

Community forestry: A national approach to Safeguard Information Systems (SIS)

Policy brief



Overview

- * The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is requiring governments of REDD+ countries to provide information on how they are responding to the seven UNFCCC REDD+ Safeguards agreed to during the 2010 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Cancun.
- * Thus far, the UNFCCC has only provided elementary guidance on how to formalize Safeguard Information Systems (SIS) for reporting on the Cancun Safeguards.
- * REDD+ stakeholders are calling for SIS to build upon existing frameworks to avoid duplication and unnecessary burdens on countries.
- * Community forestry exists in almost all REDD+ countries and provides a structure for contributing to multiple components of SIS development, implementation and reporting.

Introduction

With REDD+ now formalized as the internationally agreed upon approach for tackling deforestation-produced emissions following agreements at the 2013 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Warsaw, and the global community preparing for the negotiation of a landmark international climate change agreement at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris in 2015, there is a growing push to implement REDD+ initiatives. However, one aspect of REDD+ requiring attention as implementation gets underway is REDD+ Safeguard Information Systems (SIS): the development of systems for the design, implementation and monitoring of environmental and social safeguards for REDD+, as laid out in the 2010 Cancun Agreement (see Box 1). Although REDD+ holds the promise of providing multiple benefits to local communities, it simultaneously poses threats, particularly to the rights of these communities to forest access and tenure (RECOFTC, 2011).

RECOFTC – The Center for People and Forests has been advocating for the devolution of forest management from central government to local communities in the Asia-Pacific region since its founding in 1987. With over 25 years of experience in the capacity development of government officials, local community members and intermediaries in community forestry, RECOFTC understands the potential for community forestry to serve multiple functions in ensuring the rights and well-being of local communities as well as the vitality and sustainability of forest ecosystems.

Community forestry has been recognized by REDD+ related bodies as a suitable modality for the piloting of REDD+ and is increasingly being adapted to evolving policy and economic environments. A considerable body of experience and lessons learned has been gained from this work with direct relevance for SIS.

The definition of community forestry has evolved from a narrowly defined technical field to a broader concept that includes all aspects, initiatives, sciences, policies, institutions and processes that are intended to increase the role of local people in governing and managing forest resources. It consists of informal, customary and indigenous and formal or government-led initiatives. Community forestry covers social, economic and conservation dimensions in a range of activities including indigenous management of sacred sites of cultural importance, small-scale forest-based enterprises, forestry outgrower schemes, company-community partnerships, and decentralized and devolved forest management (RECOFTC, 2008).

Box 1 Cancun Safeguards on REDD+

When undertaking REDD+ activities the following safeguards should be promoted and supported:

- A. That REDD+ actions complement or are consistent with the objectives of national forest programmes and relevant international conventions and agreements;
- B. Transparent and effective national forest governance structures, taking into account national legislation and sovereignty;
- C. Respect for the knowledge and rights of indigenous peoples and members of local communities, by taking into account relevant international obligations, national circumstances and laws, and noting that the United Nations General Assembly has adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
- D. The full and effective participation of relevant stakeholders, in particular indigenous peoples and local communities, in the actions referred to in paragraphs 70 and 72 of this decision;
- E. That actions are consistent with the conservation of natural forests and biological diversity, ensuring that the actions referred to in paragraph 70 of this decision are not used for the conversion of natural forests, but are instead used to incentivize the FCCC/CP/2010/7/Add.127 protection and conservation of natural forests and their ecosystem services, and to enhance other social and environmental benefits;
- F. Actions to address the risks of reversals;
- G. Actions to reduce displacement of emissions.

Source: UNFCCC Decision 1/CP.16, FCCC/CP/2010/Add.1 Appendix 1



How can community forestry contribute to SIS?

Community forestry policies, regulations and institutions serve as existing frameworks for SIS (Responding to Cancun Safeguards A):

Incorporating REDD+ related safeguard implementation and monitoring does not necessarily require creating brand-new systems; instead, a re-evaluation and enhancement of the systems already at a country's disposal reduces the burdens of establishing new mechanism. Building upon existing national legal, institutional and compliance frameworks (a country-led safeguards approach) is thus essential (Rey et al., 2014).

Rights and rights-based approach (Responding to Cancun Safeguards B, C and D):

Community forestry provides a rights-based framework through which safeguards can be effectively and equitably designed, implemented, monitored and reported on with direct involvement of forest-dependent communities and indigenous peoples.

Decentralized decision-making (Responding to Cancun Safeguards B, C and D):

A basic principle in community forestry is that decisions should be handled at the lowest (or least centralized) level of authority capable of addressing such matters effectively. That is, community forestry laws and regulations must empower local management units and provide them with autonomy in decision-making.

Formalized local stakeholder rights and access to forest areas (Responding to Cancun Safeguard B, C, D and F):

There is an abundance of evidence demonstrating that insecure tenure rights and access to resources of forest-dependent people undermines their incentives for sustainable management of forest landscapes, which often results in deforestation and forest degradation; conversely, providing secure access and tenure results in healthy and carbon rich forest ecosystems (Persha, et al., 2011; Chhatre and Agrawal, 2009).

Ensuring sustainable livelihoods (Responding to Cancun Safeguards C, D, F and G):

Retention of forest quantity and quality is often directly related to the livelihood security of forest-dependent peoples. As REDD+ payments are unlikely to be sufficient (or delivered in a timely enough manner) to offset lost opportunities at least in the short-term, sustainable management of forests and associated carbon stocks requires that sufficient benefits can be sustainably derived from forests by local communities.

Opportunities for local-level monitoring (Responding to Cancun Safeguards A, B, C and D):

Local communities can be effective forest biomass monitors delivering high quality results (RECOFTC, 2014). Moreover, costs of community carbon monitoring are likely to be much lower than professional surveys and recent studies suggest that accuracy and costs of community monitoring increases and decrease respectively over time (Brodgelt et al, 2014).

Community forestry includes multiple non-carbon benefits (Responding to Cancun Safeguards E, F and G):

The long-term viability of REDD+ is closely linked both to the non-carbon benefits it may provide and the degree to which it will contribute to sustainable forest management. Community forestry offers a valuable framework to deliver a 'basket' of carbon and non-carbon benefits ranging from carbon sequestration, income generation, climate change adaptation, biodiversity conservation, social capital and human resource development and cultural preservation, among others.



Recommendations

In order for REDD+ to be successful, it is essential that the basic rights and needs of communities living in and around forests are addressed. Community forestry can be a powerful part of an approach that ensures important rights such as basic livelihood needs forest access and tenure and participation in decision-making are met. It also provides a basket of multiple benefits with the potential to incentivise sustainable forest management whether or not carbon payments come through.

RECOFTC, together with our partners, propose the following actions for policymakers and community forestry stakeholders to leverage the effectiveness of REDD+ safeguard design and delivery and to reinforce the role of community forestry in national forestry programmes:

For policymakers:

- Analyse national community forestry programs, identifying frameworks, plans and policies that can contribute to national SIS development, implementation and monitoring.
- Build capacity and raise awareness of user group members and local government officials on safeguards and how these can be harmonised with community forestry management plans and processes.
- Ensure REDD+ related reporting on SIS builds upon and is mainstreamed as much as possible within national policies and plans such as community forestry.
- Support tenure and regulatory reform to encourage sustainable use of community forests and ensure economic and policy incentives to support REDD+.

For community forestry stakeholders:

- Develop operational plans and practices that meet or exceed REDD+ safeguards.
- Support skill and system creation for SIS monitoring recognising that the benefits go beyond REDD+.
- Develop economic (and non-economic) incentives for multiple benefits and better valuation of non-carbon forest benefits.
- Incorporate SIS design and reporting elements with an integrated 'climate sensitive' approach to community forest management.

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RECOFTC's mission is to enhance capacities for stronger rights, improved governance and fairer benefits for local people in sustainable forested landscapes in the Asia and the Pacific region.

RECOFTC holds a unique and important place in the world of forestry. It is the only international not-for-profit organization that specializes in capacity development for community forestry. RECOFTC engages in strategic networks and effective partnerships with governments, nongovernmental organizations, civil society, the private sector, local people and research and educational institutes throughout the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. With over 25 years of international experience and a dynamic approach to capacity building – involving research and analysis, demonstration sites and training products – RECOFTC delivers innovative solutions for people and forests.