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REDD in Vanuatu

Vanuatu is an archipelago of over 80 islands in the South Pacific, with an estimated population in 2012 of 247,300 (WORLD BANK, 2013a). In 2010, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), national forest cover was 440,000 hectares, equal to 36% of the country’s 1.22 million hectare total land area (FAO, 2010). Compared to other Pacific Island countries, Vanuatu has a relatively low historical rate of deforestation, with the FAO’s Global Forest Resources Assessment establishing the national deforestation rate between 1990 and 2000 at zero (FAO, 2010). However, as the most recent national forest inventory was carried out over two decades ago in the early 1990s, it is widely accepted that robust data for changes in forest cover are not readily available. Other sources recognise a loss of 4600 hectares of forest throughout the
Despite the recently low rate of forest loss when compared to other countries in the region, between the country’s independence in 1980 until 1998, Vanuatu experienced widespread and largely unchecked logging for a lucrative international timber market (KING, 2007). This caused extensive degradation of the country’s indigenous forests (DOF, 2013b) and at least 40% of the commercial forest area is now considered to be degraded (KING, 2007). In 1998, a ban on the export of whole round logs was enacted (ibid) and the government expelled international loggers, dominated by Malaysian firms, from their operations in the country (DOF, 2013b). As a result there are currently no active industrial logging concessions in Vanuatu and timber extraction continues primarily in the form of small-scale harvesting carried out with the use of mobile sawmills. Although these present a lesser threat compared to their industrial predecessors (DOF, 2013a), harvesting is still reported to exceed the rate of replanting, suggesting there is a need for improved management in the forestry sector (DESP, 2006).

The predominant drivers of land use change in Vanuatu vary between the country’s many islands. Some areas have undergone large-scale forest clearing for agriculture, namely for coconut plantations and pastures (SIMÉONI & LEBOT, 2012), while in the more remote areas, subsistence activities represent the major threat to forestland (DOF, 2013b); one that is likely to be exacerbated with the growing population. Potential future threats include agro-industrial development, as well as increasing infrastructure and a growing tourism industry (DOF, 2013a). There is also a risk that Vanuatu may experience renewed interest and external pressure for its timber, once resources from the neighbouring Solomon Islands have been exploited (DOF, 2013a).

As emphasised in Vanuatu’s National Adaptation Programme of Action [19] (NAPA), Vanuatu is extremely vulnerable to climate change (NACCC, 2007). It was one of the first countries to sign and ratify the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1993 (KING, 2007) and, with international support, is in the process of developing a robust climate change policy framework. Given the country’s high susceptibility to the impacts of climate change, much attention has been paid to climate change adaptation, with mitigation efforts perhaps being less of a focus.

Deforestation has nonetheless been identified as a key pressure in relation to climate change and as a significant driver of environmental degradation (KING, 2007), with a number of other drivers of change, including urban drift and population growth, likely to have an amplifying effect on forest loss. Vanuatu has been an active participant within the negotiations on REDD+ within the UNFCCC and has initiated its national REDD+ programme. Through the Coalition for Rainforest Nations, Vanuatu supported the inclusion of forest degradation in the international REDD+ policy framework, as well as the ability for countries with historically low deforestation rates to participate in REDD+ through the development of reference levels with development adjustment factors (WEAVER ET AL., 2011).

The REDD+ readiness process in Vanuatu began in 2007 with the establishment of the Vanuatu Carbon Credits Project [20](VCCP). Since then, driven initially by the VCCP and subsequently by support provided largely from the German Environment Ministry through GIZ [21] (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) under a joint regional programme with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community [22] (SPC), Vanuatu has become a participant country of the World Bank’s Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF). Vanuatu’s REDD+ Readiness Preparation Proposal [23] (R-PP) has been developed and accepted by the FCPF Participants Committee, enabling Vanuatu to access up to US$ 3.6 million from the Readiness Fund (WORLD BANK, 2013b). The R-PP details how Vanuatu plans to develop its national national REDD+ programme, which is referred to as the "National REDD+ Scheme". This is expected to adopt a programmatic approach involving the implementation of subnational policies and activities rather
than area-based REDD+ projects. It is planned that provinces and/or islands demonstrating changes in forest carbon stocks will be eligible to receive REDD+ funding, which will form the basis for further investments into sustainable land use activities (DOF, 2013a). Although the government does not expect to implement subnational area-based projects, private project developers and non-governmental organisations will be able to do so with government approval, and any results in terms of carbon stocks will be considered in the national carbon accounting system. Vanuatu is in the early stages of preparing for the National REDD+ Scheme, however on-the-ground progress is being made in the form of a community-based REDD+ pilot project [24], implemented by Live and Learn Vanuatu [25].

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Institutional arrangements

The National Advisory Board on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction [26] (NAB) has been formally instructed by Vanuatu’s Council of Ministers (COM) to act as the official advisory body for climate change and mitigating the risks of natural disasters. The NAB was established to replace two former agencies: the National Advisory Committee on Climate Change (NACCC) and the National Task Force on Disaster Risk Reduction (NTF), to increase efficiency and reduce duplication in Vanuatu’s climate change response. The NAB is therefore the ultimate authority on climate change policy in Vanuatu. It is comprised of high-level government representatives and is co-chaired by the Directors of the Vanuatu Meteorological and Geo-hazards Department [27] (VMGD) and the National Disaster Management Office [28] (NDMO). These two departments are now housed under the Ministry for Climate Change Adaptation, Meteorology, Geo-Hazards, Environment, Energy and Disaster Management [29](Ministry of Climate Change), within a new government-funded complex built as part of efforts to improve coordination. As the supreme authority on the country’s climate change programme, the NAB is responsible for the overall management and coordination of REDD+.

The Ministry of Climate Change is the country’s national focal point for the United Nation’s Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Along with the NAB, it is mandated with coordinating all government and non-governmental initiatives addressing climate change and disaster risk reduction. A small project management unit (PMU) under the Ministry for Climate Change Adaptation, Meteorology, Geo-Hazards, Environment, Energy and Disaster Management [29](Ministry of Climate Change), within the VMGD is also responsible for the management and execution of some programmes and projects (J. BENJAMIN 2013, pers. comm., 24 October). The overall institutional set up is currently undergoing review, in order to assess current capacity and better clarify the roles and responsibilities of government departments in the coordination, management and implementation of the various climate change initiatives underway in Vanuatu.
The National REDD+ Coordinator is located in the Department of Forests (DoF), which is housed within the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry, Fisheries and Biosecurity (MALFFB). DoF is responsible for the overall management of Vanuatu’s forests and forestry operations and is the core implementing agency for REDD+. To date, the involvement of other government agencies in the development of REDD+ has been limited. The Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation (DEPC) has joined the planning process, as have other designated members of the National REDD+ Technical Committee (TC), as well as the provincial governments of the major islands of Efate, Santo, Malekula and Tanna. As Vanuatu plans to adopt a multi-sectoral approach to reducing emissions from deforestation, it is expected that these government departments and others will become increasingly involved, ultimately implementing their own REDD+ activities overseen by DoF (DOF, 2013a).

The TC was established in September 2012. It is comprised of representatives from different government agencies, as well as from four civil society organisations (CSOs), including Live and Learn Vanuatu, the Vanuatu Christian Council, Transparency Vanuatu and the Vanuatu Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (VANGO) (DOF, 2013a). The TC also includes GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) jointly as a regional partner. Once formally mandated by the NAB, responsibilities can be divided amongst members of the TC and it can assume its role in advising the NAB and providing strategic oversight to the national REDD+ programme. Although represented in the TC, aside from Live and Learn, CSOs have been restricted in their involvement due to poor awareness of REDD+. Increasing the participation of other CSOs has been identified as a priority within the Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP) (DOF, 2013a).

According to the R-PP, future coordination of the specific elements of REDD+ implementation is expected to be carried out by a number of Ad-hoc Thematic Working Groups (AWGs), to be established in response to different issues as and when they arise. The R-PP proposes AWGs for data management; the development of the national reference emission level/reference level (REL/RL); the national forest carbon inventory; the national REDD+ policy and strategy; and safeguards for REDD+ (DOF, 2013a).

The National REDD+ Scheme is expected to operate under a jurisdictional approach in which sustainable land use activities are planned and implemented at the provincial or island level. At the subnational level, provincial REDD+ stakeholder committees are expected to be established to distinguish priority areas for sustainable land use management and for government investment (DOF, 2013a).

As the country proceeds in its preparedness activities, the main issue is that national ownership of the process is increased, while not overstretching the capacity of the different government departments. REDD+ readiness has to date been largely externally driven. It is important that REDD+ has a local champion and that it is supported from high levels within Vanuatu’s government.

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Stakeholder engagement and participation

The Vanuatu Carbon Credits Project (VCCP), initiated in 2007, marked the inception of REDD+ in Vanuatu. Phase 1 of the VCCP involved a series of consultations with landowners in local communities to improve understanding of community development and to establish a set of Socio-
Economic Good Practice Guidelines for REDD+ activities in the project’s second phase (NAPAT ET AL., 2008). At the end of Phase 1 in February 2008, a national workshop [36] with key stakeholders was held, initiating Phase 2 of the project (WEAVER & PHILLIPS, 2008). Key stakeholders included members of the former National Advisory Committee on Climate Change (NACCC), members of the VCCP’s International Technical Advisory Team, and representatives from Vanuatu’s private and non-governmental sectors (WEAVER & PHILLIPS, 2008). Throughout 2007, the VCCP also held consultations with representatives from the timber industry to assess the potential for REDD+ activities to be carried out within timber concessions (NAPAT ET AL., 2008).

The VCCP, in its official capacity, was hindered by a lack of funds throughout its second phase. The Readiness Plan Idea Note (R-PIN) was developed and submitted to the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) with relatively low financial support and there was further difficulty in accessing the development grant for the Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP) from the FCPF. The national process of stakeholder engagement was therefore re-established through the support of GIZ [21](Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community [22] (SPC), whose involvement under their joint regional programme, ‘Climate Protection through Forest Conservation in Pacific Island Countries’ [37], allowed for the continued development of the R-PP. At the start of this programme in June 2011, a national planning workshop was held. One of the main objectives of this meeting was to conduct a comprehensive stakeholder analysis to better understand the different aspects of stakeholder interests, relations and management, regarding those stakeholders viewed as central and on the periphery of REDD+ developments in Vanuatu (SPC-GIZ, 2011). This analysis aimed to inform the future development of REDD+ by highlighting groups considered as important to engage in order to achieve positive outcomes from implementing REDD+ in Vanuatu (ibid).

To date, the Department of Forests [30] (DoF) and the Vanuatu Meteorological and Geo-hazards Department [27] (VMGD) have been the main governmental stakeholders in the national process and specifically in the development of the Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP). Although involved, other government agencies, such as the Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation [32] (DEPC), have played a lesser role. So far, the national REDD+ process has been largely externally-driven, principally by internationally-led donor programmes. As a result, international consultants have often taken a leading role in the development of REDD+. A key priority is therefore ensuring that capacity within the government is supported so as to increase national ownership and support of REDD+.

Live and Learn Environmental Education Vanuatu [25] (LLEE) has been the main non-governmental stakeholder in the REDD+ process. It has been central to stakeholder engagement, public consultation, and education activities on REDD+ and has developed a number of resources to promote understanding of REDD+ among indigenous communities (LLEE, n.d.; HENDERSON ET AL., 2012). Due to relatively low awareness and inadequate resources, other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) remain limited in their capacity for participation (DOF, 2013a). However, the R-PP emphasises the importance of increasing the involvement of other civil society organisations, including Transparency Vanuatu [35] and the Vanuatu Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (VANGO), in particular in aspects of the national REDD+ strategy, such as processes supporting increased transparency (DOF, 2013a).

The geographic and cultural context of Vanuatu has significant implications for public consultation and achieving effective stakeholder engagement and participation in REDD+, especially when it comes to increasing awareness and engagement among rural Ni-Vanuatu (indigenous) communities. The country’s small population is disproportionately distributed among Vanuatu’s many islands, with different communities subject to different degrees of isolation, varying levels of education and
literacy, and different communication structures (FCPF TAP, 2013; DOF, 2013a). These demographic and geographic circumstances make information sharing and communication challenging and costly, and complicate the establishment of a meaningful stakeholder dialogue on REDD+ (FCPF TAP, 2013). An initial process of information sharing, awareness raising and stakeholder engagement with rural communities has nonetheless been initiated. In 2011, GIZ began work to identify potential sites for REDD+ pilot projects and gauge interest and motivation in future implementation, ultimately selecting two sites on Espiritu Santo and one on Malekula for further scoping (PINEDA, 2011). Given the move towards an activity rather than project- or area-based approach, these pilots subsequently did not proceed. The potential consequence of this is the raised and then unmet expectations of communities anticipating prospective REDD+ benefits, highlighting the importance of managing expectations as REDD+ progresses in Vanuatu. The R-PP recognises the dangers of raising expectations and emphasises that any future awareness-raising as part of implementation of the R-PP must be carried out with caution (DOF, 2013a).

In November and December 2012, DoF, SPC-GIZ and the Project Management Unit [38] of VMGD held three two-day workshops with diverse groups of stakeholders in the Provinces of Tafea, Sanma and Malampa. These were successful in raising the profile of REDD+, but importantly also elicited some important feedback from participants regarding the national approach, including the idea that REDD+ in Vanuatu could involve the establishment of a national investment programme for sustainable land use activities (DOF, 2013a).

Following this, in January 2013, in order to develop the Consultation and Participation Plan of the R-PP, the NGO Live and Learn facilitated focus groups and interviews with rural Ni-Vanuatu communities on the islands of Santo (Sanma province), Efate (Shefa province) and Tanna (Tafea province) (NELSON ET AL. 2013). This process aimed to achieve better understanding of community perceptions and experiences of past government consultations on land-use issues, in order to inform effective future consultation and participation for REDD+ (ibid). The main messages to come out of this dialogue were that in the past communities have felt disconnected from policies and activities and that effective communication requires that existing community communication structures must be utilised and strengthened (ibid).

Looking forward, Live and Learn will continue with its programme of extension and outreach, with a key messaging workshop planned in early 2014. It will support the National REDD+ Unit in implementing the Consultation and Participation Plan as part of the REDD+ readiness phase. A key component of this will be ensuring the effective participation of women, who have historically often been excluded from decisions regarding land-use, despite their central role in subsistence agriculture (NELSON ET AL., 2013).

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**Land tenure arrangements and carbon rights**

Vanuatu, formerly the New Hebrides, gained independence in 1980. At this time land previously alienated from the Ni-Vanuatu during the Anglo-French Condominium rule was formally restored to its customary owners (SIMEONI & LEBOT, 2012). The Constitution [39] of 1980 therefore vests all land in Vanuatu in its indigenous custom owners and their descendants, and states that the rules of custom ownership are to form the basis of the ownership and use of land (CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF VANUATU, 1980). The majority of land in Vanuatu is therefore under customary ownership (CORRIN, 2012), with land generally individually-owned with community members
exercising use rights (DOF, 2013a). Customary land rights are therefore perhaps more appropriately considered as land holding rather than ownership rights, as traditional systems in Vanuatu distinguish between ownership and use (DOF, 2013a). The remaining 10% of land, comprising the urban centres of Port Vila and Luganville on the islands of Efate and Espiritu Santo, is under government ownership, however none of this is forested (SIMEONI & LEBOT, 2012; DOF, 2013a).

Following a long history of land alienation, the process of restoring land to its customary owners after independence has proved complex and land disputes have been common (SCOTT ET AL., 2012). Disputes over who constitutes the rightful customary owner to land, along with the variable and unwritten nature of customary law make identifying who actually owns a parcel of land problematic (CORRIN, 2012). Fundamental differences between statutory and customary law systems make reflecting customary ownership in the national legal framework challenging and as such there is no legal requirement in Vanuatu for the registration of customary ownership (FORSYTH, 2004). These factors, along with the relatively small size of land parcels held by recognised customary groups, pose problems for the establishment of REDD+ projects of any considerable size and with clearly attributable rights.

In an assessment of forest carbon rights in Vanuatu, several options for allocating forest carbon rights were identified (CORRIN, 2012). Vanuatu has a framework for forest carbon rights on leased land, in the form of the Forestry Rights and Timber Registration Harvests Guarantee Act 2000 [40], which includes carbon sequestration rights as a forestry right (ibid). However, on unleased land the situation is more complex. Land boundaries are rarely surveyed and are often contested and the options for rural communities to form legally recognised entities capable of addressing forest carbon rights are limited (ibid). As the majority of customary land is unleased (89.7%), this has significant implications for the allocation of forest carbon rights to indigenous Ni-Vanuatu communities (ibid). One option is to allocate carbon rights to communities through different leasing arrangements (see: CORRIN, 2012), thereby utilising the provisions of the Forestry Rights and Timber Registration Harvests Guarantee Act.

However, in response to the complexities of the tenure system in Vanuatu and the problems associated in particular with establishing REDD+ projects on large areas of land that encompass parcels owned by a variety of customary groups, the government has opted for the establishment of an activity-based national REDD+ scheme rather than one involving numerous projects in distinct areas. In this way, it is expected that the national REDD+ scheme will operate without seeking to establish land registration and will function on the basis of Ni-Vanuatu landholders giving their consent to the REDD+ strategy (DOF, 2013a). The national REDD+ scheme proposes to incentivise sustainable land use activities by rewarding measurable forest carbon changes associated with more sustainable land use in individual jurisdictions. It is hoped that in this way, investing REDD+ funds into sustainable land use activities will allow communities to ultimately reap higher benefits than they potentially would from receiving carbon payments (I. VIJI 2013, pers. comm., 22 October), which in turn may be unlikely due to the complications presented by Vanuatu’s small land areas and problems of land registration.

Assigning carbon rights to communities through lease could be at odds with the implementation of this proposed top-down, government-led national REDD+ programme (DOF, 2013a). This is a contentious issue and it is currently being assessed whether it would be unconstitutional for the government to receive performance-based payments for REDD+ activities for redistribution while carbon rights remain with custom landowners on the majority of land, which is unleased custom land (A. NELSON 2013, pers. comm., 21 October). The Readiness Preparation Proposal [23] (R-PP) plans for a study assessing the legality of the proposed approach and the options for legal implementation of the national strategy (DOF, 2013a). It is important to note also, that whilst the government is
pursuing a national REDD+ agenda that attempts to sidestep issues associated with the complex land tenure system in Vanuatu by adopting an activity-based approach, in practice, upon implementation, such REDD+ activities will still have to be implemented with close collaboration of local communities. Following external rule in Vanuatu, distrust of outside influence remains and in this sense, for REDD+ to be widely accepted the REDD+ scheme will have to be implemented from the bottom-up to a certain extent.

Despite the fact that direct government support will not be provided for area-based REDD+ projects, the national REDD+ scheme intends to recognise private forest carbon projects that meet their criteria; to be defined by a specifically created Ad-hoc Working Group (AWG) (see: Institutional arrangements) (DOF, 2013a). Live and Learn’s REDD+ pilot project is currently the only on-the-ground REDD+ project in Vanuatu. The project is being implemented in an area under the communal ownership of a single clan. The project involves carbon rights remaining with custom landowners managed by a family business, who acts on behalf of the clan concerning the REDD+ project (A. NELSON 2013, pers. comm. 21 October).

Forest management

All forest land in Vanuatu is customarily-held by Ni-Vanuatu communities. Although the Forestry Act requires the preparation of a Forestry Sector Plan, due to difficulties associated with consulting with custom owners across large forest areas, Vanuatu does not have an area formally established as permanent forest estate (PFE) or production forest (ITTO, n.d.).

Although government-owned forest land does not exist in the country, the government is responsible for forest management, in terms of policy, planning, development and protection (ITTO, n.d.) and through the Forestry Act, regulates the commercial forestry operations. Tree felling, timber extraction and the removal of non-timber forest products for sale by customary owners is regulated by customary owners. Within the government, forestry is the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry, Fisheries and Biosecurity [31] (MALFFB). Within the MALFFB, the Department of Forests [30] (DoF) covers the areas of forest research, extension, utilisation and conservation (CORRIN, 2012) and has overall responsibility for forest administration and management (ITTO, n.d.).

Forestry protection in Vanuatu has historically been relatively unsuccessful due to the resistance of customary landholders to grant governmental control for the protection of traditionally owned land (TECHERA, 2005). It is against this backdrop that a more participatory approach to environmental protection was initiated. The Environmental Management and Conservation Act 2002 [41] was passed in 2003. This provides for the establishment of Community Conservation Areas (CCAs), which are established to grant legal protection to areas under customary land conservation agreements (TECHERA, 2005). The establishment of CCAs involves the development of conservation, protection or management plans with significant involvement of the customary owners and therefore the incorporation of traditional knowledge of resource use and conservation (ibid). According to the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO), there are five formally registered forest protected areas covering a total of 8,366 hectares in Vanuatu (ITTO, n.d.), although there are also dozens of unregistered community and private initiatives. DoF works with the Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation [32] in the implementation of CCAs (DOF, 2013b). The establishment of CCAs could help avoid future deforestation and forest degradation, however as
such areas are community-led, the government is limited in its power to enforce CCA management and permanence is therefore dependent on community willingness to conserve the area accordingly (ibid).

DoF has extension offices in Vanuatu’s main centres and provides technical assistance and support to customary landowners in the use of forest resources, such as in tree planting, sawmill activities and conservation (I. VJJI 2013, pers. comm., 22 October). The involvement of the department in Vanuatu’s more remote areas is however limited, and has meant that in some areas forestry activities are not closely monitored (PINEDA, 2011).

As reiterated in the National Forest Policy [42], DoF aims to build a strong basis for both industrial and community agroforestry activities (NAPAT ET AL., 2008). It has already supported the establishment of various agroforestry initiatives. These have demonstrated their value in contributing to food security and increasing incomes from high value timber species, while alleviating pressure from harvesting natural forests. The promotion of agroforestry therefore continues to be a key strategy of DoF and a cornerstone of future forest management activities in Vanuatu. Agroforestry is identified within the Readiness Preparation Proposal [23] (R-PP) as an area with great potential to increase the sustainability of the forestry sector (DOF, 2013a). Given the government’s existing support and interest in rolling out agroforestry activities across Vanuatu, they are likely to be central within sustainable land use activities promoted by the national REDD+ scheme and could incentivise community involvement in REDD+

International, industrial logging firms were expelled from Vanuatu in the late 1990s and the last large scale logging operations ceased in 2004. There are therefore currently no industrial logging concessions in the country. Melcoffee Ltd is the largest domestic firm with a concession that remains active on Santo, however in recent years it has shifted its focus from harvesting native species to harvesting from plantations. Timber extraction therefore occurs through small-scale harvesting by mobile sawmills, with the Department of Forestry only issuing licenses for mobile sawmills. The Government has also intermittently imposed log export bans to stimulate domestic wood processing industries (BROWN, 1997). The development of the forestry industry is an objective of the Vanuatu Forest Policy 2013-2023 [42] (DOF, 2013b). This aims to promote mobile sawmilling in line with principles of sustainable forest management, as well as increased Ni-Vanuatu ownership of the industry, and domestic processing and value adding of wood products (ibid). It also envisages increased production from plantation forests and identifies the establishment of 20,000 hectares of large-scale plantations, community forestry plantations and woodlots by 2020 as a goal (ibid). A legal framework for plantations is being introduced in 2014, with the proposed establishment of the Plantation Forestry Act.

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Reference levels

A national reference emission level/forest reference level (REL/RL) is yet to be established but is planned for as part of implementation of the Readiness Preparation Proposal [23] (R-PP). Vanuatu’s activity-based approach to REDD+, with implementation planned for the provincial and island level, requires the development of subnational RELs aggregated to a national REL (DOF, 2013a). The R-PP specifies that different reference levels will be established for each of the five REDD+ activities: reducing emissions from deforestation; reducing emissions from forest degradation; sustainable management of forests; enhancement of forest carbon stocks; and, conservation of forest carbon
There are plans for REL development to follow the Verified Carbon Standard’s (VCS) Jurisdictional and Nested REDD+ (JNR) Requirements. Through this approach, activity specific subnational RELs will be developed for Vanuatu’s five largest islands, given their differing contexts of current and potential future forest resource exploitation (DOF, 2013a). These islands are Efate, Erromango, Malekula, and Santo, as selected by the regional GIZ-SPC programme “Climate Protection through Forest Conservation in Pacific Island Countries” (SEIFERT-GRANZIN & HECHT, 2012), and Tanna, as this has historically shown one of the highest rates of deforestation.

It is anticipated that development adjusted RELs accounting for potential future demand for timber and agro-industrial developments will be established. In line with recommendations from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the national REL will take into account non-anthropogenic emissions and removals by excluding emissions caused by natural events (DOF, 2013a). This is of particular importance for Vanuatu given the country’s high susceptibility to natural disturbances.

MRV

Vanuatu’s most recent national forest inventory was carried out in 1993, financed by the Australian Development Cooperation. This national forest inventory was incorporated into the Vanuatu Resource Information System (VANRIS), which has been used to guide commercial forest resource exploitation and as the basis for forest management since. However, given the changes in national forest cover since the early 1990s, the information contained within the inventory and VANRIS is now out of date. Vanuatu therefore requires a revised and updated national forest inventory to allow for monitoring for REDD+ (DOF, 2013a).

The national system for the measuring, reporting and verification (MRV) of changes in forest carbon stock will be developed by the Department of Forests (DoF), with external financial and technical support from the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), and specifically its Applied Geoscience and Technology Division, and GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit), through their collaborative regional forest conservation programme. DoF requires greater capacity in the technical expertise needed to develop a national MRV system, therefore the support of SPC-GIZ will be vital. There are concerns however that increasing the Department’s focus in this area may strain its capacity and so detract from other aspects of forest management, and equally that Vanuatu may not be able to immediately take ownership of this aspect of REDD+.

Vanuatu’s Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP) details the stepwise development of a cost-effective system for measuring, reporting and verifying changes in carbon stock at the national level, that will ultimately allow for the MRV of the all five REDD+ activities (deforestation, forest degradation, sustainable management of forests, enhancement of forest carbon stocks, and conservation of forest carbon stocks). The national MRV system will initially be comprised of two main activities: a National Forest and Greenhouse Gas Inventory, and Deforestation Monitoring (DOF, 2013a).

In line with Vanuatu’s activity-based REDD+ scheme, the MRV system will allow for data on changes in forest carbon stock at the national level to be associated with land use activities at the subnational
level within provinces or islands. The MRV system will be developed using available national forest inventory and remote sensing data and in line with the recommendations of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Guidelines for National Greenhouse Inventories of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (DOF, 2013a).

According to the R-PP, Vanuatu’s national forest inventory is expected to be based on the Monitoring, Assessment and Reporting for Sustainable Forest Management (MAR-SFM) approach, developed by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) using FAO guidelines specifically for small Pacific island states (see: THIELE ET AL., 2010).

As part of the Vanuatu Carbon Credits Project (VCCP), a satellite-based monitoring assessment of Vanuatu’s national forest resources for 1990 and 2000 was undertaken (HEROLD ET AL. 2007). The assessment, based on Landsat, ASTER and SPOT satellite imagery, indicated the change in forest cover between 1990 and 2000 and identified the historical rates of deforestation for individual islands (ibid). Despite the use of a variety of data sources, 20% of Vanuatu’s land area could not be included in the assessment due to persistent cloud cover (ibid). It is therefore anticipated that the national forest inventory will also include multispectral optical and radar imagery data (DOF, 2013a).

In the early stages of the development of the national MRV system, efforts will be focused on Vanuatu’s five larger islands of Santo, Malekula, Efate, Tanna and Erromango. Some of this work has already commenced on Santo, and it is anticipated that once this is complete, inventory work on the remaining four islands will commence (DOF, 2013a).

The activity-based approach being taken by Vanuatu means that area-based projects, such as the Live and Learn pilot project, are not the responsibility of the government. However, there will be the opportunity for project developers to nest projects within the national accounting framework. Although it is unlikely that the national MRV system will be accurate enough for the project-level, more detailed data from the project-level will be incorporated into the national MRV system so as to ensure that any changes in forest carbon stock will not be double counted.

The R-PP also contains information plans to develop parallel systems for monitoring the impacts of different REDD+ policy measures, as well as social and environmental safeguards. Ideally, these systems will then inform subsequent REDD+ activities in an adaptive management framework (DOF, 2013a).

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Safeguards

The Pacific Islands Regional Policy Framework for REDD+ [44] emphasises the importance of safeguards not only to minimise the potential negative impacts and enhance the positive effects of REDD+ implementation, but also to allow for maximum financial return through the verification of REDD+ projects under voluntary standards, such as the Climate, Community and Biodiversity Standards and Plan Vivo (SPC, 2013). Recently, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has decided to make safeguard reporting a requirement for any flow of REDD+ funds (UNFCCC, 2013). The regional policy framework document identifies the need for transparent governance and recommends that Pacific Island countries should integrate REDD+ with other forest governance programmes such as forest certification schemes and the programme for Forest Governance Integrity in the Asia Pacific (SPC, 2013). Equally important is the need for
equitable and transparent benefit sharing systems that will depend in part on clear land and carbon tenure arrangements (ibid).

According to the Readiness Preparation Proposal [23] (R-PP), environmental and social consideration will be integrated into REDD+ through a one-time Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment (SESA), which along with the development of a Safeguards Information System (SIS) will form the basis for an Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) (DOF, 2013a). The R-PP plans for the SESA to assess different potential REDD+ strategies in a participatory way that accounts for the daily needs of subsistence Ni-Vanuatu land users (ibid). The SESA will assess the possible impacts of REDD+ and ensure that the safeguards of the World Bank are integrated from the outset. The R-PP proposes a timeline for the SESA. This anticipates that the SESA will be launched in June 2014, with the assessment itself carried out from 2015-2016, followed by preparation of the ESMF from 2017 to 2018 (ibid).

It is expected that one of the Ad-Hoc Thematic Working Groups (AWGs) established by the National REDD+ Technical Committee [33] (TC) will oversee and coordinate the SESA process. Before the Terms of Reference (ToRs) for the SESA can be established, this AWG must be created. The SESA ToRs will include the national REDD+ safeguards policy as well as identify the social and environmental issues associated with the drivers of deforestation. The Forest Carbon Partnership Facility provides guidelines for the preparation of SESA ToRs, however these will have to be adapted specifically for REDD+ implementation in Vanuatu (DOF, 2013a).

Safeguarding indigenous rights is an important aspect of ensuring equitable implementation of REDD+. The context in Vanuatu, where the indigenous Ni-Vanuatu are the majority of the population and are therefore almost exclusively represented within the country’s leadership structure, means that indigenous rights are perhaps less vulnerable to exploitation than in other parts of the world. This is not to say however that local indigenous rights are not at risk. An analysis of national land leasing data, for example, shows that the Government through the Minister of Lands has commonly and increasingly granted leases for disputed customary land since independence (SCOTT ET AL., 2012). Furthermore rural land dealings are often agreed by village chiefs, on behalf of the customary group, along with local but non-indigenous investors (MCDONNELL, 2013). These examples demonstrate that local community rights are not necessarily safeguarded in Vanuatu, especially in areas where customary rights are not clearly defined.

It is therefore important that subnational REDD+ activities are implemented with the significant involvement of local communities to ensure that REDD+ is fully supported and therefore effective, and that communities are able to feel the maximum possible benefits of REDD+. It is also important that gender considerations are integrated into planning and implementation of REDD+ activities. Although women represent the primary decision makers when it comes to subsistence agriculture, they have historically been marginalised from land use decisions (NELSON ET AL., 2013). The Extension and Outreach programme of the R-PP’s Consultation and Participation Plan aims to pay particular attention to ensuring that women play a more prominent role in REDD+ readiness.

Due to the complex land tenure system in Vanuatu in which individuals typically hold the ownership rights to land, with the wider community exercising use rights, it is important that REDD+ implementation is done in such a way that ensures the wider community benefits from REDD+ incentives. One way in which the national REDD+ scheme plans to promote equitable REDD+ is by awarding REDD+ incentives, which may be payments or in kind benefits, to associations of farmers or community groups. It is expected that these may then be reinvested to support the sustainable land use activities of these groups. However, past experiences have shown the importance of ensuring that community expectations for such benefits are not unduly raised.
In response to the potential of disputes occurring upon implementation of the R-PP and the national REDD+ scheme more broadly, the R-PP identifies the need to develop a Feedback and Grievance Redress Mechanism (FGRM) (DOF, 2013a). Existing programmes in Vanuatu could provide valuable lessons for REDD+. The Jastis Blong Evriwan (Justice for the Poor) programme implemented by the World Bank, and the Australian Agency for International Development’s (AusAID) Mama Graon land programme both have extensive experience working on land issues in the country and could therefore provide a means for the communication and feedback of REDD+ grievance procedures (DOF, 2013a).

With regards to environmental safeguards, Vanuatu’s Environmental Management and Conservation Act of 2002 requires that activities that are likely to “cause significant environmental, social and or custom impacts”, including that “affect important custom resources” or “affect any protected, rare, threatened or endangered species” are subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment (REPUBLIC OF VANUATU, 2002). Accompanying Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations were endorsed in 2012. The R-PP recognises that the Act and the associated Regulations have so far been inadequate in improving environmental planning in Vanuatu, however it is hoped that the SESA will contribute to raising public awareness and facilitate implementation of the provisions of this legislation (DOF, 2013a).

Vanuatu is a Party to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (CBD, n.d.) and therefore there are a number of initiatives aimed at biodiversity conservation. The increased involvement of the institutions involved in these programmes in REDD+ could have positive impacts for the establishment of environmental safeguards and the achievement of environmental co-benefits (DOF, 2013a).

The voluntary establishment of Community Conservation Areas (CCAs) by communities in collaboration with the Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation (DEPC) aims to strengthen the on-going, traditional forest conservation efforts of local communities. CCA establishment and registration involves the development of management plans based on biodiversity assessments and the traditional governance systems of the community involved (D. KALFATAK 2013, pers. comm., 22 October). This approach, with community structures and environmental management at its heart, could have important lessons for REDD+ as implementation progresses.

Gender Equality

Vanuatu’s Constitution makes provision for equal treatment as discrimination based on sex is unlawful (Article 5). This has been interpreted by court to include customary laws (Noel v Toto (1995) VUSC 3), so where women are excluded from owning property, legal recourse should be available. The Vanuatu National Plan of Action for Women 2007-2011 informed the gender considerations in the R-PP. Gender issues were also included in the Priority Action Agenda 2012-2016, which aims to mainstream gender into all policy processes, and in 2015, the country adopted the National Gender Equality Policy 2015-2019 (Government of Vanuatu, 2015c).

Despite clear legal provisions promoting gender equality, women still face discrimination in the country (Ogle 2014). Women living on customarily governed law may face particular problems acquiring property, not least as disputes are often heard initially by the nakamal, local dispute resolution mechanisms. These do not have to consult women on questions of land administration. The 2013 Land Law Reforms did not explicitly include women in land reform programmes. Women
are also underrepresented in lease decisions (Land Reform (Amendment) Act 2013, Sections 6c, 2a, 6g and 6j) and men also represent the majority of chiefs and administrators on customary land (Ogle 2014).

The Vanuatu Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2016-2030 (Government of Vanuatu, 2015a), has a strong gender focus. (This policy covers REDD+ alongside the major themes climate change adaption, disaster risk reduction and response and recovery.) It includes gender as a cross-cutting issue (section 8.2), and states that initiatives are underway to mainstream gender into climate change efforts, in recognition of the past exclusion of women from participation in decision-making forums. Equity is one of six principles, and the policy specifies that this includes the opportunity for meaningful participation by women (section 3). The policy further specifies the need to include women in lessons learned processes (section 7.3.4); it includes the incorporation of the rights and needs of women into action on adaption and risk reduction (section 7.4.3); and the need for communication to consider and target groups including women. This policy emphasises that the government aims to strengthen Vanuatu’s capacity to design a socially and environmentally inclusive REDD+ national strategy. The need to engage with civil society and generate equitable benefits from REDD+ is clear (section 7.5.2).

Gender is given focused consideration in Vanuatu’s R-PP of 2013, with a short but targeted section on the incorporation of gender into information sharing and dialogue and REDD+ Readiness (Section 1b.6). This states that the Extension and Outreach Programme will pay particular attention to gender, to address the risks that became apparent when few women were present during early REDD+ dialogues. The section recognises that although rural women are the main farmers and decision-makers regarding agriculture on customary land, they nonetheless tend to be excluded from decision-making on land use management. The traditional roles of women make it difficult for them to attend ordinary workshops, or to speak their views if they are present. The R-PP also notes the need to include gender in REDD+ risk assessment, as increasing land values could lead to conflicts, and women could be excluded from discussions to resolve these (2d.4.2). Given that the R-PP acknowledges the clear risks for women around REDD+ and land tenure, it is concerning that a legal analysis of REDD+ and forest carbon rights (Corrin, 2012) contains no meaningful consideration of gender issues.

The R-PP also proposes that capacity building and community monitoring efforts include gender considerations (section 4b.4 and 4b.4.1). The Consultation and Participation Plan (annex 1c) suggests that in rural areas, consultation timing should take account of women’s typical availability, and separate consultations with men and women may be beneficial. Moreover, Provincial REDD+ Stakeholder Committees are to be set up which shall include representation of women (sections 1a.3.4 and 2c.2.2). The R-PP also points out that most cooperatives in Vanuatu are managed by women, so existing consultations with cooperatives could also be a way to engage women on REDD+ (Section 1c.2.1). Although Vanuatu has a Department of Women’s Affairs, listed as a stakeholder for transparency and safeguards (sections 1b.1 and 1c.3.2b), their role is not clearly defined.

The risks to women from REDD+ are also recognised in the FCPF assessment of the R-PP (para. 45), which points out that benefit-sharing arrangements are weak, and that land leasing tends to concentrate benefits into the hands of a small number of men. It also notes the actions to be taken to address this, such as taking account of women’s knowledge and use of the forest, and including risk mitigation measures in the SESA, to ensure that REDD+ frameworks benefit men and women equally (para. 76, and para. 14 of annex 4). The need for targeted consultation with women is emphasised, for example table 8 and para. 82 include the Vanuatu National Council of Women among stakeholder groups, and table 9 and para. 85 recognise the role of the Department of Cooperatives in reaching women.
The National REDD+ Technical Committee outsourced the development of its Consultation and Participation Plan to Live & Learn Environmental Education - Vanuatu (Live & Learn Vanuatu), who published a report in 2013 (Nelson, 2013). Live & Learn Vanuatu was also consulted during the development of the R-PP, and all their findings on gender in their 2013 report was picked up in the R-PP, for example on the importance of involving women in consultations; on the contrast between women’s key role in agriculture and their exclusion from decision-making; the barriers to their participation in meetings, and options of engaging them via cooperatives, through careful timing, by separating men and women for consultations; etc. It makes no further suggestions for addressing gender, for example in its recommendations for grievance processes or the ESMF TORs; however, Live & Learn has developed methodologies for FPIC and benefit sharing, and materials such as an information video about REDD+ in various local languages, which could help engage women (Live & Learn, 2015).

Updates from Vanuatu to the FCPF give little detail on REDD+ progress since the R-PP submission. The 2014 update reported that Live & Learn had been contracted to prepare a Communication and Participation Plan. It gives ‘does not apply’ as the response to many questions on gender and participation, and supplies no data on male and female participation (p13-14), most probably as the Preparation Grant Agreement was yet to be signed (Government of Vanuatu, 2014). The 2015 update reported that activities had been delayed by a lack of staff, funds, external expertise, and support among NGOs that themselves lack resources for REDD+. However, it did report that Live & Learn had produced REDD+ materials and reached 1000 men and 500 women (Government of Vanuatu, 2015b).

At the regional level, Vanuatu is a participant in the Secretariat of the Pacific Community /GIZ programme ‘Coping with climate change in the Pacific Island Region (CCCPIR)’. This ran from 2009 to the end of 2015, aiming to strengthen the capacities of Pacific member countries and regional organisations to cope with the impacts of climate change. The other countries involved were Fiji, Tonga, the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu. The programme intended to integrate gender considerations at all levels, and produced a booklet on ‘Pacific Gender and Climate Change toolkit - Tools for practitioners’ (CCCPIR, 2014). SPC/GIZ was also developing a regional pool of experts to support the integration of gender into climate change initiatives: two sessions in June 2014 gathered 55 trainees from ten countries (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2014). Through CCCPIR, GIZ was also instrumental in developing the Vanuatu R-PP.

Vanuatu is also party to the Pacific Islands Regional Policy Framework for REDD+ which recommends that benefit-sharing mechanisms should address gender inequality (Recommendation 4.6g).

References


UNFCCC (UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE). 2013. Decision -/CP.19. Work programme on results-based finance to progress the full implementation of the activities referred to in decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 70. Available here [67]. [Accessed December 2013]


WORLD BANK. 2013b. FCPF Carbon Fund and Participants Committee Meetings Discuss REDD+ Activities. 27 March 2013. Available here [70]. [Accessed October 2013]

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**Related initiatives**

- The Nakau Programme [71]
- The Mangrove Ecosystem Conservation and Livelihoods (MESCAL) project [72]
- Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) Programme (Vanuatu) [73]
- Widening Informed Stakeholder Engagement for REDD+ [74]
- Pilot effective models for governance and implementation of REDD+ in Small Island Developing States to provide equitable benefits for forest-dependent local and indigenous people [75]
Related news

- REDD+ allows for forest inventory in Vanuatu [76]
- Pacific Trade Deal “Backtracking” on Environment Safeguards [77]

Recommended reading

- Vanuatu: Legal Framework for REDD+ [78]
- Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP), Vanuatu [79]
- Live & Learn Environmental Education – Vanuatu Extension & Outreach Consultancy Report [80]

External Links

- The Forest Carbon Partnership Facility| Vanuatu [81]

Related encyclopaedia articles

- Activity [82]
- Adaptation [83]
- Afforestation [84]
- Agroforestry [85]
- Allocation [86]
- Anthropogenic [87]
- Benefit Sharing [88]
- Carbon Accounting [89]
- Carbon Accounting System [90]
- Carbon Credits [91]
- Carbon Sequestration [92]
- Carbon Stock [93]
- Carbon Tenure [94]
- Climate Change [95]
- Climate, Community and Biodiversity Standard [96]
- Co-benefits [97]
- Community Forestry [98]
- Concession [99]
- Convention on Biological Diversity [100]
- Customary Rights [101]
- Deforestation [102]
- Development Adjustment Factor [103]
- Drivers of Deforestation [104]
- Ecosystem [105]
- Ecosystem Services [106]
- Forest [107]
- Forest Carbon Partnership Facility [108]
- Forest Governance [109]
- Forestry [110]
- Free, Prior and Informed Consent [111]
- Gender equality [112]