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Country Approaches to Safeguards:
Initial Experiences and Emerging Lessons

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KEY MESSAGES

1. **Setting the goals and scope of safeguards application for REDD+ is an iterative process that should be linked to national strategy or action plan** (NS/AP) development, and the identification of REDD+ actions appropriate to the scale(s) at which REDD+ will be implemented.

2. **Clarifying safeguards in accordance with national circumstances is key**, as it presents an opportunity to anchor safeguards to existing frameworks of policy, law and regulations (PLRs), as well as to REDD+ actions comprising evolving NS/APs, and serves as a basis for designing a safeguards information system.

3. **Building on existing governance arrangements is central to country approaches to safeguards**, and presents a strategic opportunity to strengthen those existing governance arrangements – such as PLRs, institutional arrangements; information systems and sources; grievance redress mechanisms; and law enforcement mechanisms – with far-reaching benefits beyond REDD+.

4. **Safeguards information system design processes** which relate to the overall national strategic approach, REDD+ actions and a **country's clarification of the Cancun safeguards** help identify what information is needed to demonstrate safeguards have been addressed and respected throughout the implementation of REDD+ actions.

5. **Engaging stakeholders is paramount in any country approach to safeguards** and will define the quality and ownership of processes and outcomes; how, when, where and to what degree different constituencies are engaged will make or break a country approach to safeguards.

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Introduction

In 2010 Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) agreed on seven broad principles constituting a set of safeguards for REDD+ – known as the *Cancun safeguards*[1]. Since the Cancun safeguards were agreed five years ago, a number of countries have attempted to meet the associated UNFCCC safeguards requirements[2], as well as those of other initiatives and sources of financing, such as the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility's (FCPF) Readiness Fund[3] and Carbon Fund[4], through a single ***country approach to safeguards***.

The *country approach to safeguards* is an approach that a country adopts based on its own unique needs and circumstances to enhance REDD+ social and environmental benefits and reduce the risks. Components of a country approach to safeguards include three core elements: policies, laws and regulations that address safeguards; institutional mandates, procedures and capacities to ensure that the safeguards are being

respected; and a safeguard information system which makes information available on how REDD+ safeguards are being addressed and respected.

Through the country approach to safeguards, the diverse requirements of the different donors, investors and other related programmes can be accommodated.

These are early days for country approaches to safeguards and many countries are still in the initial stages of their safeguards processes. As such, many REDD+ stakeholders are "learning by doing", which has yielded important preliminary lessons. These lessons learned are now informing dialogue and decision-making on how to meet different REDD+ requirements for safeguards through the unified and coordinated system of a country approach to safeguards.

This *UN-REDD Programme Information Brief* presents an initial global overview of country perspectives, experiences and lessons learned that may be used to inform country approaches to safeguards in the future. These have been gathered through broad consultations with countries on **how** they have responded to REDD+ safeguard requirements. Semi-structured interviews with national government focal points, dialogue captured during regional South-South knowledge exchange workshops, and a desk-based review of published and unpublished literature, has yielded a rich and diverse body of information.

Five main topics related to a country approach to safeguards have been identified through the collation and synthesizing of this information:

1. Setting safeguards goals and scope;

2. Clarifying the Cancun safeguards in accordance with national circumstances;

3. Identifying, assessing and strengthening existing governance arrangements;

4. Developing safeguard information systems; and

5. Engaging stakeholders in country approaches to safeguards.

Setting safeguards goals and scope

These two interrelated components are emerging as fundamental to framing country approaches to safeguards:

1. **Setting goals:** determining which safeguards a country seeks to apply for REDD+ – including the Cancun safeguards and any other additional safeguards requirements chosen by the country.

2. **Setting scope:** determining what interventions – REDD+ actions, - and any other actions in forestry and land-use sectors to which the chosen safeguards will be applied.

In setting safeguards *goals*, perhaps the most important perspective shared by countries is that the Cancun safeguards constitute the *default*, not minimum, safeguards to be applied. The Cancun safeguards were negotiated under the UNFCCC to ensure *all* countries looking to implement REDD+ apply this essential set of safeguards to their REDD+ actions – while some countries may choose to include additional safeguards in accordance with their national and international policy and funding commitments.

In defining the *scope* of safeguards application, countries identified that it is vital to have a clear idea of what REDD+ actions might be implement. This is particularly the case for countries that have chosen to embed REDD+ in low-carbon development or green growth strategies and are applying the Cancun safeguards more broadly than just to REDD+ actions alone. These countries have expanded the scope of safeguards application to other forest-sector activities, or even more widely to activities in other sectors that impact forests and land use.

Clarifying the Cancun safeguards in accordance with national circumstances

Clarifying the Cancun safeguards in accordance with national circumstances requires reaching a shared in-country understanding, among different stakeholder constituencies, of the rights and obligations that are embodied in the Cancun safeguards, as relevant to the specific country context. Examining and utilizing existing PLRs can be important in this iterative clarification process.

In order to ensure that the implementation of REDD+

actions is consistent with the Cancun safeguards, countries have acknowledged that they will need to anchor their country-specific clarification of the Cancun safeguards to their proposed REDD+ actions (i.e. policies and measures) comprising their REDD+ NS/APs. This will enable priority environmental and social benefits to be optimized and risks mitigated. Clarifying the Cancun safeguards can also be central to the design of safeguards information systems and subsequent preparation of the summary of information.

Identifying, assessing and strengthening existing governance arrangements

Existing governance arrangements for safeguards – such as PLRs, institutional arrangements, information systems and sources, grievance redress mechanisms, and law enforcement mechanisms – are collectively considered by many countries as the foundation through which they can address and respect the Cancun safeguards throughout the implementation of their REDD+

actions. Building on existing governance arrangements allows countries to respond effectively to safeguards commitments in a rigorous yet flexible manner.

Though existing governance arrangements can be used to address and respect the Cancun safeguards, gaps, weaknesses and/or possible inconsistencies in these arrangements are also to be expected and would need to be identified. While there has been a focus on PLR assessments to date, PLR reforms are not the only approach to deal with identified gaps. They can be difficult to achieve (requiring high levels of objectives and long periods of time) and are usually outside of the control and influence of the government institutions leading REDD+ and the country's approach to safeguards. Strengthening institutional capacity to implement PLRs can be an effective option in this regard.

Several countries that have embarked on the identification and assessment of their safeguards-relevant governance arrangements recognize that building on existing PLRs, institutional arrangements and information systems has application and benefit beyond immediate REDD+

requirements. They have found that these assessments identify gaps, weaknesses and contradictions in forest and broader land-use governance arrangements that a country may want to resolve, regardless of REDD+, as part of on-going efforts to strengthen governance to meet policy goals.

Developing safeguards information systems

A safeguards information system (SIS) is generally recognized by countries as a domestic institutional arrangement built on existing information systems and sources, and is used to gather, compile and provide information as to how the Cancun safeguards are being addressed and respected. Countries have identified that their SIS should meet national objectives first and foremost, in addition to UNFCCC requirements. Aligning SIS objectives with national policy agenda goals related to forest management, environment and sustainable development has been essential for a number of countries in their justification of SIS development and operational costs.

Many countries have also found that the overall strategic approach to REDD+, the specific REDD+ actions outlined in evolving NS/APs, and the clarification of the Cancun safeguards according to national circumstances, are all crucial to determining the information needs and structure of their SIS. In addition, countries noted that an assessment of existing systems and sources of information has proven to serve as a primary input and consideration when trying to determine how the information needs of their SIS can be met.

Countries also identified that the potential functions of their SIS should be considered in its design phase, and that these functions could include compilation, analysis, validation and dissemination of information. In many cases, the information systems and sources countries intended to build on in developing their SIS, already encompass internal analysis and assessments of the information they collect and provide, and this should also be considered in designing a SIS.

Engaging stakeholders in country approaches to safeguards

The success of a country's approach to safeguards will depend on stakeholder ownership across a wide range of constituencies, particularly national and subnational government agencies, civil society, indigenous people and local communities. Two main issues are emerging from countries' initial experiences in engaging stakeholders in their country approaches to safeguards, namely the need to:

1. *Raise awareness* of safeguards requirements, thematic issues and stakeholder responsibilities.

2. *Build capacities* so stakeholders can effectively engage in safeguards processes.

Defining the appropriate timing and format for carrying out awareness raising and capacity building activities has been found, in many countries, to be critical to the success of any stakeholder engagement in safeguards processes. Managing stakeholder expectations is also recognized as very important. In communicating with stakeholders, a safeguards process "owner" (typically

the national government) needs to ensure the clarity of messages to be communicated, how messages should be communicated (i.e. through appropriate media and in a culturally appropriate manner), and when messages should be communicated in relation to each stakeholder group.

In terms of a stakeholder consultation process on safeguards, country experiences show that a national government-led, technical or political coordinating body can be highly conducive to advancing multi-stakeholder safeguards processes. Coordinating bodies can identify and reach out to the most interested and relevant stakeholders to engage at the appropriate junctures, as well as lobby for necessary political support in both national line ministries and subnational government departments. A coordinating body does not need be a new entity. Where it may be newly established, it can be built on existing platforms that have the requisite political capital and technical capacities.

Conclusion

A country approach to safeguards is emerging as a practical, cost-effective, and strategic model for meeting UNFCCC (and other relevant) REDD+ safeguards requirements, as well as supporting all-important country ownership and relevance. Common generic elements, or

steps, in a country approach to safeguards are beginning to emerge: setting goals and scope, clarifying safeguards, building on existing governance arrangements, and various SIS design considerations.

A clear lesson learned from countries is that to be effective a country approach to safeguards should not be initiated or undertaken in isolation. Safeguards processes should ensure regular and frequent exchange with other REDD+ readiness processes to ensure synergies with essential elements of REDD+ architecture. Paramount among these, countries have identified, is the need to link safeguards to REDD+ actions – the specific policies and measures to address drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, as well as more sustainable management, conservation and enhancement of forest carbon stocks – as part of the development of a REDD+ NS/AP. Forging such links with REDD+ actions is now widely acknowledged by countries as imperative to ensuring that safeguards will be effectively addressed and respected during REDD+ implementation.

Endnotes

1. UNFCCC Decision 1/CP.16, appendix I, paragraph 2

2. UNFCCC Decisions:
- 1/CP.16, paragraphs 69, 71, 72, 76 and appendix I, paragraph 2;
- 12/CP.17, preamble, paragraphs 1-6;
- 9/CP.19, paragraph 4 and 11; and
- 12/CP.19, paragraphs 1-5.

3. Readiness Fund Common Approach to Environmental and Social Safeguards for Multiple Delivery Partners. Available at: https://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org/sites/forestcarbonpartnership.org/files/Documents/PDF/Aug2012/FCPF%20Readiness%20Fund%20Common%20Approach%208-9-12.pdf.

4. Carbon Fund Methodological Framework available at: https://www.forestcarbonpartnership.org/sites/fcp/files/2014/MArch/March/FCPF%20Carbon%20Fund%20Methodological%20Framework%20Final%20Dec%2020%202013.pdf.

More Information

More information on early country experiences and emerging lessons related to country approaches to safeguards will be available in the forthcoming UN-REDD Publication Technical Resource publication, *Country Approaches to REDD+ Safeguards: A global review of country experiences and lessons*, which accompanies this Information Brief.

More information on country approaches to safeguards, including safeguards information system design, can be found in the following publications:
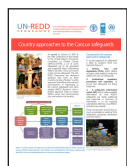
UN-REDD Programme (2015)
Country Approaches to Safeguards
(English - Español - Français)

UN-REDD Programme (2015)
Technical Brief No. 1 - REDD+ Safeguards Information Systems: Practical Design Considerations
(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 Safeguards page of UN-REDD Programme Online Collaborative Workspace: www.unredd.net.

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