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TECHNICAL BRIEF

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Conceptual framework for country approaches to safeguards

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WHY A COUNTRY APPROACH TO SAFEGUARDS?

Country approaches to safeguards can, among other things:

1. Help countries **meet UNFCCC safeguards requirements** and accommodate the safeguards requirements of organizations funding readiness efforts and providing future payments for REDD+ results in a single coordinated process.

2. Help countries to explore **what the Cancun safeguards mean** in accordance with their particular national circumstances, and in relation to the specific REDD+ actions in their evolving national REDD+ strategies or action plans.

3. Contribute to the design of **more sustainable REDD+ actions**, by taking into account the potential socio-economic and environmental benefits and risks of such actions as part of national REDD+ strategy or action planning processes.

4. Help **engender country ownership and increase domestic legitimacy** of REDD+ by demonstrating commitment to a comprehensive yet context-specific safeguards process aimed at optimising multiple benefits and minimising, mitigating and managing the risks.

5. Help **build confidence among private and public investors** in REDD+ actions, as well as those providing payments for REDD+ results, through reducing risk, a key factor in investment decisions.

READ THIS BRIEF …

- If you are involved in processes in your country to meet international safeguards requirements for REDD+, particularly in terms of providing safeguards information.

- If you want to learn about, or get a clearer understanding of, the UNFCCC requirements on summaries of safeguards information, and options to meet them.

- If you are looking for further technical assistance on what might be included in summaries of safeguards information to be submitted to the UNFCCC.

Safeguards are a core component of the international framework for REDD+ agreed under the UNFCCC. Safeguarding against risks and enhancing benefits can be crucial to ensuring that REDD+ actions, results, and finance endure in the long term and contribute to national development goals, as well as sustainable development and green growth strategies. **Country approaches to safeguards** have advanced in recent years and provide a strategic opportunity to build on existing governance arrangements and processes, with potential benefits beyond REDD+. Common elements of such approaches are emerging and are presented in this Brief as a unified concept.

What are safeguards and how are they applied to REDD+?

Safeguards are widely understood to be measures to protect someone or something or to prevent something undesirable; in other words, to do no harm. Safeguards have a broad remit and can apply to projects, a set of projects or programmes, as well as acting as policies.

REDD+ has the potential to deliver social and environmental benefits that go beyond the reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions but which may also entail potential risks to people and the environment. The nature of these benefits and risks will depend on a number of factors related to national circumstances – such as how REDD+ actions[1] are designed, how successful these actions are in addressing the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, and the barriers to sustainable management, conservation and enhancement of carbon stocks. Benefits and risks also depend on where, how and by whom REDD+ actions are implemented.

Safeguards can build confidence and provide assurance for stakeholders that mitigation actions in the forest and land use sectors will not proceed at the expense of environmental sustainability and social equity.

Brief overview of safeguards requirements under the UNFCCC

Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCCC) agreed to a set of safeguards for REDD+ in Cancun in 2010[2] (Annex I). When undertaking REDD+ activities, the Cancun Safeguards should be 'promoted and supported[3]' in order to ensure that the implementation of REDD+ not only mitigates or avoids potential environmental and social risks, but also enhances the benefits for people and the environment.

The UNFCCC decisions on REDD+ safeguards span a five-year time period from 2010 to 2015 and can be summarised as follows:

1. **promote and support** the Cancun safeguards throughout the implementation of REDD+ actions, regardless of the source and type of funding[4];

2. develop a **system for providing information** on how the Cancun safeguards are being addressed and respected (i.e. a "safeguards information system" (SIS)[5]; and

3. provide **summaries of information** on how all the Cancun safeguards are being addressed and respected throughout the implementation of REDD+ actions[6].

Further UNFCCC guidance has been provided on two tangible safeguard requirements: a SIS (Annex II) and summaries of information (Annex III). Countries should begin providing summaries of information in their national communications, or voluntarily via the web platform of the UNFCCC, after the start of the implementation of REDD+ actions under their NS/APs[7]. Both a functioning SIS[8] and submission of the most recent summary of information[9] are safeguard prerequisites to obtain results-based payments under the UNFCCC.

In addition to the UNFCCC provisions, countries will often have to take into consideration the safeguard requirements and/or guidance of international (multi-lateral and bi-lateral) REDD+ initiatives such as the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, the Forest Investment Programme and the Green Climate Fund.

What is a country approach to safeguards?

A country approach to safeguards refers to the set of governance arrangements and processes that a country has in place or will put in place, in order to respond to safeguards requirements for REDD+. It has the potential to be a single, unified approach through which a country can accommodate the safeguards obligations of different initiatives, donors and investors. It helps countries to meet UNFCCC safeguards requirements and access results-based payments for REDD+.

There is no blueprint for country approaches to safeguards. Rather, each country will have its own particular approach, reflecting its unique needs and circumstances, and taking into account the range of socio-economic issues and environmental concerns that are likely to be important in addressing its drivers of deforestation and forest degradation. Experiences to date, however, indicate that country approaches generally comprise three core elements, collectively referred to as 'governance arrangements':

1. **policies, laws and regulations (PLRs)** - defining, on paper, what needs to be done in order to support REDD+ implementation in a manner consistent with the Cancun (and other) safeguards;

2. **institutional arrangements -** the mandates, procedures and capacities of institutions responsible to ensure that the relevant PLRs are implemented in practice; and

3. **information systems and sources** - collecting and making available information on how safeguards are being addressed and respected throughout implementation of REDD+ actions.

Building on existing governance arrangements is central to country approaches to safeguards, which can present a strategic opportunity to strengthen these arrangements or, in some cases, set up complimentary ones. Country approaches can be described as dynamic iterative processes. Inasmuch as the relevant governance arrangements are periodically identified, assessed and strengthened over time, country approaches have the potential to serve as a cost-effective means to help countries achieve and keep track of long-term governance improvements beyond REDD+.

For more information on country approaches to safeguards see:
- Info Brief 4: Country Approaches to Safeguards: Initial Experiences and Emerging Lessons (English / Français / Español)
- Technical Resource Series 2: Country Approaches to REDD+ Safeguards: A global review of Initial Experiences and Emerging Lessons (English / Français / Español)
- REDD+ Academy Learning Journal No. 8: REDD+ Safeguards under the UNFCCC (English / Français / Español)

How to develop a country approach to safeguards?

Based on countries' experiences to date, a number of important elements, or potential 'steps', are emerging that a country may wish to consider when developing a country approach to safeguards (Figure 1). One cross-cutting element of country approach to safeguards processes is the engagement of different constituencies, or stakeholders. Each element is described in more detail below.

For planning country approaches to safeguards see:
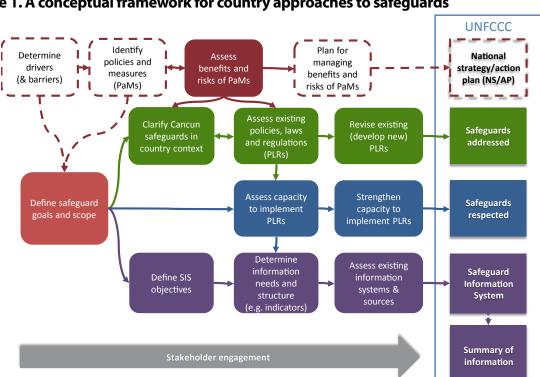- Country Approach to Safeguards Tool (CAST) (English / Français / Español)

Figure 1. A conceptual framework for country approaches to safeguards

Engaging stakeholders

Stakeholder engagement is essential in developing inclusive and transparent country approaches to safeguards. The success of a country's approach to safeguards and its resulting products (e.g. SIS, summaries of information, any other domestic reporting) will, to a large extent, depend on stakeholder engagement and ownership across a wide range of constituencies, particularly government bodies, civil society, indigenous peoples and local communities[10]. Furthermore, targeted involvement of stakeholders at different 'steps' of a country approach to safeguards process, such as during the review of technical assessments, presents opportunities for ongoing improvement.

Two main issues are emerging from countries' initial experiences from engaging stakeholders in their country approaches to safeguards. These are the need to:

1. **Raise awareness and build capacities** on UNFCCC (and other, as relevant) safeguards requirements, thematic issues and stakeholder responsibilities, to engage stakeholders in safeguards processes. Aware-ness raising, capacity building and dissemination activities are critical throughout the entire process of a country approach to safeguards, and require dedicated human, financial and time resources to yield effective results.

2. **Ensure consultation and participation in decision-making processes**, cost-effectively throughout country approaches to safeguards. Key consultative or partici-patory steps in country approaches to safeguards can encourage broad stakeholder ownership and support for safeguards, and REDD+ in general. Relevant stake-holders will, in part, be determined by the REDD+ actions comprising the evolving NS/AP (e.g. at national, subnational local level). Experience indicates that the presence of national government-led technical and/or political coordinating bodies is highly conducive to advancing multi-stakeholder safeguards processes.

Defining safeguards goals and scope

Safeguards apply to the REDD+ actions, or policies and measures (PAMs), that a country chooses through a participatory process as means of addressing the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation and barriers to the sustainable management, conservation and enhancement of carbon stocks in its national context. These REDD+ actions make up the core of national REDD+ strategies or action plans(NS/AP). Defining safeguards

goals refers to determining which safeguards a country seeks to adopt and apply to REDD+. These include, by default, the Cancun safeguards under the UNFCCC. Some countries may choose to incorporate additional safeguards requirements in their country approaches, in accordance with national and international policy and funding commitments and priorities.

Safeguards goals are likely to reflect a trade-off between a country's strategic policy objectives and budgetary and capacity constraints. Integrating all safeguards requirements – either international or domestic – into a single country approach and, therefore, a single SIS design process, can avoid the development of inefficient and unsustainable parallel safeguards processes.

Defining the scope of safeguards application refers to determining what, exactly, the safeguards should be applied to. This is linked to the strategic approach to REDD+, including the scale of implementation, the country intends to adopt. The default UNFCCC requirement is to apply the Cancun safeguards to all REDD+ actions to be implemented under the NS/AP. Such actions, as means of tackling drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, as well as enabling more effective and extensive "plus activities"[11], are unlikely to be restricted to the forestry sector, however, some may be cross-sectoral in nature.

Defining the scope of safeguards application is often challenging and relies greatly on strategic decisions surrounding the development of NS/APs. Assessing the social and environmental benefits and risks of potential policies and measures can be an effective way of linking safeguards to REDD+ actions and of anchoring them to NS/APs. Such assessments may also contribute to the selection and design of more robust REDD+ actions, for example by triggering multi-stakeholder discussions on how, when and where PAMs will be implemented.

Clarifying Cancun safeguards in accordance with national circumstances

Countries have expressed the importance of "clarifying"[12] the meaning of the Cancun safeguards, as well as other international safeguard frameworks they wish to apply, in their specific country context. In some cases, this clarification process has led to the definition of country-specific national REDD+ safeguards or standards, the scope of which sometimes goes beyond what is required by theUNFCCC.

For help with assessing benefits and risks see:
- Benefits and Risks Tool (BeRT) (English / Français / Español)

This can be an important entry point for stakeholder engagement, and can help a country to define a collective understanding of what the Cancun safeguards (and others, if applicable) mean to different domestic stakeholder groups. This is particularly true if the process of clarifying safeguards is based on a multistakeholder assessment of the potential benefits and risks of proposed REDD+ actions. Clarifying the Cancun safeguards can also be central to the design of a SIS and preparation of summaries of safeguards information.

> **For help with clarifying the Cancun safeguards see:**
> • Benefits and Risks Tool (BeRT) (English / Français / Español)

Addressing and respecting safeguards

Although not defined by the UNFCCC, it is commonly agreed that safeguards are addressed through the existence, on paper, of a coherent body of governance arrangements – PLRs, institutional arrangements, information systems and sources, etc. – covering all environmental and social considerations relevant to the REDD+ actions as identified and implemented by the country. A common understanding of what it means to respect safeguards encompasses the implementation of existing governance arrangements through institutional mandates, procedures and capacities, as well as the effective operation of these governance arrangements in practice, together with the resulting outcomes of their implementation.

Assessing existing governance arrangements – on paper and in practice – can help determine what safeguards-relevant PLRs are already in place, what institutions are mandated and capacitated to implement and enforce them, and what information systems and sources might contribute to the SIS. Such assessments can also identify potential gaps, overlaps or inconsistencies in the relevant governance arrangements that could limit the extent to which safeguards are addressed and respected during REDD+ implementation.

Designing and operating a safeguard information system

The safeguard information system, or SIS, is generally understood by countries to be a domestic institutional arrangement, and sometimes technological solution (e.g. web platform), building on existing national (and subnational, as desired) information systems and sources. Apart from the basic characteristics of a SIS as laid out under UNFCCC guidance (Annex II),
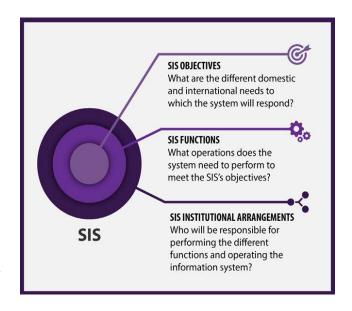
each country's SIS will differ according to its national circumstances, including other elements of its broader country approach to safeguards.

While the specifics of SIS design and operation will necessarily vary by country, three key elements of SIS design are identified, based on initial country experiences as outlined in Figure 2, below.

Setting objectives of a safeguard information system

The default objective of a SIS, as stated under the UNFCCC, is to serve as a means for a country to provide information as to how the Cancun safeguards are being addressed and respected throughout REDD+ implementation. Countries may set further objectives, including using information from the SIS to prepare a summary of safeguards information to submit to the UNFCCC. Broadening the objectives of a SIS could help to build domestic support for REDD+, and increase the returns on the investment for developing and operating the system. The provision of information on how risks are being managed in the forestry and other land-use sectors, for instance, could contribute to a number of domestic objectives, such as accessing funding for REDD+ actions; improving implementation of NS/APs through adaptive management; improving legitimacy of REDD+ among domestic stakeholders; and informing national policy.

Figure 2. Key design elements of REDD+ safeguards informationsystems

SIS OBJECTIVES
What are the different domestic and international needs to which the system will respond?

SIS FUNCTIONS
What operations does the system need to perform to meet the SIS's objectives?

SIS INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS
Who will be responsible for performing the different functions and operating the information system?

SIS

Establishing the desired functions of a safeguard information system

A number of potential functions to be considered in SIS design have emerged, although the list is by no means mandatory or exhaustive. These can be summarised as:

- information compilation and management -- what information is needed, where will it be sourced, how will it be structured, and how will it be brought together and managed?;

- information analysis and interpretation -- what does the information reveal about how safeguards have been addressed and respected, and the attribution of outcomes to REDD+?;

- information quality control and assurance – is the information accurate and is the interpretation acceptable to different stakeholders?; and

- information dissemination and use – how will information be communicated to, and used by, stakeholders to meet their different needs?.

Exploring the institutional arrangements necessary for a safeguard information system

When building on existing systems, institutional mandates of existing information systems will need to be reviewed to assess whether they cover the desired SIS objectives and functions. New institutional arrangements, such as information sharing agreements among institutions or entities that could contribute to the SIS, might be considered to address any gaps.

While the UNFCCC calls for a national-level SIS, strategic decisions related to the evolving NS/AP, such as, the most appropriate scale(s) at which to implement REDD+ actions, will influence the information needs, sources and institutional arrangements to be considered during the SIS design process.

> **For more detailed information on safeguard information systems see:**
> - Technical Brief: Practical Design Considerations for REDD+ Safeguards Information Systems (English / Français / Español)
> - Technical Resource Series 1 - REDD+ Safeguards Information Systems: Practical Design Considerations (English / Français / Español)

Preparing summaries of safeguards information

Countries should submit their most recent summary of safeguards information to the UNFCCC upon commencing implementation of REDD+ actions. Once the first summary of information has been submitted, subsequent summaries should be submitted every four years, consistent with the provisions for submission of national communications for developing countries[13]. Additionally, a country may submit a summary of information directly to the UNFCCC REDD+ web platform at any time[14].

There is no explicit requirement for summaries of information to be outputs of a country's SIS. However, a large number of countries and other stakeholders, including Brazil in the first summary of information submitted to the UNFCCC[15], have stated that once established, the SIS should logically inform the preparation of future summaries of information.

The recently adopted UNFCCC decision[16] on *'Further guidance on ensuring transparency, consistency, comprehensiveness and effectiveness when informing on how all the [Cancun] safeguards are being addressed and respected'* (Annex III), provides guidance on the content of summaries of safeguards information.

Elements of country approaches to safeguards can complement the UNFCCC guidance and help countries meet requirements for the summary of information. Information on how each of the safeguards has been addressed and respected can be expected to form the core of the summary. To strengthen the credibility of the summary's core components information could be presented concerning : the process of how the summary was produced.

1. the processes of SIS design, development and operation (and how the SIS links to the summary);

2. the process of developing the country approach to safeguards in general (particularly stakeholder engagement);

3. any subnational elements of safeguards application and SIS operation;

4. any monitoring provisions put in place for safeguards, as applicable;

5. safeguards processes other than the UNFCCC requirements, and their inter linkages, as relevant or applicable;and further sources of information such as annexes or hyperlinks to websites, databases, etc.

6. safeguards processes other than the UNFCCC requirements, and their interlinkages, as relevant or applicable; and

7. further sources of information such as annexes or hyperlinks to websites, databases, etc.

> **For more detailed information on summaries of information see:**
> - Info Brief - Summaries of information: How to demonstrate REDD+ safeguards are being addressed and respected? (English)

Endnotes

1   Throughout this brief, 'REDD+ actions' refers to the specific policies and measures, under the five REDD+ activity categories agreed under the UNFCCC (Decision 1/CP.16 paragraph 70 (a-e), comprising the national REDD+ strategy or action plan (or similar document) and put in place to tackle the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, and/or enabling more effective or extensive "plus activities", i.e. conservation of forest carbon stocks; sustainable management of forests; and enhancement of forest carbon stocks

2   UNFCCC Decision 1/CP.16, appendix I, paragraph 2. Available at http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2010/cop16/eng/07a01.pdf#page=12

3   UNFCCC Decision 1/CP. 16, paragraph 69

4   Ibid

5   UNFCCC Decision 1/CP. 16, paragraph 71 (d) ; Decision 9/CP.19 paragraph 3

6   UNFCCC Decision 12/CP.17, paragraph 3; Decision 9/CP.19, paragraph 4

7   UNFCCC Decision 12/CP.17, paragraph 4; Decision 12/CP.19, paragraphs 3-5

8   UNFCCC Decision 2/CP.17, paragraph 64

9   UNFCCC Decision 9/CP.19, paragraph 4

10 UN-REDD (2015) Technical Resource Series 2: Country Approaches to REDD+ Safeguards: A global review of Initial Experiences and Emerging Lessons. (English / Français / Español)

11 Conservation of forest carbon stocks; sustainable management of forests; and enhancement of forest carbon stocks

12 Synonymous terms used in the literature and by practitioners include: "contextualizing", "elaborating", "interpreting", "specifying" and "unpacking" the Cancun safeguards.

13 UNFCCC Decision 12/CP.17, paragraph 4. Available at: http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2011/cop17/eng/09a02.pdf

14 UNFCCC Decision 12/CP.17, paragraph 3. Available at: http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2011/cop17/eng/09a02.pdf. UNFCCC Decision 9/CP.19, paragraph 11. Available at: http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2013/cop19/eng/10a01.pdf#page=24

15 Ministry of the Environment, Brazil (2015). Summary of information on how the Cancun safeguards were addressed and respected by Brazil throughout the implementation of actions to reduce emissions from deforestation in the Amazon biome between 2006 and 2010. Available at: http://redd.unfccc.int/files/brazil_safeguards_summary_final20150508.pdf.

16 UNFCCC Decision 17/CP.21. Available at: http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/10a03.pdf#page=13.

Annex i: The UNFCCC ('Cancun') safeguards for REDD+

"When undertaking [REDD+] activities, the following safeguards should be promoted and supported:

a.   That actions complement or are consistent with the objectives of national forest programmes and relevant international conventions and agreements;

b.   Transparent and effective national forest governance structures, taking into account national legislation andsovereignty;

c.   Respect for the knowledge and rights of indigenous peoples and members of local communities, by taking into account relevant international obligations, national circumstances and laws, and noting that the United Nations General Assembly has adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of IndigenousPeoples;

d.   The full and effective participation of relevant stakeholders, in particular indigenous peoples and localcommunities;

e.   That actions are consistent with the conservation of natural forests and biological diversity, ensuring that the [REDD+] actions are not used for the conversion of natural forests, but are instead used to incentivize the protection and conservation of natural forests and their ecosystem services, and to enhance other social and environmentalbenefits[1];

f.   Actions to address the risks ofreversals;

g.   Actions to reduce displacement ofemissions."

Source: UNFCCC Decision 1/CP.16, appendix I, paragraph 2

Annex ii: UNFCCC guidance on safeguard information systems

"…systems for providing information on how the safeguards… are addressed and respected should[2]:

a. be consistent with the guidance [for policy approaches and positive incentives onREDD+][3];

b. provide transparent and consistent information that is accessible by all relevant stakeholders and updated on a regularbasis;

c. be transparent and flexible to allow for improvements overtime;

d. provide information on how all of the safeguards…are being addressed andrespected;

e. be country-driven and implemented at the national level; (f)build upon existing systems, asappropriate."

Source: UNFCCC Decision 12/CP.17, paragraph 2

Annex iii: UNFCCC guidance on summaries of information

"The Conference of the Parties…

3. Notes that information on how all the safeguards are being addressed and respected should be provided in a way that ensures transparency, consistency, comprehensiveness and effectiveness;

4. Decides that developing country Parties should provide information on which [REDD+] activity or activities…are included in the summary of information…

5. Strongly encourages developing country Parties, when providing the summary of information…to include the following elements, whereappropriate:

    a. Information on national circumstances relevant to addressing and respecting the safeguards;

    b. A description of each safeguard in accordance with nationalcircumstances;

c. A description of existing systems and processes relevant to addressing and respecting safeguards, including the [safeguards] information systems… in accordance with nationalcircumstances;

d. Information on how each of the safeguards has been addressed and respected, In accordance with nationalcircumstances;

6. Encourages developing country Parties to provide any other relevant information on the safeguards in the summary ofinformation…;

7. Also encourages developing country Parties to improve the information provided in the summary of information…taking into account the step-wiseapproach…"

Source: UNFCCC Decision 17/CP.21

Annex Endnotes

1 Taking into account the need for sustainable livelihoods of indigenous peoples and local communities and their interdependence on forests in most countries, reflected in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as the International Mother Earth Day

2 taking into account national circumstances and respective capabilities, and recognizing national sovereignty and legislation, and relevant international obligations and agreements, and respecting gender considerations…

3 UNFCCC decision 1/CP.16, appendix I, paragraph 1

UN-REDD safeguards publications and tools

Technical Resource Series 1 - REDD+ Safeguards Information Systems (English / Français / Español) – provides a synthesis of stakeholder perspectives on SIS design considerations, complementing and elaborating on the guidance provided by the UNFCCC

Technical Brief 1 - Practical Design Considerations for REDD+ Safeguards Information Systems (English / Français / Español) – summarises *Technical Resource Series 1: REDD+ Safeguards Information Systems: Practical Design Considerations*

Technical Resource Series 2 - Country Approaches to REDD+ Safeguards: A global review of Initial Experiences and Emerging Lessons (English / Francais / Español) – presents an overview of progress towards meeting UNFCCC safeguards requirements; includes country factsheets and case studies

Info Brief 4 - Country Approaches to Safeguards: Initial Experiences and Emerging Lessons (English / Français / Español) – summarises *Technical Resource Series 2: Country Approaches to REDD+ Safeguards: A global review of Initial Experiences and Emerging Lessons*

Info Brief 5 - Summaries of information: How to demonstrate REDD+ safeguards are being addressed and respected? (English) - *elaborates on UNFCCC guidance, indicating possible content of summaries of information by drawing on key elements of country approaches to safeguards*

REDD+ Academy Learning Journal No. 8: REDD+ Safeguards under the UNFCCC (English/ Français/ Español) - a comprehensive response to capacity building needs on safeguards as identified by the countries receiving support from the UN-REDD Programme.

Benefit and Risk Tool (BeRT) (English / Francais / Español) - supports REDD+ countries to: a) assess the social and environmental risks and benefits associated with potential REDD+ actions; and b) analyse how existing policies, laws and regulations address the Cancun safeguards

Country Approaches to Safeguards Tool (CAST) (English / Francais / Español) – an interactive tool that supports REDD+ countries to plan and review their country approach to safeguards via multi-stakeholder processes; CAST is designed to be broadly applied to the full scope of a country's safeguards- related activities and help countries identify tools and resources available to support each activity or area of work

Further Information

For further information on country approaches to REDD+ safeguards and the various products and services offered by the UN-REDD Programme, please:

- visit the UN-REDD Programme Online Collaborative Workspace - http://bit.ly/un-redd- safeguardshome

- contact Safeguards Coordination Group - safeguards@un-redd.org

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The United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries