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Methodological guidance for activities relating to 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

Report on the expert meeting on guidance on systems for providing information on how safeguards for REDD-plus activities are addressed and respected

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) requested the secretariat to organize meetings of technical experts on methodological issues referred to in document FCCC/SBSTA/2011/2, paragraphs 28 and 29, including a meeting before its thirty-fifth session. The first of these meetings, on guidance on systems for providing information on how the safeguards for REDD-plus activities are addressed and respected, took place in Panama City, Panama, from 8 to 9 October 2011. The discussions focused on the sharing of experiences and lessons learned from developing countries implementing REDD-plus activities and their efforts to implement safeguards through existing systems, and on how information on safeguards is being provided. Experts exchanged views on the principles, characteristics and design of such information systems and the potential channels for the provision of information. Experts identified elements that could be included in a draft decision on guidance on systems for providing information on how the safeguards for REDD-plus activities are addressed and respected that could be forwarded by the SBSTA to the Conference of the Parties for adoption at its seventeenth session.

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I. Introduction

A. Mandate

1. The Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA), at its thirty-fourth session, considered views on methodological guidance for activities relating to 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,¹ taking into account issues identified in appendix II to decision 1/CP.16 and relevant issues. At the same session, Parties identified a range of issues, including guidance on systems for providing information on how safeguards referred to in appendix I to decision 1/CP.16 are addressed and respected, modalities relating to forest reference emission levels and forest reference levels, and modalities for measuring, reporting and verifying as referred to in appendix II to decision 1/CP.16.²

2. In order to facilitate the consideration of the matters referred to in paragraph 1 above at its thirty-fifth session, the SBSTA requested the secretariat to organize, subject to the availability of supplementary funds, meetings of technical experts, including a meeting before its thirty-fifth session.³ The meeting on guidance on systems for providing information on how the safeguards for REDD-plus activities are addressed and respected was the first of these meetings.

3. At the same session, the SBSTA invited Parties⁴ and accredited observers⁵ to submit to the secretariat their views on the issues identified in paragraph 1 above.

4. The SBSTA decided to continue its consideration of the methodological guidance referred to in paragraph 1 above, taking into account the elements referred to in annex II to document FCCC/SBSTA/2011/2 and the submissions of views referred to in paragraph 3 above, with the aim of completing its work on these matters at its thirty-fifth session and reporting to the Conference of the Parties (COP) at its seventeenth session on progress made, including any recommendations for draft decisions on this matter.

B. Scope of the note

5. This document contains a description of the proceedings of the expert meeting (chapter II), summarizes the presentations that were made (chapter III) and presents the main points and outcomes of the discussions (chapter IV).

C. Possible action by the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice

6. The SBSTA, at its thirty-fifth session, may wish to consider the information in this document as part of its continuing discussions on methodological guidance referred to in

¹ Referred to as “REDD-plus” in this document.

² FCCC/SBSTA/2011/2, paragraphs 28 and 29.

³ FCCC/SBSTA/2011/2, paragraph 31.

⁴ Submissions from Parties are contained in document FCCC/SBSTA/2011/MISC.7 and Add.1.

⁵ Submissions from intergovernmental organizations are available at <http://unfccc.int/parties_observers/igo/submissions/items/3714.php>; submissions from non-governmental organizations are available at <http://unfccc.int/parties_observers/ngo/submissions/items/3689.php>.

paragraph 1 above, and to provide additional guidance on further actions in order to complete at its thirty-fifth session the work on these matters as referred to in paragraph 4 above.

II. Proceedings

7. The expert meeting on guidance on systems for providing information on how the safeguards for REDD-plus activities are addressed and respected took place in Panama City, Panama, from 8 to 9 October 2011. Financial support for the meeting was provided by the Governments of Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

8. In total, 66 experts participated in the expert meeting, representing 41 Parties not included in Annex I to the Convention (non-Annex I Parties), 14 Parties included in Annex I to the Convention, six experts from intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and five experts from non-governmental organizations.⁶ The IGOs represented were the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD Programme) and the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) of the World Bank.

9. The meeting was opened by the Chair of the SBSTA, Mr. Mama Konaté. He introduced the mandate and objective of the meeting, updated the experts on the progress of work on this agenda item under the SBSTA and provided an outlook to the next session of the SBSTA. He then invited the co-chairs of the contact group for this agenda item at SBSTA 34, Mr. Peter Graham (Canada) and Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz (Philippines), to co-chair the technical sessions. The co-chairs, at the start of the meeting, appointed Mr. Bas Clabbers (Netherlands) and Mr. V.R.S. Rawat (India) as rapporteurs to support them in summarizing the main points of discussions at the meeting.

10. The expert meeting, which took place over two days, was organized in three parts:

(a) Part I: presentations were made by experts from developing country Parties on their experiences of the implementation of REDD-plus activities and relevant safeguards, followed by presentations by experts from the IGOs.⁷ A plenary discussion was held at the end of the first day;

(b) Part II: on the second day, discussions focused on issues raised during the previous day's discussions and the identification of elements that could be considered in a draft decision on guidance on systems for providing information on how the safeguards for REDD-plus activities are addressed and respected. The experts were divided into four breakout groups (two English-speaking groups, one Spanish-speaking group and one French-speaking group). The groups reported back at the end of the discussions;

(c) Part III: discussions took place on issues raised by the breakout groups and the co-chairs gave a summary of the main points raised and discussed on the second day of the meeting.

11. Summaries of the presentations and the discussions are contained in chapters III and IV, respectively.

⁶ Before the meeting, the secretariat extended an invitation to each of the nine constituencies of civil society. Four of these constituencies nominated experts to the meeting: environmental non-governmental organizations, research and independent non-governmental organizations, farmers, and women and gender.

⁷ All presentations are available at <http://unfccc.int/methods_science/redd/items/6149.php>.

III. Summary of presentations

12. An expert from Indonesia presented her country's views on and efforts to promote and support safeguards for REDD-plus activities. She briefly described Indonesia's REDD-plus strategy. She also noted a paradigm shift in the implementation of REDD-plus activities through the strengthening of forest governance, the empowering of the local economy and the engagement of stakeholders in the implementation of safeguards. One of the activities conducted by the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry was a workshop to engage stakeholders in the development of a system for the provision of information on safeguard implementation (ISS-REDD+). The expert highlighted the challenges faced in the translation of the safeguards identified in appendix I to decision 1/CP.16 into a practical system which Indonesia can effectively implement within the context of existing national policies and legislation and national circumstances. She noted that the ISS-REDD+ developed should be one that is the most appropriate for Indonesia. In the implementation of safeguards, the elements selected, based on the national context, should be demonstrable, measurable and reportable in a transparent manner. She also provided a timeline for the development of Indonesia's ISS-REDD+.

13. An expert from Viet Nam presented three options that are being considered by the country to operationalize the REDD-plus safeguards. The first option is to strengthen existing policies and ensure that REDD-plus policies are consistent with existing national and international policy commitments. Efforts are also being made to plan from an early stage to ensure that outcomes provide co-benefits. The second option is to integrate REDD-plus into spatial and socio-economic planning or subnational planning. The third option is to adopt new or adapt available regulatory and economic instruments to ensure that social and environmental standards are met and that implementation and monitoring are cost-effective. Several challenges were also identified, such as demonstrating co-benefit performance, integrating REDD-plus and co-benefits into policy and planning, adoption/adaptation of programmatic standards (standards provided by IGOs) and determining the appropriate degree of monitoring of impacts. The expert also provided several key recommendations on issues such as the need to enhance capacity to integrate safeguards into planning and implementation, the need to build on existing policies and legislation, the importance of intersectoral coordination, and the need to clarify tenure issues and ensure effective land-use zoning.

14. The third presentation on country experiences and views was from Brazil. The expert provided a brief overview of the timeline for the implementation of REDD-plus activities in the country and noted some supporting frameworks such as the Amazon Fund, the monitoring capacity in the country and the action plans in place to prevent and combat deforestation in all biomes. She described Brazil's policies and efforts to promote and support safeguards, including respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities. Brazil has used legal and institutional arrangements to support REDD-plus, established transparent financial mechanisms and built capacity to ensure good forest governance. The country's systems for monitoring emissions from deforestation were highlighted for their ability to monitor on a regular basis, including in real time, to facilitate and support the implementation of policies and measures. She noted that many existing national and state-level policies, laws and regulations are applicable to REDD-plus safeguards, although they were not originally developed for this purpose. The expert stated that the purpose of national information systems on safeguards is to provide clear, easily accessible and reliable information to national and international stakeholders on how the safeguards are being addressed and respected. In addition, she noted the importance of separating the information systems for safeguards from those for measuring, reporting and verification. While noting that there was no single recipe for the development of such information systems, she highlighted key elements such as the need for the systems to be

cost-effective, the need to build confidence through regular provision of information and the need to build capacity for the development and implementation of such systems.

15. A presentation by an expert from the Democratic Republic of the Congo described the country's REDD-plus process and, specifically, the integration of safeguards and standards into this process. The expert described the preparation phase of REDD-plus, which includes the creation of a national committee responsible for monitoring the risks and social and environmental co-benefits of REDD-plus activities. This national committee, comprising representatives from the government, civil society and the private sector as well as technical and financial partners, oversees the development of national REDD-plus standards. The expert outlined the country's plan to undertake a strategic environmental and social assessment in 2012, which will help to ensure that environmental and social management is taken into account in the implementation of REDD-plus projects and activities. In developing the appropriate national social and environmental standards, various studies, public consultations and workshops, and testing and validation of these standards on the ground have been conducted. The final standards are expected to be incorporated into an information system for REDD-plus in mid-2012.

16. The expert from the FCPF of the World Bank gave a presentation on the World Bank's safeguards as the basis for environmental and social risk management. It was noted that there was a great deal of consistency between the safeguards of the World Bank and the those set out in appendix I to decision 1/CP.16. The expert described the Common Approach to REDD-plus readiness preparation used by the FCPF and its delivery partners in developing countries. This approach centres on the use of a strategic environmental and social assessment (SESA) that focuses on participatory and consultative processes among key stakeholders as a key to comprehensive risk management. Results from this assessment and the potential impacts on REDD-plus strategy options are fed into the refinement of these options for a country. He noted that a process or product achieved at each milestone in the SESA process could serve as sufficient evidence that an applicable safeguard is being addressed and respected. A key output of the SESA is the Environmental and Social Management Framework, which provides a direct link to the relevant safeguard standards. SESA has been applied in two countries, Costa Rica and Mexico, and workplans with agreed steps for moving forward have been developed.

17. An expert from the secretariat of the UN-REDD Programme provided an overview on how the programme is supporting countries in implementing REDD-plus safeguards and providing information on how the safeguards are being addressed. Thus far, national programmes supported by the UN-REDD Programme must meet certain minimum requirements (e.g. country ownership, coherence with national strategies and plans), ensure stakeholder engagement and develop a framework for assessing and monitoring forest governance. The expert highlighted several tools, approaches and guidelines that are under development for addressing safeguards (e.g. free, prior and informed consent, social and environmental principles and criteria, participatory governance assessments, tools for reducing potential risks). The following recommendations are taken into consideration in the proposed approach by the UN-REDD Programme to the provision of information on REDD-plus, including safeguards: the purpose of the information system should be clear; an assessment of what information is available and the institutions responsible for the information and the identification of gaps should be carried out; adequate time and resources are needed for consultations with stakeholders; local capacity should be relied on for participatory processes; and a coordinated approach to the information system should be developed. The UN-REDD Programme plans to continue its work with countries in support of addressing and providing information on safeguards.

18. The expert from the GEF secretariat provided an overview of the implementation of safeguards in GEF-supported projects in developing countries. The seven GEF

environmental and social safeguard standards are principles-based with an emphasis on transparent and inclusive public participation and promoting gender equality in all projects. The implementing agencies (e.g. the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and regional development banks) working with the GEF have the flexibility to use their own safeguard systems or, if needed, augment their systems to comply with GEF standards. The GEF secretariat itself is not directly involved in project implementation. The GEF programme includes a focus on building institutional safeguard capacity and gathering lessons learned from project implementation. The expert informed the meeting that the interim safeguards that are being applied are undergoing revision.

19. The expert from the secretariat of the CBD presented an overview of the decisions of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD that relate to REDD-plus and forest biodiversity. The key outcomes of four expert workshops, organized by the CBD secretariat, on the links between biodiversity and REDD-plus, including relevant biodiversity safeguards, were summarized. The workshops identified the following needs: to address safeguards as early as possible; to ensure adequate financial support; to cross-reference with existing safeguard frameworks (e.g. those of the World Bank and the UN-REDD Programme); to ensure intersectoral coordination within and between ministries; to clarify land tenure issues and implement land-use planning and zoning in order to lower risks and enhance benefits; and to identify biodiversity indicators and assessment mechanisms for biodiversity impacts of REDD-plus activities. The discussions at these workshops recognized that safeguard processes can benefit from existing knowledge at various levels, including from the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization to the Convention on Biological Diversity, payment for ecosystem services and community-based natural resources management. It was also recognized that as part of the learning process, additional capacity-building will be needed at several levels.

IV. Main outcomes of discussions

20. This chapter summarizes the key points from the plenary discussions on the first day and the discussions of the breakout groups on the second day. It elaborates on, and is consistent with, the preliminary summary of the co-chairs and the rapporteurs mentioned in paragraph 9 above. It covers the main issues and elements raised and highlighted by the experts at the meeting relating to guidance on systems for providing information on how the safeguards for REDD-plus activities are addressed and respected.

A. Lessons learned from implementing REDD-plus activities and addressing safeguards

21. During the presentations and the ensuing discussions, the experts shared a range of views on addressing safeguards and identified several elements relating to systems that provide information on how safeguards are addressed and respected. They acknowledged that several lessons can be extracted from these discussions and sharing of experiences; these lessons are summarized below. The experts also noted a few points that require further clarification to facilitate the consideration of guidance for information systems.

22. Most of the experts shared the view that, for most cases, there is no need to develop new systems to provide information on how safeguards are addressed and respected. In most developing countries, there already exist systems, instruments, policies and practices that provide such information. The challenge is to adopt new or to adapt existing national systems to the different sets of safeguards or standards promoted or required at the

international level (e.g. the safeguards in decision 1/CP.16, appendix I, paragraph 2, the World Bank's safeguard policies or those of other implementing agencies) when implementing national REDD-plus programmes. It was noted that the guidance to be developed should be sufficiently general and flexible to allow countries to translate this guidance within their own national contexts and differing national circumstances. In addition, several experts highlighted the importance of integrating safeguards into the planning process for national REDD-plus strategies from the beginning. The need to strengthen existing policies, improve policy coherence and ensure intersectoral coordination within a country was also noted in the discussions. It was recognized that addressing safeguards and providing information on them is a learning process requiring continuous improvement.

23. Several principles and characteristics of information systems that provide information on how safeguards are addressed and respected were identified in both the presentations and the discussions. First of all, the experts agreed that safeguards are an essential aspect in the implementation of REDD-plus actions and activities. They emphasized that the development and implementation of such information systems must be country-driven and national sovereignty and national legislation respected. In addition, the processes relating to addressing safeguards and providing information should be transparent and ensure the participation of all relevant stakeholders.

24. In discussing the characteristics of information systems, experts also touched on the possible channels through which information could be provided. The experts suggested that countries could provide information through national communications under the Convention and, if applicable, biennial update reports.⁸ Additional channels were proposed, such as a web platform where information could be updated as new data become available. They also suggested that different types of safeguard information may be required at the national level and at the international level. Hence, the frequency of reporting information at the national level could differ from that at the international level.

25. The experts also identified several benefits associated with systems that provide information on how safeguards are addressed and respected. They shared the view that early stakeholder engagement that continues throughout the process of implementing REDD-plus activities and addressing safeguards is a worthwhile investment of time and financial resources. Stakeholder participation is not only about the provision of information; it helps to build confidence and consensus, overcomes scepticism about REDD-plus actions and activities and builds capacity among stakeholders once they achieve an understanding of REDD-plus. It was also noted that information systems serve the purpose of improving governance and transparency and are useful for identifying opportunities and avoiding negative impacts. A few of the experts highlighted the importance of early identification and mapping of the relevant stakeholders and institutions to be involved in the process. Furthermore, it is necessary to ensure that adequate time and resources are set aside for awareness-raising and consultations, as these are often underestimated.

26. Another important aspect raised by the experts was on the costs involved in developing systems that provide information on how safeguards are addressed and respected and the availability of financial resources. Several experts emphasized that the development and operation of a well-designed system can be very costly.

27. Insufficient capacity, particularly at the provincial, district or subnational levels, was also raised as an issue. In the presentations by countries and by the implementing agencies, the experts noted that in the readiness phase their capacity-building efforts included a focus on addressing safeguards and integrating safeguards into national planning and

⁸ Decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 60(c).

implementation. The experts also noted the need to build the technical and institutional capacity necessary to undertake the assessments associated with addressing safeguards (e.g. SESA, environmental impact assessments, assessment of biological diversity impacts). The lack of financial resources and capacity is among the reasons mentioned by the experts as to why existing safeguard systems are often not implemented.

Issues requiring further consideration

28. During the discussions, a few issues were brought up that the experts felt would require further clarification. Several experts questioned whether it would be useful to make a distinction between “addressing” and “respecting” safeguards. They noted the possibility of a safeguard being addressed but not necessarily respected. It was suggested that “addressing” would relate to the operational side of safeguard implementation and the institutions in place, while “respecting” would refer to performance in safeguard implementation.

29. The applicability of several principles in the context of information systems for safeguards was discussed. The experts questioned the principle of “comparability”: would it apply to the systems, the countries, the information provided or over time? Some experts were of the view that the terms “comparability” and “accuracy” are more relevant to the context of greenhouse gas inventories and that such principles are not applicable to non-Annex I Parties. It was added that comparability is not as essential in this context, and that it is more important to ensure that systems improve and enable national actions and stakeholder participation. Furthermore, most of the safeguards to be addressed require indicators that are more qualitative in nature. The accuracy of quantitative data and information is more applicable to greenhouse gas inventories. Another expert stated that while accuracy can apply equally to qualitative information, it is more important that the information provided be reliable.

30. Several experts raised the issue of transparency of the process and information and noted that there could be a need for reporting and review. They further questioned whether it would be a stakeholder review or an independent technical review of the information provided. Other experts stressed the need to delink the concepts of review and reporting when developing guidance for systems for providing information on how safeguards are addressed and respected, as this departs from the mandate given in decision 1/CP.16.

B. Elements that could be considered in a possible draft decision of the Conference of the Parties

31. On the second day of the meeting, the experts, working in breakout groups, were guided by a set of questions posed by the co-chairs, based on the discussions and issues raised on the first day of the meeting. The co-chairs asked the groups to identify the elements that could be considered in a draft decision on guidance on systems for providing information on how the safeguards referred to in appendix I to decision 1/CP.16 are addressed and respected. In addition, they asked the groups to identify the type of information to be provided and possible channels that could provide such information. Each group reported the main points of their discussions in a plenary session. This section summarizes the main points raised by the breakout groups.

32. The groups expressed the views that any draft decision on this matter for adoption by the COP should recognize the following: that relevant systems may already exist and be operating at the national level; that there is value in harmonization of the different sets of safeguards and reporting tools provided or required by the various international agencies

involved in the implementation of REDD-plus activities; and the importance of respecting national sovereignty, legislation and circumstances.

33. A number of characteristics of the information systems that should be included in the guidance were identified, including simplicity, transparency, flexibility (of the systems), consistency, completeness, comprehensiveness, regularity, adequacy (of the information provided) and accessibility for all relevant stakeholders. Some of the experts noted that the guidance identified in decision 1/CP.16, appendix I, paragraph 1, and the consideration of gender are also applicable as guidance for safeguard information systems.

34. Regarding the design of the information systems, experts reiterated the importance of building on and improving on existing systems available at the national level. The design of information systems should be country-driven and flexible to allow for improvement over time. Many of the experts stated that any COP guidance on the design of information systems should be general enough to accommodate the different national circumstances and allow for translation into the national context. A few experts commented that the purpose of the guidance should be to identify minimum requirements and, hence, should not be prescriptive.

35. There were varying views on potential channels for the provision of information. The use of national communications from non-Annex I Parties was identified as one possible channel. The experts also identified the possibility of using biennial update reports, where updates and supplementary information are provided every two years instead of new reports. However, some of the experts cautioned that the subject of biennial reports and biennial update reports are still under discussion by the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action under the Convention.

36. When discussing the possible channels for the provision of information, the groups also discussed the users of the information and the frequency of the provision of information. Some of the experts noted that the information could serve the interests of at least two categories of user: first, at the national level where the information could be used to inform domestic policy and decision-making processes, and, second, at the international level where information would be provided on a regular basis. It was noted that the provision of information for these two categories does not necessarily have to be at the same level of detail, have the same timing or be provided through the same channels.

37. The groups also discussed some tools that could be developed to assist countries in the design and operation of systems to provide information on how the safeguards are addressed and respected. One proposal by one of the groups was to formulate a matrix listing the seven safeguards stipulated in decision 1/CP.16, appendix I, paragraph 2, individually, along with separate columns in which could be noted how each of the safeguards are addressed and at which level. Another proposal was the development of an interactive web platform (at the national level) that would be accessible by all relevant stakeholders and allow for their participation, and where information could be easily and quickly updated. However, the development of such a web platform would be dependent on the availability of funding.
