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INFO BRIEF

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Summaries of Information: How to demonstrate REDD+ safeguards are being addressed and respected

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KEY MESSAGES

1. Key elements of a **country's approach to safeguards** (Figure 1) are likely to inform the contents of their summaries of safeguards information, in accordance with national circumstances and within the broad guidance agreed under the UNFCCC. Some of these elements are outlined below.
2. Providing information on national circumstances relevant to the Cancun safeguards could, *inter alia*, include the **goals and scope** of safeguards application, together with the country's proposed REDD+ actionsⁱⁱ and their potential **benefits and risks**.
3. **Clarifying the Cancun safeguards** according to the specific country context can inform descriptions of each safeguard while presenting an opportunity to engage stakeholders in defining the content of summaries of information.
4. Providing information on existing systems and processes relevant to addressing and respecting safeguards could, *inter alia*, comprise existing: **policies, laws and regulations; institutional arrangements; and relevant information systems and sources**.
5. Credibility of summaries of information can be supported by the provision of **additional information** (or access thereto), e.g. on relevant in-country safeguards processes, and on **how domestic stakeholders were engaged** in these processes.

READ THIS BRIEF ...

- If you are involved in processes in your country to meet international safeguards requirements for REDD+, particularly in terms of providing safeguards information.
- If you want to learn about, or get a clearer understanding of, the UNFCCC requirements on summaries of safeguards information, and options to meet them.
- If you are looking for further technical assistance on what might be included in summaries of safeguards information to be submitted to the UNFCCC.

After eight years of negotiation, the final REDD+ guidance, including a decision on **summaries of safeguards information**, was adopted by the 21st Conference of the Parties (CoP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in December 2015. This brief elaborates on UNFCCC guidance to achieve transparency, consistency,

comprehensiveness and effectiveness when informing on how all the UNFCCC REDD+ safeguards, also known as the “Cancun safeguards”, are being addressed and respected. Drawing on key elements of and experiences from **countries’ approaches to safeguards** (Figure 1)ⁱ, the brief indicates possible content of summaries of safeguards information.

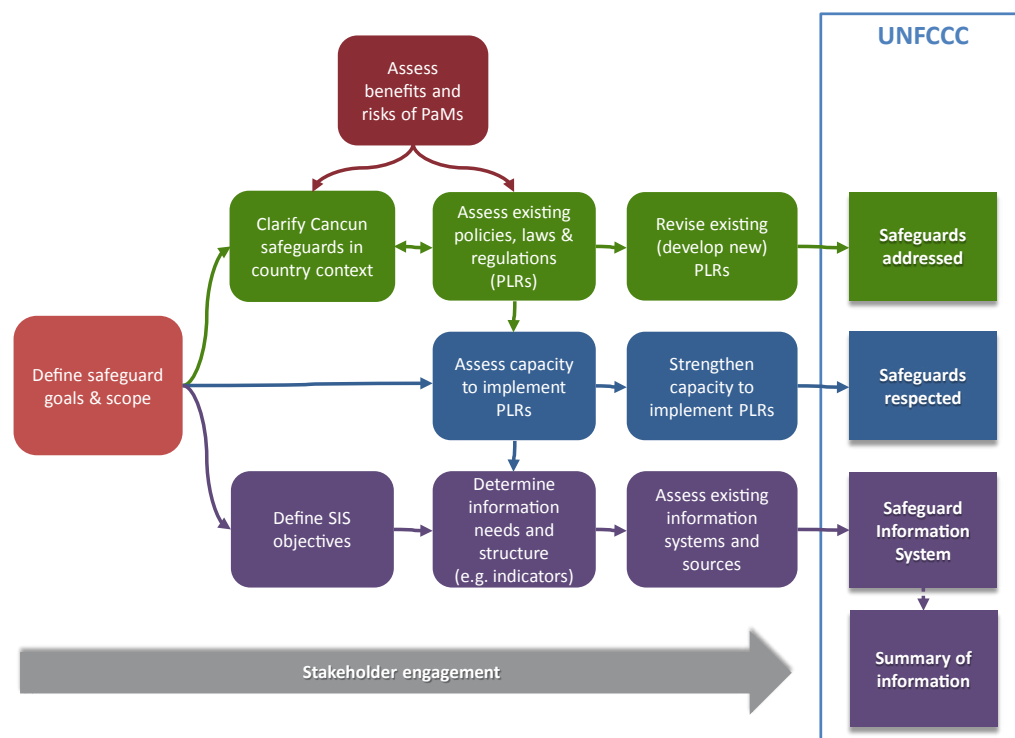


Figure 1 A conceptual framework for country approaches to safeguardsⁱⁱⁱ

Introduction

A landmark climate deal - the Paris Agreement - was adopted by representatives of 195 nations at the 21st Conference of the Parties (CoP21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in December 2015. Forests are identified as key to climate change mitigation in the agreement, and REDD+iv is explicitly recognized as an instrument to contribute to reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and enhancing forest carbon sinks. The CoP21 also concluded negotiations around REDD+ with the adoption of, *inter alia*, ‘Further guidance on ensuring transparency, consistency, comprehensiveness and effectiveness when informing on how all the [Cancun] safeguards [for REDD+] are being addressed and respected’^v.

Under the UNFCCC, the Cancun safeguards^{vi} were agreed by the CoP16 in 2010. It was agreed that these safeguards should be ‘promoted and supported’^{vii} when

undertaking REDD+ actions, in order to ensure that the implementation of REDD+ not only mitigates or avoids potential environmental and social risks, but also enhances the benefits for people and the environment. Further decisions on the Cancun safeguards outline three basic interrelated safeguards requirements of countries seeking to receive results-based payments for measured, reported and verified GHG emissions reductions and removals from REDD+ under the UNFCCC^{viii}:

1. **promote and support** the Cancun safeguards throughout the implementation of REDD+ actions^{ix};
2. develop a **system for providing information** on how the Cancun safeguards are being addressed and respected (i.e. a “safeguards information system” - SIS)^x; and

3. provide **summaries of information** on how all the Cancun safeguards are being addressed and respected throughout the implementation of REDD+ actions^{xi}.

This brief discusses the recently adopted UNFCCC guidance on the content of summaries of safeguards information, and shows how countries might develop their summaries by drawing on some of the work they may already have undertaken to develop their country approaches to meeting the UNFCCC, and other, REDD+ safeguard requirements.

The ideas presented in this brief build on the outcomes of a consultative process - comprising regional South-South knowledge exchange workshops, as well as one-on-one interviews – through which the UN-REDD Programme has compiled and synthesised different perspectives from REDD+ stakeholders (including countries, donors and civil society) on the possible contents of summaries of information. An overview of stakeholders' understanding and expectations of the contents of summaries of safeguards information is presented below.

What is the UNFCCC guidance on summaries of information?

Developing countries seeking to receive results-based payments for REDD+ should provide the most recent summary of safeguards information, to be made publically available, upon commencing implementation of REDD+ actions. Once the first summary of information has been submitted, the frequency of subsequent summaries should be consistent with the provisions for submissions of national communications, i.e. at least once every four years for developing countries^{xii}. Additionally, a country may submit a summary of information directly to the UNFCCC REDD+ web platform^{xiii} at any time.

There is no UNFCCC-required *structure* for a country's summary of safeguards information. Guidance on the *content* of summaries of information, however, has been adopted by Cop21 (Box 1).

What information could be included in the summaries?

The following suggestions on the contents of summaries of safeguards information elaborate on the UNFCCC guidance (Box 1) but are not intended to be prescriptive. Rather, suggestions are offered on how countries might achieve '*transparency, consistency, comprehensiveness and effectiveness*' with regards to the information content of their summaries.

Box 1: UNFCCC guidance on ensuring transparency, consistency, comprehensiveness and effectiveness when informing on how all of the Cancun safeguards are being addressed and respected

'The Conference of the Parties,

4. Decides that developing country Parties should provide information on which [REDD+] activity or activities...are included in the summary of information...;
5. Strongly encourages developing country Parties, when providing the summary of information..., to include the following elements, where appropriate:
 - (a) Information on national circumstances relevant to addressing and respecting the safeguards;
 - (b) A description of each safeguard in accordance with national circumstances;
 - (c) A description of existing systems and processes relevant to addressing and respecting safeguards, including the [safeguards] information systems..., in accordance with national circumstances;
 - (d) Information on how each of the safeguards has been addressed and respected, in accordance with national circumstances;
6. Encourages developing country Parties to provide any other relevant information on the safeguards in the summary of information...;
7. Also encourages developing country Parties to improve the information provided in the summary of information referred to in paragraph 1 above taking into account the stepwise approach;'

Source: UNFCCC decision 17/CP.21^{xiv}

Information on how the Cancun safeguards have been addressed when developing the national REDD+ strategy or action plan

Developing country Parties to the UNFCCC, undertaking REDD+ activities, should provide a summary of information on how all of the Cancun safeguards are being addressed and respected throughout the implementation of those activities. The UNFCCC also requests that countries address the Cancun safeguards when developing their national REDD+ strategies or action plans (NS/APs)^{xv}; however, there is no explicit

requirement to include this information in the summaries of safeguards information. Nevertheless, countries may wish to briefly describe, in their summaries of information, how the Cancun safeguards were addressed during the development of the NS/AP.

Information on which REDD+ activities are included in the summary of information

At a minimum, countries should indicate which of the five generic REDD+ activities – reducing emissions from deforestation; reducing emissions from forest degradation; conservation of forest carbon stocks; sustainable management of forests; and/or enhancement of forest carbon stocks – are covered by the summary of safeguards information. Countries may also choose to provide information on the country specific REDD+ actions (i.e. the specific policies and measures) that have been, or will be, implemented. This would provide additional context for understanding the summary of information as it is these specific actions to which the safeguards are applied.

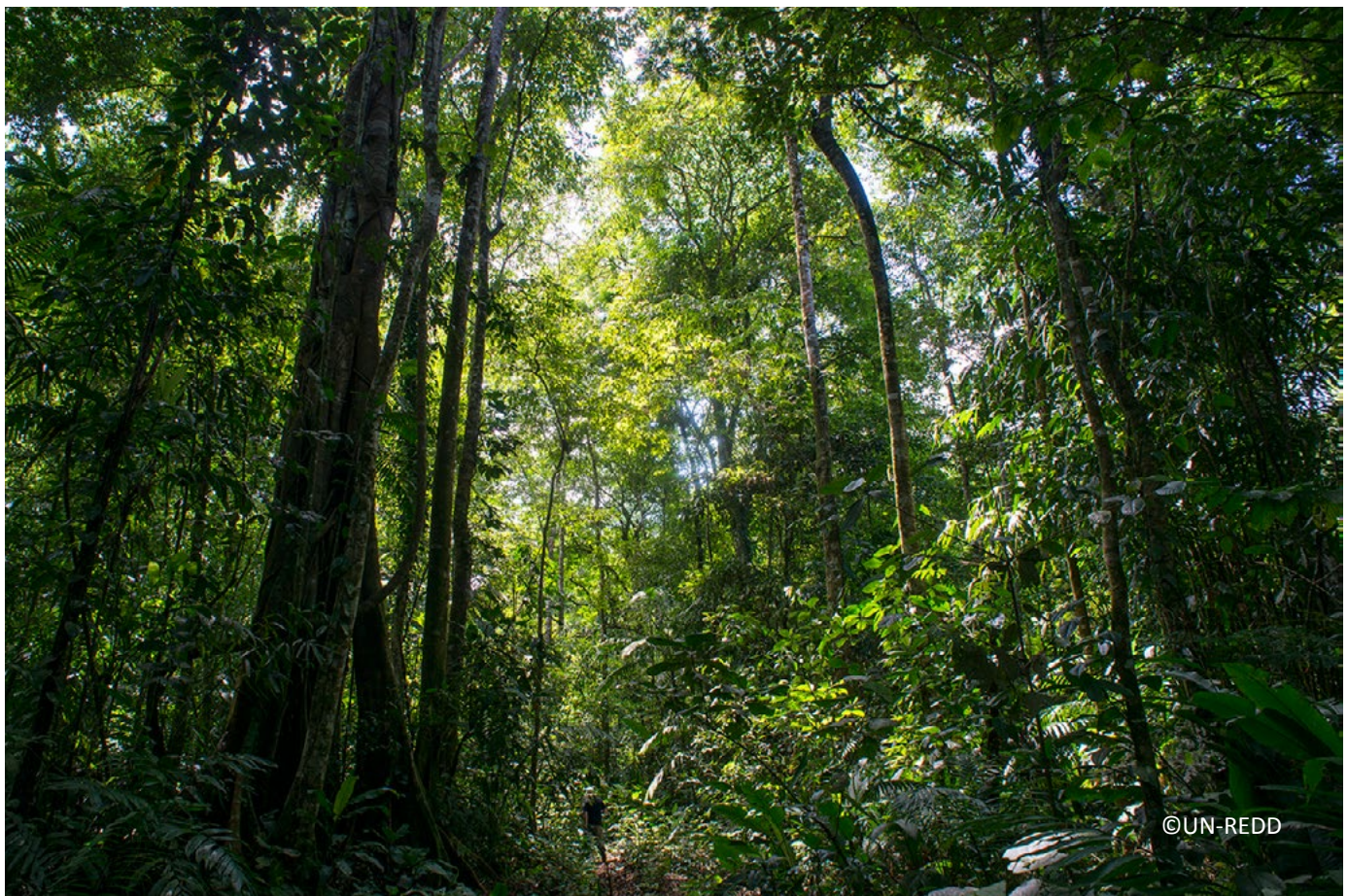
Information on national circumstances relevant to addressing and respecting the safeguards

Beyond outlining the nature and scale of REDD+ actions that the country is implementing, or planning to implement, and circumstances such as natural disasters or civil conflict, other information on national circumstances relevant to addressing and respecting safeguards might cover elements of a country's approach (Figure 1) to safeguards, inter alia:

- The goals of the country's approach to safeguards – are there any additional safeguards frameworks (beyond the Cancun safeguards) that the country approach should be compatible with, for example in accordance with its policy and funding commitments and priorities (World Bank, Green Climate Fund, bilateral donors, etc.)?
- The scope of safeguards application – will the safeguards be applied only to those REDD+ actions included in the NS/AP, or to broader actions in the forestry and/or other relevant land-use sectors?
- The specific environmental and social benefits and risks identified for each REDD+ action being implemented under the NS/AP – what priority environmental and social issues are to be safeguarded, and why?

A description of each safeguard in accordance with national circumstances

The Cancun safeguards constitute a broad set of principles to be clarified, in terms of country specific thematic issues, in order for domestic stakeholders to understand and agree on what it means to address and respect these safeguards based on national circumstances. As such, country specific descriptions of each safeguard might reflect the priority environmental and social benefits and risks identified for the REDD+ actions comprising the NS/AP (i.e. what, exactly, is to be safeguarded throughout REDD+ implementation).



It is likely that a country will undertake the “clarification”^{xvi} of the Cancun safeguards according to its national circumstances before embarking on the development of a summary of information, as part of its overall country approach to addressing and respecting safeguards. Countries have expressed the importance of clarifying the meaning of the Cancun safeguards, as well as other international safeguards frameworks they wish to apply, within their specific country context early in their safeguards processes. Such clarification exercises are essential (Cancun safeguards alone being too broad) to identify and assess existing governance arrangements that can be employed to address and respect safeguards. They can also inform how information in the SIS might be structured^{xvii}.

Collectively, REDD+ countries have identified three main governance arrangements as central to their country approaches to safeguards (Figure 1):

- policies, laws and regulations (PLRs);
- institutional arrangements; and
- information systems and sources^{xviii}.

The process of identifying the governance arrangements through which the country intends to address and respect the safeguards may involve documenting a detailed explanation or clarification of each of the seven REDD+ safeguards agreed under the UNFCCC. Where such documentation exists, this could be referenced in the summary description of the safeguards.

A description of existing systems and processes relevant to addressing and respecting safeguards

In this section of the summary of information, a country might consider including a description of the three governance arrangements central to country approaches to safeguards (Figure 1), as mentioned in the preceding section.

Policies, laws and regulations

A country's PLRs, together with operational plans and programmes and the institutional arrangements in place to implement and enforce them, can serve to define how safeguards are to be addressed when implementing REDD+ actions. The summary of information could draw on the identification of (and, where appropriate, efforts to strengthen) relevant existing PLRs.

While safeguard-relevant PLRs are primarily codified statutory ordinance in the public sector, countries could also draw on commitments by the private sector, such as corporate environmental and social responsibility policies or industry standards (e.g. for sustainable forest management and agricultural commodity production). Customary norms of indigenous peoples and local communities could also be

considered as ‘PLRs’ that may contribute to addressing and respecting safeguards.

Institutional arrangements

In the context of REDD+ safeguards, the formal and informal, state and non-state, institutions and their mandates, procedures and capacities for implementing or enforcing a country's PLRs are relevant. These institutional arrangements can serve to define who is responsible for ensuring safeguards are *respected* when implementing REDD+ actions, and how they will go about carrying out these responsibilities.

Information systems and sources

Information on existing systems and sources of safeguard information – such as national and subnational censuses, land registries and cadastral databases, feedback and grievance redress mechanisms, etc. – making significant contributions to the national SIS could be included in the summary of information^{xix}. Descriptions of any modifications to existing information systems, to accommodate new information needed to close any safeguard information gaps (e.g. new indicators), could also be provided. Links between the SIS and the national forest monitoring system, particularly in relation to Cancun safeguards (e - conservation of natural forests), (f – reversals of emissions reductions) and (g - displacement of emissions), could be described here.

Information on how each of the safeguards has been addressed and respected

Demonstrating how the priority thematic issues under each and every safeguard, have been addressed and respected to date, is likely to constitute the most significant part of the summary of information. Distinction between what is meant by ‘*addressed*’ and what is meant by ‘*respected*’ is important in selecting and structuring information in the summary. Although not defined by the UNFCCC, commonly agreed working definitions of addressing and respecting REDD+ safeguards have emerged at the international level:

1. **Safeguards are addressed** – is understood to mean that the body of PLRs, and associated institutional arrangements are in place *on paper* to deal with the potential benefits and risks associated with REDD+ actions; and
2. **Safeguards are respected** – is understood to mean that these PLRs, through the associated institutional arrangements, are implemented and enforced *in practice*, and that this implementation affects real and positive outcomes on the ground, in line with the Cancun safeguards.

As the Cancun safeguards should be both addressed and respected, a list of safeguard-relevant PLRs alone would

not be sufficient. As such, although initial summaries of information may focus more on demonstrating how safeguards are being addressed (existing PLRs, notable gaps, proposed gap-filling measures, etc.), over time there would likely be more information included on how they are respected.

Efforts to address safeguards are likely to take place before the implementation of REDD+ actions begins, although some PLR reforms, if necessary, may take longer to realize^{xx}. Consequently, information on addressing safeguards might be expected to be relatively static over time. Descriptions of how a country is respecting safeguards (strengthened institutional arrangements, effective implementation and enforcement of PLRs, evidence of social and environmental outcomes, etc.) may, however, be more dynamic and become the main focus of successive summaries of information.^{xxi}



Summary information could take the form of a safeguard-by-safeguard narrative description following the Cancun safeguards. Alternatively, a country may choose to structure information in a more hierarchical way, such as according to principles, criteria and/or indicators. As each Cancun safeguard is substantially different in nature, countries may wish to consider a hybrid approach to structuring information in the summaries, possibly using the same structure as that used in the national SIS. For example, information on Cancun safeguard (a) – consistency with national forest programmes and international conventions and agreements – might be summarized as a narrative description of how the NS/AP contributes to broader national and international policy goals; whereas information on Cancun safeguard (e) – non-conversion of natural forests and enhancement of social and environmental benefits – might benefit from some application of indicators to demonstrate incremental progress in terms of both process and outcomes.

Any other relevant information

In addition to the core components described above, the quality and credibility of summaries of information could be further ensured by including (or providing access to) supplementary information as relevant or applicable, such as^{xxii}:

- the process of how the summary of information was produced;
- the processes of SIS design, development and operation;
- the process of developing the country's approach to safeguards;
- subnational elements of safeguards application and SIS operations;
- monitoring provisions put in place for safeguards;
- other safeguards processes (external to UNFCCC requirements) and their interlinkages; and
- channels and mechanisms for stakeholders to provide feedback on draft and published summaries, further sources of information such as annexes or hyperlinks to websites, databases, etc.

Information on how domestic stakeholders were effectively engaged in any safeguards processes outlined in the summary of information, might be particularly valuable in assuring domestic and international stakeholders of the transparency, consistency, comprehensiveness, and effectiveness of the information on how the safeguards are being addressed and respected throughout REDD+ implementation.

Improving information taking into account a stepwise approach

UNFCCC guidance on summaries of information encourages countries to improve the quality of information with each successive submission. As such, it will be important to demonstrate incremental progress, or the 'positive direction of travel'^{xxiii}, in addressing and respecting safeguards to facilitate payments for REDD+ results in the future^{xxiv}. Early summaries of information could contain information on what has been achieved, as well as on plans to attend to remaining gaps and weaknesses in the implementation of relevant systems and processes. The submission of information on safeguards is an opportunity to showcase not just what is already in place and underway, but also plans to improve on how safeguards are addressed and respected from one summary to the next.

As NS/AP implementation progresses, any changes in: (i) drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, (ii) corresponding REDD+ actions and/or (iii) the goals and scope

of a country's approach to safeguards can be reflected in the information on changing national circumstances. With progress in NS/AP design and implementation will come evolving capacities and perhaps clearer expectations with respect to safeguards. This may be particularly relevant for information on how safeguards are being respected and how improvements in how PLRs are being implemented in practice, together with the positive outcomes of that implementation, should be documented from one summary of information to another.

Conclusion

Summaries of information should be viewed as key tools to ensure legitimacy of (and possibly greater levels of financing for) REDD+ as a viable policy option contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals. It is hoped that some of the key steps emerging as good practice from collective experiences of country approaches to safeguards – such as benefit and risk assessments, clarification of Cancun safeguards, and assessments of existing systems, processes, etc. – can be drawn upon to inform the contents of summaries of information. The elaboration of UNFCCC guidance on the contents of summaries of safeguards information outlined in this brief, however, is

not intended to be prescriptive, but offered as an optional suggestion of how to achieve '*transparency, consistency, comprehensiveness and effectiveness*' of their information content.

Summaries of information provide an opportunity for countries to demonstrate to the international community – including donors, civil society and other stakeholders interested in the environmental and social integrity of REDD+ implementation – that safeguards are being addressed and respected. Although domestic stakeholders are likely to have interest in more detailed information than what is provided in the summary of information to the UNFCCC, the summary may be of value to some in-country (particularly national-level) stakeholders as well. Furthermore, summaries could form the basis of domestic safeguards information products tailored to specific stakeholders' needs (e.g. subnational government agencies tasked with implementing REDD+ actions, private companies investing in results-based actions, or local communities).

As such, producing and sharing transparent, consistent, comprehensive and effective information on how safeguards are being addressed and respected, through credible and quality summaries of information is an opportunity to secure essential stakeholder confidence in safeguards processes.

Endnotes

- i UN-REDD Programme (2016) Concept Brief: Country Approaches to Safeguards. United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD Programme), Geneva. Available at: http://www.unredd.net/index.php?view=document&alias=11892-un-redd-framework-for-supporting-the-development-of-country-approaches-to-safeguards-en-11892&category_slug=studies-reports-and-publications-1364&layout=default&option=com_docman&Itemid=134
- ii Throughout this brief, 'REDD+ actions' refers to the specific policies and measures, under the five REDD+ activity categories agreed under the UNFCCC (Decision 1/CP.16 paragraph 70a-e), comprising the national REDD+ strategy or action plan (or similar document) and put in place to tackle the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, as well as enable more effective or extensive sustainable management of forests and conservation and enhancement of forest carbon stocks.
- iii This figure presents an idealised, generic country approach to safeguards, developed by the UN-REDD Programme, in consultation with other initiatives, and drawing on the collective country experiences of working towards meeting UNFCCC REDD+ (and other relevant) safeguard requirements.
- iv 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. A compilation of UNFCCC REDD+ decisions. Available at: http://unfccc.int/files/land_use_and_climate_change/redd/application/pdf/compilation_redd_decision_booklet_v1.1.pdf
- v UNFCCC Decision -/CP.21. Available at: http://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris_nov_2015/application/pdf/sbsta_42_agenda_item_further_guidance_on_ensuring_transparency_cop_auv_template.pdf
- vi UNFCCC Decision 1/CP. 16, appendix I, paragraph 2. Available at: <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2010/cop16/eng/07a01.pdf>
- vii UNFCCC Decision 1/CP. 16, paragraph 69. Available at: <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2010/cop16/eng/07a01.pdf>
- viii In addition to safeguards, the other 'pillars' of the Warsaw framework for REDD+, required for countries to be eligible for results-based payments, include a national REDD+ strategy or action plan, a forest reference emissions level or forest reference level, and a national forest monitoring system.
- ix UNFCCC Decision 1/CP. 16, paragraph 69. Available at: <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2010/cop16/eng/07a01.pdf>
- x UNFCCC Decision 1/CP. 16, paragraph 71 (d). Available at: <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2010/cop16/eng/07a01.pdf>
- xi UNFCCC Decision 12/CP.17, paragraph 3. Available at: <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2011/cop17/eng/09a02.pdf> Decision 9/CP.19, paragraph 4. Available at: <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2013/cop19/eng/10a01.pdf#page=24>
- xii UNFCCC Decision 12/CP.17, paragraph 4. Available at: <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2011/cop17/eng/09a02.pdf>
- xiii UNFCCC Decisions 12/CP.17, paragraph 3. Available at: <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2011/cop17/eng/09a02.pdf> UNFCCC Decision 9/CP.19, paragraph 11. Available at: <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2013/cop19/eng/10a01.pdf#page=24>
- xiv UNFCCC Decision -/CP.21. Available at: <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/10a03.pdf#page=13>
- xv UNFCCC Decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 72. Available at: <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2010/cop16/eng/07a01.pdf>.
- xvi Synonymous terms used in the literature and by practitioners include: "contextualization", "elaboration", "interpretation", "specification" and "unpacking" of the Cancun safeguards.
- xvii UN-REDD Programme (2015a) Country Approaches to REDD+ Safeguards. A Global Review of Initial Experiences and Emerging Lessons. United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD Programme), Geneva. Available at: http://www.unredd.net/index.php?view=document&alias=15044-technical-resource-series-2-country-approaches-to-redd-safeguards-a-global-review-of-initial-experiences-and-emerging-lessons&category_slug=technical-resources-series&layout=default&option=com_docman&Itemid=134
- xviii Some countries also include grievance redress, and law enforcement, mechanisms as important existing systems and processes relevant to addressing and respecting safeguards (see UN-REDD, 2015b, for details).
- xix UN-REDD Programme (2015b) REDD+ Safeguards Information Systems Practical Design Considerations. United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD Programme), Geneva. Available at: http://www.unredd.net/index.php?view=document&alias=15043-technical-resource-series-1-redd-safeguards-information-systems-practical-design-considerations&category_slug=technical-resources-series&layout=default&option=com_docman&Itemid=134
- xx UN-REDD Programme (2015a)
- xxi Braña Varela et al. (2014). REDD+ Safeguards: Practical Considerations for Developing a Summary of Information. Meridian Institute, Washington, DC. Available at: <http://www.merid.org/reddsafeguards>
- xxii *Ibid*
- xxiii *Ibid*
- xxiv Menton, M., Ferguson, C., Lelmu-Brown, R., Leonard, S., Brockhaus, M., Duchelle, A.E., Martius, C. (2014) Further guidance for REDD+ safeguard information systems? An analysis of positions in the UNFCCC negotiations. CIFOR Infobrief no. 99. Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), Bogor. Available at: http://www.cifor.org/publications/pdf_files/infobrief/5199-infobrief.pdf

Further Information

For further information on country approaches to REDD+ safeguards and the various products and services offered by the UN-REDD Programme, please:

- Visit the UN-REDD Programme Online Collaborative Workspace - <http://bit.ly/un-redd-safeguardshome>
- Contact the Safeguards Coordination Group - safeguards@un-redd.org



UN-REDD (2015a) Info Brief No. 4 -
Country Approaches to Safeguards:
Initial Experiences and Emerging
Lessons ([English](#) - [Español](#) - [Français](#))



UN-REDD Programme (2015b)
Technical Brief No. 1 - REDD+
Safeguards Information Systems:
Practical Design Considerations
([English](#) - [Español](#) - [Français](#))

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