

The evolving role of REDD+ National Strategies and Action Plans



United Nations
Climate Change

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Executive Summary

This briefing paper provides an overview of the strategic role, and key components of REDD+ National Strategies or Action Plans (NS/APs) within the Paris Agreement. It is based on a qualitative analysis of published REDD+ NS/APs and NDCs. Its objective is to inform policy makers of countries who are considering establishing and updating their REDD+ NS/APs, but it can also be a relevant source of ideas for a wider range of interested stakeholders.

Section 1 recalls the foundations of REDD+ NS/APs in the context of relevant decisions taken by the Conference of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Building on this, section 2 looks at where REDD+ NS/APs sit within the broader international climate change framework of the Paris Agreement. The analysis suggests that REDD+ NS/APs are evolving from being technical “readiness” documents to serving as strategic roadmaps. They could be regarded as a central operational mechanism for delivering forest and land-use objectives outlined in a country’s NDCs, with performance indicators that could feed directly into Biennial Transparency Reports (BTRs). REDD+ NS/APs can provide the practical approach for achieving sectoral targets that countries have adopted in their voluntary engagement with the REDD+ process, while supporting considerations on how a country engages in forest-related Article 6 transactions.

Section 3 examines core components and cross-cutting them in REDD+ NS/APs by synthesizing high-level findings around 11 key topics related to REDD+ NS/APs: drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, Policies and Measures (PaMs), land tenure issues, policy integration, alignment with national commitments, financing, timeline and targets, governance arrangements, capacity building needs, safeguards integration and cross-sector coherence. Agricultural expansion is a leading direct driver of forest loss worldwide, with regional variations. Notwithstanding regional differences, common challenges in addressing forest loss include insecure land tenure, weaknesses in forest governance, and insufficient cross-sectoral coordination. Perhaps as a response to this, countries appear to be increasingly adopting a “mixed portfolio” of Policies and Measures (PaMs) that link interventions to specific drivers, including regulatory measures like strengthening forest governance, law enforcement, zoning, and moratoriums; incentive mechanisms such as national Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) schemes and benefit-sharing to support local conservation; and the promotion of sustainable practices.

The Cancún safeguards are fundamental in relation to REDD+ NS/APs as they are required to address safeguards during both development and implementation. Section 4 therefore looks at the importance of linking REDD+ NS/APs with the Cancún safeguards. Three points are considered: using the safeguards as design principles for the REDD+ NS/AP, how inclusivity (social inclusion) ensures the success and sustainability of REDD+ activities, and the financial and political implications to mitigate risks that could jeopardize access to Results-Based Payments (RBPs).

In the context of climate finance, section 5 looks at the importance of REDD+ NS/APs for seeking and obtaining RBPs. Clearly formulated priorities and PaMs in the REDD+ NS/AP can help to unlock diversified financing that combines domestic budgets, international RBPs, and private investment. Whether seeking funds through the GCF or voluntary carbon markets, the REDD+ NS/AP can provide the essential narrative of integrity and policy coherence required to monetize emission reductions. Three strategic elements can be considered when thinking about how the REDD+ NS/AP can be used to obtain RBPs: UNFCCC and GCF eligibility, carbon markets (e.g. Article 6), and as a prospectus to increase investability by addressing issues that are not necessarily mandatory requirements, but that are fundamentally important for investors.

Section 6 provides some practical country experiences in establishing or improving their REDD+ NS/APs, highlighting how countries are operationalizing PaMs to address specific drivers of deforestation and forest degradation as well as barriers for the implementation of REDD+ actions. Examples are shared from four intervention areas: incentive mechanisms, sustainable commodity production, law enforcement, land tenure reform. The section also provides possible reasons for updating REDD+ NS/APs.

Finally, section 7 provides a checklist with recurring questions that can be relevant when preparing or updating a REDD+ NS/AP.

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List of Acronyms

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| AFOLU | Agriculture, Forestry, and Other Land Use |
| ART | Architecture for REDD+ Transactions |
| BTR | Biennial Transparency Report (under the Paris Agreement) |
| COP | Conference of the Parties |
| ETF | Enhanced Transparency Framework (under the Paris Agreement) |
| FPIC | Free, Prior, and Informed Consent |
| FREL/FRL | Forest Reference Emission Level / Forest Reference Level |
| GCF | Green Climate Fund |
| GHG | Greenhouse Gas |
| GHG-I | National Greenhouse Gas Inventory |
| GRM | Grievance Redress Mechanism |
| ICTU | Information to facilitate Clarity, Transparency, and Understanding (for NDCs) |
| IPLCs | Indigenous Peoples and local communities |
| ITMOs | Internationally Transferred Mitigation Outcomes (under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement) |
| MRV | Measuring, Reporting, and Verification |
| NCBs | Non-Carbon Benefits |
| NDC | Nationally Determined Contribution (under the Paris Agreement) |
| NFMS | National Forest Monitoring System |
| NS/AP | National Strategy or Action Plan (for REDD+) |
| ODA | Official Development Assistance |
| PaM | Policy and Measure (Interventions proposed in the NS/AP) |
| PES | Payment for Ecosystem Services |
| RBPs | Results-Based Payments |
| 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 |
| SDGs | United Nations Sustainable Development Goals |
| SFM | Sustainable Forest Management |
| SIS | Safeguard Information System |
| TREES | The REDD+ Environmental Excellence Standard |
| UNFCCC | United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change |

1. Introduction on REDD+ NS/APs

REDD+ is included in Article 5 of the Paris Agreement: “Parties are encouraged to take action to implement and support, including through results-based payments, the existing framework as set out in related guidance and decisions already agreed under the Convention for: policy approaches and positive incentives for activities relating to 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; and alternative policy approaches, such as joint mitigation and adaptation approaches for the integral and sustainable management of forests, while reaffirming the importance of incentivizing, as appropriate, non-carbon benefits associated with such approaches”

Developing country Parties aiming to undertake REDD+ activities in the context of the provision of adequate and predictable support, including financial resources and technical and technological support to developing country Parties, are requested to develop a REDD+ National Strategy or Action Plan (NS/AP), as outlined in paragraph 71 of decision [1/CP.16](#). The specific nature of this plan is highly contingent upon the country's unique national circumstances. It is important to highlight that there is no specific definition of a REDD+ NS or AP in the UNFCCC decision texts, purposely allowing for flexibility.

This briefing paper on REDD+ NS/APs was prepared to support countries establishing and updating their REDD+ NS/APs and can inform REDD+ practitioners, academics and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It is based on a qualitative analysis of 40 REDD+ NS/APs^[1] and 60 NDCs explicitly mentioning REDD+^[2]. It is important to note that examples provided are based upon REDD+ NS/AP submissions received and reflect the situation at the time of submission and may be outdated in case these are relatively old. The briefing paper can be complemented by the [UN-REDD Programme's REDD+ Academy](#), Learning Journal on National Strategies or Action Plans

1.1 Relevant UNFCCC COP decisions for REDD+ NS/APs

In the evolution of the UNFCCC REDD+ “rulebook” from Cancún to Warsaw, there are two pivotal decisions regarding REDD+ NS/APs: decisions [1/CP.16](#) and [9/CP.19](#). These decisions respectively provide a political mandate (Cancún), and transparency requirements (Warsaw). Other decisions are relevant too, including decision [12/CP.17](#), decision [15/CP.19](#), and decision [16/CP.21](#).

2010

Decision 1/CP.16 - Cancún Agreements The foundation

This decision provides a clear framework for policy approaches and positive incentives on issues related to REDD+.

- **The mandate (§71):** The decision requests developing country Parties to develop a REDD+ NS/AP as one of the four essential elements of REDD+, alongside a National Forest Monitoring System (NFMS), a Forest Reference Emission Level (FREL/FRL), and a Safeguard Information System (SIS).
- **Required content (§72):** The decision stipulates that REDD+ NS/APs must address specific issues. These include drivers of deforestation and forest degradation; land tenure issues; forest governance issues; gender considerations; [REDD+ safeguards](#) (ensuring the full and effective participation of relevant stakeholders, such as Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs)).
- **Phased approach (§73):** It establishes that REDD+ should be implemented in phases, evolving from readiness (capacity building and strategy design) to implementation (policies and demonstration activities), and finally to results-based actions that are fully measured, reported, and verified (MRV'd).

[1] All REDD+ NS/APs listed on the page <https://redd.unfccc.int/fact-sheets/national-strategy.html> by 1 December 2025

[2] Most recent NDCs submitted by developing countries Parties by 1 December 2025 containing an explicit reference to REDD+ were analysed, namely: Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, Colombia, Republic of Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Dominica (Commonwealth of Dominica), Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Fiji, Gabon, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Tanzania, Timor-Leste, Togo, Uganda, Vanuatu, Viet Nam, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

2011

Decision 12/CP.17 - Durban Safeguard operationalized

While broadly known for establishing modalities for FREL/FRLs, decision [12/CP.17](#) (adopted in Durban in 2011) operationalised safeguards, and confirmed the link between the strategy and the "Cancún Safeguards." Paragraph 1 of the decision notes that the implementation of safeguards (and the information provided regarding them) should "support national strategies or action plans". This implies that safeguards should be integral to the strategy's design.

2013

Decision 9/CP.19 - Warsaw Framework Eligibility for results-based payment

Adopted as part of the "Warsaw Framework for REDD+," this decision indicates the requirements to fulfil to become eligible for Results-Based Payments (RBPs).

Reporting requirements (§11 and 14): To be eligible for and receive RBPs for their REDD+ results-based actions, developing countries must have, inter alia, submitted their REDD+ NS/AP to the [Lima REDD+ Information Hub](#). Once all the required information is submitted, including the REDD+ NS/AP, the results for each relevant period are available through the appropriate channels under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

2013

Decision 15/CP.19 - Warsaw Addressing drivers of deforestation

Other decisions also include specific references to REDD+ NS/APs. Through decision [15/CP.19](#), the Conference of the Parties (COP) reaffirmed the importance of addressing drivers of deforestation and forest degradation in the context of the development and implementation of REDD+ NS/APs, recognised that drivers of deforestation and forest degradation have many causes, and that actions to address these drivers are unique to countries' national circumstances, capacities and capabilities. The COP encouraged Parties, organizations and the private sector to take action to address the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation and to share the results of their work on this matter.

2015

Decision 16/CP.21 - Paris Alternative policy approached

Through decision [16/CP.21](#), the COP decided that developing country Parties seeking to receive support for the design and implementation of alternative policy approaches, such as joint mitigation and adaptation approaches for the integral and sustainable management of forests, may consider the development of REDD+ NS/APs for the implementation of the REDD+ activities in order to support the integral and sustainable management of forests.

2. Synergies between REDD+ NS/APs and other parts of the Paris Agreement

Historically, REDD+ NS/APs were often viewed as technical compliance documents required to “pass” the “readiness” phase of REDD+. In the current landscape of the Paris Agreement, the REDD+ NS/AP could strategically be considered as an operational framework for delivering the forest and land-use targets embedded within a country’s NDC and long-term development goals.

Based on a qualitative analysis of 40 REDD+ NS/APs and 60 NDCs, the synergy between these instruments appears to be evolving from theoretical alignment to technical and strategic integration.

The REDD+ NS/AP provides the opportunity to outline the why (e.g. drivers of forest loss) and how (implementation), while the NDC/ICTU provides the what (target), and the BTR, including the technical annexes on REDD+ if any, allows to track progress in the implementation (transparency).

Successful synergies between REDD+ NS/APs across other parts of the Paris Agreement can be characterized by the three following distinct, yet connected, dimensions.

1. Operationalizing NDCs through REDD+ NS/APs

The most direct synergy is the use of the REDD+ NS/AP as an “implementation arm” of the NDC. Among the 40 REDD+ NS/APs analysed, 19 explicitly cite the (I)NDC^[3], positioning the strategy not as a separate initiative but as the tool to achieve specific greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets in the Agriculture, Forestry, and Other Land Use sector (AFOLU).



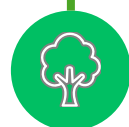
Explicit alignment

Countries like Argentina, Colombia, Ethiopia and Mexico explicitly identify their REDD+ NS/APs as a core instrument for implementing sectoral commitments under the Paris Agreement



Target synchronization

Several strategies align their quantitative targets with the NDC. For instance, Indonesia’s updated REDD+ strategy (2021-2030) is linked to its “FOLU Net Sink 2030” target, ensuring that REDD+ activities directly feed into the national net-zero ambition. Similarly, Ethiopia notes that its strategy is set to deliver a large part of the emission reduction targets of its Climate Resilient Green Economy strategy. India’s REDD+ NS/AP is designed to achieve the exact quantitative target of creating an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3.0 billion tCO₂e through additional forest and tree cover by 2030. The implementation of Malaysia’s REDD+ NS/AP is directly linked to achieving the NDC pledge for the 2020-2030 period by successfully maintaining 50% forest cover



HFLD contexts

For High Forest, Low Deforestation (HFLD) countries such as Gabon and Suriname, the synergy lies in using the REDD+ NS/AP to operationalize NDC commitments regarding the maintenance of carbon sinks rather than solely emission reductions. Gabon’s strategy acts as the instrument to achieve its unconditional commitment to remain carbon neutral.

[3] Argentina (2017), Brazil (2016), Costa Rica (2017), Ecuador (2016), Ethiopia (2018), Ghana (2016), Guatemala (2020), Guyana (2022), Honduras (2019), Indonesia (2022), Mexico (2017), Mongolia (2020), Mozambique (2016), Nepal (2024), Panama (2022), Papua New Guinea (2017), Peru (2016), Uganda (2017 & 2020) and Vietnam (2017).



Defining PaMs to meet NDC targets

The REDD+ NS/AP defines the specific PaMs designed to meet the NDC targets for the forest sector. For instance, if an NDC includes an unconditional target for the forest sector, the REDD+ NS/AP may provide clarity on how this will be accomplished and how domestic budgets will finance specific PaMs (e.g. Chile's strategy detailing measures addressing forest degradation).

2. Coherence with the Enhanced Transparency Framework (ETF) and BTRs

Under Article 13 of the Paris Agreement, developing countries transitioned from Biennial Update Reports (BURs) to BTRs by the end of 2024. For developing countries engaged in REDD+, the REDD+ NS/AP can provide the necessary policy context for the information on policies and measures for the relevant sectors. The ETF requires parties to track progress toward their NDCs. The performance indicators defined in the REDD+ NS/AP could feed directly into the BTR.

Consistency of data

Country examples have shown the value of streamlining technical consistency between the REDD+ NS/AP, the FREL/FRLs, and the BTR. For example, Indonesia's National Registry System integrates data and information about climate change mitigation and adaptation action in the country, facilitating the reporting of consistent information in the BTR with the REDD+ results.



3. Article 6 and market readiness

With the operationalization of Article 6 (cooperative approaches), the REDD+ NS/AP could be used as a strategic document for determining how a countries' forests/REDD+ activities interact with carbon markets.



Strategic decision making

Besides identifying the PaMs for results-based actions, developing the REDD+ NS/AP is a process through which countries can strategically decide whether to sell and what to sell. REDD+ countries may for instance consider keeping lower-cost mitigation outcomes for achieving their own NDCs and offer higher-cost mitigation outcomes to buyers; the REDD+ NS/AP can be a venue to outline the countries' strategic decisions on this matter.



Authorization and corresponding adjustments

The REDD+ NS/AP can be used as a strategic tool to help define which emission reductions and removals are utilized for the country's own NDC, and which are authorized for international transfer (Internationally Transferred Mitigation Outcomes or ITMOs), requiring a "corresponding adjustment" to avoid double counting. For example, Guyana's Low Carbon Development Strategy ([LCDS 2030](#)) serves as the REDD+ NS/AP and explicitly outlines how credits generated (e.g., under [ART-TREES](#)) integrate with national accounting and market mechanisms.

3. Core components and cross-cutting themes in REDD+ NS/APs

This section synthesizes high-level findings around 11 key topics related to REDD+ NS/APs. As for other sections of this briefing, examples provided are based upon REDD+ NS/AP submissions received and reflect the situation at the time of submission, and may be outdated in case these are relatively old.

1. Drivers of deforestation & forest degradation

REDD+ NS/APs reveal that forest loss is driven by various context-specific yet globally consistent factors, with agricultural expansion (commercial and subsistence) as the leading cause across different regions. They can be roughly categorized by region: commercial agriculture (soy/beef) in many Latin American countries (e.g. Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Guatemala and Paraguay) and commercial crops (e.g. palm oil/rubber) in several countries in Asia (e.g. Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea and Vietnam), versus subsistence agriculture and biomass energy (i.e. poverty-driven pressures) in many countries in Africa (e.g. Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Liberia, Mozambique, Republic of Congo, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia). Infrastructure and illegal logging appear to be secondary but significant drivers. Additionally, underlying issues like insecure land tenure, inadequate governance, institutional weaknesses, and limited economic alternatives exacerbate forest decline worldwide.

2. PaMs

Countries appear to be adopting a "mixed portfolio" approach for their REDD+ NS/APs, highlighting the importance of both regulatory enforcement and incentive-based mechanisms. For instance, sustainable land-use management focuses on promoting climate-smart agriculture, agroforestry, and silvopastoral systems to ease pressure on forests, as demonstrated in countries like Argentina and Ethiopia. Ghana, meanwhile, places particular emphasis on sustainable cocoa cultivation. In the realm of forest governance and law enforcement, efforts are directed at strengthening monitoring, control, and surveillance frameworks to combat illegal logging and ensure adherence to forest legislation and zoning regulations, examples of which can be found in Vietnam and Panama. When it comes to forest conservation and restoration, initiatives often include protecting vital forest regions and undertaking extensive reforestation and restoration activities, as seen in Nepal and Chile. Finally, incentive mechanisms such as payment for ecosystem services (PES) schemes (implemented in countries like Costa Rica and Ecuador) and other benefit-sharing arrangements aim to encourage local communities and private landowners to engage in forest preservation.

3. Land tenure issues

Insecure land tenure appears to be a key underlying driver and a critical barrier to implementation. Several REDD+ NS/APs prioritize tenure clarification and titling, particularly for IPLCs, as a prerequisite for effective benefit-sharing and long-term emission reductions and removals (e.g. Ethiopia, Honduras, Nepal, Pakistan, Sudan).

4. Policy integration

REDD+ NS/APs are sometimes linked or integrated into broader national development plans (e.g. Belize, Honduras, Uganda), green economy (bioeconomy) strategies (e.g. Cambodia, Ethiopia, Vietnam), and low-carbon development frameworks (e.g. Guyana), ensuring REDD+ is treated as a development enabler rather than a conservation constraint.

5. Alignment with national commitments

There is a strong trend of aligning REDD+ NS/APs with NDCs. The REDD+ NS/AP could serve as the operational vehicle to deliver the forest-sector targets pledged in the NDC, thereby offering a possibility to further increase consistency in national climate ambition.

6. Financing

Several REDD+ NS/APs emphasize the importance of financing diversification (e.g. Costa Rica, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Republic of Congo, Zambia). This includes blending domestic budget allocations with international RBPs (e.g. GCF, carbon markets) and private sector investment (e.g. Ghana for climate-smart agriculture like cocoa) to ensure long-term sustainability.

7. Timelines and targets

1. Most REDD+ NS/APs align their implementation timelines with national planning cycles (e.g. to 2030), synchronizing REDD+ targets with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) and NDC implementation periods.

8. Governance arrangements

Several countries (e.g. Central African Republic, Chile, Gabon, Mexico and Mozambique) mentioned in their REDD+ NS/APs the establishment of high-level inter-ministerial coordination bodies (e.g. Climate Change Commissions) that sit above line ministries to manage trade-offs between forestry, agriculture, and finance to break sectoral silos.

9. Capacity-building needs

Countries highlighted in their REDD+ NS/APs that significant gaps remain in technical and functional capacities. Examples of needs identified include strengthening NFMS and MRV (e.g. Gabon and Nepal), SIS (e.g. Mongolia), enhancing fiduciary capacities to manage and disburse climate finance (e.g. Uganda) and strengthening human resources (e.g. Burkina Faso and Ethiopia).

10. Safeguards integration

Countries are recognizing the usefulness and strategic importance of addressing Cancún safeguards, and of integrating this earlier in the implementation process. Strategies increasingly emphasize the "do no harm" approach (e.g. Uganda and Papua New Guinea), specifically regarding gender mainstreaming and the rights of IPLCs, ensuring social inclusion is central to implementation (e.g. Ghana, Indonesia and Nepal).

11. Cross-sector coherence

The analysis underscores that several countries have identified a critical need to align conflicting sectoral policies - such as agricultural subsidies or mining concessions that drive deforestation - with forest conservation goals. Achieving coherence is cited as essential for addressing indirect drivers.

4. Importance of linking the REDD+ NS/APs with the Cancún safeguards

The Cancún Safeguards are an important element of the central design architecture of a robust REDD+ NS/AP. The following three points could be considered when linking REDD+ NS/APs with the Cancún safeguards.

1. Shifting the paradigm: safeguards as design principles

Decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 72 requires that REDD+NS/APs address safeguards during both development and implementation. REDD+NS/APs could therefore utilize safeguards as a filter for selecting PaMs:



From "do no harm" to "do good"

While safeguards mitigate risks (e.g., preventing the conversion of natural forests, Safeguard E), they may also be used for the design of "Non-Carbon Benefits" (NCBs). Integrating these benefits, such as biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services, into the REDD+ NS/AP rationale is essential for cross-sectoral buy-in. For example, Ecuador's REDD+ Action Plan establishes its national safeguards approach with the dual purpose of avoiding/minimising risks and actively "potentiating social and environment benefits" resulting from REDD+ implementation to contribute to the country's sustainable development. Another example can be found in Indonesia: its updated REDD+ National Strategy (2021-2030) defines six specific NCBs to be prioritized: (i) conservation of biological diversity, (ii) protection of hydrological function, (iii) protection of ecological function, (iv) improved livelihood, (v) improved forest and land governance, and (vi) protection of essential ecosystems. The strategy mandates the development of specific criteria and indicators to measure, monitor, report, and verify these NCBs during implementation. Furthermore, some countries explicitly discuss synergies between their REDD+ NS/APs and international frameworks such as the Convention on Biological Diversity with its Aichi targets (e.g. Indonesia, Malaysia, and Peru) and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans targets (e.g. Belize, Pakistan and Uganda) and to a lesser extent, the Global Forests Goals (e.g. Malaysia).



Structural integration

Safeguards could be used to filter strategic options. For example, if PaMs involve agricultural intensification to reduce pressure on forests, Safeguard F (reversals) and G (displacement) could guide the technical design to ensure emissions are not simply shifted elsewhere. Ethiopia, for example, employed a highly structured, multi-phase screening exercise to prioritize its REDD+ strategic interventions across key sectors, including agriculture. It also applied a screening safeguard explicitly designed to review agricultural and forestry activities against environmental and social criteria, allowing policymakers to re-design activities to address risks and maximize benefits before they are finalized.



Country approaches

Several countries have successfully developed a "country approach to safeguards" that anchors international requirements in existing national governance frameworks. This ensures that the REDD+ NS/AP is legally enforceable and not merely aspirational. Mexico and Vietnam, for instance, have utilized legal gap analyses to align their REDD+ NS/APs with national laws, ensuring consistency with Safeguard A.[4]

[4] Rey, D., Korwin, S., Ribet, U. and Rivera L. (2016) Best Practices and Considerations for the Development of REDD+ Country Approaches to Safeguards and Design of Safeguard Information Systems. CLP and SNV, London, United Kingdom.

2. Social inclusion: how inclusivity ensures the success and sustainability of REDD+ activities

Social inclusion is not merely a procedural step; it is a structural requisite for the permanence of emission reductions and removals. Safeguards C (rights of Indigenous Peoples) and D (full and effective participation) are the primary mechanisms for ensuring the success and sustainability of REDD+ activities in forest landscapes.



Rights-based implementation

Several countries' REDD+ NS/APs have moved beyond consultation of IPLCs to recognizing rights. For example, Ecuador's National Consultation Guide operationalizes Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) as a mandatory step for activities in collective territories, embedding Safeguard C into the operational DNA of the strategy. Similarly, Indonesia's strategy links REDD+ success directly to tenure reform, the recognition of IPLCs and clear tenure (Safeguard B).



Gender mainstreaming

Per decision [1/CP.16](#), gender is a cross-cutting issue. REDD+ NS/APs like Ghana's prioritize women's representation in governance bodies to ensure that both men and women are fully recognized as REDD+ stakeholders and have equal access, use and control of forest resources as well as equitable share of associated benefits.

3. Financial and political implications

Linking the REDD+ NS/AP to the SIS consistently with decision [1/CP.16](#), would help to mitigate risks that could jeopardize access to RBPs.



De-risking investment

A robust REDD+ NS/AP that explicitly addresses safeguards signals to donors and private investors that the country has mitigated social and reputational risks. Guyana clearly positioned ART-TREES and its safeguards requirements in its Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS).



Preventing the escalation of disputes

Embedding feedback and Grievance Redress Mechanisms (GRM) within the REDD+ NS/AP architecture, as seen in Costa Rica and Paraguay, provides a safety valve for conflict, preventing disputes from escalating into deadlocks or failures.

In summary, safeguards could be seen as the structural engineers of the REDD+ NS/AP. When integrated early in the implementation process, they support the preparation of REDD+ NS/APs that help to target the root causes (drivers) of deforestation and forest degradation while maximising positive externalities.

5. Importance of REDD+ NS/APs to obtain RBPs

A reported REDD+ NS/AP is required for accessing RBPs and also serves as an investment prospectus proactively addressing investors' concerns. Whether seeking funds through the GCF or voluntary carbon markets, it can provide the essential narrative of integrity and policy coherence required to monetize emission reductions.

Three strategic elements can be considered when thinking about how the REDD+ NS/AP can be used to obtain RBPs.

1. The regulatory gatekeeper: UNFCCC and GCF eligibility

The REDD+ NS/AP is a non-negotiable prerequisite to access REDD+ RBPs.

The Warsaw Framework mandate: Decisions [1/CP.16](#) (para 71) and [9/CP.19](#) establish the REDD+ NS/AP as one of the four "elements" of REDD+. Developing countries **must** have submitted their REDD+ NS/AP. A link to it is published on the UNFCCC Lima REDD+ Information Hub when a country becomes eligible for REDD+ RBPs.

- **GCF requirements:** The GCF's REDD+ RBPs Policy (decision [B.40/16](#)) closely aligns with the Warsaw Framework for REDD+. To access GCF REDD+ RBPs, a country must demonstrate that it has submitted a REDD+ NS/AP to the [Lima REDD+ Information Hub](#).

2. The carbon market key:

For countries targeting carbon markets or Article 6 transactions, the REDD+ NS/AP is an important part in the process of issuing credits.



Article 6.4

In October 2024, the Article 6.4 Supervisory Body agreed that activities that fall under the scope of Article 5, paragraph 2 of the Paris Agreement (i.e., REDD+ activities) must be included in the host country's REDD+ NS/AP referred to in decision 1/CP.16 para 71(a).[5]



Ensuring integrity (safeguards)

Markets require proof that emission reductions and/or removals were not achieved at the expense of social rights. The REDD+ NS/AP could be used as a vehicle that facilitates the operationalization of the Cancún Safeguards. For example, Ghana used its strategy and implementation plan to define benefit-sharing mechanisms and FPIC guidelines, which can be regarded as prerequisites for market participation.

[5] See paragraph 87 of the Methodologies Standard, available at <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/A6.4-STAN-METH-001.pdf>, and paragraph 15 of the standard for addressing leakage in mechanism methodologies, available at <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/A6.4-STAN-METH-005.pdf>.

3. From "plan" to "prospectus": increasing investability

The REDD+ NS/APs can be used to pro-actively address investors' concerns by providing a narrative that enhances transparency by addressing questions on issues that are not mandatory requirements, but that are fundamentally important for investors.



Defining the "use of proceeds"

Several REDD+ NS/AP outline a costed implementation plan, for example bridging the gap between carbon revenues and on-the-ground action. Costa Rica's strategy, for instance, explicitly links carbon revenues to the financial sustainability of its PES program. Uganda's strategy features a highly structured "Five-Year Costed Action Plan" based on specific Strategic Options (PaMs). This output-based budgeting allows the National Accounting Officer to trace expenditures directly to planned REDD+ activities, improving frontline service delivery and fiduciary accountability.



Managing risk

By clarifying land tenure and carbon rights within the REDD+ NS/AP, countries reduce legal risks for buyers. Indonesia's updated strategy (2021-2030) aligns REDD+ activities with its "FOLU Net Sink 2030" target and carbon pricing regulations, providing the regulatory certainty needed to further attract GCF RBPs and bilateral partnerships



Adapting (living documents)

Strategies that are not updated to reflect new developments, including UNFCCC decisions (e.g., Article 6) or market standards (e.g., ART's TREES) risk becoming obsolete. The inability to pivot from "readiness" to "investment" can prevent access to RBPs.

6. Practical country experiences in establishing or improving their REDD+ NS/APs

This section provides some examples of practice-oriented evidence from REDD+ NS/APs, highlighting how countries are operationalizing PaMs to address specific drivers of deforestation and forest degradation as well as barriers for the implementation of REDD+ actions. Examples are shared from four intervention areas: incentive mechanisms, sustainable commodity production, law enforcement, land tenure reform as well as reasons to update REDD+ NS/APs.

1. Incentive mechanisms: PES

Several countries have institutionalized national PES schemes as incentive mechanisms to protect forests.

Costa Rica

The Pago de Servicios Ambientales program serves as the central pillar for reversing forest loss. Established under Forestry Law 7575, it is financed primarily through a 3.5% levy on fossil fuels and water usage fees. As of 2023, more than 18,000 families have benefited from the program, with an investment of USD 524 million in the PES projects and more than 1.3 million hectares under PES contracts. Recent evolutions include a specific modality for Indigenous Territories to align with customary governance and the creation of "Forest Emission Reduction Contracts" to expand coverage. This is also a good example of how a REDD+ NS/AP can effectively build on existing experiences and programmes in countries.

Ecuador

The Socio Bosque Program targets the financial drivers of land conversion by providing direct monetary incentives to individual landowners and indigenous communities who voluntarily commit to 20-year conservation agreements and hopes to protect 4 million hectares. This program is integrated into the National Development Plan ("Buen Vivir") and, as of 2026, covers over 1.83 million hectares. It explicitly links conservation payments to investment plans for community development (e.g., health, education), thereby addressing poverty as an underlying driver.

2. Sustainable agriculture: addressing commodity expansion

Agricultural expansion remains the primary driver of deforestation globally. Strategies are shifting from simple restrictions to yield-intensification models.

Ghana

Ghana implemented the Cocoa-Forest REDD+ Programme to combat deforestation driven by cocoa expansion. The strategy focuses on Climate-Smart Cocoa within designated "Hotspot Intervention Areas". The approach targets the "low yield" driver by providing farmers with an engagement package (inputs, planting materials) to intensify production on existing land rather than expanding into forests. Furthermore, the program negotiates premium prices for certified climate-smart beans and promotes the retention of shade trees to maintain carbon stocks.

3. Law enforcement: monitoring, control, and surveillance

To address illegal logging and encroachment, countries are deploying robust technical and institutional systems.

Panama

The National REDD+ Strategy (ENREDD+) addresses illegal logging (particularly in the Darién region) by strengthening the operational capacity of the Ministry of Environment. Measures include increasing the number of park rangers (guardaparques), equipping rapid response teams, and utilizing satellite monitoring for fiscalization and vigilance to ensure effective territorial control.

Vietnam

The National REDD+ Action Plan (NRAP) prioritizes the implementation of the Timber Legality Assurance System (VNTLAS) to comply with EU Timber import requirements. This involves rigorous supply chain controls and inter-agency coordination, training over 50,000 personnel - including customs, border guards, and environment police - to detect and penalize illegal timber circulation.

4. Land tenure: addressing underlying structural barriers

Insecure tenure is consistently identified as a fundamental barrier that incentivizes short-term extraction over long-term management.

Clarification and regularization: Across all regions, strategies commit to regularizing tenure, particularly for IPLCs, as a prerequisite for implementation.

- **Ecuador** prioritizes the legalization of land titles in REDD+ zones to allow actors to access incentive programs, acknowledging that lack of legal clarity exacerbates deforestation.
- **Ghana** is undertaking tree tenure reform to eliminate the perverse incentive where farmers remove trees because they lack ownership rights over the timber on their farms.
- **Peru** explicitly includes "Completing the titling of native and campesino communities" (Strategic Action 5) to close the gap on unassigned lands where invasion and illegal occupation are prevalent.

5. Reflect new developments: reasons to update a REDD+ NS/AP

Some countries have published updated or second editions of their REDD+ NS/APs. These updates often reflect a transition from technical readiness to operational implementation and alignment with newer climate commitments like the Paris Agreement.

The following countries have submitted multiple versions or significant updates to their REDD+ strategies to the UNFCCC:

Burkina Faso: Submitted a first strategy in October 2022 and a second REDD+ NS/AP in February 2025.

Ghana: Revised its initial 2015 strategy to produce an updated version for 2016–2035.

Indonesia: Developed its first strategy in 2012 and released a second version for the period 2021–2030 in November 2022.

Sudan: Produced a revised version of its REDD+ NS/AP in March 2021.

Uganda: Launched a first edition in November 2018 and a second edition in June 2020 (submitted July 2024).

In terms of reasons for updating their REDD+ NS/APs, countries appear to choose to do so to ensure they remain 'living documents' that reflect current political, legal and financial realities. Specific reasons include:

Alignment with the Paris Agreement & NDCs:

- **Ghana:** The 2016 revision was necessitated by the adoption of the Paris Agreement at COP21, which formally recognized the role of REDD+ in global climate action.
- **Indonesia:** The 2021–2030 strategy was specifically updated to align with its NDC and the "FOLU Net Sink 2030" target.

Consistency with national laws and development plans:

- **Uganda:** The second edition was prepared to ensure consistency with national development plans and the mandates of institutions in the forestry, energy, wildlife, land, and agriculture sectors.

Accessing RBPs and finance:

- **Ghana:** The revision incorporated experiences gained from developing its first sub-national Emission Reductions Programme (the Ghana Cocoa-Forest REDD+ Programme) to reflect practical implementation needs.
- **Uganda:** Updated its strategy to meet the requirements of the FCPF Readiness Assessment Framework, providing the necessary guidance to transition into the results-based payment phase.

Reflecting institutional and technical progress:

- **Indonesia:** Updates were made to reflect the establishment of new national institutions like the BPD LH (Environmental Fund Management Agency) and improved monitoring systems (NFMS-MRV).
- **Sudan:** The 2021 revision was done to benefit from subject matter specialist reviews and to ensure the strategy aligned with updated national economic development strategies.

7. Considerations when developing or updating REDD+ NS/APs

An opportunity to develop a central instrument to achieve the country's goals for forest and land-use

There are many opportunities for countries to explore when developing or updating a REDD+ NS/AP. The analysis of 40 REDD+ NS/APs suggests that several developing countries see it as a central, strategic instrument for their climate and sustainable development agenda. It is noticeable to see examples of countries seeing their REDD+ NS/AP as:

1. **An operational arm of the NDC** (see section 2.1 above).
2. **An investment prospectus** pro-actively addressing investors' concerns (see section 5 above).
3. **An opportunity to ensure success and sustainability of REDD+ activities building on inclusivity** (see section 4.2 above).

This may be challenging to achieve with outdated strategies, especially if they are no longer consistent with the current circumstances and priorities of the country.

Food for thought for strengthening REDD+ NS/APs

When choosing to develop or update a REDD+ NS/AP, there are recurring questions that countries may find helpful to consider. Below are some (non-exhaustive) examples/ideas of question that countries may find helpful in this process:

1 How can the design of the REDD+ NS/APs be improved according to the mandatory elements of paragraph 72 of decision 1/CP.16?

• Drivers of deforestation and forest degradation

- Are individual PaMs explicitly linked to specific, direct or indirect drivers of deforestation or forest degradation and other drivers impacting REDD+ results?

• Land Tenure

- How can carbon rights be aligned with tenure laws?
- How can the country move beyond consultation to formally recognizing and securing land tenure and carbon rights for IPLCs (and can this be used as a system for potential benefit-sharing)?
- Are there actions within the REDD+ NS/AP to accelerate boundary demarcation, resolve historical land disputes, and formalize communal land certificates?

• Forest governance

- How can cross-sectoral coherence - aligning forest conservation goals with conflicting policies in agriculture, mining, and infrastructure, be achieved?
- Is an elevated political mandate for the REDD+ NS/APs needed to address this issue?
- Does the REDD+ NS/AP need to be anchored at cross-ministerial level or at a higher level (e.g. Presidential office)?

1

How can the design of the REDD+ NS/APs be improved according to the mandatory elements of paragraph 72 of decision 1/CP.16?

• Forest governance

- How to establish and maintain vertical coherence, maintaining the alignment of the REDD+ NS/AP with national laws and high-level national documents such as Long-Term Strategies for decarbonization, making it legally enforceable?
- Does the REDD+ NS/AP explain how the country considers building REDD+ activities upon existing country-specific experiences and circumstances, for example existing stakeholder engagement or PES benefit-sharing programmes?
- Are there recurring concerns from donor organizations or countries that could usefully be addressed in the NS/AP?

• Gender considerations

- Is the representation of women and youth in REDD+ governance and benefit-sharing mechanisms explicitly addressed to ensure benefits for the broader community and leverage their distinct roles in forest conservation and management?
- Are there specific, trackable indicators (and dedicated budget lines) within the REDD+ NS/AP to ensure that women have equal access to training, credit, alternative livelihoods, and land titling programs?
- Have gender analyses been conducted to understand how specific proposed REDD+ actions might disproportionately impact women (e.g. restrictions on fuelwood gathering), and are mitigation strategies in place?

• Cancún safeguards

- Are safeguards being considered as design principles of the REDD+ NS/AP?
- Are the Cancún Safeguards integrated early in the implementation process?
- Does the country see a need to move beyond consultation of IPLCs?
- Are there changes in policies needed regarding the recognition and security of land tenure and carbon rights by IPLCs?
- Does FPIC still need to be operationalized as a mandatory step for any activity taking place in collective territories?
- Are non-carbon benefits being considered in the design and operationalisation of the REDD+ NS/AP?

2

How can the analytical base of the REDD+ NS/AP be reinforced and support a results-oriented implementation? This may, for example, include the development of:

• Explicit PaM to REDD+ actions chain

- Are individual PaMs explicitly linked to specific, direct or indirect drivers of deforestation or forest degradation and other drivers impacting REDD+ results?
- If the PaMs in place do not allow to achieve the country REDD+ goals, could a "mixed portfolio" approach (regulatory and incentives) help to target high-impact drivers?

2 How can the analytical base of the REDD+ NS/AP be reinforced and support a results-oriented implementation? This may, for example, include the development of:

• Integrated monitoring

- Can the NFMS be strengthened to not only track the reduction of emissions and the increase of removals (the carbon result) but also the implementation success of the underlying PaMs (the policy action) and their impact on non-carbon benefits (NCBs)?

• Costed implementation plans

- Have detailed financing needs for each PaM been identified, thereby facilitating and/or enabling the strategic prioritisation of use of domestic budgets, bilateral and multilateral RBPs, and private or market-based finance?

3 How can the development/update of the REDD+ NS/AP be done through an inclusive process?

• These could be questions around how social inclusion can be structurally embedded in the REDD+ NS/AP development and implementation process:

- Are robust, accessible Grievance Redress Mechanisms (GRMs) embedded within the REDD+ NS/AP architecture to handle potential conflicts?
- Are there frequently asked questions from stakeholders that could be usefully addressed in the REDD+ NS/AP?

4 Which are the key capacity building needs?

• Institutional capacity

- How can institutional capacity for the implementation of the REDD+ NS/AP be strengthened?