

How should forest reference emission levels and/or forest reference levels (RELs/RLs) be developed and submitted and how will they be assessed?

REL/RL Development

According to COP 17 Decision¹ 12, RELs/RLs must be developed according to the following rules:

1. They must be consistent with national greenhouse gas inventories;
2. They must be expressed in tonnes of carbon dioxide (tCO₂) per year;
3. They may be improved using a step-wise approach as better data and methodologies become available and as additional carbon pools are included;
4. They may be adjusted according to national circumstances but details of associated considerations must also be submitted (detailed in COP 17 Decision 12 Annex and below); and
5. They should be periodically updated to take into account new knowledge and trends, and any modifications in scope or methodologies.

REL/RL Submission

The Annex to COP 17 Decision 12 includes *Guidelines for submissions of information on reference levels*, which state that the 'information provided should be guided by the most recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC] guidance and guidelines.' The information should include the following:

1. Information that the country used in constructing a REL/RL, including historical data, in a comprehensive and transparent way;
2. Transparent, complete,² consistent and accurate information, including methodological information, used at the time of construction of RELs/RLs, including a description of data sets, approaches, methods, models, and assumptions used (as applicable, e.g. descriptions of relevant policies and plans, and descriptions of changes from previously submitted information);
3. Pools and gases, and the REDD+ activities, which are included in a REL/RL, along with reasons for omitting a pool and/or activity, noting that significant pools and/or activities should not be excluded; and
4. The definition of forest used in the construction of the REL/RL, if appropriate, in case there is a difference with the definition of forest used in the national greenhouse gas inventory or in reporting to other international organizations, and an explanation of why and how the definition used in the construction of REL/RL was chosen.

¹ Decision 12/CP.17 Guidance on systems for providing information on how safeguards are addressed and respected and modalities relating to forest reference emission levels and forest reference levels as referred to in decision 1/CP.16 <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2011/cop17/eng/09a02.pdf>

² Meaning provision of information allowing reconstruction of RELs/RLs.

REL/RL Assessment

At COP 19 in Warsaw, *Guidelines and procedures for the technical assessment of submissions from Parties on proposed forest RELs and/or RLs* were adopted,³ which outline the objectives, scope, and procedures of the assessment, the composition of the assessment team, and the timing of the assessments. The guidelines specify that all country submissions will be subject to a technical assessment and that proposed RELs/RLs '*might be technically assessed in the context of results-based payments.*' The technical assessment of RELs/RLs will focus on:

1. Consistency with national greenhouse gas (GHG) inventories;
2. How historical data have been taken into account;
3. The extent to which information is transparent, complete, consistent and accurate, including methodological information, description of data sets, approaches, methods, models, assumptions, and whether RELs/RLs are national or cover less than the entire national territory or forest area;
4. Whether a description of relevant policies and plans has been provided;
5. If applicable, whether changes to previously submitted RELs/RLs are provided;
6. Pools, gases and REDD+ activities included and rationale for any omissions;
7. Whether the definition of forest used for the REL/RL has been provided, and if it is different from that used for other national reports (i.e. GHG inventory);
8. Why and how the forest definition was chosen;
9. Whether assumptions about future changes to domestic policies have been included in construction of the REL/RL; and
10. The extent to which the REL/RL value is consistent with information and descriptions provided.

The assessment team may also identify areas for technical improvement but will not make judgements on domestic policies taken into account in constructing reference levels.

The assessment process will be coordinated by the UNFCCC secretariat and the assessment team will be composed of LULUCF experts selected from the UNFCCC roster of experts. Assessment sessions will be organized once a year. Draft reports will be provided within 12 weeks of the session, and final reports provided four weeks after the Parties' response.

Additional information

LEAF 2013. Decision Support Tool for Developing Reference Levels for REDD+.

<http://www.leafasia.org/library/decision-support-tool-developing-reference-levels-redd>

Herold, M.; Verchot, L.V.; Angelsen, A.; Maniatis, D.; Bauch, S. 2012. A step-wise framework for setting REDD+ forest reference emission levels and forest reference levels. CIFOR brief.

http://www.cifor.org/publications/pdf_files/Infobrief/3788infobrief.pdf? ga=1.177298533.1917646974.1392751201

³ Decision 13/CP.19 Guidelines and procedures for the technical assessment of submissions from Parties on proposed RELs/RLs. <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2013/cop19/eng/10a01.pdf#page=34>.