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| **DRAFT:****Considerations for identifying or developing indicators that can contribute to a REDD+ Safeguards Information System (SIS)** |
| UN-REDD PROGRAMME |
| *July 2016**Draft for comment* |

The UN-REDD Programme is the United Nations collaborative initiative on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD) in developing countries. The Programme was launched in 2008 and builds on the convening role and technical expertise of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The UN-REDD Programme supports nationally-led REDD+ processes and promotes the informed and meaningful involvement of all stakeholders, including Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent communities, in national and international REDD+ implementation.

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Prepared by

***To be completed* (drawing on earlier work by Nathalie Doswald, Barney Dickson and Rebecca Mant)**

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## About this document

This technical briefing document was developed under the UN-REDD Programme as part of the Programme’s response to a growing number of requests from partner countries for support in developing their REDD+ Safeguards Information Systems (SIS). It focuses specifically on the steps that can be taken to identify or develop indicators that can be of use in an SIS.

It is important to note that the UNFCCC decisions on REDD+ have not specified the form in which countries should provide information on how REDD+ safeguards are addressed and respected. The use of indicators as a means to facilitate the gathering and presentation of transparent and consistent information in an SIS is therefore only one of the possible options. However, a number of countries have chosen to develop a set of indicators as an element of their SIS, and the UN-REDD Programme has supported some of this work. It is in this context that a shortage of information materials on possible approaches to the identification and use of indicators was observed.

The present document aims to assist experts involved in the design of Safeguards Information Systems by providing contextual information, recommendations, practical examples, and links to further reading with regard to indicator development. It is intended to support the identification of indicators that are appropriate to a national context rather than to propose specific indicators for general use. It should be read in the context of other relevant UN-REDD outputs such as the framework for supporting the development of country approaches to safeguards, the upcoming report on the potential for data from National Forest Inventories to contribute to an SIS, or the report on options for the development of SIS.

*At this initial stage, the draft document is circulated for inputs and comments from the UN-REDD partner agency teams. Once an advanced draft is agreed internally, it is suggested to circulate it for external review by partner countries and other stakeholders prior to finalization. Any comments will be gratefully received. Please send them to:* *lera.miles@unep-wcmc.org* *and* *cordula.epple@unep-wcmc.org**.*

## Executive Summary

(to be completed)

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Like all processes that change the way land and natural resources are managed, the implementation of REDD+[[1]](#footnote-1) can entail both environmental and social benefits and risks. With this in mind, parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) have adopted a set of seven social and environmental safeguards (also known as the Cancun safeguards, see Box 1) that should be promoted and supported when REDD+ activities are carried out, and have requested countries who wish to engage in REDD+ to develop a system for providing information on how the safeguards are being addressed and respected (UNFCCC Decision 1/CP.16).

Parties further decided that:

* the information provided through these systems should be transparent and consistent, accessible to all relevant stakeholders and updated on a regular basis (Decision 12/CP.17);
* countries should provide periodic summaries of information on how all of the safeguards are being addressed and respected throughout the implementation of REDD+ activities (Decision 12/CP.17);
* countries should provide the first of these summaries after the start of the implementation of REDD+ activities (Decision 12/CP.19);
* provision of the most recent summary will be a condition for receiving results-based REDD+ payments (Decision 9/CP.19);
* in addition to information on how safeguards are being addressed and respected, countries should provide information on the REDD+ activities that are covered by the summary, and on relevant national circumstances for addressing and respecting the safeguards, a description of each safeguard in accordance with national circumstances, and a description of existing systems and processes relevant to addressing and respecting safeguards, including their SIS (Decision -/CP.21, advance unedited version); and
* the information provided should be improved over time (Decision -/CP.21, advance unedited version).

As a result of these decisions, many countries that are aiming to implement REDD+ are currently in the process of developing a Safeguards Information System (SIS). One of the challenges frequently encountered by the experts tasked with such work is that both the wording of the Cancun safeguards and the decisions relating to the SIS and the summary of information leave room for interpretation. The absence of more prescriptive requirements is seen by some as an advantage, as it facilitates the development of country-specific approaches that reflect the national situation. At the same time, others have stated that more precise guidance would reduce the effort needed to reach consensus over the design of a country’s SIS, as well as the risk of countries being faced with varying expectations from donors and other stakeholders. (See e.g. views expressed in the submissions to the UNFCCC on inclusion of further guidance on REDD+ safeguard information systems[[2]](#footnote-2)). Many governments have expressed an interest in supportive materials of a technical nature, which can be applied on a voluntary basis.

The UN-REDD Programme assists its partner countries on a wide range of aspects of preparing for REDD+, including the development of practical and feasible approaches to promoting and supporting the Cancun safeguards, and to the design of Safeguard Information Systems. With regard to SIS design, a number of partner countries have opted for an approach that makes use of an indicator framework as a means to guide the gathering, analysis and presentation of information. Experience to date has shown that such an approach can tie in well with efforts to provide more specific definitions of what the Cancun safeguards mean in the national context, and can help to structure discussions with stakeholders and to set out a clear vision of the type of information that will be included in the system.

However, in some cases challenges have been met with regard to identifying appropriate indicators and sources of information for all of the Cancun safeguards, as data availability can be lower for some safeguard topics than for others. Concerns have also been raised about the risk of ending up with a set of indicators that is too large to be easily manageable, or that requires more resources for the collection and handling of data than are currently available.

The present document is intended to help address some of these issues and offer information and advice for experts engaged in the design of Safeguards Information Systems that involve an indicator-based approach. It provides background information on the context in which indicator development is likely to take place, by setting out the linkages between Safeguard Information Systems and other components of a country approach to safeguards (section 2), and describing different types of relevant information and the role each can play in an SIS (section 3). The main part of the text (section 4) focuses on the description of important steps in the development of indicators, presenting different options and advice for their implementation and using examples drawn from the emerging work on SIS within and outside the UN-REDD Programme, as well as from wider experiences with the development of indicators for social and environmental safeguards and the adaptive management of natural resources. Further considerations on the use of the information that has been generated are also presented (section 5). The annexes contain additional examples of indicators and sources of information, as well as suggestions for further reading.

**Box 1: The Cancun safeguards**

***a) Actions complement or are consistent with the objectives of national forest programmes and relevant international conventions and agreements;***

***b) Transparent and effective national forest governance structures, taking into account national legislation and sovereignty;***

***c) Respect for the knowledge and rights of indigenous peoples and members of local communities, by taking into account relevant international obligations, national circumstances and laws, and noting that the General Assembly has adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;***

***d) Full and effective participation of relevant stakeholders, in particular indigenous peoples and local communities;***

***e) Actions are consistent with the conservation of natural forests and biological diversity, ensuring that REDD+ actions are not used for the conversion of natural forests, but are instead used to incentivize the protection and conservation of natural forests and their ecosystem services, and to enhance other social and environmental benefits;***

***f) Actions to address the risks of reversals;***

***g) Actions to reduce displacement of emissions.***

## 2 DEVELOPING AN SIS IN THE CONTEXT OF A COUNTRY APPROACH TO SAFEGUARDS

In order to implement the UNFCCC decisions on safeguards, countries have to decide on the steps they wish to take in order to ensure that the safeguards are promoted and supported[[3]](#footnote-3) and that REDD+ activities are consistent with them[[4]](#footnote-4), as well as on their approach to the establishment of a Safeguards Information System[[5]](#footnote-5). The two areas of work are often jointly referred to as “the development of a country approach to safeguards”.

The design of an SIS should not be undertaken in isolation from the process that elaborates the approach for promoting and supporting adherence to the safeguards, as knowledge about the elements of this approach will make it easier to clearly define the types of information that should be included in the SIS. There is also significant potential for synergy between the two efforts, since activities such as the development of communication materials about safeguards or the establishment of modalities and structures for stakeholder participation can be carried out for both together.

It should be noted that there is no fixed or linear pathway for developing a country-level safeguards approach. The elements of the process will depend significantly on country circumstances, including any safeguards-related policies, institutions or processes that are already in place. The choice of a way forward that is appropriate to the country circumstances is facilitated by the generic wording of the UNFCCC decisions.

The UN-REDD Programme has developed a number of materials to support the development of a country approach to safeguards, including a conceptual framework that sets out the main steps that countries may wish to consider as they respond to the UNFCCC decisions on safeguards, and the Country Approach to Safeguards Tool ([CAST](http://www.un-redd.org/tabid/133448/Default.aspx)). The latter is an Excel-based tool that facilitates the identification and prioritization of activities that can support the development or refinement of an approach to safeguards. CAST also provides information on available tools, guidelines and resources for each of these activities.

It is recommended to develop the country approach to safeguards in the context of the national REDD+ strategy, in order to ensure that safeguards are considered against the specific REDD+ options and interventions that are envisaged.

Figure 1 shows the main steps in the development of a country approach to safeguards, as identified in the UN-REDD conceptual framework. Each of these steps will be explained briefly below. For a more detailed explanation, see UN-REDD (2015).

Although the steps are depicted in a linear sequence for the sake of clarity, this is not meant to suggest that they should be undertaken in a strict chronological order. The development of a national approach to safeguards can be an iterative and multi-faceted process, and depending on country circumstances it may be appropriate to combine some tasks or work on them simultaneously. Countries may also wish to take a phased approach, initially aiming at the development of working drafts of key documents that can be refined later on the basis of experiences made or information obtained during other stages of the process, or during a pilot application of the safeguards approach.

As shown on the right-hand side of the diagram, the elements of a country’s approach to safeguards that would be developed or identified as a result of the steps described in the UN-REDD framework include:

* the **policies, laws and regulations (PLRs)** through which the safeguards are translated into the national context;
* the design of the **safeguards information system,** including structure, content and ways of functioning;
* the modalities for developing the **summary of information** that will be communicated to the UNFCCC;
* the **institutional arrangements** for supporting the implementation of the PLRs, operating the SIS and producing the summary of information; and
* the **processes and procedures** that will guide the application of the safeguards approach.



**Figure 1: Key steps in the development of a country approach to safeguards**

*Defining the goals of the safeguards approach*

The first step as identified in the framework is the definition of the goals that a country wishes to reach through its safeguards approach. The definition of goals is a crucial element of the process and deserves particular attention, as clarity on this point will facilitate work on both the modalities for applying the safeguards and development of the SIS.

While a fundamental objective of any national approach to safeguards will be to meet the requirements of the relevant UNFCCC decisions, many countries are interested in designing their safeguards response so that it also helps them to address the specific social and environmental requirements of certain donors who may fund activities that relate to REDD+ (such as the World Bank, the Global Environment Facility or the Green Climate Fund).

Other possible goals that countries may want to achieve through their work on safeguards include:

* Enhancing synergies between REDD+ and the goals of other national policies, such as wider forest sector reform, climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, watershed restoration, biodiversity conservation, poverty alleviation, social inclusion, etc.
* Ensuring that REDD+ activities undertaken by different actors follow established good practice (e.g. by following rules of good governance, promoting cross-sectoral integration or supporting clarification of land tenure and use rights), leading to more sustainable results and the achievement of benefits beyond carbon, and reducing the risk of conflicts about REDD+ implementation or reversals of achieved results.
* Providing stakeholders with an assurance that risks of negative impacts from REDD+ are being addressed and social and environmental benefits will be promoted, thus increasing public support for and interest to participate in REDD+.

Some countries may also wish to facilitate the application of national legal requirements (such as Social or Environmental Impact Assessment of projects or programmes) or voluntary standards or guidelines (such as the REDD+ Social and Environmental Standards or the criteria of certification schemes like FSC or Plan Vivo) to REDD+ actions by ensuring compatibility and coherence between these provisions and the national safeguards approach.

Goals for the development of the Safeguards Information System are likely to be determined at least partly by the goals identified for the national approach to safeguards as a whole. For example, if a country decides to design its safeguards approach so that it also covers the requirements linked to certain potential sources of REDD+ funding, the SIS may be designed to provide any information on social and environmental impacts that will be needed for reporting to the funders. The SIS can also deliver the data needed to assess whether REDD+ implementation is achieving any intended synergies with other national policies, and to inform possible changes to the way REDD+ is implemented in case any shortcomings are identified. In addition, the SIS may have the potential to serve further domestic information needs, e.g. by strengthening the knowledge base for wider policy-making related to land use and land tenure.

In some cases, the stage of defining goals for a national approach to safeguards has also involved a discussion on how to delimit the scope of activities that the safeguards will apply to, as it may not always be clear whether an intervention in forestry or other land use sectors that has the potential to contribute to the success of REDD+ is actually part of REDD+ implementation. There may be arguments for embedding REDD+ safeguards into a wider safeguards approach that applies to a broader range of activities or programmes.

Once the overall purpose and scope of the safeguards approach has been clarified, a second important aspect of defining goals can be to develop a more detailed understanding of what the Cancun safeguards might mean in the country context.

The process of identifying the topics that are most relevant to the application of each of the Cancun safeguards in the specific circumstances of a country has been variously described as ‘unpacking the safeguards’, ‘developing a national interpretation of the safeguards’, ‘developing a national specification of the safeguards’, ‘operationalizing the safeguards’ or ‘contextualizing the safeguards’. Regardless of the terminology used, there is wide agreement that the UNFCCC text by itself is too general to afford clarity to all actors engaged in REDD+ on what is needed in order to promote and support the safeguards, and that more detailed national guidance is useful.

Many countries have chosen to initiate a participatory discussion process involving a wide range of stakeholders to establish consensus on a national interpretation or specification of the safeguards.

Experience has shown that it can be an advantage to link this part of the safeguards process to the scoping of strategic options for REDD+ implementation, which may be carried out in the context of the development of a REDD+ strategy or action plan. This is because on the one hand, an assessment of the potential benefits and risks of different types of possible REDD+ actions can facilitate the identification of key environmental and social issues to be considered when developing a national approach to safeguards. On the other hand, the outcomes of such an assessment can feed back into the process of selecting and prioritizing the types of actions that will form part of the strategy.

The [UN-REDD Social and Environmental Principles (SEPC)](http://www.un-redd.org/multiple_benefits_sepc/tabid/54130/default.aspx) were developed as a guiding framework to support countries in addressing social and environmental issues during REDD+ planning and implementation and developing their national approaches to REDD+ safeguards. They are consistent with the Cancun safeguards but set out the main opportunities and risks that are relevant to each of the safeguards in a more detailed way. The SEPC can thus be a useful tool during the initial stages of identifying issues to be considered in a national specification of the safeguards.

Depending on national circumstances and preferences, the outcome of discussions on the specification of the Cancun safeguards can be reflected in various forms such as, for example, an explanatory text, a description of actions that will be taken to implement the safeguards, a set of qualitative and/or quantitative targets that the country intends to achieve through its safeguards approach, or a statement of criteria that REDD+ policies, measures or projects will be required to meet. A number of countries have taken the latter approach and developed a framework of principles and criteria that can assist those planning or approving REDD+ actions in assessing whether a given intervention is in line with the country’s interpretation of the safeguards.

It is worth noting that perceived priorities with regard to benefits that can be achieved and risks to be avoided can vary between different locations or regions of a country, and countries may choose to reflect such spatial variation in their definition of the REDD+ safeguards for the national context.

After the goals of a national approach to safeguards have been agreed, they can be recorded in an official document or communicated through the established channels for awareness-raising and stakeholder involvement. Some countries have chosen to describe their vision for the outcomes of the safeguards work in the relevant section of a national REDD+ strategy or in a dedicated national safeguards framework document.

*Identifying, revising and/or creating policies, laws and regulations to cover the safeguards*

There is a broad choice of political, legal and administrative instruments and arrangements through which countries can ensure that the Cancun safeguards are promoted and supported in the implementation of REDD+. These are often collectively referred to as policies, laws and regulations (PLRs). PLRs may include formal instruments such as laws and sublegal acts, official government strategies, or rules of procedure for government authorities, as well as informal ones such as established practices for the selection of participants in consultation processes or the dissemination of information on government plans and programmes, or enabling activities routinely carried out by the government to support different stakeholder groups in their efforts to respect the safeguards.

The first step in identifying or establishing a set of PLRs as set out in the UN-REDD framework is a gap analysis of already existing policies, laws, regulations and procedures. Most countries will already have a number of social and environmental PLRs in place that are relevant to the implementation of the Cancun safeguards. In order to avoid duplication of effort or the creation of competing or even conflicting arrangements, it can be useful to carry out a mapping of these PLRs against the text of the Cancun safeguards, or against a national specification of the safeguards if there is one[[6]](#footnote-6). If the development of the safeguards approach is carried out in conjunction with the identification of strategic options for REDD+ implementation, this can facilitate the assessment of whether or not the PLRs adequately cover the potential benefits or risks of the types of REDD+ actions that are envisaged.

The gap analysis could not only identify any aspects of the safeguards that are not yet addressed by existing PLRs, but also consider whether there are any weaknesses in the way the PLRs are currently implemented that might compromise the country’s ability to apply the safeguards. Where appropriate, it should also take into account whether the PLRs are suitable for achieving any additional goals that may have been identified for the national approach to safeguards.

Based on the results of the analysis, in a next step suitable arrangements can be developed to fill any identified gaps in the coverage of PLRs, and address existing weaknesses in PLR implementation. Such arrangements may include changes to PLRs or the creation of new PLRs or informal instruments, as well as the strengthening of technical, financial or institutional capacities to implement the PLRs. In some cases, closing key information gaps can also help to facilitate the application of safeguards. For example, REDD+ actors may need information on the distribution of natural forests or forest areas that provide important ecosystem services to help them in addressing safeguard e).

The UN-REDD Programme has developed a number of tools that countries can use to support a PLR review. The Benefits and Risks Tool ([BeRT](http://www.un-redd.org/multiple_benefits/sepc_bert/tabid/991/default.aspx)) sets out key questions for identifying relevant topics that may need to be covered by PLRs across the full scope of the Cancun safeguards. Other tools such as the Guidance on Conducting REDD+ Corruption Risk Assessment, the framework for Participatory Governance Assessments or the Guidelines on Free, Prior and Informed Consent can be used to analyse specific issues in more detail.

Countries may find it helpful to describe the outcome of the PLR review process in a document that gives an overview of the set of existing or planned PLRs that has been identified as part of the framework through which the national approach to safeguards will be put into practice.

*Developing the safeguards information system*

According to the UNFCCC decisions[[7]](#footnote-7), safeguard information systems should build on existing systems where appropriate. In line with this, the UN-REDD framework suggests to initiate the development of an SIS by carrying out a gap analysis of existing information systems.

One of the inputs to such a gap analysis can be a mapping of information needs for the SIS, based on any goals for the SIS that have been identified as part of the definition of goals for the national approach to safeguards, and, where available, the identification of potential benefits and risks from envisaged REDD+ actions, the national specification of safeguards, and the identified set of PLRs to address the safeguards.

Once information needs have been identified, choices can be made with regard to the role that different types of information will play in the SIS (see section 3). In particular, if there is a wish to include indicators among the information elements of the SIS, the type of indicators can be selected and the structure of an indicator framework can be defined, if appropriate. If an indicator-based approach is chosen, identification of the indicators would then constitute the next step in developing the SIS.

An example of the close linkages that can exist between a national specification of the Cancun safeguards and the development of indicators for an SIS are the safeguard frameworks that have been drawn up in a number of countries using a set of Principles, Criteria and Indicators. In most of these cases, the principles and criteria set out what the Cancun safeguards are understood to mean in the national context, while indicators corresponding to each of the criteria provide the means of verifying that the safeguards are being met. There is a clear opportunity to draw on these indicators when designing an SIS, and several of the countries that are using a Principles, Criteria and Indicators framework as part of their safeguards approach are planning to do so.

The final step in developing an SIS according to the UN-REDD framework is to define the approaches that will be used to collect and provide the information. This may involve the elaboration of protocols for the collection and handling of data, as well as the identification of institutional roles and responsibilities for collecting, sharing, storing, analysing and communicating information, making use of existing information systems, platforms or web portals where appropriate.

Depending on available technical and financial capacities and given timeframes for work on the SIS, countries may choose to take a stepwise approach to the development of their SIS, starting with an initial version that contains information that is easily available and/or most relevant to the early phases of REDD+ implementation, and expanding or improving it at a later stage. Such an approach is in line with UNFCCC decision 12/CP.17, which states that SIS should be “transparent and flexible to allow for improvements over time”. Developing the SIS in an iterative and adaptive manner will also allow for the incorporation of lessons learned from implementing the initial version of the system, as well as adaptation of the content and design of the system in line with progress or changes in the country’s plans for REDD+ implementation or the national interpretation of safeguards.

## 3 DIFFERENT TYPES OF INFORMATION AND THEIR ROLE IN AN SIS

There is a wide range of qualitative and quantitative information, related to both the REDD+ process itself and the wider socio-economic and environmental context in which it takes place, that can be relevant to providing a picture of how the Cancun safeguards are addressed and respected in a country.

For the purpose of the present document, a general distinction is made between narrative information and information that is conveyed through indicators. Narrative information is understood to comprise all elements of information that are provided in the form of free text, or accompanying figures and illustrations whose type and format is not pre-defined. That is to say, the form and thematic coverage of the narrative information related to a certain topic may change from one period of information collection and provision to the next, and is not necessarily described in detail in the design of the SIS. By contrast, any indicators that are included in the information structure of the SIS will normally have been explicitly defined during the design stage and may be presented in the form of an indicator framework.

As has been pointed out previously, the UNFCCC decisions make no mention of the types of information that should be included in an SIS, and depending on country preferences and circumstances both narrative and indicator-based information can have a role to play, as will be described in the following.

When thinking about the thematic scope of the SIS, it is useful to keep in mind that the UNFCCC decisions call for information on how the safeguards are both “addressed” and “respected”. There has been a certain amount of discussion over the meaning of these terms, as there is no official definition provided by the UNFCCC. Many participants in the discourse seem to have converged on the view that “how safeguards are addressed” refers to the arrangements that are in place or are being established to promote and support the safeguards, while information on “how safeguards are respected” would reflect how these arrangements are being implemented in practice, and whether they fulfil the purpose of meeting the safeguards.

The nature of the information that is provided under each of these categories will to a certain degree depend on the goals that have been agreed for the SIS. For example, if a country wishes to use the information provided in its SIS in order to identify good practices for REDD+ implementation that lead to certain social and environmental benefits, it may be useful to structure the information in a way that allows linking actions to outcomes. Similarly, if one aim of the SIS is to demonstrate compliance with the requirements of specific funders, there may be an argument for structuring the SIS so that it is easy to obtain information on whether certain criteria have been met.

The characteristics of a national specification of the safeguards, if available, may also have an influence on the contents of the system. For example, whether the information to be provided focuses on specific actions taken or outcomes achieved may be determined by the approach chosen for the national safeguards framework, and whether or not this defines objectives with regard to tasks to be undertaken by different actors, or with regard to the achievement of benefits and avoidance of risks.

The emphasis of the information provided in an SIS may shift over time. For example, countries might choose to place greater focus on describing the arrangements in place to promote and support the safeguards (“how safeguards are addressed”) during early stages of REDD+ implementation, followed by an increasing focus on describing the implementation of the arrangements and the achieved outcomes in relation to the safeguards (“how safeguards are respected”) once REDD+ implementation is well underway. However, it is likely that information on the approaches to address the safeguards will need to be updated periodically, as countries make adjustments to their PLR frameworks and institutional arrangements or undertake efforts to enhance the capacity of specific actors to promote and support the safeguards, based on the experiences made.

All of the above considerations may be relevant when determining the role that narrative information and information conveyed through indicators should play in different thematic sections and during different periods of implementation of an SIS.

### 3.1 NARRATIVE INFORMATION

Presentation in narrative form may be particularly suitable for the following types of information:

* Background information that is provided in order to help users of the SIS in understanding the context in which the application of safeguards takes place, e.g. information on current forest condition and the values provided by forests to different stakeholders, drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, planned REDD+ policies and measures and their potential benefits and risks, or political goals related to REDD+ implementation and the benefits to be achieved through it. While the UNFCCC decisions do not require countries to include such information in their SIS, it can greatly enhance the accessibility of SIS contents for different stakeholder groups. Dec. 17/CP.21 of the UNFCCC strongly encourages Parties to include a description of national circumstances relevant to addressing and respecting the safeguards in their summaries of information, and hosting this kind of information in the SIS would be a straightforward approach.
* Information on how the country is addressing the safeguards – this could include for example: an explanation of the process to develop the national approach to safeguards, including descriptions of consultations that were carried out and studies and policy documents that have been produced (e.g. a national safeguards clarification or the results of a PLR review); a description of the current framework of PLRs and institutional arrangements to support implementation of REDD+ in line with the safeguards, as well as any measures that have been undertaken or are planned in order to address identified gaps or weaknesses; an account of how the safeguards have been taken into account in the development or updating of the national REDD+ strategy (e.g. selection of the policies and measures to be supported, inclusion of risk mitigation measures). Again, providing this kind of information through the SIS will facilitate the development of summaries of information, as countries are encouraged in Dec. 17/CP.21 to include in their summaries a description of each safeguard in accordance with national circumstances, and a description of existing systems and processes relevant to addressing and respecting safeguards.
* Information on stakeholders’ perspectives on how safeguards are being respected; this may include information obtained through interviews or focus group discussions.
* Information related to the interpretation of indicator values, e.g. background information on data sources, context and rationale for each indicator, a description of the factors linked to REDD+ implementation and external influences that may have contributed to changes (or absence of change) in an indicator, a presentation of the conclusions drawn from indicator values and any observed changes in them, or a discussion of any uncertainties associated with the interpretations made.

Generally speaking, narrative form is particularly well suited for the provision of contextual information, or information related to processes or actions whose development is hard to foresee at the time the SIS is designed, for example because they depend on or respond to external factors. Narrative information can also be used to compensate for unavoidable gaps in an indicator framework, as it may be necessary to restrict indicator coverage to a selection of key safeguard topics for which data can be obtained (see section 4).

### 3.2 INFORMATION CONVEYED THROUGH INDICATORS

An indicator is “a measure based on verifiable data that conveys information about more than itself”. Because indicator assessment can be repeated periodically over time using a constant methodology, indicators are a good means of observing progress towards an objective. The use of indicators in an SIS can also be a way to ensure that the information provided is transparent and consistent and can be updated on a regular basis, in line with Decision 12/CP.17.

There are certain characteristics that distinguish a good indicator. In the context of monitoring and evaluation, many organizations call for indicators to be defined in a way that is SMART[[8]](#footnote-8):

* Specific (i.e. the indicator should be defined unambiguously, so that different people will have the same understanding of the kind of information that it provides)
* Measurable (i.e. it should be possible to observe or collect the information required for the indicator in an objective and verifiable way)
* Achievable (i.e. the methods and information required for the indicator should be available, and sufficient funds and capacity should be accessible to apply the indicator with the required frequency and accuracy)
* Relevant (i.e. the indicators should be clearly related to the subject of interest, and should be sensitive enough to show change over a scale and timeframe that is appropriate for the purpose)
* Time-Bound (i.e.it should be clear when the information required for the indicator will be collected and analysed).

In order to be successful, indicators should also be easy to understand and communicate. This means that the logical connection between the indicator and the subject of interest should be intelligible to non-experts with little or no additional explanation, and that it should be clear which types of change in the indicator imply a positive or negative development.

Indicators can range in complexity, from simple statements (e.g. whether or not a certain type of policy is in place), to complex aggregated indices developed from several parameters according to a set formula (such as the Living Planet Index, which is a composite measure of different vertebrate population trends that is intended to provide an overall picture of trends in the world’s biodiversity).

In the context of an SIS, a useful distinction is that between process and outcome indicators.

## 4 IMPORTANT STEPS IN THE IDENTIFICATION OR DEVELOPMENT OF INDICATORS FOR AN SIS

There is no fixed, linear approach to developing a safeguards approach, which will depend significantly on what is already in place in the country, as well as what governments define as the overall goals of the system. Moreover, developing suitable design for an SIS is likely to be an iterative process, with consideration of the later guidelines being used to inform the application of the earlier ones.

### IDENTIFY STAKEHOLDERS

Identify stakeholders and holders of knowledge and expertise to be involved in objective formulation for the SIS, indicator development and subsequent collection and provision of information. Where existing national processes for engagement exist, they can be supported in order to be fit for purpose.

Stakeholder input is important at all stages of SIS development; stakeholders can help to identify priority concerns to be covered by indicators, scope possible sources of data, advise on indicator definitions and data collection methods, etc.

Key stakeholder groups with regard to SIS design may include:

i. Those that can provide relevant information for inclusion in the SIS; for example, NGOs, government departments and research groups may be collecting information that can be relevant to REDD+ safeguards or may be in a position to provide technical input.

ii. Those that may be involved in SIS implementation; such as technical experts employed by relevant institutions and forest communities who could be involved in community-based information collection initiatives.

iii. Those that have an interest in the results of information collection; policy makers, those involved in forest management and NGOs will require the information for different purposes, such as reporting, scrutiny or adaptive management.

Relevant stakeholders in each of these groupings may vary according to the region and its circumstances and can sometimes be quite remote from the forestry sector. For example, where mangrove forests are important for REDD+, SIS stakeholders may include officials from the fisheries department and local fishermen.

The institutional and context analysis for REDD+ (ICA/REDD+) that UN-REDD has been using represents a valuable methodology to help countries scope their stakeholders, understand the political and socio-economic views around REDD+, and explore their interrelations. The ICA/REDD+ not only provides stakeholder analysis, but also serves to forecast points of divergence and tension between stakeholders when developing a NS/AP, as well as opportunities for alliances and collaborative efforts.

There will need to be close collaboration with the FCPF and other relevant safeguard initiatives to increase complementarity in supporting country-led safeguards processes, aiming to improve coordination at an early stage of requests for support.

### IDENTIFY AND PRIORITIZE INFORMATION NEEDS

Identify the objectives for the SIS, taking into account any agreed goals and requirements of the country approach to safeguards in relation to biodiversity and ecosystem services, including any safeguard commitments more specific than those described in the Cancun agreements. Important considerations in choosing the objectives of an SIS include whether the SIS is intended primarily to provide information to donors and the UNFCCC, or whether the country also wishes to obtain and communicate information for domestic policy purposes.

Other steps in the development of a country approach to safeguards that can be relevant to SIS design are the national clarification of safeguards, the PLR analysis and the analysis of benefits and risks of candidate REDD+ actions.

While the UN-REDD Programme recommends that work on the SIS starts after the work on a national interpretation of safeguards, in practice this doesn’t always happen, and sometimes SIS teams are not aware of the linkages.

In defining information needs, it is also important to be realistic about what is feasible in providing information on the impacts of REDD+ on biodiversity and ecosystem services as relevant to the country approach to safeguards

### IDENTIFY INFORMATION SOURCES

Make use of existing information sources and systems that are relevant to the safeguards. If necessary and feasible adapt existing systems.

1. Make use of Measurement, Verification and Reporting (MRV) data as it relates to the selected biodiversity and ecosystem service indicators. This may include remote sensing data that can be used to establish ecosystem-scale indicators.

2. Where appropriate, make use of data collected at the level of projects

3. Recognise that communities can play an important role in collecting and providing information on biodiversity and ecosystem services.

The NFMS may include information related to some of the Cancun safeguards, for example identifying if natural forests are being converted. Another example of a process that may be a potentially integral component of national approaches to safeguards is a national-level grievance mechanism.

### SELECT INDICATORS

Carefully select indicators to illustrate how the relevant Cancun safeguards are being addressed and respected, in terms of evaluating REDD+ actions and their environmental and social impacts and progress towards the selected objectives.

It is very important when choosing indicators for an SIS to consider the feasibility of its design and implementation. Feasibility has three important but interrelated aspects: technical, financial and human resources.

The technical feasibility of collecting information on how safeguards are addressed and respected will limit what indicators are selected and how they are measured.

Financial considerations are a central but not necessarily ultimate aspect of feasibility. While having a comprehensive suite of indicators covering a wide range of aspects of safeguards application may be desirable, it may not be realistic. Indeed, past experience has shown that using large numbers of indicators can generate unwieldy data requirements, bureaucracy and high demand for resources, which combine to inhibit effective operationalization. SIS design requires financial consideration not only of equipment, data collection and training, but also of data storage, data analysis and reporting.

Human resources considerations relate in part to the financial aspects of resources and capacity to undertake information collection and analysis. However, motivation, willingness, ability and availability to be involved in implementation are also crucial in their own right.

Choose an appropriate mix of process and impact indicators.

Where appropriate, establish a hierarchy of indicators, with ‘headline indicators’ to summarize and communicate key trends.

### ESTABLISH METHODS, PROTOCOLS AND INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

## 5 OUTLOOK – USING THE INFORMATION THAT HAS BEEN GENERATED

A key use of SIS information is to feed into the development of Summaries of Information to be reported to the UNFCCC. There is no specific guidance from UNFCCC on the content or structure of the summary of information, beyond that it covers all seven Cancun safeguards. It is expected to draw on the SIS and may describe the overall safeguards process, the relevant PLRs in place, and the degree to which these are being respected in practice.

However, governments may also want to provide information from the SIS in different formats to different users. National stakeholder groups may have differing interests, needs and capacities to absorb information from the SIS.

Purposes to which SIS information can be applied include:

i. Policy needs: decision-makers may want to be able to use SIS content for the design of further policy interventions. The information therefore needs to be presented as clear messages and facts relevant to national (and international) decision-making.

ii. Environmental management needs: managers of REDD+ interventions may have an interest in SIS content as a basis for adapting their REDD+ actions.

iii. Reporting needs: different policy commitments may have different reporting needs. However, information needed for the UNFCCC is likely to be clear national level information on addressing and respecting REDD+ safeguards. Additionally, some of the content compiled for the SIS could be used to report on the implementation of other policy commitments (e.g. CBD).

iv. Broader interests: this category encompasses all other stakeholders that have an interest in learning about the social and environmental impacts of REDD+ How the information is presented therefore depends on the audience: simple and clear for a broad audience and more detailed for a research audience for example.

## REFERENCES

(To be completed)

## ANNEX

### Examples of potential indicators and information sources

(To be completed based on published country examples and other examples provided without reference to a specific country.)

### Further reading on SIS and indicator development

(To be completed)

1. Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation, conservation of forest carbon stocks, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. FCCC/SBSTA/2014/MISC.6; Menton et al. (2014) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. As per Decision 1/CP.16, para. 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. As per Decision 2/CP 17, para.63. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. As per Decision 1/CP.16, para. 71 d). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Note that depending on timing a PLR review against the Cancun safeguards can also serve as one of the inputs to a national specification of the safeguards. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. UNFCCC Dec. 12/CP.17 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See also <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/20141022071803-18927814-a-good-start-with-s-m-a-r-t-indicators> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)