

Sylvera's additionality score assesses whether (1) the activities implemented to sequester carbon would have taken place without the revenue derived from the carbon project and (2) the risk that the project has sold too many credits. The additionality score is a function of how likely it is that the project is additional, and how likely it is that the project is over-crediting on the carbon removal it is delivering.

Why does it matter?

If the carbon sequestration claimed by a project would have occurred without revenue from the sale of carbon credits then they are not additional. Additionality can also be undermined if a project has issued too many credits. Additionality underpins the validity of credits issued by a project and if the project is not additional the one credit purchased does not equate to 1 metric tonne of carbon sequestration and yields no climate benefit above the business as usual scenario. A measure of the likely additionality of carbon credits is, therefore, essential to understand their true climate impact.

Additionality of activities	Financial additionality: We consider the project's type (e.g. natural regeneration, commercial plantation etc.), whether the project owner receives additional income from other revenue streams such as the sale of timber products, and determine the likelihood of whether the sale of carbon converts the project from sub-economic in the business as usual scenario to economic in the "with offset project" scenario.
	Policy & regulatory barriers: We evaluate whether there are legal, regulatory or fiscal incentives in place for the type of project at the regional or national level that may reduce a project's likelihood of additionality.
	Common practice analysis: We assess the extent to which similar ARR activities are conducted in the nearby region, with the assumption that a project is less likely to be additional if there exist many similar (non-VCM) projects in the region or country of interest and evidence provided to explain difference in need for carbon finance is not sufficient.
Over-crediting risk	Project ineligibility: ARR projects must not have been initially cleared of native ecosystems within 10 years prior to the project's start date by the project proponent. Using our ML models to measure, Sylvera considers any significant (>5%) portion of land deliberately cleared by the project proponent ineligible for crediting.
	Land class emissions potential: Some land classes have evolved to store carbon in soil and below ground. These ecosystems are not suited to tree-growing and planting trees on such land classes may produce more emissions than the project can sequester (e.g. peatland or wetlands). In this section, we test for undisclosed presence of such land classes at a project level, taking into consideration the type of project activities.

Additionality score (continued)

How do we calculate the additionality score?

To arrive at the additionality score we integrate the additionality of activities and over-crediting risk scores using the below matrix. This matrix ensures that underperformance in over-crediting risk does not get overshadowed by high performance in additionality of activities. For example, if a project is implementing highly additional activities, but Sylvera finds the project developer cleared the project area of primary forest three years before the project start year then the over-crediting risk undermines the overall additionality of the project.

Additionality		Activities				
		1	2	3	4	5
Over-crediting	1	1	1	2	2	3
	2	1	2	3	4	5
	3	2	3	4	6	7
	4	2	4	5	7	9
	5	2	4	5	8	10

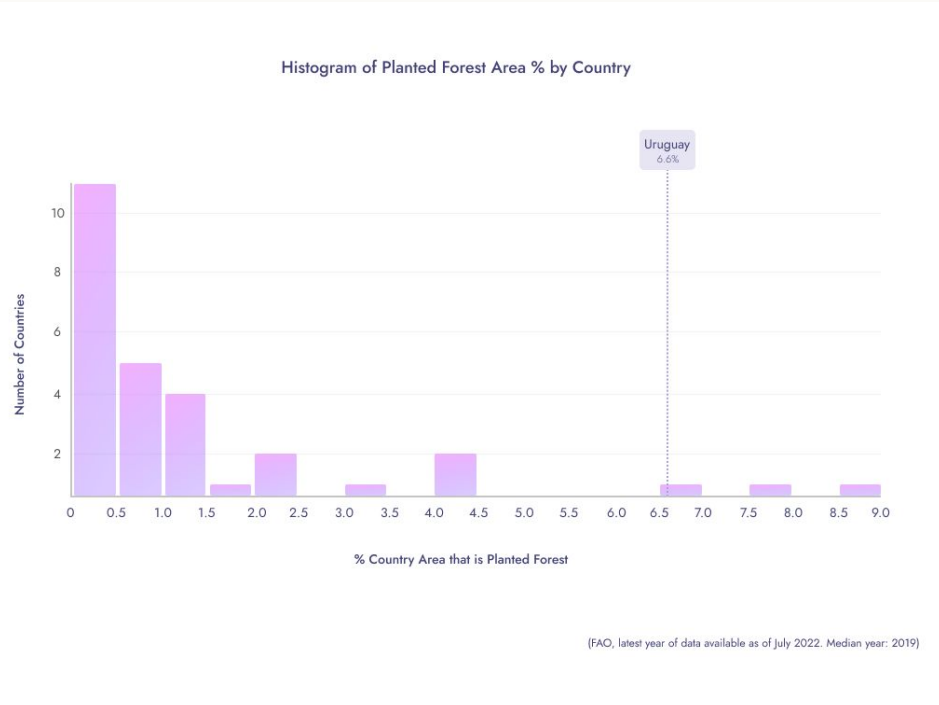
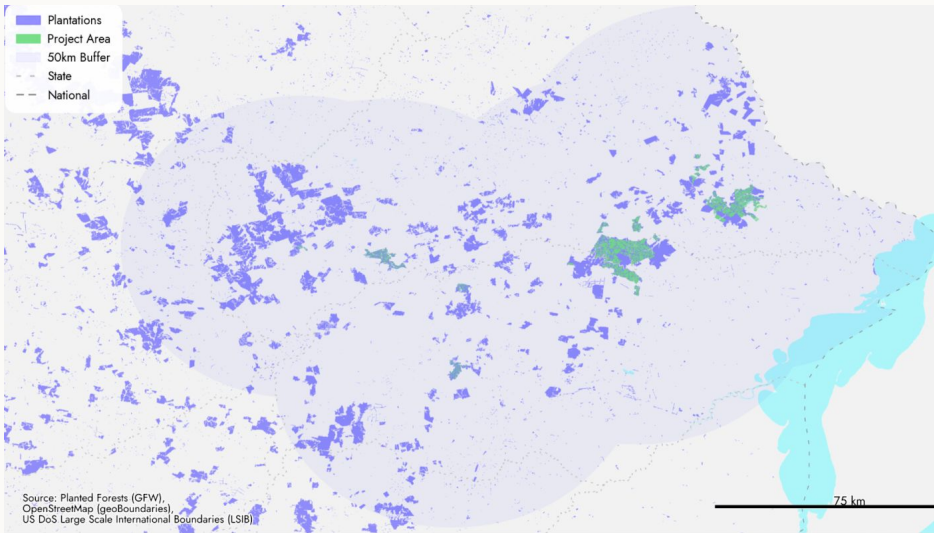
The values in the table are divided by two to arrive at the overall additionality score.

How we leverage geospatial capabilities to assess additionality

Principle: A project is less additional if there are many similar (non-carbon market) projects in the region or country of interest. **The more similar projects there are within that range that do not receive carbon finance, the less additional the project.**

In Action: Project activities are highly unlikely to exceed what is considered common practice due to prevalence of planted forests, undermining the additionality claim.

- 4,817 plantations within a 50 km buffer zone of the PA
- Coverage of plantations in the departments of Cerro Largo and Treinta y Tres (9.3%) is higher than the national coverage (8.2%)



Principle: Sylvera ratings enable clients to understand drivers of additionality across geographic location.

In Action: 8.2% of Uruguay's land area was covered by planted forest as of 2021, considerably higher than nearby countries that also feature ARR projects, including Guatemala (1.3%), Brazil (1.1%), and Mexico (0.8%). **Compared to a group of peers, planted forests are significantly more common in Uruguay and ultimately undermines the additionality of projects developing planted forests with the most common species.**

Permanence score

What is it?

Sylvera's permanence score takes an additive risk approach, where we assess multiple causes of carbon stock loss individually and let each risk speak for itself. Each cause of carbon stock loss (called a 'pillar of loss') has additive variables for likelihood and severity which together multiply in a traditional risk matrix. For each 'pillar of loss' we have researched and selected variables based on their known contribution to the likelihood or severity of the physical phenomenon resulting in carbon stock loss.

Likelihood	Severity
<i>How likely is it that the project will experience a loss as a result of this phenomenon?</i>	<i>How severe would the impact be of this phenomenon on the project if it were to occur?</i>
Variables that (a) demonstrate that the physical destruction of trees by this phenomenon is historically common and/or increasing, (b) are from third party models which demonstrate short return intervals for significant events and (c) are known to be triggers of the physical phenomenon.	Variables that (a) demonstrate the extent of the impact of past events, (b) are known to be determinants of the effect of the physical phenomenon and (c) can have a mitigative effect on the severity of any event.

'Pillars of Loss' Potential Causes of Carbon Stock Loss

Pest / Pathogens
Fire
Storm & Wind
Flood
Drought
Anthropogenic

$SUM (Likelihood * Severity)$

Our **permanence score** in the ARR framework is additive and combines an assessment of both the likelihood and severity of each risk.

Activities to mitigate these risks will reduce the severity but not likelihood.

Example additive risk score*

What's the total risk to the project from all the possible causes of carbon stock loss?

	1
Fire	2
Drought	3
Anthropogenic	4
Pest / Pathogens	
Storm & Wind	
Flood	5

*This addition is illustrative. Actual conversion of risks additively to a relative score of 1-5 using both additive methods and risk category frequency thresholds.

Co-benefits rating

What is it?

Sylvera's co-benefits rating examines whether the project is implementing activities to support biodiversity and local communities, as well as the scale and likely impact of these activities.

How do we assess the co-benefits of ARR credits?

Sylvera measures the impact ARR project activities have on biodiversity and considers 3 temporal ranges. We leverage data provided by project developers, IUCN data, IBAT data, as well as a proprietary database on the impact of chemicals used in planting activities to assess the impact of the project over time.

When assessing community impact, we utilize data disclosed by project developers and the SDG framework to triangulate a project's community impact. ARR project activities by their nature require a large cyclical workforce. To achieve a high score, projects must deliver community benefits beyond temporary employment opportunities. Projects that have a balanced gender workforce, and employ large numbers of people with long term employment opportunities and fair wages will score higher.

BIODIVERSITY

PRE PROJECT

A project area that was highly degraded and implements minimally disturbing land preparation activities would achieve a high score.

DURING PLANTING

Projects planting a variety of native species in a majority of the project area with minimal chemical application would achieve a high score. Projects which create a wildlife corridor are also rewarded with points.

POST PLANTING

Projects that maintain a biodiverse forested area are considered to have greater biodiversity impact.

COMMUNITIES

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

We independently identify which UN SDGs the project is contributing towards by assessing the activities implemented by the project.

SCHEME

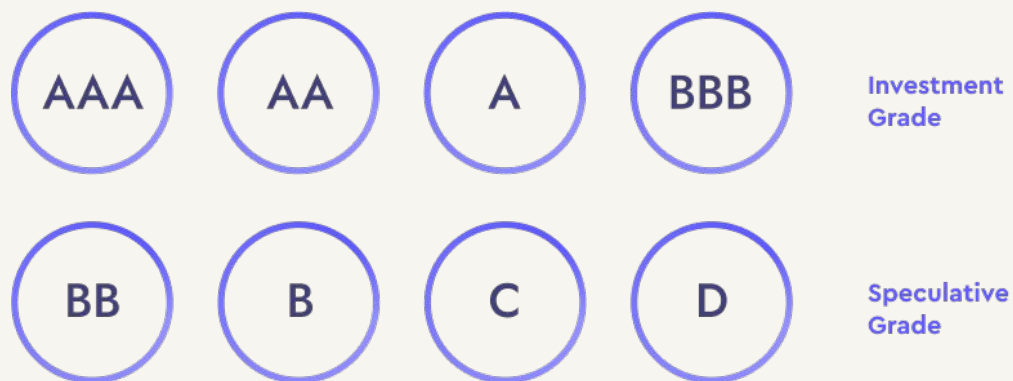
We determine whether the scheme is novel or ongoing, and if it goes beyond activities currently implemented in the region. We also assess whether the project makes a foundational contribution to activities that support SDGs.

IMPACT

We determine the relative impact of activities on local communities by scaling the SDG impact against country level performance, the size of the population affected, and the carbon removals achieved by the project.

Interpreting the Sylvera Rating

Our rating categories



The terms “investment grade” and “speculative grade” are market conventions and do not imply any recommendation or endorsement of a specific project for investment purposes.

Investment grade categories indicate relatively low risk, while ratings in the speculative categories signal either a lower level of potential impact, a relatively high risk to the project in the future or that an important negative event has already occurred.

Sylvera may also disclose issues relating to a project that means that it can not be rated. Such issues can be fundamental red flags (such as potential fraud) or the absence of the necessary data to produce a rating (such as high error shapefiles).

To arrive at our Sylvera rating (AAA-D) we first integrate additionality of activities and over-crediting risk to get an overall additionality score. Next, we use a matrix to generate our impact score by combining our carbon and additionality scores. Lastly, we integrate the impact and permanence scores via a matrix to arrive at our top level Sylvera Rating.

This same process is followed for the different types of projects, however, matrices are adjusted to each project type.

Interpreting the Sylvera Rating

How do we calculate the Sylvera Score?

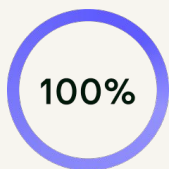
To arrive at our Sylvera rating (AAA-D) we first integrate Carbon score and Additionality in an intermediate Impact score, which then is integrated with Permanence resulting in our top level rating. The integration is done with the scoring matrices below.

This same process is followed for the different types of projects, however, matrices are adjusted to project type nuances. The matrices here are for ARR projects only.

		ADDITIONALITY									
		5	4.5	4	3.5	3	2.5	2	1.5	1	0.5
CARBON SCORE	100%	10	10	10	9	8	6	5	4	3	2
	90-100%	10	10	8	8	7	6	5	4	3	2
	80-90%	9	9	7	7	7	6	5	4	3	2
	70-80%	8	8	7	7	6	6	4	3	3	2
	60-70%	6	6	6	6	6	4	4	3	2	2
	50-60%	6	6	6	5	5	4	3	3	2	1
	40-50%	5	5	5	5	5	3	3	2	1	1
	30-40%	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	2	1	1
	20-30%	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	1	1	1
	10-20%	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1
	0-10%	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

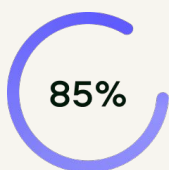
		PERMANENCE				
		5	4	3	2	1
IMPACT (Carbon Score x Additionality)	10	AAA	AAA	AAA	A	BB
	9	AAA	AAA	AA	BBB	B
	8	AAA	AA	AA	BBB	C
	7	AA	A	A	BBB	D
	6	A	BBB	BBB	B	D
	5	BBB	BB	BB	C	D
	4	BB	B	B	C	D
	3	B	C	C	C	D
	2	D	D	D	D	D
	1	D	D	D	D	D

Interpreting the carbon score



The project has delivered the verified emissions sequestration.

Sylvera detects the same level of planting as the project, and has detected no unreported loss events. The maximum carbon score for ARR projects is 100%. Whereas for REDD+ projects, it is possible for the carbon score to exceed 100%.



The project has under delivered on verified emissions sequestration.

Sylvera detects less planting than claimed by the project and/or has detected some unreported loss events.



The project has not delivered any verified emissions sequestration and should not be issuing credits.

Sylvera detects no net increase in carbon stock in the project area. The project has not planted and/or there have been significant loss events.

Interpreting the additionality score



Indicates very high confidence that a project is additional.

Example: The project has a very low risk of over crediting. There is a significant difference in activities between the “business as usual” and the “with project” scenario. The project activities implemented were a direct result of the revenue derived from the carbon project.



Indicates high confidence that the project is additional.



Indicates the project is likely additional.

Example: There is potential risk of over crediting. There is a difference in activities between the “business as usual” and the “with project” scenario. The projects activities implemented may be a direct result of the carbon revenues.



Indicates uncertainty about the project's additionality claim.



Indicates we found a serious red flag questioning the project's claims of additionality.

Example: The project has a high likelihood of severe over crediting and/or the activities implemented to increase carbon stock would have occurred in the absence of carbon revenues.

Interpreting the permanence score



Indicates very high permanence and low risk, the project carbon credits are very likely to remain valid long-term.

Example: Across all pillars of loss, likelihood and severity of carbon stock loss are low. The project also implements effective mitigation activities.



Indicates high permanence, the project carbon credits are likely to remain valid long-term.



Indicates moderate permanence, the project carbon credits may remain valid long-term.

Example: No pillar of loss is above 'Moderate' risk.



Indicates low permanence, the project carbon credits are unlikely to remain valid long-term.



Indicates very low permanence and high risk, the project carbon credits are highly unlikely to remain valid long-term.

Example: At least one pillar of loss component has scored as 'Extreme' or more than four components have scored as 'High' risk.

Interpreting the co-benefits rating



Indicates exceptional progression of targeted SDGs, as well as extraordinary species richness and increases biodiversity.

Example: The project implements a broad range of SDG activities with extensive reach in the community, restores a highly degraded area, and plants diverse native species.



Indicates strong progression of targeted SDGs, as well as high species richness and quality activities to increase biodiversity.



Indicates average progression of targeted SDGs, as well as average species richness and adequate activities increase biodiversity.

Example: The project implements SDG activities with moderate reach in the community, has average species richness, and takes acceptable action to reduce pressures on biodiversity increasing.



Indicates narrow progression of targeted SDGs, or low species richness and limited activities increase biodiversity.



Indicates very limited progression of targeted SDGs, as well as very low species richness and deficient activities to increase biodiversity.

Example: The project implements limited SDG activities with limited reach in the community, while not taking meaningful action to increase biodiversity.

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