

REDD+ reference level submission and technical assessment

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Decision 12/CP.17¹ and its Annex establish the basis for REDD+ forest reference levels/reference emissions levels (RLs) and contain guidance on the content of REDD+ RL submissions. This decision also calls for a process to enable the technical assessment of proposed RLs once they have been submitted. Parties agreed at SBSTA 36 to initiate work on developing methodological guidance for the technical assessment of proposed REDD+ RLs at SBSTA 37. **In Doha, SBSTA should start this work and commit to developing a technical assessment process for adoption at COP 19 in 2013.**

The proposed assessment process contained in this document represents the level of detail we believe is necessary to produce the technically robust and transparent RLs necessary to inform a results-based mechanism. This framework was designed to **minimize the burdens on both REDD+ countries and technical experts by providing a common framework for RL assessment** that maximizes the efficiency and enhances the transparency of the RL construction, submission, and assessment processes. The technical assessment process should be both facilitative and iterative, and should be designed to avoid being unnecessarily onerous.

Importance of the technical assessment process

The RL submission and assessment process can serve several functions, including helping Parties to supply transparent, complete, consistent, and accurate information on RLs – ultimately increasing stakeholder confidence in the REDD+ mechanism. Expert reviewers, selected from the UNFCCC’s roster of experts, will play a vital role in ensuring the integrity of RLs. In order for reviewers to effectively fulfill this role, reviewers should be explicitly empowered to request clarifications and suggest revisions to Parties' submitted RLs based on the principles and criteria contained in decision 1/CP.16, decision 12/CP.17 and its Annex, and any further guidance adopted by the COP.

The “Guidelines for submissions of information on reference levels” contained in the Annex to decision 12/CP.17 lay out the elements included in Parties’ RL submissions that expert reviewers will assess. In order for the technical assessment process to provide the most added value for both REDD+ countries and stakeholders, Parties submitting RLs should provide thorough and complete information in accordance with all relevant decisions. In particular, there are two elements contained in decision 12/CP.17 that will be critical to this exercise: 1) the rationale behind a Party’s development of its RL and, if applicable, the decision to adjust the RL according to national circumstances (paragraph 9, 12/CP.17); and 2) information on how interim subnational RLs, if used, relate and will transition to the anticipated national RL (paragraph 11, 12/CP.17).

The text below lays out a proposed framework for the technical assessment of countries’ proposed REDD+ RLs. As stated above, this framework is designed to minimize the burden on countries submitting RLs by providing a

¹ “Guidance on systems for providing information on how safeguards are addressed and respected and modalities relating to forest reference emission levels and forest reference levels as referred to in decision 1/CP.16”

common, transparent process for submitting information that can be objectively and effectively assessed by technical experts.

Guidelines for the assessment of information on reference levels

The goals of the technical assessment are as follows:

1. To determine whether robust, transparent, complete and accurate information, consistent with guidance agreed by the Conference of the Parties (COP), is sufficient for the technical assessment of the data, methodologies and procedures used in the construction of the RL;
2. To ascertain that the construction of RLs is consistent with the information and descriptions used by the Party;
3. To provide, as appropriate, technical recommendations for improving the RL,
4. To provide a uniform technical assessment to support consideration by the COP of the RLs to be adopted, and
5. To assess whether RLs are consistent with environmental integrity and avoidance of perverse incentives.

Goal 1: To determine whether robust, transparent, complete and accurate information, consistent with guidance agreed by the Conference of the Parties (COP), is sufficient for the technical assessment of the data, methodologies and procedures used in the construction of the RL.

Expert reviewers should assess the robustness and transparency of information used in the construction of the RL, including

- a. Historical emissions, removals, forest areas, and rates and types of land use change
- b. The rationale on the development of the RL including details of national circumstances and, if adjusted, details on how the national circumstances were considered

Expert reviewers should also assess whether the Party has provided transparent, complete, consistent, and accurate information, including methodological information, used to construct RLs, including:

- a. Description of the data sets, approaches, methods, models (if applicable), and assumptions used
- b. Description of the relevant policies and plans, including how and why they were or were not included in the RL
- c. If applicable, description of how the information used in construction of the reference level differs from historical data
- d. Changes from previously submitted information
- e. Any other relevant information

Goal 2: To ascertain that the construction of RLs is consistent with the information and descriptions used by the Party.

Expert reviewers should assess whether the Party has identified the pools and gases, and the activities listed in decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 70, which have been included in RL, including:

- a. Reasons for omitting any pool, gas, and/or activity from the construction of the RL, noting that significant pools, gases, and/or activities should not be excluded

Technical Guidance and an Assessment Process for REDD+ Reference Levels

- b. If applicable, reasons why the pools, gases, and/or activities used in the construction of the RL differ from those contained in national greenhouse gas inventories or in reporting to other international organizations
- c. Whether the Party has included the definition of forest used in the construction of the RL
- d. If applicable, explanation of the difference between the definition of forest used in the national greenhouse gas inventory or in reporting to other international organizations and that used in the RL
- e. Whether the Party has included information, if applicable, on how an interim subnational RL is related to and is expected to transition to a national RL

Goals 3, 4, and 5 will be met by assessing the information listed above following a procedure established in accordance with the guidelines below that allows the expert team to request clarification and/or provide technical recommendations to the developing country Party on the construction of its RL. This may include the recommendation to make revisions to elements used in its construction. The timing of the assessment process should be developed by SBSTA in consultation with the Secretariat.

Guidelines for Review Procedures

1. Each submission will be assigned to an expert assessment team responsible for performing the technical assessment in accordance with the procedures and timeframes established in these guidelines.
2. Each assessment team will provide a thorough and comprehensive assessment of the submission and will, under its collective responsibility, prepare a report.
3. The assessment process will be coordinated by the Secretariat. Review teams will be composed of review experts selected from the roster of experts. Participating experts will serve in their personal capacity and will be neither nationals of the Party under review, nor funded by that Party.
4. Teams should be made up of at least three experts. The Secretariat shall ensure that in any review team one co-lead reviewer shall be from an Annex I Party and one co-lead reviewer shall be from a non-Annex I Party. The Secretariat will select the members of the review team with a view to achieving balance between experts from Annex I Parties and non-Annex I Parties.
5. The expert team may request clarification and/or provide technical recommendations to the developing country Party on the construction of its RL. This may include the recommendation to make revisions to elements used in its construction.
6. In order to facilitate the Secretariat's work, each Party should confirm to the Secretariat their active experts on the roster of experts who will be able to participate in the assessment of reference levels.
7. All information submitted by Parties to the Secretariat should be made publicly available on the UNFCCC's REDD+ web platform.
8. Prior to the review, the review teams should identify any preliminary questions requiring clarifications from the Party, as appropriate.
9. The Secretariat shall aim to prepare a synthesis report of the reference level assessments, and assessments of updated or revised reference levels, including comments by Parties within six months of submission. The synthesis report will be made publicly available and be published on the UNFCCC REDD+ web platform.

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