UN-REDD
PROGRAMME
INFO BRIEF
ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

REDD+ Safeguards and Safeguards Information Systems in the Asia-Pacific Region

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KEY MESSAGES

1. A regional South-South knowledge exchange event convened in Hanoi, Viet Nam, in October 2017, generated a wealth of shared experiences on progress, challenges and lessons learnt from efforts to meet safeguards requirements for REDD+ from the Asia-Pacific region. The experiences from the nine participating countries are synthesised in this Info Brief.

2. Progress has been made by REDD+ countries in the Asia-Pacific region on developing approaches to address and respect safeguards, as well as developing national-level safeguards information systems (SIS). Some of the countries with more advanced readiness processes are starting to turn their attention to drafting their first summaries of information.

3. Opportunities to exchange lessons between countries have proved to be valuable learning experiences, making safeguards approaches across the region more efficient and effective. Further opportunities for South-South knowledge exchange, within the region, as well as with other regions will accelerate collective learning and advancement on safeguards.

READ THIS BRIEF …

- If you are involved in processes, in your country, to meet safeguards requirements for REDD+, particularly in terms of SIS design.

- If you want to learn from other countries in the Asia-Pacific region about what they have done to meet these requirements.

- If you are working on other aspects of REDD+ in the Asia-Pacific region and want to get an overview of progress on REDD+ safeguards to date.

Introduction

A number of developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region are making notable progress in getting ready for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD+) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Many countries have now developed three, out of four, pillars of the Warsaw Framework for REDD+ ('The REDD+ rulebook' under the UNFCCC)[i]: 1) national strategy/action plan; 2) forest reference emission levels or forest reference levels); and 3) national forest monitoring systems. There is now an increasing level of attention being paid to the fourth pillar of REDD+ readiness: safeguards.

Developing countries participating in REDD+ are expected - as agreed by Parties to the UNFCCC in Cancun, Mexico, in 2010 - to address and respect a set of seven safeguards throughout the implementation of REDD+ actions, be they nationwide policy or site-specific interventions. In addition, countries should also have in place a SIS providing information on how the 'Cancun safeguards' have been addressed and respected. Lastly, countries are required to submit summaries of information on how all the Cancun safeguards have been addressed and respected throughout REDD+ implementation.

Most recently, the Green Climate Fund, the financing arm of the UNFCCC, has established further safeguards requirements for a pilot programme for REDD+ results-based payments[ii]. Eligibility requirements include having a SIS in place, together with submission of the most recent summary of information on how the Cancun safeguards have been addressed and respected, which will be assessed using a scorecard. There are also additional requirements to meet the Fund's interim Environmental and Social Safeguards.

REDD+ countries in the Asia-Pacific region are currently at varying stages of readiness in attempting to meet these safeguards requirements. Many of these countries also receive financial support from the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), as well as other bilateral and multilateral donors, each with their own safeguards and associated procedural requirements.

In response to the challenge of meeting multiple safeguards requirements, countries have been adopting different safeguards approaches depending on their overall approaches to REDD+, their primary sources of readiness funding, and their existing in-country capacities. The different approaches to meeting different safeguards requirements for REDD+ have generated a wealth of experience for countries. In the spirit of South-South cooperation and learning, a knowledge exchange event was held in Hanoi, Viet Nam on 26-27 October, 2017.

The event provided an opportunity for REDD+ countries around the Asia-Pacific region to share experiences and lessons learnt to date, as well as discuss common challenges and potential solutions. Attending the event were national-level stakeholders and experts involved in developing safeguards approaches from Bhutan, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Indonesia, Mongolia, Myanmar,

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Nepal, Papua New Guinea and Viet Nam. Guests representing two other tropical forest regions where REDD+ is being pursued – Ghana for Africa, and Peru from Latin America – were also present.

This information brief presents the issues discussed during the event as well as key experiences and lessons learned from the participating countries and the Asia-Pacific region in general. The brief is structured around three themes:

1. Addressing and respecting safeguards

2. Safeguards information systems

3. Summaries of information

1. Addressing and respecting safeguards

UNFCCC requirements and guidance

Throughout the implementation of REDD+ activities, and regardless of the source or type of funding, countries are required to 'ensure consistency with', 'promote and support' and 'address and respect' the Cancun safeguards. UNFCCC decisions do not define any of these terms, but as the SIS is expected to demonstrate addressing and respecting, which is also supposed to be captured in summaries of information, the terms 'address' and 'respect' have acquired common working definitions as follows:

- **address** – to have, on paper, a coherent body of policies, laws, regulations and other measures in place to ensure the principles of the safeguard are met

- **respect** – to implement, in practice, this coherent body of policies, laws, regulations and other measures, as well as the outcomes of that implementation

Progress to date

No 'one-size-fits-all' approach to addressing and respecting safeguards can be identified for the Asia-Pacific region; the type and particular mix of REDD+ actions identified by a country, in their national REDD+ strategy or action plan, has influenced the safeguards approach taken in each country. Although no universally agreed categorization exists, REDD+ safeguard approaches taken in the Asia-Pacific region to date can be broadly grouped into two types: 'country approaches' to safeguards, building on existing governance arrangements and systems, and 'project-driven' approaches that develop discrete environmental and social impact management frameworks.

Country approaches involve building on a country's existing 'governance framework', which includes its policies, laws and regulations, used to translate global REDD+ safeguards into the national context, as well as the institutions mandated to implement the existing legal framework, to ensure that the content of the safeguards is enforceable in the country.

A project-driven approach to safeguards is most widely adopted by international financial institutions such as the World Bank. Generally tailored to a single site-based project or series of

projects constituting a sub-national programme, this approach aims to define a tailored framework for screening, minimizing and managing potential social and environmental risks. The World Bank-administered FCPF supports this type of approach in many countries.

Some countries, particularly those who started their REDD+ readiness processes most recently, have drawn from the experiences of other countries and are turning to more hybrid approaches (see Box1 for an example from Bhutan), where existing governance arrangements are being harnessed to address and respect the Cancun safeguards, while also designing more REDD+ specific impact management frameworks to ensure that all REDD+ actions are covered in adequate detail.

> **Box 1: Developing a hybrid approach to safeguards in Bhutan**
>
> The Royal Government of Bhutan initiated a safeguard process in mid-2017. As a recipient of FCPF funding, Bhutan has committed to meeting the FCPF procedural safeguard requirements (development of a Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment and Environmental and Social Management Framework). This approach will identify and aim to mitigate the social and environmental risks of the actions in the emerging National REDD+ Strategy. In addition to this, the government has committed to meeting the UNFCCC safeguard requirements and is, therefore, designing an approach that will ensure consistency with both UNFCCC and FCPF requirements.
>
> The combined approach will aim to harness existing governance arrangements, as much as possible, through policies, laws and regulations and institutional assessments, to ensure safeguards are addressed and respected throughout REDD+ policy implementation, while still developing an environmental and social management framework, with its novel REDD+ specific procedures, to ensure that safeguards are clearly enforced during design and implementation of the site-specific measures.

Key challenges

For country approaches to safeguards in the region, the following two main challenges have been identified:

- The possible need for policy, legal or regulatory reform to address gaps between the domestic legal framework and (a national interpretation of) the Cancun safeguards; together with

- The possible need for additional, novel REDD+ specific procedures, where closing PLR gaps is not politically feasible, to ensure safeguards are addressed and respected across implementation of all REDD+ actions, particularly for localised, project-based measures.

Irrespective of country, project-based or hybrid approaches to safeguards, conducting an environment and social benefit/risk assessment of proposed REDD+ actions, be they in national strategies, subnational programmes or site-based projects, has emerged as a crucial first step. Such benefit/risk assessments help identify the country context-specific environmental and social issues that need to be safeguarded. In the Asia-Pacific region, however, these kind of assessments have met with the following challenges:

- Multiple, iterative benefit/risk assessments, for national strategies, and subnational projects, incurs significant costs and requires the development of multiple, progressively more detailed impact management frameworks; and

- Assessing the environmental and social benefits and risks for policy type REDD+ actions - such as jurisdiction-wide integrated land-use planning or fiscal (e.g. agricultural credit or subsidy) policy reforms – is not straightforward, as the benefits and risks of policies are more complex to identify, due to their indirect impacts together with multiple negative and positive feedback loops.

Lessons learnt

No two countries have followed the exact same approach to addressing and respecting safeguards, yet regardless of the approach (country, project-driven or a hybrid of the two) it has been important to consider the timing of key REDD+ processes and how they influence each other, particularly:

- Development of the national REDD+ strategy or action plan;

- Assessments of existing legal and institutional frameworks for addressing and respecting safeguards; and

- Assessments of environment and social benefits and risks of proposed REDD+ actions.

Country approaches to safeguards need to be **adapted to the type and scale** of the planned REDD+ actions, each of which bring their own operational considerations including:

- Empowering mandated institutions and ensuring appropriate institutional mandates are in place;

- Ensuring that the mandated institutions have the (financial, human and technical) capacity to enforce safeguard

compliance and reporting at the relevant administrative level;

• Developing guidance and procedures, such as operational manuals, to ensure that the safeguards approach is followed by mandated institutions, as well as project implementers; and

• Opportunistically identifying entry points in other policy, law or regulatory reform processes into which country approaches to safeguards can be integrated; policy, laws or regulations – such as those for forestry, low-carbon development or planning - can be reformed to be more in line with the principles of REDD+ safeguards.

No one country in the Asia-Pacific region has a fully functional safeguards approach yet, and it is acknowledged that the process of developing REDD+ actions is **often iterative**, which means the development of a safeguard approach is also likely to be an **iterative process** of review, revision and improvement.
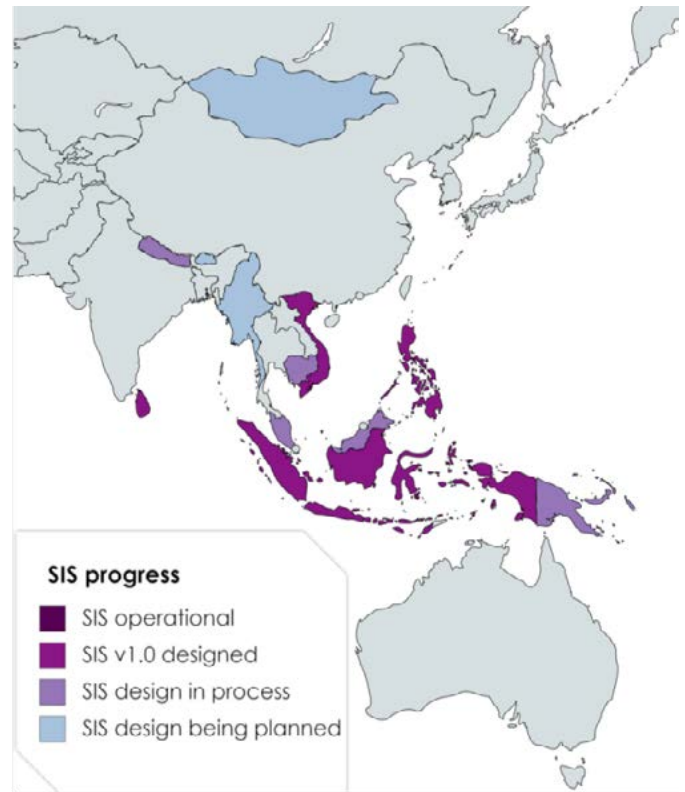
2. Safeguard Information Systems

UNFCCC requirements and guidance

Developing a 'system for providing information on how safeguards are addressed and respected [commonly known as a safeguard information system or SIS] throughout the implementation of REDD+ activities' is a key requirement and a prerequisite for results-based payments from REDD+, under the UNFCCC[iii]. It is also an eligibility criterion for REDD+ result-based payments under the Green Climate Fund.

Although there are no official guidelines on how countries are supposed to set up and run a SIS, Parties to the UNFCCC have agreed on some broad guidance on the characteristics of a SIS:

• Provide transparent and consistent information that is accessible by all relevant stakeholders and updated on a regular basis;

• Be transparent and flexible to allow for improvements over time;

Figure 1: Progress on safeguards information systems in Asia-Pacific, as of December 2017 (Source: UN-REDD Programme)

• Provide information on how all the Cancun safeguards are being addressed and respected;

• Be country-driven and implemented at the national level; and

• Build upon existing systems, as appropriate.

Progress to date

As more and more countries in the Asia-Pacific region progress in their readiness processes and move towards REDD+ implementation, attention is turning towards designing and implementing the SIS.

While no country in the Asia-Pacific region has a fully operational SIS yet, significant progress has been made in many REDD+ countries worldwide and a number of Asia-Pacific countries have already started designing their systems (see Figure 1). Box 2 summarises Indonesia's approach to designing a SIS at national, subnational and site-based project scales.

Box 2: Designing a safeguard information system in line with the scale of REDD+ implementation in Indonesia[iv]

Given the decentralized governance structure of Indonesia, the REDD+ National Strategy recognizes the crucial roles of both national and subnational (provincial and district) governments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The 'SIS-REDD+' has, therefore, been structured both horizontally (coordination between national ministries) and vertically (collaboration with national and sub-national governments), with information expected to be fed from subnational administrative units implementing the national REDD+ strategy, into the national SIS. Two mechanisms are used:

1. Pilot REDD+ project implementers report directly to the national SIS data management unit, conducting a self-assessment with a 'Safeguards Implementation Assessment Tool'

2. Existing provincial-level information systems linked to the national web-based database with initial piloting in Jambi and East Kalimantan provinces.

Indonesia has focused on stakeholder engagement at different scales for the design of the SIS-REDD+, to increase confidence and create a sense of ownership and acceptance, and to ensure outputs fit within both the national and subnational contexts. The extensive consultations took time but stakeholder engagement was essential to achieve consensus throughout the SIS-REDD+ development process.

Key challenges

Countries in Asia-Pacific have faced a number of common SIS design challenges. Those that resonate across most countries of the region include:

1. **The limited operational guidance** from UNFCCC and significantly different country contexts means that it is difficult to replicate design approaches from one country to another; each SIS must be tailored to each country's specific context.

2. **Limited technical capacities,** among government and other stakeholders; while the political emphasis on SIS design is often strong, it is not always understood that the SIS itself will not address and respect the safeguards. This fact is often brought to light when attempting to define the information needed to demonstrate that safeguards are being addressed and respected, especially when the safeguard approach itself is not clear.

3. **Defining and acquiring information for the SIS**, from different existing sources and systems, generally involves going through a lengthy process of national interpretation of the Cancun safeguards, through to defining information needs and structure, and finally developing different templates to collect information from different sources. This process is technically complex and lengthy, usually taking at least 10-12 months. Ensuring consistent technical engagement is a challenge due to personnel changes, both within government and among relevant stakeholders.

4. **Structuring the information gathered by the SIS.** In many cases, countries have undergone lengthy processes of developing frameworks of principles, criteria and indicators to structure the information gathered by the SIS. This has typically been undertaken before clarity on the REDD+ actions, as articulated in the national strategy, was achieved, and independently from the safeguard approach itself, all too often resulting in end-products of questionable utility.

Lessons learnt

While SIS design features will be country-specific, several key strategic lessons for SIS design have been identified based on countries' respective experiences.

- **Ensuring coherence between the SIS and overall safeguard approach.** SIS on its own is not expected to – nor is it intended to – ensure that the Cancun safeguards are addressed and respected throughout the implementation of REDD+ actions. The SIS is only intended to demonstrate how safeguards are being addressed and respected; it is an institutional framework for collecting, managing and disseminating information, not a means of addressing and respecting the safeguards themselves. It is important, therefore, to ensure that, in addition to designing a SIS, adequate steps are also taken to develop the country's overall approach to addressing and respecting the safeguards.

- **The process of interpreting** how the general principles contained in the Cancun safeguards are reflected in the national context has been regarded as a key input for linking the safeguard approach to the SIS. Undertaking such an exercise aims to ensure that the SIS will be able to gather and provide information on the approach put in place to ensure the safeguards are addressed and respected.

- **Relying entirely on existing information systems** may not be feasible. Though UNFCCC guidance encourages this, in practice, relying entirely on existing systems can result in either: a) big gaps in thematic coverage of some of the safeguards; or b) not enough detailed information to demonstrate safeguards are being respected.

- **Institutional arrangements.** When identifying/designating the institution that will be responsible for hosting and managing the SIS, it will be important to consider necessary institutional mandates, human and financial resources. It is also important to consider the benefits and costs of using existing non-REDD+ sources of information versus novel REDD+ specific reporting arrangements that may need to be set up.

3. Summaries of Information

Summaries of information on safeguards refers to documentation of how a country is addressing and respecting the Cancun safeguards throughout the implementation of REDD+. Summaries of information must be submitted to the UNFCCC before a country can receive results-based payments for REDD+.

UNFCCC requirements and guidance

The UNFCCC sets out requirements and provides guidance to countries on summaries of information:

- Countries should submit their most recent summary of information to the UNFCCC upon commencing implementation of REDD+ actions[v].

- Once the first summary of information has been submitted, subsequent summaries should be submitted every four years, consistent with the provisions for submission of national communications for developing countries[vi].

- Additionally, a country may submit a summary of information voluntarily and directly to the UNFCCC REDD+ web platform at any time[vii].

- The UNFCCC decision[viii] on *'Further guidance on ensuring transparency, consistency, comprehensiveness and effectiveness when informing on how all the* [Cancun] *safeguards are being addressed and respected'* provides guidance on the content of summaries of safeguards information:.

Countries 'should' provide:

- *Information on which REDD+ activities are included in the summary of information*

Countries are 'strongly encouraged' to provide:

- *Information on national circumstances relevant to addressing and respecting the safeguards*
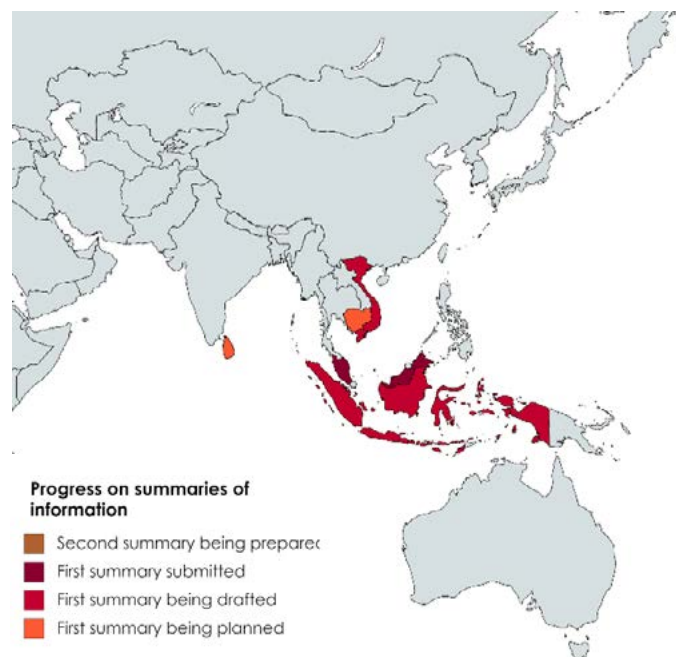

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- *Description of each safeguard in accordance with national circumstances*

- *Description of existing systems and processes relevant to addressing and respecting safeguards*

- *Information on how each of the safeguards has been addressed and respected*

Countries are 'encouraged" to provide:
- *Any other relevant information*

- *Improving information taking into account a stepwise approach*

Progress to date

As of December 2017, four countries (Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Malaysia) have submitted summaries of information to the UNFCCC. A number of Asia-Pacific countries are currently in the process of preparing their first summary (see Figure 2), while Brazil and Colombia have begun developing their second summaries. Box 3 outlines experiences and lessons from Viet Nam in drafting its first summary of information.

Progress on summaries of information

- Second summary being prepared
- First summary submitted
- First summary being drafted
- First summary being planned

Figure 2: Progress on summaries of information in Asia Pacific, as of December 2017 (Source: UN-REDD Programme)

Box 3: Preparing a first summary of information for Viet Nam

Viet Nam began drafting its first summary of information in 2017. A working group made up of representatives from key government institutions was established to guide the preparation of the summary of information, as well as the development of the first iteration of the country's SIS.

A team of national and international experts has been supporting the working group in drafting a first summary of information, drawing on key outputs of Viet Nam's country approach to safeguards: its national clarification of the Cancun safeguards; assessments of policies, laws and regulations; and SIS design.

Key lessons from Viet Nam's experience in developing its first summary of information include:

- The country's REDD+ implementation monitoring framework, SIS and summary are being developed in parallel. This provides substantial opportunity to improve the design of these systems to support each other and inform the summary.

- A National REDD+ Implementation Plan (NRIP), operationalising the National REDD+ Action Programme, has also been in parallel development alongside drafting of the summary of safeguards information. Part of the NRIP process included an assessment of environmental and social benefits and risks of proposed REDD+ actions. Consequently, the summary has continually evolved as clearer understanding of REDD+ actions and their potential impacts has emerged.

The engagement of multiple government and non-government stakeholders is essential for developing the SIS and preparing a credible summary of information. The information to show that safeguards are being addressed and respected is generated and located across a range of sectors, and information-sharing must be promoted.

Key challenges

A number of questions, identifying challenges related to summaries of information, have been raised by the region:

- **What is a 'good' length for a summary of information?** The initial summaries of information published to date are long (in the range of 50-70 pages), and feature substantial background information on the REDD+ context and

safeguards processes in the countries concerned. In the absence of any template or guidance on this topic, how much background information should be included, especially in a country's first summary?

- **Should the foundation documents for the summary of information be officially accepted or endorsed?** It is challenging to develop a summary of information when key elements of the safeguards approach may not yet be officially endorsed or published, such as the clarification of the safeguards in the country context, or the SIS design.

- **How to ensure information on respecting the safeguards is credible and accurate?** This is especially challenging for initial summaries of information, which may be prepared at the very beginning of REDD+ implementation and before an SIS is operational. Country representatives also noted that information sources from different ministries/sectors may use different terminologies, time periods and standards, compared to needs for REDD+. Stakeholder engagement and validation of summaries of information is considered essential in ensuring that a quality summary is produced and submitted.

- **What does the Green Climate Fund requirement for results-based payments, 'SIS in place', mean in practical terms, and how to document the SIS in the first summary of information?** As above, this is a challenging task when an SIS may not be fully operational, or may be an early iteration that is not yet gathering information on respecting the safeguards.

Opportunities

It is too early to draw conclusive lessons learnt from experiences in preparing summaries of information in the Asia-Pacific region. A number of forward-looking opportunities, however, have been identified:

- Learning from the experience and examples of summaries of information already published by early movers in REDD+, such as Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia and Malaysia.

- Building on the momentum provided by recent initiatives for results-based payments, such as the Green Climate Fund pilot scheme and any relevant bilateral deals to support REDD+, which require demonstrated progress on safeguards and submission of a summary of information.

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Conclusion

Building on previous UN-REDD safeguards workshops for the Asia-Pacific region, in 2013 and 2015[ix], the regional South-South knowledge exchange event convened in Hanoi, in October 2017, has generated a wealth of shared experiences on progress, challenges and lessons learnt on REDD+ safeguards. Opportunities to exchange lessons between countries have proved to be valuable learning experiences, making safeguards approaches across the region both more efficient and more effective.

REDD+ countries in the Asia-Pacific region have made progress over the past five years towards meeting two, out of three, of the UNFCCC safeguards requirements: addressing and respecting safeguards and designing a national-level SIS. Some of the countries with more advanced REDD+ readiness processes are now starting to turn their attention to drafting their first summaries of information. With one third of Asia-Pacific REDD+ countries having something an initial SIS design in place, and about half of them moving towards drafting first summaries of information, overall progress on REDD+ safeguards in this region is slightly more advanced than in Africa (no progress on summaries to date), but a little behind Latin America (two-thirds of REDD+ countries working on first, if not second, summaries of information).

Further South-South knowledge exchange, within the region, as well as with other regions, will only serve to accelerate collective learning on safeguards. Accelerated learning on safeguards, coupled with dedicated financial and technical assistance from outside the region, is needed if Asia-Pacific countries are to conclude their readiness processes, by meeting all safeguards requirements of the UNFCCC (and now the GCF) and be eligible for results-based payments.

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More information

REDD+ safeguards in general

UN-REDD workspace knowledge page on safeguards: http://www.unredd.net/knowledge/redd-plus-technical-issues/safeguards.html

UN-REDD workspace Safeguards Country Resources Hub: http://www.unredd.net/announcements-and-news/2592-safeguards-country-resource-hub.html

UN-REDD Technical Brief 1 (v2.0): REDD+ Safeguards Information Systems: practical design considerations (English / Français / Español)

UN-REDD Technical Brief 2 - Conceptual framework for country approaches to safeguards (English / Français / Español)

Safeguards information systems

SNV-CLP Strategic and Design Considerations for Designing a Safeguards Information System: a self-assessment tool: https://www.climatelawandpolicy.com/files/Publication_SIS_Self_Assessment_Tool.pdf

UN-REDD Technical Brief 1 (v2.0): REDD+ Safeguards Information Systems: practical design considerations (English / Français / Español)

Summaries of information

UN-REDD Info Brief 5 - Summaries of information: How to demonstrate REDD+ safeguards are being addressed and respected (English / Français / Español)

Endnotes

i   UNFCCC Warsaw framework for REDD-plus. Available at: http://unfccc.int/land_use_and_climate_change/redd/items/8180.php

ii   GCF Decision B.18/07. Available at: http://www.greenclimate.fund/documents/20182/820027/GCF_B.18_23_-_Decisions_of_the_Board___eighteenth_meeting_of_the_Board__30_September___2_October_2017.pdf/b55d8183-005c-4518-91dc-152113506766

iii   UNFCCC Decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 71d. Available at: https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2010/cop16/eng/07a01.pdf

iv   For further information on Indonesia's SIS see: Safeguards Information System for REDD+ in Indonesia: Moving towards an Operational SIS-REDD+. Available at: http://www.forclime.org/documents/Books/Safeguards%20Information%20System%20for%20REDD+%20in%20Indonesia_Engl_Full_med%20res.pdf

v   UNFCCC Decision 12/CP.17, paragraph 3. Available at: http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2011/cop17/eng/09a02.pdf

vi   UNFCCC Decision 12/CP.17, paragraph 4. Available at: http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2011/cop17/eng/09a02.pdf

vii   UNFCCC Decisions 12/CP.17, paragraph 3. Available at: http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2011/cop17/eng/09a02.pdf

viii   UNFCCC Decision 17/CP.21. Available at: http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2011/cop17/eng/09a02.pdf

ix   UN-REDD Programme (2015) Asia-Pacific Information Note: Cancun Safeguards, SIS and Summary of Information. Available at:http://www.unredd.net/documents/un-redd-partner-countries-181/asia-the-pacific-333/a-p-knowledge-management-a-resources/information-notes-and-lessons-learned/14034-safegaurds-and-sis-information-note.html

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