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Safeguard Information Systems (SIS): An Opportunity for REDD+ Countries and Donors Alike

The future success of REDD+ to slow, halt and reverse forest cover and carbon loss will depend on various factors, and one of the most important ones is REDD+ safeguards implementation. Safeguards not only serve to promote social and environmental benefits and protect against harm, they contribute to the overall effectiveness and sustainability of REDD+ by reducing undesirable outcomes for communities and ecosystems. Both COP 16 and 17 resulted in positive steps for REDD+ safeguards, including:

- Adoption of REDD+ safeguards
- Agreement by developing country REDD+ participants to implement safeguard information systems
- Preliminary guidance for those safeguard information systems

Safeguard Information Systems (SIS) are an opportunity for REDD+ countries

- **SIS can improve overall REDD+ implementation.** Collecting and sharing information on how safeguards are addressed and respected will help REDD+ countries to understand what is working and what is not, enabling them to engage in adaptive management and improve their overall implementation of REDD+. SIS can help to identify problems early on, before they result in failure of the program or delays in financing.
- **SIS builds confidence in REDD+ at local and international levels.** Using inclusive stakeholder consultation processes to collect and review information for SIS increases the confidence of local communities, as well as international observers and REDD+ donors, with respect to REDD+ activities.
- **SIS facilitates the flow of finance.** Safeguards are important to the public and private entities that fund REDD+. SIS provides them with the information they need to invest in REDD+ with confidence. SIS can also enable countries to demonstrate the provision of social and environmental benefits, which may enable them to access additional sources of financing, such as adaptation, development or biodiversity funding.

The time to advance REDD+ SIS is now

Countries can now move forward with REDD+ readiness and implementation that addresses and respects the safeguards set out in the Cancun Agreements while also beginning to develop their SIS. REDD+ countries should start developing and implementing their SIS to understand what works given their country's national circumstances. REDD+ Social & Environmental Standards (SES) is an effective approach for participant countries to consider employing because of its country-led, multi-stakeholder safeguards assessment of REDD+ program design, implementation and outcomes. Some Parties have begun to accumulate experience in safeguards implementation and reporting using REDD+ SES, most notably Brazil, Ecuador and Indonesia¹. REDD+ SES also complements the existing safeguards tools and initiatives of the FCPF and UN-REDD Programme.

Implementation can inform SIS guidance and vice versa

As more participating countries begin implementing safeguard information systems, they can inform international negotiations (UNFCCC) with input on how to define safeguard indicators, ways to set forth monitoring and reporting processes, and methods for information-sharing with other REDD+

¹ www.redd-standards.org

stakeholders, donor countries, private investors and the international community. As international guidance on safeguards continues to evolve, an iterative, collaborative process referencing in-country lessons with SIS will result in an innovative risk mitigation framework based on realistic conditions. Given that countries employing SIS seek some level of certainty that their progress will not conflict with emerging safeguards frameworks, international guidance on SIS should be provided as soon as possible (i.e. by 2013) with further guidance limited to inputs that enhance REDD+ implementation and financing.

Unlock financing and reduce the burden on REDD+ countries

Consistent international guidance for SIS is a key to unlocking both public and private financing for REDD+ initiatives. UNFCCC guidance could benefit everyone by providing an overarching framework while still allowing countries to develop their SIS according to their national circumstances.

- **Guidance from the UNFCCC can provide more clarity** across the menu of existing approaches that support countries to address safeguards like those of the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility and the UN-REDD Programme. Clarifying safeguards compliance requirements would lessen the time, cost and overall burden on participating REDD+ countries in their SIS monitoring and evaluation.
- **Consistent guidance would also make it easier for donor countries and private investors to understand and compare information provided by different countries, thus promoting the flow of finance.** This would uphold transparency, consistency, comprehensiveness and effectiveness while facilitating stakeholder access to safeguards information. The result is confidence in safeguards, financing for REDD+ initiatives and international support of the entire REDD+ process. In the view of Switzerland, “ensuring the participation in, quality, and on-going improvement of information systems for safeguards is essential to providing constant feedback and continued finance of REDD+ programs and will ultimately consolidate their credibility.”²

Conclusion

Progressing safeguards information systems for REDD+ activities offers multiple benefits to developing country participants, REDD+ donors and stakeholders, as well as the international REDD+ policy process.

- SIS can help REDD+ countries to improve overall REDD+ implementation and address problems while they are still small.
- By working to develop SIS in their countries immediately, REDD+ host countries can be at the forefront of the international debate on safeguards, informing negotiations rather than receiving top-down mandates.
- Donors benefit from consistent, easy-to-understand information on country-specific safeguards which helps build confidence and support for REDD+ and facilitates the flow of finance.
- Consistent international guidance for SIS will lead to efficiencies by harmonizing the requirements of multiple initiatives and reducing the burden on host countries.
- REDD+ SES provides the opportunity to generate examples of how SIS can be developed and implemented following a country-led, multi-stakeholder process.

² http://unfccc.int/files/methods_science/REDD+/application/pdf/submission_of_switzerland_for_sbsta_-_19_sept.pdf