

Designing Effective REDD+ Safeguard Information Systems: Building on existing systems and country experiences

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Designing Effective Safeguard Information Systems (SIS) for REDD+

A key determinant of REDD+¹ success will be the continued development and implementation of safeguards. REDD+ safeguards aim to ensure that REDD+ actions do not cause negative social or environmental impacts and cover a range of issues, including respect for the knowledge and rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, transparent national forest governance structures, effective participation of stakeholders, and the conservation of natural forests and biodiversity.

An important element of REDD+ safeguards, which is being negotiated under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), is systems for providing information on how safeguards are addressed and respected. Effective systems to share information will help promote transparency, guard against unintended social and environmental harms, and provide information on the impact of REDD+ actions. A decision of the 17th Conference of the Parties in Durban in 2011 agreed on broad provisions for guidance, including that safeguard information systems (SIS) “build upon existing systems, as appropriate.”²

The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) and the ASB Partnership for the Tropical Forest Margins explored how existing systems can be built on to develop REDD+ SIS under a three-year REDD+ capacity-building initiative supported by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation.³

¹ REDD+: reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries.

² UNFCCC (2012). *Guidance on systems for providing information on how safeguards are addressed and respected*. FCCC/CP/2011/9/Add.2. p. 16.

³ See www.iisd.org/climate/land_use/redd/ for information on all project activities and the full policy paper on REDD+ SIS.



Using the Durban guidance on safeguards as a starting point, and drawing on information gathered through expert meetings and interviews with over 50 developing country REDD+ decision-makers and implementers, the research examined:

- Information collected through eight existing systems that could feed into reporting on REDD+ safeguards.
- How the existing systems ensure transparency, consistency, accessibility, flexibility, country-driven processes and the lessons for a REDD+ SIS.
- Early action in five countries—Ethiopia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Tanzania and Vietnam—to provide lessons and insights for the further development of REDD+ SIS.

In exploring these key areas, this research aims to contribute to improved REDD+ SIS by identifying how REDD+ practitioners can build on existing systems and learn from early action. The complete analysis is available in the policy paper, *Designing Effective REDD+ Safeguard Information Systems: Building on Existing Systems and Country Experiences*.

Building on Existing Processes

A host of existing systems can be built upon in the development and implementation of REDD+ SIS. Eight existing processes were examined, looking at the information collected relative to the REDD+ safeguards, as well as lessons for meeting the Durban guidance of ensuring transparency, consistency, accessibility, flexibility and country-driven processes. The eight processes analyzed were:

- Social and Environmental Principles and Criteria (SEPC) of the UN-REDD Programme
- Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment (SESA) and Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF), Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF)
- REDD+ Social and Environmental Standards (REDD+ SES), CARE International and the Climate, Community and Biodiversity Alliance (CCBA)
- Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)
- Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA)
- Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Principles and Criteria
- Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT)

Information Collected

These processes collect and analyze information that has particular relevance for reporting on the seven REDD+ safeguards set out in the Cancun Agreements. Research findings include:

- The UN-REDD SEPC and CCBA REDD+ SES collect information that is applicable to most of the REDD+ safeguards. These two processes are most closely aligned to the REDD+ safeguards and with appropriate and focused planning and coordination; with them, countries could collect information that would meet the needs of reporting on both REDD+ safeguards and the UN-REDD or CCBA process.

- The FLEGT process is especially strong on the governance safeguards (a) and (b), providing information on national forest laws, policies, regulations and programs; the effectiveness of legal frameworks and gaps; and barriers and challenges to their implementation. Countries could build on their FLEGT analysis to determine which policies, laws and programs help to implement safeguards.
- Countries with FPIC processes may have reporting processes in place relevant to safeguard (c), respect for knowledge of indigenous peoples. The World Bank principles also address respect for indigenous peoples, and this reporting could pertain to the REDD+ safeguard.
- Stakeholder participation is an important element in most processes, and many of the processes may provide information on safeguard (d). Countries may consider reporting on this participation, or use the reporting as an example. Countries could also consider using established stakeholder processes to collect information on safeguards.
- The CBD provides information on biodiversity that is applicable to reporting on safeguard (e). Countries may be able to directly use information reported to the CBD to provide information on the REDD+ biodiversity safeguard.
- The Forest Resource Assessments provide information related to safeguard (e). FRA information may help countries report on the state of natural forests and biodiversity. The CBD's reporting on the loss of natural habitat may also provide information on permanence at the national level—safeguard (f); and possibly on the leakage safeguard (g) at the national level.
- The FSC information tends to be at the level of a specific forest and is not as applicable to REDD+ safeguard reporting as the other processes.

The REDD+ safeguards and those existing systems that collect information relevant to safeguards are summarized in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF INFORMATION ON REDD+ SAFEGUARDS WITHIN EXISTING SYSTEMS

REDD+ SAFEGUARD	EXISTING PROCESS							
	UN-REDD SEPC AND BERT	FCPF SESA AND ESMF	CCBA REDD+ SES	CBD	UNDRIP AND FPIC	FRA	FLEGT	FSC P&C
(a) Consistency with existing laws	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
(b) Transparent governance and sovereignty	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓
(c) Respect for knowledge of indigenous people, UNDRIP	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
(d) Full and effective participation of stakeholders	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
(e) Conservation, biological diversity and enhancement of benefits	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
(f) Address risk of reversals	✓		✓	✓		✓		
(g) Reduce displacement of emissions	✓		✓			✓		

Addressing the Principles in the Durban Guidance

These existing systems also provide lessons on how to address the principles set out in the Durban guidance: transparency, consistency, accessibility, flexibility and country-driven, as discussed below.

- **Transparency** – Information needs to be collected using broad multistakeholder processes. Validation is an important element of transparency, with some processes using national experts and others using national and international. It is important to use country experts to compile safeguards information.
- **Consistency** – Setting timelines for reporting can help ensure consistency and comparability across countries, and across years within countries. For example, reporting to the CBD takes place every four years with the next reports due in 2014; and the next FRA reports will be delivered in 2015. The FCPF ESMF requires annual monitoring report. Common reporting frameworks and tools can help with the collection of information that is comparable and consistent across countries, such as the resource manual (CBD), common questionnaire (FRA), and the Benefits and Risk Tool (BeRT) tool (UN-REDD SEPC). The CCBA SES use common international standards, for which countries develop nationally specific indicators; Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs) have a similar general framework.
- **Accessibility** – Information should be made publicly available in an accessible manner (which also contributes to transparency). Most processes use online portals or databases to make information available. Availability in local languages can help increase accessibility.
- **Flexibility** – Processes evolve and improve as lessons are learned. Some processes have changed their indicators (FRA, ESMF, CBD, FSC) as knowledge has improved and monitoring processes have adopted new methodologies.
- **Country-driven processes** – All processes encourage country-driven processes. This often includes a general framework that is consistent across countries, with flexibility to develop country-specific details, indicators, reporting and monitoring processes. The UN-REDD SEPC and the CCBA SES have developed international standards and principles, with country-specific interpretation of specific indicators. Country-level experts undertake the FRA data collection and validation, and ESMF are country-specific based on the national SESA process. FLEGT VPAs reflect a country's legal and institutional foundations to develop country-specific agreements (that follow a general framework across countries).

Learning from Early Action

Early experiences in developing systems for reporting on REDD+ safeguards provide important insights. Some countries are beginning to establish formal or informal bodies that are tasked with developing a REDD+ SIS within the national REDD+ planning processes. Other countries are undertaking a more piecemeal approach, with individual actors, governments, departments or civil society groups (CSOs) working toward the elaboration of a REDD+ SIS. The main lessons learned from early experiences in Ethiopia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Tanzania and Vietnam are discussed below.

- **REDD+ information systems are building on existing systems** – The Philippines is using data from its FRA to inform its safeguards reporting, as well as using biodiversity assessments established for other processes. The Philippines is also considering harmonizing its international safeguards reporting requirements with that of bilateral donors. Tanzania is exploring the safeguard reporting requirements under UN-REDD, FCPF and CCBA SES to identify national safeguards and reporting information. Vietnam’s REDD SIS Sub-Technical Working Group is looking at existing REDD+ systems—such as the national REDD+ measurement, reporting and verification (MRV) framework, REDD+ benefits distribution system, forest management information system, UN-REDD’S Participatory Governance Assessment and FPIC experiences—for linkages with REDD+ safeguards reporting. Tools and reporting processes developed at the activity level in Tanzania and the Philippines are being explored for their applicability to national REDD+ safeguard reporting.
- **Institutional structures for REDD+ safeguards reporting can build on existing structures** – Indonesia’s National Council on Climate Change envisions an institutional setting for its REDD+ SIS that builds on existing relevant REDD+ authorities at the subnational and national levels. Most countries consider REDD+ focal points as the logical entity for reporting to the UNFCCC, being that they are well placed to access and coordinate information using existing lines of communication.
- **Institutional structures can facilitate feeding information up into a national REDD+ information system** – Indonesia has evolved data collection to the provincial level, with the national focal point rolling up information and reporting internationally. Tanzania has institutional processes in place that allow CSOs and REDD+ project implementers to feed information on REDD+ projects to the national level, and are exploring using these avenues for conveying safeguard information. The project-level MRV system in the Philippines that assesses emissions and safeguards is providing lessons and input to the national level.
- **Stakeholder participation is central to REDD+ success** – All countries stressed the importance of stakeholder processes to provide and validate REDD+ safeguard information. Ethiopia, informed by Participatory Forest Management experiences, stresses the importance of community-level involvement in safeguard reporting, including data collection, monitoring and measurement. The Philippines’ experience shows the importance of stakeholders, particularly CSOs, in filling capacity gaps. Indonesia’s institutional structure includes a board of multistakeholders, and Tanzania and Vietnam’s work to develop an SIS has included multistakeholder working groups.
- **International guidance is needed, but country-driven processes are critical** – International guidance is needed to assist countries in safeguard reporting, and could include guidance documents and reporting frameworks. This international guidance must recognize that countries have varied levels of information on REDD+ and forests and different capacities to collect, monitor and report on safeguards. The information and capacity will improve, but early reporting requirements should respect the situation at the country level and not add large burdens or impose requirements that will require the use of international consultants. The aim should be to build on and improve existing in-country capacity.
- **Safeguard reporting needs to consider how benefits flow to local communities** – REDD+ success will be largely dependent on benefits flowing to local communities and safeguard reporting should address this. CSOs are considering how Vietnam’s work on a benefits distribution system could be linked to the REDD+ SIS.

Issues for Consideration by REDD+ Negotiators, Policy-Makers and Practitioners

Discussions on a system for providing information on how REDD+ safeguards are addressed and respected will continue in the lead up to and at COP 18 in Doha, Qatar. This research shows that countries can build on existing processes in developing their REDD+ SIS, consistent with the Durban guidance. Issues for consideration by REDD+ negotiators, policy-makers and practitioners as they move forward to build on the Durban guidance are discussed below.

Harmonize REDD+ Safeguard Reporting Requirements

A unified REDD+ safeguard reporting framework (collection, reporting and verification) is needed that meets the requirements of the UNFCCC as well as funders of REDD+ activities. REDD+ countries are involved in numerous processes related to safeguards at the national and subnational levels. These include processes imposed by funders, voluntary standards and national systems. Examples include the FCPF, UN-REDD Programme's Social and Environmental Principles and Criteria, and the REDD+ Social and Environmental Standards of the CARE International and the Climate, Community and Biodiversity Alliance, which collect information on issues included in the UNFCCC safeguards. Reporting on REDD+ safeguards to multiple authorities with different requirements introduces unnecessary complexities and could mean that REDD+ focal points are faced with competing demands from various processes. Many of these initiatives are at an early stage of development, offering an opportunity to align information needs in the various processes.

Coordinate Collection of REDD+ Safeguard Information with Other Processes

Over the next two to three years, countries will be developing reports for the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Global Forest Resource Assessment (FRA), and coordination with these processes is needed to ensure coherence and prevent duplication of effort. Various processes, such as the CBD and the FRA, collect could information that could be used to report on addressing and respecting REDD+ safeguards. For example, reporting processes under the CBD collect information on biodiversity and natural forests, and the FRA collects information on natural forest conversion and biodiversity. In addition, countries that have developed legality matrices under FLEGT agreements have gathered information on national forest governance structures.

Provide International Guidance

Under the UNFCCC, a draft reporting template and draft online database should be developed to provide guidance to developing countries; the UN-REDD Programme's Benefits and Risk Tool could be applicable for reporting internationally. REDD+ policy-makers and practitioners have expressed the need for international guidance on safeguard reporting, providing further clarity around minimum standards or thresholds for REDD+ SIS. This could include a reporting template, checklist or guiding questions.

Ensure REDD+ Safeguards Reporting is Country-Driven and Country-Appropriate

Future guidance on REDD+ safeguard reporting needs to be sufficiently flexible, and should aim to build on and improve existing in-country capacity. While international guidance is needed, REDD+ SIS must be country-driven and sensitive to national circumstances. Countries have varied levels of information on REDD+ and forests, and different capacities to collect, monitor and report on safeguards. The information and capacity will improve as REDD+ programs are implemented, but early reporting requirements should respect the situation at the country level.

Use Existing Stakeholder Processes where Possible

Given in-country capacity concerns, safeguard reporting processes need to be imbedded in stakeholder processes established for existing systems. For example, many of the same government authorities, stakeholder groups and private sector actors have an interest in both FLEGT and REDD+. The stakeholder groups established for other REDD+ processes could be the basis on which to build an appropriate stakeholder group to guide the development of an information system for reporting on how REDD+ safeguards are addressed and respected. Critical stakeholders in other processes, such as the CBD and FRA, could be brought into the REDD+ SIS working groups to facilitate information sharing.

Provide Financial and Capacity-Building Support

Financing for capacity building should be a short-term priority. Many developing countries require international financial and capacity-building support to develop effective systems to provide information on how REDD+ safeguards are addressed and respected.

Disseminate Lessons Learned and Tools Developed

Countries are establishing institutions and processes for reporting on REDD+ safeguards and there is a need for sharing information and lessons learned. Workshops under the UNFCCC are one way to share country experiences. Another option is workshops supported by groups not linked to the negotiations, such as the series of REDD+ experts meetings held by IISD and the ASB Partnership at the Tropical Forest Margins with support of the Government of Norway. Country representatives often are able to speak more frankly about experiences in less formal, non-negotiation sessions. Furthermore, a systematic assessment of the applicability and usefulness of REDD+ tools and methods is needed across the REDD+ value chain. In this respect, there is a need and desire for continued dialogue to address the various concerns and needs of governments, the private sector and civil society.

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About ASB Partnership for the Tropical Forest Margins

Founded in 1994 as a program on Alternatives to Slash and Burn (ASB), the ASB Partnership for the Tropical Forest Margins has evolved into a global partnership that brings together local knowledge, policy perspectives and science to understand the tradeoffs associated with different land uses and the roles of markets, regulation, property rights and rewards. While ASB is coordinated by the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), it is a global partnership of international and national-level research institutes, non-governmental organizations, universities, community organizations, farmers' groups and other local, national and international organizations. Our goal is to raise productivity and income of rural households in the humid tropics without increasing deforestation or undermining essential environmental services.