



# REDD+ Safeguards Information Systems: practical design considerations

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#### **Key messages**

- **1. Development of a SIS does not require establishment of an entirely new system.** It is likely to be more cost effective, in the long term, to develop a SIS from a combination of existing information systems, sources and institutional arrangements to meet desired SIS objectives.
- **2. SIS design and operation will be different in each country** due to different national circumstances, existing legal and institutional frameworks, and choice of REDD+ actions; consequently, generic blueprint SIS models cannot be prescribed at the global or regional levels.
- **3.** Three practical design considerations could be considered by countries when developing a SIS:
  - SIS objectives;
  - · SIS functions; and
  - SIS institutional arrangements.
- **4.** Important steps in the process of a country's approach to safeguards will influence SIS design, including:
  - assessing benefits and risks of REDD+ actions;
  - clarifying the Cancun safeguards in accordance with national circumstances;
  - identifying, assessing and strengthening existing governance arrangements; and
  - defining the goals, scope and scale of safeguards application.
- **5. A SIS provides a strong basis for developing summaries of safeguards information.** By drawing on the SIS, the quality, reliability and credibility of information comprising the summaries may be significantly improved.

#### Introduction

Developing a "system for providing information on how the [Cancun] safeguards are being addressed and respected throughout the implementation of [REDD+] activities" is a key requirement for REDD+ under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Design of such a safeguards information system (SIS) can be a challenging piece of REDD+ architecture, and is usually undertaken in the more advanced stages of the readiness process.

Significant progress has been made in recent years in several countries with other pillars of the UNFCCC's Warsaw Framework for REDD+ (e.g. reference levels, national forest monitoring systems, national strategies/ action plans). Yet, most national REDD+ teams are only now ready to begin the important process of developing a SIS that is anchored to a national strategy/action plan (NS/AP) and integrated into a wider country approach to safeguards. It is through this process that the complexities and ramifications of designing a SIS and the importance of safeguards information are now beginning to be realized.

This Technical Brief is a synopsis of stakeholder perspectives and country experiences, obtained

through broad consultations, related to the design considerations for REDD+ SISs. The brief accompanies a detailed resource document designed to assist those in developing their own SIS.

# REDD+ safeguards needs and requirements under the UNFCCC

REDD+ has the potential to deliver social and environmental benefits that go beyond the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, but may also entail potential risks to people and the environment. These benefits and risks will depend on a number of factors related to specific national circumstances – such as how REDD+ actions are designed, how successful these actions are in addressing the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation (and the barriers to sustainable management, conservation and enhancement of carbon stocks); as well as where, how and by whom these actions are implemented.

To protect against these potential risks while promoting benefits beyond climate change mitigation, Parties to the UNFCCC have adopted a set of seven *Cancun safeguards*<sup>2</sup> to be addressed and respected when implementing REDD+ actions. Developing a SIS is a key requirement for REDD+ under the UNFCCC. Provision



of summaries of information<sup>3</sup>, on how all of the Cancun safeguards are being addressed and respected throughout REDD+ implementation, completes the main UNFCCC safeguards requirements.

## **Safeguards information system** design - the challenge and emerging solutions

Broad consensus exists around a few fundamental desian characteristics transparency, comprehensiveness, flexibility to allow improvements over time, and built on existing systems as appropriate - as reflected in UNFCCC guidance<sup>4</sup>. These guiding characteristics, however, do not directly answer the questions most frequently asked when designing a SIS: What does a SIS look like? How do I go about designing one? How much will it cost to both build and to operate?

To answer these questions, the UN-REDD Programme carried out a preliminary consultative process with a range of REDD+ stakeholders representing developing country and donor governments, civil society, and technical advisors. Through this process, insights were gathered from early country experiences in SIS development during regional knowledge exchange workshops and one-on-one interviews. The resultant practical design considerations for SIS offered in this Technical Brief, together with the broader context of emerging country approaches to safeguards, have been informed by these wide ranging experiences and perspectives.

These opinions and perspectives among key REDD+ stakeholders on what a SIS might look like, how it should be developed and what it might cost to design and operate, remain diverse. This is due to the different political expectations among various constituencies, a lack of existing generic SIS models that can be tailored to national circumstances, and alternative interpretations of the UNFCCC requirements. The dialogue on REDD+ safeguards in general and SISs in particular has yet to mature, but it is hoped that the practical considerations shared here present an opportunity for those developing a SIS to consolidate their thinking and develop design solutions adapted to meet their country's needs.



### Key design elements of safeguards information systems

Development of a SIS does not require establishment of an entirely new system (although a new system can be developed if needed). Depending on the country context, it can be helpful to integrate design of a SIS into existing information systems or to draw on existing sources of information. As such, a SIS can be a combination of existing systems and sources of information, together with any new elements needed to fill identified gaps.

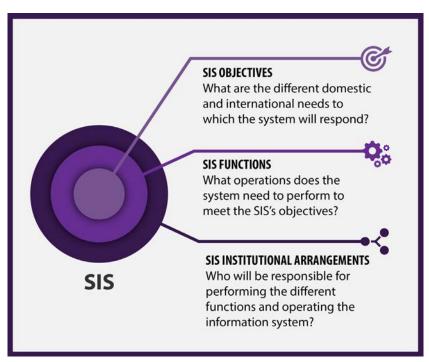


Figure 1: Key design elements of REDD+ safeguards information systems

While SIS design features will be country-specific by necessity, and a one-size-fits-all model of SIS design is not recommended, the initial experiences of REDD+ countries indicate three potentially key design elements (*Figure 1*) that may be considered, summarised as:

- 1. SIS objectives
- 2. SIS functions
- 3. Institutional arrangements

It should be noted that SIS design choices and processes are not static and are likely to proceed in a stepwise manner, incorporating iterative improvements – with a view to expand objectives, functionality or institutional arrangements at later stages – in line with the progress of evolving REDD+ implementation.



The default objective stated under the UNFCCC is to demonstrate that the Cancun safeguards are being addressed and respected throughout REDD+ implementation. A further objective could relate to using information from the SIS to prepare a UNFCCC-required summary of safeguards information. Initially, the objectives of a SIS may be limited to meeting these

UNFCCC requirements. Over time, or from the outset, additional SIS objectives can be considered – for example, to ensure that REDD+, through the safeguards, contributes to broader sustainable development goals.

Broadening the objectives of a SIS can help to build domestic support for REDD+, as well as increase the return on investment for developing and running the system. For example, information on how environmental and social benefits and risks are being managed in forestry and other landuse sectors could contribute to a range of domestic objectives such as accessing funding for REDD+ actions, improved implementation of NS/APs through

management, greater legitimacy of REDD+ among domestic stakeholders, and informing national policy reform agendas.

# SIS functions: What will the SIS need to do to achieve its objectives?

Through stakeholder consultation, and drawing on lessons learnt from information and monitoring systems outside REDD+, a number of SIS functions (*Figure 2*) have been identified for consideration in SIS design, summarised as:

- Information compilation and management
  What information needs to be included in the
  SIS, where will it be sourced, how will it be
  structured, and how will it be brought together
  and managed?
- Information analysis and interpretation What does the information tell us about how safeguards have been addressed and respected, and the attribution of outcomes to REDD+?
- Information quality control and assurance
  Is the information accurate and is the
  interpretation acceptable to different
  stakeholders?

#### Information dissemination and use

How will information be communicated to, and used by, different stakeholders to meet their different needs?

### SIS institutional arrangements: Who will be responsible for performing the chosen SIS functions?

To build on existing systems, a review, of how current institutional mandates of existing information systems cover the necessary functions of the SIS, could be conducted. New institutional arrangements, such as information sharing agreements, might need

to be considered to feed information from multiple institutions into a single national SIS. The existing framework of a country's policies, laws and regulations (PLRs) can help define the mandates and functions of government institutions that might contribute to the SIS. The role of non-state actors - civil society, indigenous peoples and local communities, as well as the private sector - could complement government institutional mandates and capacities to perform different functional responsibilities within the SIS. Where some information requirements cannot be met on the basis of what is already available, novel information solutions may need to be found to close those gaps.

## SIS design considerations as part of broader country approaches to safeguards

Early country experiences are beginning to demonstrate the value of considering aspects of overall country approaches to safeguards in the design of a SIS. Such country approaches utilise and strengthen existing governance arrangements - such as PLRs, institutional capacities and information systems - to meet UNFCCC safeguard requirements, together with any other safeguard goals a country may choose to



Figure 2: Possible functions of a REDD+ safeguards information system

adopt. Stakeholders, particularly REDD+ countries, have identified key elements of country approaches as important preparatory steps for the design of a SIS, and include:

- Defining the goals, scope and scale of safeguards application – How a country chooses to implement its NS/AP will have a profound bearing on safeguards information needs and sources and, therefore, SIS design. Defining safeguards goals refers to what safeguards frameworks the country chooses to apply for REDD+, and whether the country adopts an approach to safeguards that can accommodate UNFCCC and other REDD+-relevant safeguards requirements of other processes. The scope of safeguards application refers to what actions the safeguards will be applied to, and will determine what information should populate the SIS. The UNFCCC calls for a national-level SIS, but strategic decisions on the most appropriate scale(s) to deal with the underlying drivers of deforestation will have direct influence on the information needs, sources and institutional arrangements to be considered during the SIS design process.
- Assessing benefits and risks of potential REDD+ actions - The REDD+ actions being

considered, and their potential environmental and social benefits and risks, will determine what information will need to be provided through a SIS. SIS development can proceed in advance of clarifying REDD+ actions, but runs the risk of having a thematic scope broader than necessary. SIS design before completion of a coherent first draft NS/AP could prove to be resource inefficient, both in development and operation of the resultant information system. The assessment of benefits and risks of potential REDD+ actions should inform both the selection of actions to be included in NS/AP and the clarification of safeguards.

- clarifying the Cancun safeguards in accordance with national circumstances The Cancun safeguards serve as a set of principles that should be clarified, in terms of specific thematic issues of relevance to a country's context i.e. based on an understanding of the benefits and risks of proposed REDD+ actions, identify what aspects of society and the environment need to be safeguarded, under the broad framework agreed in Cancun.
- Identifying, assessing and strengthening existing governance arrangements – A first step

for many country approaches to safeguards is to assess what existing governance arrangements – PLRs, institutional arrangements to implement them, and information systems to demonstrate effective implementation – a country has in place to address and respect safeguards (as well as ways to fill any identified gaps). Such assessments can help identify information sources for a SIS, as well as institutional roles and responsibilities for performing different SIS functions.

# Summaries of safeguards information - priority objective of safeguards information systems

Providing a summary of information on how all the Cancun safeguards are being addressed and respected, throughout implementation of REDD+ actions, is another key UNFCCC safeguards requirement<sup>5</sup>. There is no explicit requirement for these summaries of information to be produced as outputs of a SIS. Most national and international stakeholders, however, acknowledge that, once established, a national SIS should inform the preparation of all future summaries of information.

As with a SIS, there is no UNFCCC-required structure



for a summary of information. Guidance on content of summaries of information, nonetheless, has recently been proposed within the UNFCCC process for adoption by the 21st Conference of the Parties (November-December 2015), whereby developing country Parties may be required or strongly encouraged to include, inter alia, elements in their summaries of safeguards information as: which REDD+ activities are covered, descriptions of each safeguard in accordance with national circumstances, descriptions of existing systems and processes (including a SIS), and information on how each of the safeguards has been addressed and respected.



#### **Endnotes**

- 1. UNFCCC Decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 71d (Cancun, 2010)
- UNFCCC Decision 1/CP.16, Annex I, paragraph 2 (Cancun, 2010)
- 3. UNFCCC Decision 12/CP.17, paragraph 3 (Durban, 2011)
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- UNFCCC Decision 12/CP.17, paragraph 3 (Durban, 2011)

#### **More Information**

More information on practical SIS design considerations will be available in the forthcoming Technical Resource Series publication accompanying this Technical Brief.

More information on the broader development and application of country approaches to safeguards can be found in the following publications:



UN-REDD Programme (2013)

Framework for Supporting the Development of Country Approaches to Safeguards

(English - Español - Français)



UN-REDD Programme (2015)

**Country Approaches to Safeguards** 

(English - Español - Français)

The above publications can be found at the following link: bit.ly/un-redd-safeguards. Additional information related to safeguards is available on the UN-REDD Programme Online Collaborative Workspace: www.unredd.net.



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