

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

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 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.⁴
- 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.

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.

⁴ The eight processes examined were: Social and Environmental Principles and Criteria of the UN-REDD Programme; Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment and Environmental and Social Management Framework, Forest Carbon Partnership Facility; REDD+ Social and Environmental Standards, CARE International and the Climate, Community and Biodiversity Alliance; Convention on Biological Diversity; United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Free, Prior and Informed Consent; Global Forest Resources Assessment; Forest Stewardship Council Principles and Criteria; and Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade.



The complete analysis is available in the forthcoming policy paper, *Designing Effective REDD+ Safeguard Information Systems: Building on Existing Systems and Country Experiences*.

Issues for Consideration by REDD+ Negotiators and Policy-Makers

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 Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, 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 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 Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade 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 REDD+ and Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade. 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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International Institute for Sustainable Development

Head Office

161 Portage Avenue East, 6th Floor, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3B 0Y4

Tel: +1 (204) 958-7700 | Fax: +1 (204) 958-7710 | Web site: www.iisd.org

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About the ASB Partnership for the Tropical Forest Margins

Founded in 1994 as a programme on Alternatives to Slash and Burn, 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.