Presently, over 20 Asian countries are engaged in REDD+ readiness activities. Each of these countries is committed to promoting and supporting the Cancun safeguards for REDD+ activities under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), in addition to delivering on national interpretations of the ‘Aichi Targets’ for the Strategic Plan (2011-2020) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (Swan, 2012). Applying and adapting existing multilateral safeguards frameworks to national REDD+ strategies and action plans is one clear and tangible national response to international biodiversity safeguard commitments. This has been the focus of post-Cancun activity on safeguards for national governments and their development partners (Swan & McNally, 2011).

A number of such international frameworks already exist and could inform a national safeguards response as part of REDD+. Some were developed under the umbrella of international funding mechanisms of the public sector, while others were developed with the aim of safeguarding private sector transactions on the voluntary carbon market. Three REDD+ related frameworks have come to dominate the international discourse over the past 18 months and, most recently, have been identified in draft CBD recommendations (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/16/8, 2012) on REDD+ safeguards for biodiversity:

1. The UN-REDD Programme Social and Environmental Principles and Criteria (SEPC);
2. The Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) Readiness Fund’s Common Approach to Environmental and Social Safeguards for Multiple Delivery Partners, including the Strategic Environmental & Social Assessment (SESA); and
3. An international civil society-led initiative, the REDD+ Social & Environmental Standards (REDD+ SES).

The SEPC have been prepared by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Following multiple rounds of review and consultation, the SEPC have recently (March 2012) been welcomed by the UN-REDD Programme Policy Board as a voluntary guiding framework. The SEPC have two aims:

1. Addressing environmental and social issues in UN-REDD National Programmes and other UN-REDD funded activities; and
2. Supporting countries in developing their national approaches to REDD+ safeguards in line with the UNFCCC and other international commitments.
The REDD+ SES are a voluntary set of standards - comprising principles, criteria and indicators – that provides a framework, and associated process of application, specifically for national REDD+ programme design and implementation, including a mechanism for reporting on how safeguards are addressed and benefits of REDD+ programmes have been delivered. The standards, which are currently undergoing revision following a public consultation on their second iteration, have been developed by a multi-stakeholder committee comprising representatives of developing country governments, indigenous peoples’ organizations, community associations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector. Co-ordination is provided by a Secretariat hosted by CARE International and the Climate, Community & Biodiversity Alliance (CCBA).

The SESA, on the other hand, is an assessment process leading to a risk management framework guiding a country on how to address environmental and social issues for FCPF-specific investments during the REDD+ readiness phase. Drawing on the existing safeguards of the World Bank and other delivery partners, SESA is a conditionality on all FCPF grant contracts. Although the primary purpose of SESA is to minimise the environmental and social risks of FCPF investments, SESA could also inform overall national safeguard responses for REDD+.

Each of these safeguard frameworks, and related processes and tools for application, could be applied to reduce risks and ensure environmental and social benefits from government-led REDD+ strategy/action plan design and implementation. The institutional setting and development of each of the safeguard frameworks has resulted in some differences in content and application processes. The three international safeguard frameworks summarized here are reviewed in more detail in Moss and Nussbaum (2011).

In Asia, six countries have UN-REDD national programmes; in two countries the REDD+ SES is applied to evolving jurisdictional REDD+ programmes (at national and provincial level); and seven countries are participating in the FCPF (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participation of Asian countries in relevant initiatives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>UN-REDD</th>
<th>FCPF</th>
<th>REDD+ SES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x (Central Kalimantan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
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<td>Thailand</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td>Viet Nam</td>
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</table>
Consequently, five Asian nations (Cambodia, Indonesia, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, and Vietnam) are now exploring application of more than one international safeguards framework in the design and (moving towards) implementation of their national REDD+ strategies and action plans. These and other developing countries involved in REDD+ are faced with a number of challenges when considering how to respond to international commitments on REDD+ safeguards and biodiversity conservation.

Cost and Benefits

International financial and technical assistance is increasingly demanding in terms of the environmental and social performance of REDD+, in addition to demonstrable and significant emissions reductions (and enhanced removals), expected from nascent national strategies and action plans. Bi- and multilateral initiatives, each with their own safeguard frameworks, might prompt developing countries to respond with a single rationalized national safeguard response, beyond that required to ensure Cancun compliance. Yet, despite a recent history of high international political profile around safeguards, and relatively intensive development partner assistance, national strategies must contend with persistent uncertainties with REDD+ as an international compliance mechanism under the UNFCCC process. Reluctance to make strong financing commitments on the part of the ‘demand’ side of REDD+ communicates an equally weak signal to the ‘supply’ side apropos investing significantly in non-carbon benefits and a strong and comprehensive safeguards response.

The different externally developed and promoted safeguard frameworks can be seen to be ‘competing’ for in-country stakeholder attention and resources. Some of these frameworks are still in a process of evolution, and there are varying degrees of synergy and divergence between different frameworks. Some developing countries pursuing a REDD+ agenda, and technical advisors, have cited environmental safeguards as being burdensome to the point of making the REDD+ mechanism too costly and too technically demanding to deliver on its original promise as a cost-effective climate change mitigation mechanism. The proliferation of international safeguard frameworks have sometimes been criticized as adding to, not alleviating, this burden and causing confusion among in-country stakeholders, not least of which are the national governments, contending with the complex, multifaceted and highly technical nature of REDD+. On the other hand, countries are asking for support in developing national approaches to the Cancun safeguards, and in their different ways, the SEPC and REDD+ SES efforts are designed to provide that support.
Despite on-going efforts of the different international safeguard proponents, REDD+ countries can only expect limited ‘harmonisation’ of these frameworks at an international level. Civil society has a long-term interest in environmental and social issues related to the forestry sector in general and REDD+ in particular and the constituency for REDD+ safeguards cannot be expected to diminish at the international level or within any given country. It is not likely that civil society organizations will endorse a set of agency safeguards, or vice versa. National governments will have to demonstrate leadership in responding to international commitments on REDD+ and biodiversity, through co-ordination of inclusive multi-stakeholder safeguard response processes that are constructively informed, and not hindered, by the variety of existing externally-developed frameworks. Such rationalized, nationally-led processes need to manage potentially high direct investment and transaction costs associated with the diverse issues and stakeholder values involved, and do so in the context of limited in-country government and non-government capacities.

**National Approach Options**

How might a country, pursing development and implementation of a national REDD+ strategy or action plan as part of an international compliance regime, meet these challenges and proceed with a national safeguard response that benefits from multi-lateral initiatives? Such a national approach will have to meet international policy commitments yet remain consistent with national policy frameworks. A national safeguard response must be based on in-country consensus on the major environmental and social risks and opportunities presented by REDD+ in the specific national context. It must reflect the present capacities and resources at a country’s disposal for implementing national safeguards. Generic guidance on how to operationalize international safeguard commitments have already been elaborated (Epple *et al*., 2011; Swan & McNally, 2011; SNV, 2012), but confronted with the different possible international safeguard frameworks, where does a REDD+ country start?

SNV together with UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC), the latter being part of the UN-REDD Programme, have commenced exploration of how a national safeguard approach for Vietnam could draw on, and be constructively informed by, international frameworks, such as SEPC, SES and SESA. In an initial step, considering the likely perspectives of different stakeholders in Vietnam, three options for starting points into an in-country multi stakeholder safeguards process were proposed:

1. **National starting point** – expanding upon existing policies, programmes, plans, processes and practices (‘5Ps’) in country to meet international safeguard commitments

2. **International starting point** – develop national safeguards based on one existing international framework and elaborate national safeguards starting with this framework

3. **Hybrid approach** – identifying key elements of existing multilateral frameworks pertinent to a particular country, based on an in-country assessment of potential benefits and risks
Elaborating on each of these three options in turn with some indicative steps for each approach, **Option 1 – national starting point** – would commence with initial identification of existing REDD+ relevant safeguard 5Ps, such as national forestry and agricultural sector strategies, land tenure legislation, protected area strategies, indigenous peoples policies, land-use planning procedures, community forestry programmes, etc. Existing 5Ps would then be compared with: a) international (Cancun) safeguard commitments; followed by b) other international frameworks, including SEPC, SES, and SESA. Comparative analysis of gaps and weaknesses in the existing 5Ps, in terms of the international safeguards, would then be applied to cross-check alignment against key elements of selected safeguards frameworks. Recommendations based on this analysis would then propose how to expand upon existing 5Ps to fill gaps and strengthen weaknesses to ensure consistency with selected safeguard frameworks.

**Option 2 - international starting point** – would begin with the selection of an existing multilateral safeguards framework, such as SEPC, SES and SESA. This framework would be expanded upon according to national priorities and existing in-country 5Ps. Selection of the base international framework would require comparative analysis of the various options, against criteria determined by national stakeholders, based on their different values and perspectives. Moreover, selection may depend on the country’s participation in international initiatives, such as FCPF (which requires SESA) and/or the UN-REDD Programme. As in option 1, a crucial step is the in-country analysis of major risks and envisaged benefits specific to that country context.

**Option 3 – a hybrid approach** - between options 1 and 2, would start by identifying key elements of existing international safeguard frameworks relevant for the country, in terms of content (what are the main environmental and social risks posed by REDD+?) and commitment (what level of environmental and social performance to aim for?). As with options 1 and 2, a subsequent risk-benefit assessment would follow that would inform development of the identified key elements into a national set of safeguards, which would cover the major risks and envisaged benefits as identified by in-country stakeholders and ensure minimum (Cancun) safeguard compliance.

Each option outlined above contains a number of shared key steps, but there is a fundamental difference in the perspective from looking first inwardly to what a country already has in place (option 1), to starting from an external ‘off-the-shelf’ approach and modifying to fit national circumstances (option 2), or making some compromise between the two (option 3). Shared steps include:
• Clarification of what constitutes minimum requirements for a country
• In-country assessment of potential risks and benefits presented by REDD+
• Analysis of existing 5Ps and how they might contribute to national safeguards
• Augmentation of existing international/national policy frameworks

Any REDD+ country considering a national safeguard response, following one of the approaches described above will be confronted with a basic trade-off between national ownership on the one hand and demonstration of international safeguard compliance on the other. A process following along the lines of option 1, starting and working out from a national perspective, is likely to have strong in-country institutionalisation but be a challenge to demonstrate full safeguard framework compliance to external stakeholders. Conversely, taking an existing external framework as a starting point (option 2) should present less of a challenge in demonstrating international compliance, but will be harder to institutionalise within the country. The hybrid option (3) of designing a national safeguard framework from a number of existing national and international initiatives might be expected to be intermediate, with moderate challenge of demonstrating compliance to both national and international stakeholder constituencies.

These options were recently (April, 2012) presented and discussed in Vietnam’s national working group on environmental and social safeguards with the conclusion that Vietnam would choose option 1. The output of such a process, was identified as a ‘roadmap’ for a phased approach to a national REDD+ safeguard response under the (draft) National REDD+ Action Plan. SNV is providing technical assistance to the development and implementation of this roadmap in Vietnam.

There is recognition at the international level that countries need support to reconcile the different safeguards initiatives. At the discussion of the future agenda for work on the SEPC at the UN-REDD Programme’s eighth Policy Board Meeting, one of the points noted was to: “ensure coordination and coherence with the standards and safeguards of other initiatives...to avoid duplication of work for REDD countries”. UN-REDD is working to ensure this coordination and coherence within individual countries.
References


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This Biodiversity & REDD+ Brief No. 2 is brought to you by Forest Carbon Asia, SNV Netherlands Development Organization with support from the International Climate Initiative of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, and the United Nations Environment Programme - World Conservation Monitoring Centre which is part of the UN-REDD Programme.

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FCA-SNV Biodiversity and REDD+ Updates

Regular Biodiversity & REDD+ reviews and updates are brought to you by Forest Carbon Asia and SNV Netherlands Development Organization with funding support from the International Climate Initiative of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment.

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