

UN-REDD
PROGRAMME



Food and Agriculture
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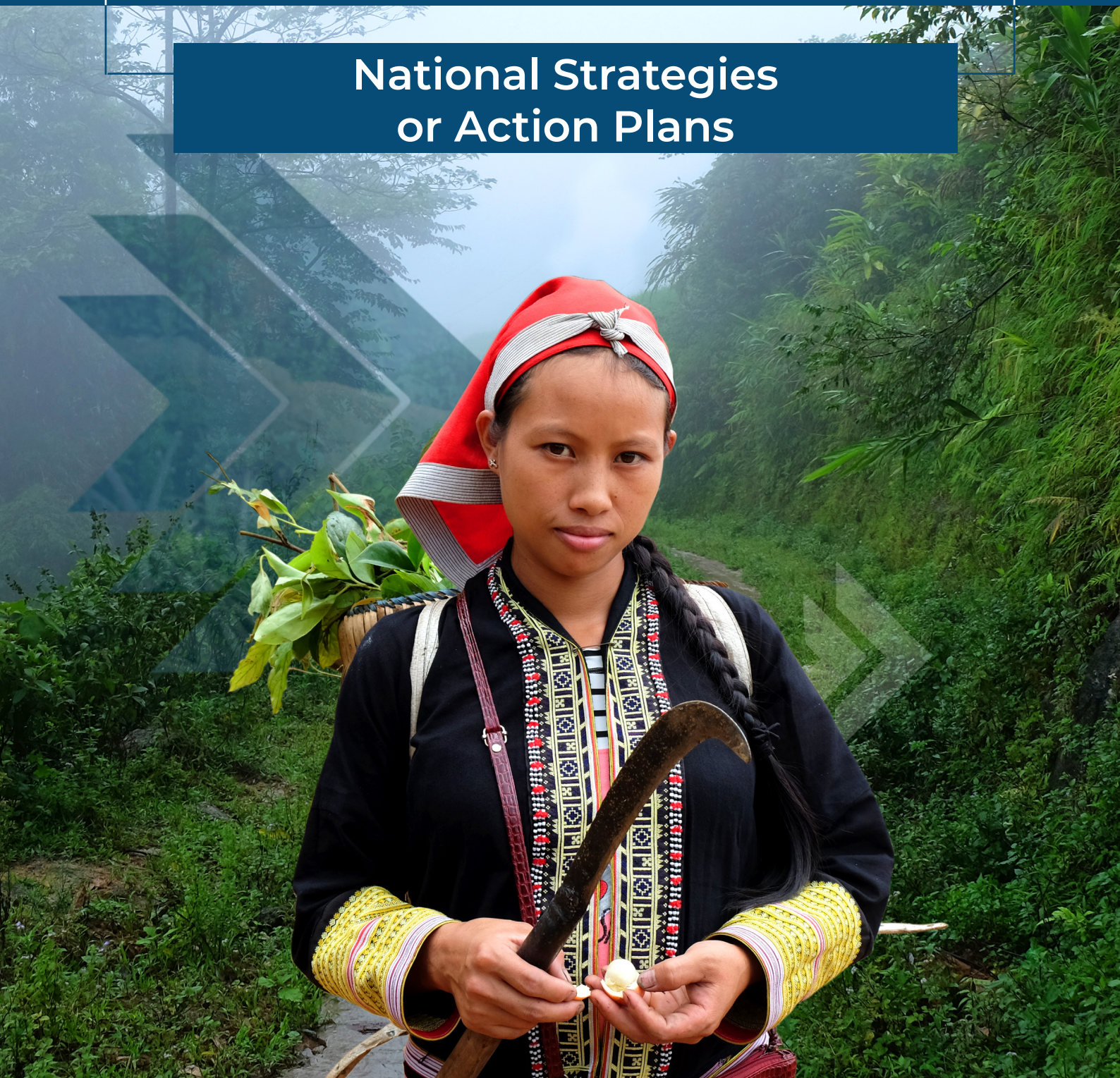


UN
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REDD+ ACADEMY

Learning Journal

National Strategies or Action Plans



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Welcome & introduction

Welcome to the Learning Journal on National Strategies or Action Plans

This Learning Journal was developed for the revitalized REDD+ Academy. This Journal explains the significance of well-structured design processes and documentation for REDD+ national strategies or action plans (NS/APs), which are essential not only for carrying out REDD+ activities but also for gaining support from key stakeholders, integrating REDD+ goals into national development agendas, obtaining funding, and delivering tangible outcomes. Additionally, the Journal outlines several elements that may help countries achieve these objectives.

At a glance

The Journal provides insights into National Strategies and Action Plans, explaining their purpose, the reasons they may be necessary, and the processes involved in their development and implementation. It outlines the steps required to ensure effective governance and safeguards across various levels of REDD+ execution. Featuring case studies and examples, the Journal examines the challenges, opportunities, and emerging best practices in formulating Action Plans for REDD+, including important safeguards considerations. It emphasizes key factors to support the creation of Action Plans aimed at strengthening integrity and curbing deforestation.

Who is it for?

This Learning Journal is intended to serve as a guide for government practitioners, but may also be of interest to project developers, public and private funders and REDD+ technical assistance partners.

How to make the best use of this Learning Journal



Read the key chapters of relevance to you.



Download this publication at [REDD+ Academy Platform](#) and use the online version to access all hyperlinks in the text.



As a practitioner, reference the sections relevant to your National Strategies or Action Plans.



Utilize it as a supplement for any lifelong learning opportunities.



Use the QR CODES to access the additional online tools to reinforce your knowledge.



Check your knowledge before starting. What do you already know about National Strategies or Action Plans in REDD+? Go to the [REDD+ Academy Platform](#) and answer the preliminary test questions to find out which topics you already are familiar with and which ones you need to learn more about.



LEARNING TOOL

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Acronyms

AP	Action Plans
ARR	Afforestation, Reforestation and Revegetation
ART-TREES	Architecture of REDD+ Transactions-The REDD+ Environmental Excellence Standard
BVCM	Beyond Value Chain Mitigation
COP	Conference of the Parties
EF	Emission Factor
ER	Emissions Reduction
ERPA	Emissions Reductions Purchase Agreement
FCPF	Forest Carbon Partnership Facility
FPIC	Free, Prior and Informed Consent
FREL	Forest Reference Emissions Level
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GHG	Greenhouse gas
GRM	Grievance Redress Mechanism
IC-VCM	Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Market
IP	Indigenous Peoples
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
JNR	Jurisdictional and Nested REDD+
LC	Local Communities
LTS	Long-Term Strategies
LULUCF	Land use, land-use change, and forestry
MRV	Measurement, Reporting and Verification
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NDP	National Development Plan
NFMS	National Forest Monitoring System
NS	National Strategies
PA	Paris Agreement
RBP	Results-based payments
REDD+	Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries
SIS	Safeguards Information System
SOI	Summary of Information
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
PAMs	Policy Actions and Measures
TFCI	Tropical Forest Credit Integrity
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
VCM	Voluntary Carbon Market
VCMi	Voluntary Carbon Markets Integrity Initiative
VCS	Verified Carbon Standard

Module 1



Introduction



This module

Draws on evolving country experiences and lessons captured through South-South knowledge exchanges facilitated by the UN-REDD Programme and lessons and cases studies from UN-REDD support to countries NA/NS design and implementation. These experiences — coupled with the latest technical and policy guidance — form the backbone of this module, which is structured to support practitioners in designing, assessing, and revising and improving on NS/APs in alignment with national development priorities and international standards.



You will be able to...

- Define National Strategies/Action Plans and their importance to countries – Describe what NS/APs are, their core objectives, and their role as a guiding framework for REDD+ implementation. Understand how they help coordinate national efforts to reduce deforestation and forest degradation, enhance forest carbon stocks, and ensure social and environmental safeguards are respected.
- Understand the link between National Strategies and how they align with national development goals and priorities – Explain how NS/APs are embedded within broader policy frameworks, such as national climate change strategies, biodiversity action plans, and sustainable development agendas. Recognize how aligning REDD+ strategies with national priorities ensures coherence, maximizes resource use, and strengthens political support for implementation.

The original version of this journal was developed in 2016 to support REDD+ readiness efforts. Since then, the REDD+ landscape has evolved considerably. As of 2024, at least 38 countries have developed or are in the process of developing national strategies, 59 have submitted forest reference levels to the UNFCCC, and 40 developed monitoring systems. At least 15 have accessed results-based payments (RBPs) and approximately 30 are engaging in carbon⁴ markets or jurisdictional crediting programs. The Paris Agreement has entered into force, and countries are now implementing their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under a new global climate architecture.

1.1 Why a NS/AP?

National Strategies or Action Plans describe how a country aims to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and/or enhance forest carbon stocks. While originally conceptualized as a key product of the REDD+ readiness phase, the role of a NS/AP has expanded in practice — it now serves as:

- A strategic roadmap for national REDD+ implementation (e.g. Ecuador);
- A policy integration tool linking forest-based mitigation to other national priorities (e.g., agriculture, land-use planning, rural development).

- A mechanism to mobilize finance, including results-based payments (RBPs) (e.g. Viet Nam).¹⁸
- A foundation for institutional coordination and long-term climate action (e.g. Ghana).

NS/APs are living strategies, expected to be revised at the end of their period and sometimes during their period to reflect emerging lessons and shifting national contexts. These revisions may be triggered by a variety of real-world factors—for instance: (i) alignment with revised or enhanced Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), such as countries updating their NS/APs to embed REDD+ in their mitigation targets (e.g., Costa Rica);(ii) shifts in deforestation drivers or forest governance priorities, requiring updates in strategic focus (e.g., Nepal’s ongoing NS/AP revision to address emerging drivers); and(iii) opportunities to access new sources of finance, including jurisdictional carbon market mechanisms under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement (e.g., Ghana exploring jurisdictional crediting pathways). Over time, NS/APs have become more than anchor points for jurisdictional or national REDD+ programmes. They articulate the national vision on forests, provide the analytical foundation for REDD+ implementation, and reflect the functional demands of REDD+ itself, including alignment with NDCs, access to results-based finance, and coordination across sectors and governance levels. As such, a NS/AP is not a one-off deliverable, but a dynamic process and institutional platform central to long-term climate action.

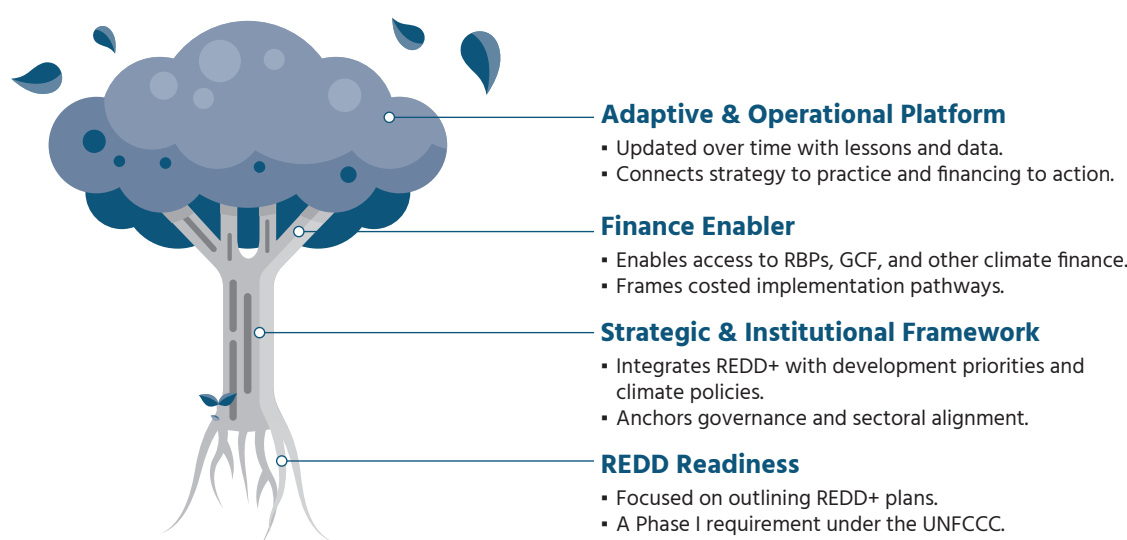


LEARNING TOOL

Go to the [REDD+ Academy Platform](#) to identify the definitions of National Strategies/Action Plans and their importance in design processes.



Figure 1: Evolving role of National Strategies or Action Plans (NS/APs) in REDD+



1.2 NS/AP in the UNFCCC

As discussed in Module 2: Understanding REDD+ and the UNFCCC, the NS/AP is one of the four design elements, together with National Forest Monitoring Systems (NFMS), Safeguard Information Systems (SIS), and Forest Reference (Emissions) Level (FREL/ FRL), agreed internationally as prerequisites for REDD+ implementation and to access Results-Based Payments (RBPs) (Decision 1/CP.16, paragraph 71(a)), in accordance with Decisions 12/CP.17 and 11/CP.19.¹⁴

In 2013, the Warsaw Framework further confirmed the importance of the NS/AP by placing it at the heart of the REDD+ architecture. Unlike FRELs, NS/APs are not subject to formal UNFCCC technical assessments, but they must be:

- Nationally endorsed.
 - Publicly available through the UNFCCC REDD+ Web Platform.
 - Coherent with the country's REDD+ activities and policies.
 - Referenced in the REDD+ Technical Annex submitted for RBPs.
- A clear national vision for REDD+ in alignment with national priorities.
 - A robust assessment of deforestation drivers and intervention options.
 - A prioritized and costed set of policies and measures (PAMs).
 - Defined institutional responsibilities and coordination mechanisms.
 - Linkages to safeguards, finance, and monitoring systems.

While the UNFCCC does not formally assess NS/APs, the international community still views them as signals of national commitment, capacity, and credibility — especially for finance access. As of 2024, over 50 countries have submitted FRELs, but 19 have published a full NS/AP on the REDD+ Web Platform. Some rely on national plans or summaries integrated into RBP applications.

While the UNFCCC does not prescribe a fixed format or scope for a NS/AP, guidance has emerged from practice. Strong strategies typically reflect:

Nonetheless, paragraph 72 of Decision 1/CP.16 indicates that when developing (phase 1) and implementing (phase 2 and 3) their NS/AP, Parties are requested to address: a) the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation; b) land tenure issues, c) forest governance issues, d) gender considerations and the safeguards'. All are designed for "ensuring the full and effective participation of relevant stakeholder" including Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

1.3 The overall "pathway" to national REDD+ planning

REDD+ is not a one-size-fits-all mechanism. Each country has its own political, ecological, and institutional context, and its REDD+ pathway reflects that diversity. However, experience over the last 15 years has shown that most countries follow a set of common building blocks when establishing their REDD+ frameworks — with the NS/AP at the center.

1.4 A phased and flexible process

This allows each country to plot an optimal pathway towards REDD+, considering its specific national circumstances. Accordingly, the NS/AP document may take many forms.

Most countries have followed a phased approach to REDD+, starting with readiness and gradually moving into implementation and results-based payment phases. However, the process is not always linear. Political shifts, funding delays, or institutional challenges often create stops, restarts, or redesigns. A strong NS/AP anticipates these realities by being:

- **Modular:** Divided into strategic pillars (e.g., PAMs, finance, safeguards) that can be updated independently.

- **Iterative:** Designed for regular review and revision;
- **Flexible:** Adaptable to new data, financing streams, or jurisdictional shifts.

Many countries use national REDD+ roadmaps structured, phased planning tools—to guide progress across readiness and implementation stages, and to define institutional, legal, and technical milestones for REDD+ delivery.

REDD+ activities often happen at multiple levels — from national programs and jurisdictional pilots to community or project-scale initiatives. The NS/AP is the mechanism that ensures these levels are:

- **Coherent:** No duplication or contradiction between activities.
- **Accountable:** Clear rules for monitoring, reporting, and benefit sharing.
- **Nested:** Integrated into a unified reference level and MRV system.

This is especially important for countries engaging in jurisdictional REDD+ programs or carbon market transactions (e.g., ART-TREES, LEAF Coalition).

Countries have approached the development of NS/APs in diverse ways — reflecting institutional preferences, planning cultures, policy frameworks, and REDD+ maturity. Some, like Brazil, DRC, or Indonesia, have adopted overarching strategies focused on long-term vision and policy coherence, while others, such as Ecuador, have issued more operational action plans detailing programs, budgets and targets. In practice, the distinction is often nominal: Chile's "strategy" is more granular than Viet Nam's "action program", which is shaped by the country's formal policy architecture.

NS/APs may appear as standalone REDD+ documents (e.g. Mexico¹⁸ and Brazil) or be

embedded within broader climate or green growth strategies (e.g. Chile and Peru). These integrated approaches can enhance cross-sector alignment and stakeholder ownership, even when “REDD+” is not in the title.

In some countries, a core strategic document is complemented by a secondary, investment-focused instrument — such as an Action Plan (Brazil), Investment Plan (DRC), or Investment Framework (Côte d’Ivoire). These typically operationalize REDD+ for early implementation phases and serve as platforms to align or attract finance — whether REDD+-specific or thematically linked.

Countries like Chile, leveraging strong data and institutional readiness, have developed detailed implementation documents with annual targets, spatial prioritization, and financing gaps clearly identified — laying the groundwork for other funding pathways.²⁰

Ghana’s REDD+ strategy includes a built-in review process every three years, aligned with its national planning cycles. This enables regular integration of lessons learned, financial updates, and institutional adaptations.

Ultimately, the structure, depth, and purpose of a NS/AP depend on two key factors:

- The national context — including institutional arrangements, decentralization, financing strategy and REDD+ planning maturity.
- The intended function — whether for UNFCCC compliance, domestic policy coherence, communications, or resource mobilization.

Accordingly, NS/AP processes differ — but all serve as the strategic backbone of a country’s REDD+ pathway.

1.5 Linking to national development and climate planning

A major shift in recent years is the move from REDD+ as a stand-alone initiative to REDD+ as an integrated component of national development and climate strategies. NS/APs can contribute to:

- Reflect national development goals, such as poverty reduction, rural development, and biodiversity conservation.
- Align with NDC targets under the Paris Agreement.
- Contribute to long-term climate strategies (LTS).
- Integrate with national adaptation planning (NAPs) where relevant.
- Coordinate with budgeting and investment frameworks (e.g., climate budget tagging, green bonds, SDG⁸ alignment).

This “mainstreaming” function of the NS/AP is increasingly critical to secure durable financing and ensure political buy-in across ministries. Such buy-in is essential because REDD+ implementation often depends on sectors beyond the environment—such as agriculture, planning, land tenure, and finance—which must align their policies, budgets, and incentives to support REDD+ goals. Without coordinated political support, REDD+ efforts risk fragmentation, conflicting policies, or institutional deadlock. With the rise of jurisdictional and nested REDD+ (JNR) frameworks, the NS/AP plays an even more critical role in setting the rules of the game for:

- Subnational participation.
- Private sector engagement.
- Project integration into national systems.

- Baseline alignment and emission accounting.
- Benefit sharing and safeguards consistency.

Countries interested in carbon market engagement — particularly under Article 6.2 or high-integrity voluntary³ standards such as ART-TREES, Verra JNR — must clearly articulate how subnational efforts fit within national strategies.

The NS/AP provides the space to define:

- Jurisdictional nesting protocols.
- Roles and rights of project developers.
- Emission reduction allocation and crediting logic.
- Processes for registry integration and tracking.

Box 1.



Integrating REDD+ into peacebuilding and climate planning: The case of Colombia

- Colombia's REDD+ strategy has matured in parallel with its peacebuilding process, governance reforms, and the enhancement of its climate commitments. It reflects a deeply integrated approach, linking forest conservation with national priorities in rural development, climate action, and territorial planning. REDD+ is formally embedded in Colombia's updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) and its National Development Plan, anchoring forest-based mitigation within broader state-building and sustainability agendas.
- A distinguishing feature of Colombia's approach is its focus on post-conflict territories—regions particularly vulnerable to deforestation due to historic marginalization, land-use pressures, and the legacy of conflict. To address these challenges, the country has leveraged REDD+ to promote zero-deforestation agreements in key commodity sectors such as beef and palm oil, while deploying a robust safeguards framework rooted in free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) and indigenous self-governance principles. Jurisdictional REDD+ strategies are being actively implemented in Amazon departments, linking subnational efforts with national targets.
- Innovations underpinning Colombia's progress include the development of the National Forest and Carbon Monitoring System (SMBYC), which supports transparent MRV, and the participatory design of REDD+ activities in indigenous territories. The establishment of the National Roundtable of Indigenous Peoples and REDD+ has formalized inclusive governance, and REDD+ has been effectively integrated into international climate finance pipelines, attracting support from partners including Norway, Germany, and the UK.
- Despite these achievements, Colombia faces ongoing challenges. Managing deforestation linked to illegal economies and weak governance structures remains a pressing issue. Moreover, aligning national REDD+ goals with the country's decentralized institutional system poses coordination difficulties, particularly in operationalizing jurisdictional nesting in high-deforestation regions.
- Colombia's experience demonstrates that REDD+ can contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding and improved land-use governance. It also shows that aligning REDD+ with commodity supply chains and subnational strategies increases leverage and coherence. Crucially, its emphasis on safeguards and partnerships with indigenous peoples reinforces the legitimacy and durability of its REDD+ framework.

1.6 Strategic value of the NS/AP design process

Designing or revising a NS/AP is not just a technical exercise — it is a political, social and institutional moment. Countries that approach the NS/AP process as a transformational opportunity — rather than a donor requirement — often emerge with stronger strategies, greater national ownership and deeper stakeholder support.

The NS/AP design process can catalyze:

- Multi-sectoral coordination.
- Institutional clarification and reform, including resolution of overlapping mandates and tenure complexities.
- Stakeholder empowerment and inclusion.
- Forest governance improvements.
- Political visibility for forest-based mitigation.

It is also a chance to unify dispersed REDD+ actions into a single national vision — aligning what may be disconnected donor programs, pilot projects, or jurisdictional efforts. A good NS/AP design or revision process can:

- Clarify and reinforce mandates for REDD+ leadership.
- Embed REDD+ in national development or climate planning instruments.
- Consolidate lessons from pilots, projects and early implementation.
- Translate technical concepts into political and policy language.
- Signal national credibility to donors, investors and partners.

The process itself matters as much as the final product — especially when it comes to building trust, ensuring inclusion and aligning incentives across actors.

The NS/AP process is often the first platform where diverse stakeholders can discuss REDD+ goals and concerns in a structured way. An inclusive design process will:

- Engage Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and civil society.
- Facilitate participation by women, youth, and marginalized groups.
- Create space for subnational governments, traditional authorities, and private actors.
- Translate technical terms into accessible, relevant language.
- Use culturally appropriate formats (e.g., dialogues, visual tools, community mapping).
- In many countries, the NS/AP process has helped institutionalize multi-stakeholder engagement, including the creation of permanent advisory groups, working groups and safeguards platforms.

The process of developing or updating a NS/AP is an opportunity to clarify institutional roles and build inter-sectoral coordination. This includes:

- Naming a REDD+ focal entity with policy and coordination authority.
- Creating technical working groups across key ministries (forestry, planning, agriculture, finance).
- Clarifying roles of subnational governments and decentralized agencies.

- Building coordination with NDC focal points and national climate committees.
- Engaging finance ministries, in coordination with other relevant ministries, in costing, budgeting and results tracking.

NS/AP processes are powerful moments for strategic communication. They provide a platform to:

- Build public understanding of REDD+.
- Promote the national vision for forest and climate action.
- Demonstrate alignment with international climate goals (e.g. NDCs, SDGs).
- Engage media and civil society as allies.
- Position REDD+ within national development narratives.

Successful NS/APs include:

- A compelling vision statement.
- Clear, simple messaging for multiple audiences.
- Visual summaries of PAMs, benefits and finance.
- Pathways.
- Storytelling elements that reflect national identity and values.

1.8 Mapping and aligning with national development goals and priorities

As REDD+ evolves, its success increasingly depends on how well it is integrated into the broader national development and climate policy landscape. An isolated REDD+ strategy — disconnected from national priorities or planning systems — is unlikely to be implemented or financed effectively.

This section explores how countries can map, align and embed their NS/AP within:

- National Development Plans (NDPs).
- Sectoral policies (e.g., agriculture, energy, land-use, infrastructure).
- National climate commitments (e.g., NDCs, NAPs, LTS).
- Biodiversity, adaptation, and restoration frameworks.
- Fiscal planning and public budgeting systems.

The goal is to ensure REDD+ is not a parallel agenda, but a core part of how the country delivers on its national vision.

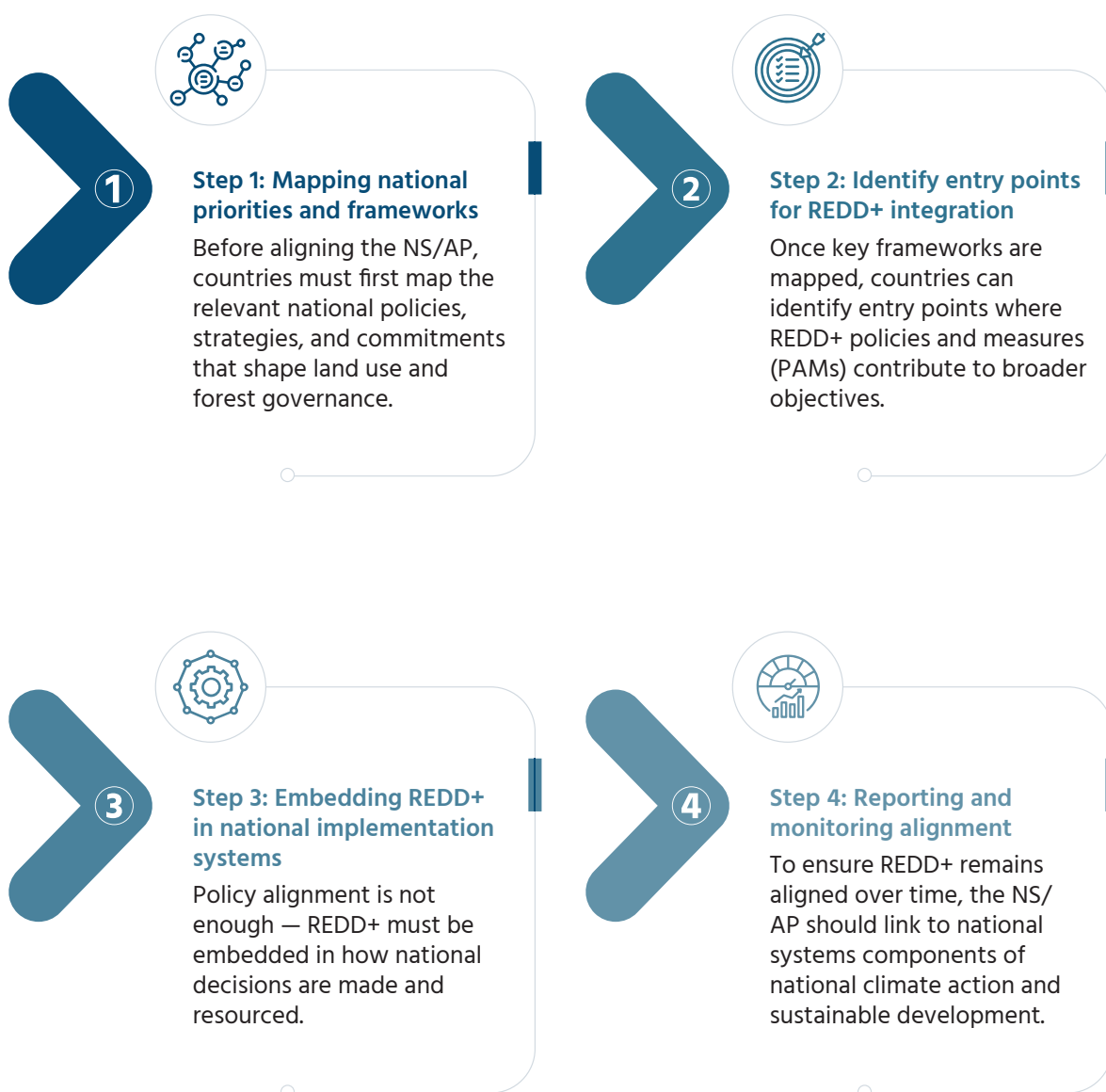
Lack of alignment between the NS/AP and other national plans can lead to:

- Contradictory land-use decisions (e.g., expanding agriculture in forested areas).
- Missed co-benefits (e.g., linking REDD+ with biodiversity or adaptation funding)
- Budgetary disconnects (e.g., REDD+ unfunded in national budgets).
- Institutional overlap or competition.
- Low uptake by key ministries, such as environmental, agricultural, development and finance or sectors.

Conversely, policy coherence helps:

- Unlock domestic finance.
- Improve monitoring and reporting.
- Attract investment from donors and markets.
- Build multi-sectoral support.
- Achieve multiple SDGs simultaneously.

Figure 2: Steps to map and align NS/AP with national development goals and priorities



(see also Module 11: Stakeholder Engagement in REDD+).

Box 2:



REDD+ NS/AP in the wider development and legal framework: The case of Ecuador

Ecuador offers a strong example of how a REDD+ strategy can be embedded within a broader national legal and development framework. The adoption of the 2008 Constitution marked a turning point, incorporating the principle of *buen vivir* (good living) and enshrining environmental sustainability, the rights of nature, Indigenous Peoples rights, and gender equality as guiding principles of national policy.

These constitutional commitments were operationalized through successive planning instruments, including the National Development Plan, the National Strategy for the Transformation of the Production Matrix, and the National Environmental Policy (2009). In 2012, climate change mitigation and adaptation were formally declared as state policies, leading to the development of the National Climate Change Strategy.

Ecuador's National REDD+ Action Plan (AP-REDD+), adopted in 2016, is framed within this policy ecosystem. It functions as a key implementation mechanism under the national climate strategy and NDC,¹⁰ while also supporting transitions toward sustainable land-use, restoration, and inclusive territorial development. Rather than a stand-alone initiative, REDD+ is positioned as a cross-cutting pillar of Ecuador's sustainable development model, aligned with constitutional principles and national planning cycles.

This integrative approach has helped Ecuador secure international recognition and access to results-based finance, while strengthening policy coherence and institutional ownership of REDD+ across sectors.

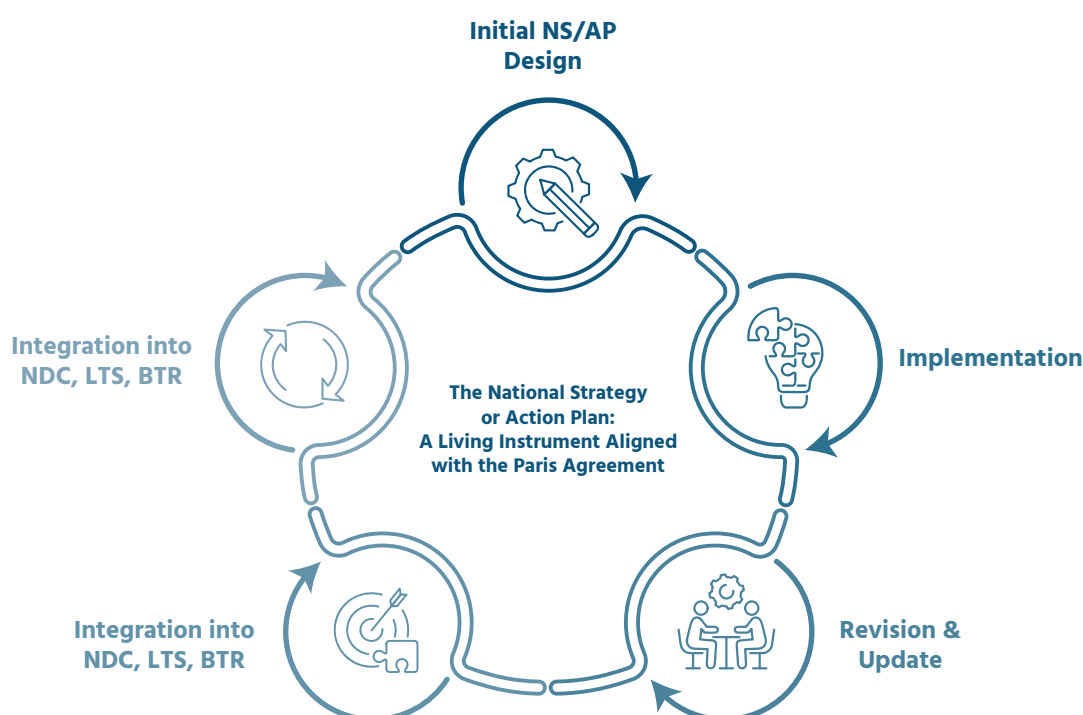


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Go to the [REDD+ Academy Platform](#) to explore how REDD+ initiatives are linked to other economic sectors.



Figure 3: NS/AP cycle



Key takeaways

- Purpose of NS/APs – National Strategies/Action Plans (NS/APs) provide a guiding framework for REDD+ implementation, helping countries coordinate efforts to reduce deforestation and forest degradation, manage forests sustainably, enhance carbon stocks, and uphold safeguards.
- Alignment with National Priorities – Effective NS/APs are embedded within broader policy frameworks (climate strategies, biodiversity plans, SDGs), ensuring coherence, efficient resource use, and strong political support.
- Evolving REDD+ Landscape – Since 2016, REDD+ implementation has advanced significantly, with many countries establishing strategies, reference levels, monitoring systems, and accessing results-based payments.
- Global Progress – By 2024, 38 countries have developed or are developing NS/APs, 59 have submitted forest reference levels, 40 have monitoring systems, 15 have received results-based payments, and ~30 are engaging in carbon markets or jurisdictional crediting.
- Support and Knowledge Exchange – The UN-REDD Programme plays a central role by facilitating South–South exchanges, providing technical and policy guidance, and supporting countries in designing, revising, and improving their NS/APs.

Module 2



Building the case for REDD+



This module

This module highlights the importance of “Making the Case for REDD+” in a National Strategy or Action Plan (NS/AP).

A central role of any NS/AP is to present a compelling, nationally grounded case for REDD+, —one that connects with decision-makers, funders, communities, and the private sector.



You will be able to...

- Identify the key elements of a strong REDD+ rationale case that aligns with national priorities, use credible evidence, and addresses both economic and environmental objectives.
- Apply communication strategies that tailor REDD+ messages to diverse audiences, using accessible language, visuals, and stakeholder stories to build broad support.

A core function of the NS/AP is to present a compelling, national REDD+ rationale — one that resonates with decision-makers, funders, communities and private actors. This is especially critical in:

- Securing political support at a high level.
- Justifying public or donor investment.
- Positioning REDD+ in climate or development debates.
- Attracting jurisdictional and private sector finance.
- Aligning stakeholder expectations around a shared vision.

What Makes a Strong REDD+ Case?

- It is rooted in national priorities and political discourse.
- It uses evidence, not just aspiration.
- It explains risks and co-benefits clearly.
- It appeals to both economic and environmental logic.
- It is communicated in accessible language and formats.

Countries need to define why REDD+ matters for them. This can vary widely:

- Climate goals: REDD+ helps countries meet NDC or LTS targets.
- Development priorities: REDD+ can deliver co-benefits — jobs, food security, ecosystem services.
- Crisis response: REDD+ supports resilience to droughts, floods and ecosystem loss.
- International reputation: REDD+ showcases leadership and access to green finance.

- Political economy: REDD+ can shift incentives away from destructive land-use practices.
- The case for REDD+ must be backed by credible data and analysis, including:
 - Deforestation trends: Where, how fast, and why forests are being lost.
 - Emissions estimates: Historical and projected emissions from LULUCF.
 - Cost-benefit comparisons: The economic viability of REDD+ versus alternative land uses.
 - Socioeconomic data: Links between forests, livelihoods and poverty reduction.
 - Co-benefit data: Biodiversity hotspots, watershed values and cultural assets.

These inputs can be drawn from:

- National forest inventories and NFMS.
- Spatial analysis and remote sensing.
- Policy and institutional reviews.
- Participatory assessments.
- Existing environmental-economic accounts.

Building a credible case also means addressing concerns honestly. A good NS/AP will:

- Recognize opportunity costs and potential land-use tensions.
- Be transparent about implementation risks.
- Clarify how safeguards, tenure, and equity issues are addressed.
- Include mitigation strategies for potential leakage or reversals.

- Offer credible benefit-sharing mechanisms to build trust.







A strong REDD+ case isn't just written — it's communicated. The NS/AP process should include a communications strategy that:

- Tailors the REDD+ message to different audiences (government, donors, civil society, private sector).
- Uses visuals, infographics and storytelling.
- Builds consistent national messaging around forests and climate.
- Avoid jargon and explain REDD+ in terms people understand.
- Integrates voices from communities and local champions.

Some countries embed a dedicated REDD+ communications unit in their coordination bodies, while others work through civil society partners or media networks.

As illustrated in Figure 4 below, some entry points on which the case can be built may already exist in the strategic development framework of the country, while others will have to be created through policy dialogue. For example, the REDD+ agenda may capitalize on the objectives of the agriculture sector for intensification objectives, while building on various other agendas and partnerships to strengthen land use planning with the Planning Ministry, and push through the REDD+ process for the modification of conditions for agricultural producers to access credit lines that include compliance with forest-related safeguards. All this will contribute to the overall objective of national socio-economic and agriculture development.

Figure 4: Examples of potential entry points for REDD+ towards various sectors and stakeholders

Sector	Actor			
	 Government	 Private sector	 Communities	 Civil Society
 Agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Agriculture intensification objectives ▪ Support to certification ▪ Access to (higher value) markets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Access to (higher value) markets ▪ Corporate image ▪ Compliance to industry sustainability standards ▪ Access to credit: PAM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Access to (higher value) markets ▪ Access to incentives (financial or not) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Social and environmental standards, with unimpaired ▪ or improved livelihoods for communities
 Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More efficient resource use ▪ Less conflict across sectors through enhanced coordination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduced conflicts with other sectors or with communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduced conflicts within the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduced conflicts within the community

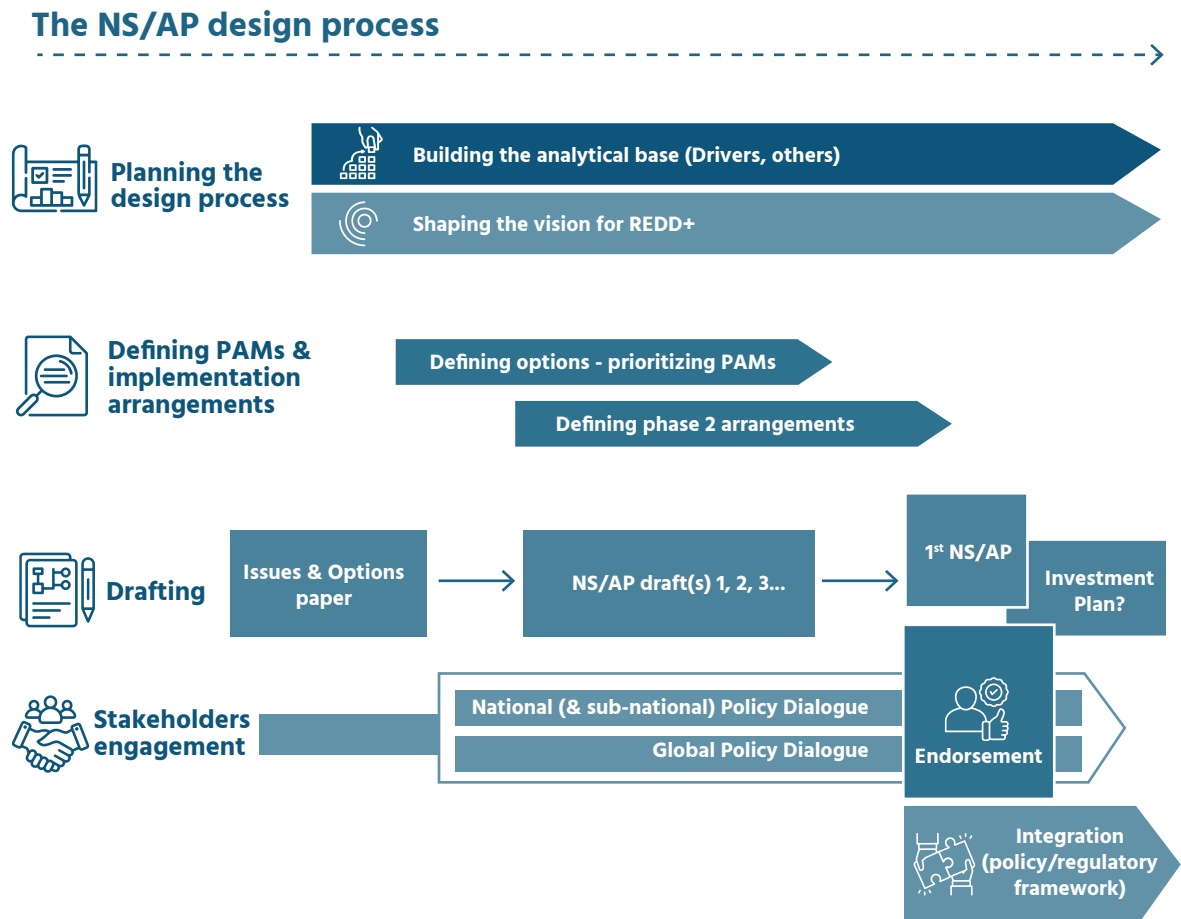
Source: UN-REDD Programme

2.1 Developing a NS/AP

Although the process of developing a NS/AP will be highly dependent on national circumstances, it may be broken down into several key elements (Figure 5). These elements are by no means fully sequential, and many should progress in parallel, with regular interactions and feedback loops:

- Planning the NS/AP design process.
- Building the analytical base.
- Building a REDD+ vision.
- Analyzing options and defining PAM.
- Defining implementation arrangements (financial, legal and institutional).
- NS/AP drafting.
- Political and stakeholder endorsement.
- Integration of the NS/AP into the policy/regulatory framework.

Figure 5: Key elements in developing a NS/AP



Source: UN-REDD Programme

2.2 Planning the NS/AP design process

The success of a National Strategy or Action Plan often depends as much on how it is developed as on what it contains. A well-planned process

increases national ownership, ensures technical soundness, builds trust and paves the way for long-term implementation. This section outlines practical steps for planning and managing a high-quality NS/AP design or revision process.



Step 1: Clarify objectives and scope

Start by defining:

- The purpose of the strategy (first draft vs. update, readiness vs. implementation).
- The target audience (technical, political, donor, multi-stakeholder).
- The scope of REDD+ activities covered (e.g., all five REDD+ activities or a subset).
- Alignment needs with other frameworks (e.g., NDC, NDP, biodiversity plans).
- Timeline, budget and political windows of opportunity.



Step 2: Assign leadership and coordination structures

Effective strategy development requires strong institutional leadership. This includes:

- A lead institution with REDD+ policy authority (often Ministry of Environment or Climate).
- A technical coordination unit or secretariat.
- A multi-stakeholder steering or oversight committee.
- Clear roles for sectoral ministries, subnational governments and IP/CSO representatives.
- Connections with NDC coordination mechanisms and financial authorities.



Step 3: Develop a process roadmap

The NS/AP process should be structured through a clear, time-bound roadmap with defined outputs. Key phases include:

A. Inception Phase

- Stocktaking of existing REDD+ documents, data and institutional setups.
- Identification of gaps and alignment opportunities.
- Process design and stakeholder mapping.
- Securing political support and financing.

B. Analytical Phase

- Updating driver analyses.
- Reviewing PAMs.
- Identifying institutional, legal and financial gaps.
- Mapping co-benefits and safeguard priorities.
- Assessing implementation lessons (if revising an existing strategy).

C. Consultation and Drafting Phase

- Structured consultations (national, subnational, thematic, IP-specific).
- Use of discussion papers, concept notes, visual tools.
- Iterative drafting with stakeholder feedback loops.
- Creation of a results framework or performance logic model.

D. Validation and Endorsement Phase

- Technical validation (through sectoral reviews or working groups).
- Political validation (ministerial, cabinet or cross-sectoral approval).
- Public launch and communications.
- UNFCCC publication (e.g., REDD+ Web Platform).

**Step 4: Budgeting and resourcing the process**

An underfunded process leads to limited participation, weak analysis and delays. A solid NS/AP plan includes a budget for:

- Coordination and staffing.
- Technical assessments and expert support.
- Stakeholder engagement and translation.
- Subnational workshops and field consultations.
- Communications and design.
- Validation and launch events.
- Gender and safeguards integration.

Some countries create a process budget as part of a REDD+ investment plan or include it in GCF readiness proposals. Others integrate the strategy development into broader climate or forest-sector planning budgets.



Step 5: Build in iteration and learning

A mature NS/AP process is never “one and done”. The roadmap should include:

- Mid-course reviews or checkpoints.
- Stakeholder re-engagement at critical moments.
- Integration of new data (e.g. FRELs, MRV findings).
- Planning for future updates (e.g. every 3–5 years).
- Mechanisms for feedback loops from implementation experience.



Country case 1:

Ecuador

From Readiness to Results-Based Payments

Context:

Ecuador’s REDD+ journey is often cited as one of the most coherent national examples of REDD+ system development — moving from readiness to full implementation and results-based finance, while embedding REDD+ in its legal and policy frameworks.

Key features:

- National REDD+ Action Plan (AP-REDD+) endorsed in 2016.
- Directly aligned with Ecuador’s National Development Plan and other relevant national policies, such as the National Biodiversity Strategy, the National Climate Change Strategy and the NDC.
- Integrated REDD+ safeguards into a broader environmental legal and policy framework.
- Linked the strategy to climate finance, receiving RBPs from the GCF for verified results.
- Strong focus on indigenous territories and subnational implementation.
- Integration and active participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IP and LC) during the design phase of the REDD+ Action Plan, while recognizing them as key partners in the implementation of Policies and Measures (PAMs).
- Direct financing mechanisms were established to support IP and LC-led initiatives and projects.
- Incorporation of IP and LC Life Plans into subnational territorial planning instruments, strengthening culturally appropriate governance and planning frameworks.



REFLECTION POINT

What elements of Ecuador's approach – including early IP and LC engagement, policy integration, institutional innovation and multistakeholder coordination – could inspire your country's REDD+ transition and access to results-based payments?



Notable innovations:

- Creation of a national REDD+ registry.
- Cross-sectoral coordination via Ministry of Environment, Water and Ecological Transition.
- Integration of gender and interculturality into safeguards and PAMs.
- Active monitoring of results and policy performance using national indicators.
- Strategic merging of GEF and GCF financing (GEF Amazonía + GCF-FP19 + GCF-FP110) into the PROAmazonía Programme, enhancing operationalization and scaling of REDD+ actions.



Challenges faced:

- Balancing national strategy goals with local implementation capacity.
- Sustaining cross-ministerial coordination over time.
- Scaling private-sector engagement beyond pilot initiatives.



Lessons from Ecuador:

- National alignment creates coherence and credibility.
- Policy integration (not isolation) strengthens long-term viability.
- Institutional innovation (registry, cross-sectoral platforms) boosts readiness for RBP and markets.
- Holistic programmatic approaches, such as PROAmazonía, demonstrate that integrating conservation, sustainable production, gender⁷ equality and indigenous rights can drive transformational change
- Meaningful inclusion of IP and LC from the design to implementation phases enhances legitimacy, effectiveness and sustainability of REDD+ strategies

2.3 Building the analytical base

A strong strategy is built on a strong evidence base. The analytical phase of NS/AP development helps identify:

- What's driving deforestation and degradation?
- Where are emissions concentrated?
- Which actors and land-use dynamics are involved?
- What institutional, legal and policy options are viable?
- Where can safeguards and co-benefits be addressed?

This foundation informs the prioritization of PAMs, guides resource allocation, and improves credibility with funders and stakeholders. The key areas are:

Drivers of deforestation and degradation

- Direct drivers (e.g. agriculture, logging, infrastructure).
- Indirect drivers (e.g. weak governance, land tenure, market demand).
- Spatial and temporal trends.
- Actor mapping (e.g. smallholders, companies, government projects).

Forest emissions and carbon stocks

- Baseline estimates from FREL/FRLs.
- Hotspot mapping for high-emission zones.
- Forest type differentiation and degradation patterns.

Policy and institutional landscape

- Relevant laws and policies (land, forest, climate, energy).
- Overlaps or contradictions in mandates.
- Institutional capacities and gaps.
- REDD+ coherence with land tenure and land-use planning frameworks.

Benefit and risk mapping

- Where REDD+ co-benefits (biodiversity, water, livelihoods) are highest.
- Where risks (conflict, displacement, leakage) are most pronounced.
- Gender¹³ and social inclusion diagnostics.

Methods and tools for analysis

The following tools and approaches can support the analytical foundation of a NS/AP.

Spatial analysis and remote sensing

- 🔧 Use of forest cover change maps, satellite imagery and GIS platforms.
- 🔧 Overlaying deforestation trends with land tenure, infrastructure and land-use plans.
- 🔧 Identifying high-risk or high-potential areas for REDD+ interventions.

Participatory analysis

- 🔧 Community mapping of land use and ecosystem services.
- 🔧 Local knowledge integration on drivers, risks and opportunities.
- 🔧 Stakeholder perception surveys on REDD+ and land governance.

Economic and policy diagnostics

- 🔧 Marginal abatement cost curves for different land-use options.
- 🔧 Analysis of subsidy regimes and fiscal drivers (e.g. tax incentives for agriculture).
- 🔧 Institutional landscape reviews to identify overlaps, gaps and reforms needed.

Social and gender assessments

- 🔧 Identifying who benefits or loses from different land uses.
- 🔧 Mapping customary tenure and access rights.
- 🔧 Assessing existing grievance mechanisms and safeguard systems.

Some countries use forest transition theory to frame REDD+ strategies — identifying where deforestation is slowing or reversing and targeting PAMs accordingly. However, real-world transitions are often non-linear and affected by external drivers like commodity markets and migration.

The goal of the analytical phase is not to generate reports for their own sake — but to inform decisions. A strong NS/AP uses analysis to:

- Prioritize policies and measures (PAMs) based on feasibility, impact and co-benefits.
- Target finance to areas with high emissions and high returns.
- Tailor safeguards to specific risks and vulnerable groups.
- Shape coordination between ministries and subnational jurisdictions.
- Create a logic model or theory of change for REDD+ implementation.

From Diagnosis to Direction: The strategy should clearly explain how analytical work influenced key decisions — such as which drivers to prioritize, which regions to focus on, or which policies to reform.



Key takeaways

- Process matters as much as content – The legitimacy and success of a National Strategy/Action Plan (NS/AP) depend not only on what goes into it but also on how it is developed. Careful planning, inclusivity, and transparency foster ownership, trust, and long-term sustainability. Clear structure and leadership are essential. – Successful NS/APs require:
 - > A clear purpose, scope, and alignment with national priorities.
 - > Strong institutional leadership (usually Ministry of Environment/Climate) supported by coordination units and multi-stakeholder platforms.
 - > Defined roles across ministries, subnational actors, and Indigenous Peoples/CSOs.
- A roadmap with iterative phases strengthens implementation – Designing NS/APs works best through phased planning: inception, analysis, consultations/drafting, and validation. Iterative reviews, stakeholder feedback loops, and future update plans help strategies remain relevant and adaptive.
- Adequate financing is non-negotiable – An underfunded process undermines participation, analysis, and credibility. Budgets should cover technical work, consultations, translation, gender/safeguard integration, and communication. Many countries combine national resources with climate finance (e.g., GCF readiness funds).



Go to the [REDD+ Academy Platform](#) to identify the cross-cutting issues essential for inclusive, effective, and sustainable REDD+ initiatives.



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Module 3



Building a vision for REDD+



This module

This module highlights that defining a long-term vision for REDD+ is a critical step in aligning forest-sector action with national development and climate goals. By building on building upon existing strategies, analytical work, and long-term planning instruments, including — such as the SDGs, NDCs, and national development plans (see Section 6), — countries can clearly articulate how REDD+ contributes not only to the five REDD+ activities, but also to broader economic, social, and environmental priorities.



You will be able to...

- Explain the purpose of a long-term vision for REDD+ and how it serves as a guiding framework for sustainable forest management, policy alignment, and investment decisions.
- Identify ways to integrate REDD+ into national and sectoral planning processes to ensure it supports wider development goals, climate commitments, and social inclusion objectives.

Defining a long-term vision for REDD+ is a critical step in aligning forest-sector action with national development and climate goals. By building existing strategies, analytical work and long-term planning instruments — such as the SDGs, NDCs, and national development plans (see Section 6) countries can articulate how REDD+ contributes not only to the five REDD+ activities, but also to broader economic, social, and environmental priorities.

Countries such as Chile, DRC, Ecuador,² and Mexico have integrated REDD+ into overarching development visions, often formalized through national strategy statements or constitutional principles. These vision statements typically reflect commitments related to forests, but also extend to sectors like agriculture, energy, land tenure and restoration — providing a whole-of-government framing for REDD+. A national REDD+ vision generally combines two key elements:

- Long-term forest-related objectives and sectoral commitments, including overarching goals for emissions reduction, sustainable land use and inclusive territorial development. These set the direction and ambition level for REDD+, and signal alignment with international climate and biodiversity commitments.
- Strategic decisions guiding implementation, such as the scope and scale of REDD+ activities, priority drivers to address, geographic focus areas, financing approach and institutional responsibilities.

This vision often emerges iteratively during the readiness phase, shaped by national dialogue, political opportunity and evolving technical and financial analyses. Where clearly defined, it helps establish REDD+ as a strategic, cross-sectoral initiative — and provides a compelling narrative for mobilizing domestic and international support.

3.1 Scope and scale of REDD+

A central part of any NS/AP is defining **what** the country wants to do under REDD+ (scope), **where and how** it will do it (scale), and **why** — meaning which drivers it's aiming to address.

This section breaks down how to define the scope and scale of REDD+ efforts, and how to link them to an evidence-based understanding of deforestation and forest degradation drivers.

1. Defining scope: Which REDD+ activities?

Countries can choose to include any or all of the five REDD+ activities:

- Reducing emissions from deforestation.
- Reducing emissions from forest degradation.
- Conservation of forest carbon stocks.
- Sustainable management of forests.
- Enhancement of forest carbon stocks.
- The strategy should be specified:
 - Which activities are prioritized and why?
 - How do they link national forest types, land uses, and stakeholder roles?
 - Which PAMs are being deployed to support each activity?
 - What results are expected (in terms of GHGs, co-benefits, governance)?

2. Defining scale: National, subnational or nested?

Countries must decide the scale at which REDD+ is implemented and accounted for, and how different levels interact. Options include:

A. National implementation

- › Single reference level, monitoring system and registry.
- › Centralized implementation and coordination.
- › Benefits: Streamlined accounting, alignment with UNFCCC requirements.

B. Subnational implementation (as interim measure)

- › Used when national systems are incomplete.
- › Allows pilot programs to proceed under REDD+.
- › Common in early phases or in countries with strong jurisdictional governments.

C. Nested approaches

- › Combines national and subnational implementation.
- › Allows for project-level activities within national frameworks.
- › Requires clear rules for baseline alignment, emissions allocation, benefit sharing and safeguards.
- › The chosen scale affects everything from finance flows to monitoring systems, private sector engagement and credibility in carbon markets.

3. Linking to drivers: Making the strategy actionable

Defining the scope and scale only matters if they are matched to real drivers of deforestation and degradation. The strategy should:

- Prioritize drivers based on emissions potential and feasibility.
- Assign PAMs to each driver (see Section 11).
- Clarify actors and land types involved (e.g., smallholder, commercial, communal).
- Identify implementation gaps (policy, finance, institutions).
- Use driver data to define geographic priorities and targets.

Cross-cutting considerations

In addition to technical choices, countries must consider:

A. Institutional implications

- › Who is responsible for implementation at each scale?
- › Are there mandates and legal instruments to support nested systems?
- › How are conflicts or overlaps resolved?

B. Safeguards and social dimensions

- › Are drivers linked to land tenure, equity or customary rights?
- › Are REDD+ activities creating or resolving social tensions?
- › Are safeguards systems (e.g. SIS, GRM) ready to operate across levels?

C. Finance Implications

- › How does the chosen scale affect benefit sharing and RBP eligibility?
- › Can projects or subnational jurisdictions attract their own finance?
- › How is carbon ownership defined?



Country case 2:

Papua New Guinea (PNG)

Pioneering Nested Jurisdictional REDD+ in a Complex Landscape. Context: Papua New Guinea is one of the earliest REDD+ movers, known for its work on nested approaches, carbon rights and forest governance reform in a highly decentralized and customary tenure system.

Key features:

- Early REDD+ engagement through UN-REDD and FCPF.
- National REDD+ Strategy was adopted in 2017.
- Integration of REDD+ into the Climate Change (Management) Act.
- National REDD+ Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) Guidelines improved by CCDA in 2021, building on the initial guidelines developed in 2017.
- Nested approach allowing subnational and private-sector participation.
- Clear policy on carbon ownership and benefit sharing.
- Notable Innovations:
 - Legal recognition of customary landowners in REDD+ governance.
 - Development of subnational nesting rules and emissions allocation procedures.
 - Active efforts to engage private projects under national accounting frameworks.
 - Use of the Climate Change and Development Authority (CCDA) as a cross-sector coordinator.

Challenges faced:

- Complex socio-cultural dynamics in a context where 97 per cent of the land is under customary ownership.
- Ensuring transparency and equity in benefit-sharing.
- Navigating tensions between national and project-level actors.
- Capacity constraints in subnational MRV and safeguards systems.

Lessons from PNG:⁶

- Nesting needs clear legal foundations and accounting logic. Customary rights and FPIC must be integrated from the start. Subnational capacity and clarity on carbon rights are key to success.

Final takeaways:

- Across countries, the most successful NS/APs are those that:
 - Are embedded in political and institutional systems.
 - Evolve with new data, climate commitments and stakeholder inputs.
 - Prioritize finance-readiness, inclusivity and transparency.
 - Bridge global frameworks and local realities.



REFLECTION POINT

What combination of experiences from Ecuador, Colombia, and PNG could help strengthen your own country's REDD+ pathway?

3.3 Priority drivers

At the heart of any REDD+ strategy are the Policies and Measures (PAMs) that a country plans to implement to reduce emissions and enhance removals. These are the tools, reforms and interventions that turn a national vision into action.

This section outlines how to:

- Identify, assess and prioritize PAMs.
- Link them to drivers and REDD+ activities.
- Evaluate their feasibility and expected outcomes.
- Clarify institutional responsibilities and financing needs.



Step 1: Identify potential PAMs

Start by compiling a long list of potential PAMs based on:

- Existing national plans and programs.
- Recommendations from stakeholder consultations.
- Lessons from REDD+ pilot projects or jurisdictional programs.
- Gaps identified during the analytical phase.
- Good practices from peer countries.

Group PAMs by driver or activity (e.g. “measures to reduce illegal logging”, “agroforestry in degraded lands”).



Step 2: Prioritize PAMs strategically

From the long list, develop a short list of priority PAMs using transparent criteria such as:

- Effectiveness: Potential to reduce emissions or increase removals.
- Efficiency: Cost per tonne of CO₂e reduced or removed.
- Feasibility: Political, legal, technical and institutional readiness.
- Equity: Distribution of benefits, risks and costs.
- Co-benefits: Biodiversity, livelihoods, water, adaptation.
- Synergies: Alignment with existing programs, NDCs or SDGs.
- Safeguard risks: Social or environmental concerns requiring attention.

Ghana⁵ used a multi-criteria tool to assess over 30 proposed PAMs. Stakeholders scored each one against effectiveness, co-benefits and feasibility, resulting in a short list of six nationally prioritized actions.

Some countries use tools like:

- Marginal Abatement Cost (MAC) curves.
- Benefit and Risk Tools (BeRT).
- Participatory scoring exercises.
- Policy simulation models or land-use planning software.



Step 3: Link PAMs to drivers and activities

Each priority PAM should be clearly linked to:

- A specific REDD+ activity (e.g. reforestation for enhancement).
- A targeted driver (e.g. shifting cultivation, charcoal demand).
- A defined scale of implementation (national, subnational, project).
- A lead institution and set of implementing partners.

Clarity here improves coordination and monitoring — and makes the NS/AP easier to fund and evaluate.



Step 4: Define roles, finance and enabling conditions

For each prioritized PAM, the NS/AP should explain:

- Who is responsible for implementation?
- What enabling conditions are needed (laws, data, capacity)?
- How will it be financed (public budget, donor funds, private investment)?
- What risks or safeguard issues must be addressed?
- How will progress be monitored and reported?

Some countries present this as a PAMs matrix or action table — summarizing all key variables and helping guide budgeting and coordination.



Step 5: Review and revise periodically

The list of priority PAMs is not fixed. It should be:

- Reviewed regularly (e.g. every 3–5 years).
- Updated based on new data, implementation lessons or funding opportunities.²⁰
- Responsive to emerging drivers or political shifts.
- Integrated with changes in FRELs, NDCs or national plans.

Treating PAMs as living policy instruments ensures the strategy remains actionable and aligned with real-world change.



Go to the [REDD+ Academy Platform](#) to examine how National Strategies support REDD+ implementation and their importance for achieving global climate goals.



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3.4 Implementation arrangements

A strong strategy doesn't just outline **what** should be done — it specifies **who** will do it, **how** it will be coordinated, and **through which systems**. Without clear implementation arrangements, PAMs and REDD+ goals often remain aspirational. This section focuses on how countries structure the **institutional, legal and operational systems** needed to implement the NS/AP.

Key dimensions of implementation

1. Institutional responsibilities

- Identify the lead REDD+ entity (e.g. Ministry of Environment, Climate, or Forests).
- Define roles for sectoral ministries (e.g. agriculture, planning, energy, finance).

- Clarify responsibilities for subnational governments, indigenous and local authorities, civil society and private actors.
- Set up coordination mechanisms (e.g. inter-ministerial committees, steering groups).

2. Legal and regulatory framework

- Clarify the legal basis for REDD+ by identifying institutional mandates and addressing overlapping jurisdictions across forest, land, mining, and local governance frameworks.
- Undertake legal gap and conflict assessments to align forest, land use, and climate legislation, improving coherence and enforceability.
- Establish enabling legal conditions for benefit sharing, recognition of carbon rights,

enforcement mechanisms, and safeguards application.¹⁹

- Institutionalize REDD+ entities and functions through legal instruments such as decrees, executive orders, or amendments to forest and environmental laws.

Some countries embed REDD+ in broader legal reforms (e.g. land-use planning laws, climate acts), while others adopt dedicated REDD+ decrees or regulations.

3. Coordination mechanisms

Effective implementation requires coordination across sectors and scales. NS/APs should include or reference:

- Horizontal coordination platforms (e.g. inter-ministerial REDD+ committees).
- Vertical coordination systems (national–subnational–community linkages).
- Thematic or technical working groups (on MRV, safeguards, finance, etc.).
- Cross-cutting teams that integrate REDD+ with NDC or SDG processes.
- Linkages with finance, planning, and legal bodies.

Institutionalized platforms with clear mandates, schedules, and resourcing tend to perform better than ad hoc groups or donor-driven working groups.

4. Operational platforms

NS/APs should also describe how REDD+ will be implemented on the ground, including:

- Subnational governance arrangements.

- Implementation partnerships (e.g. NGOs, producer associations, local governments).

- Links to landscape or jurisdictional initiatives.

- Role of communities and traditional authorities.

- Systems for performance tracking, benefit sharing, and safeguards application.

Some countries use regional or provincial REDD+ strategies that align with the national NS/AP and help manage complex, multi-actor landscapes.

5. Monitoring and performance management

To ensure implementation stays on track, the NS/AP should include or connect to:

- A performance monitoring system (e.g., KPIs for PAMs).
- Roles and responsibilities for data collection and reporting.
- Feedback loops for adaptive management.
- Integration with MRV systems for GHG results and safeguards monitoring.
- Timelines and milestones for implementation phases.

Some countries align REDD+ implementation monitoring with broader national M&E systems (e.g., national development dashboards or NDC tracking systems).

Ecuador's REDD+ strategy includes a results framework with indicators tied to PAMs, safeguards and GHG targets. Performance data is used in annual reviews and feeds into NDC progress reports and the SIS.

Box 3.



Evolving institutional arrangements to support REDD+ and climate governance: The case of Indonesia

Indonesia provides a well-documented example of how institutional arrangements for REDD+ can evolve to support both domestic implementation and international engagement. Initially, REDD+ efforts were coordinated through a dedicated REDD+ Agency (BP REDD+), which played a catalytic role in the readiness phase by developing early strategies, safeguards, and partnerships. Following a broader institutional reform, REDD+ responsibilities were transferred to the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF), under the Directorate General of Climate Change (DGCC). This integration marked a shift toward mainstreaming REDD+ within national climate governance structures, enabling stronger alignment with NDC¹⁰ implementation, national MRV systems, and results-based finance. A major institutional milestone was the issuance of Presidential Regulation No. 98/2021 on the Carbon Economic Value. This regulation clarifies the roles of government entities in managing carbon pricing instruments, including emissions trading and results-based payments, and establishes procedures for authorizing international carbon transfers. It also mandates consistency across REDD+ activities, the national REDD+ strategy, the FREL, safeguards, and monitoring systems—laying the groundwork for Article 6 participation. Indonesia’s experience highlights how institutional arrangements can mature in phases—moving from standalone mechanisms to integrated, cross-sector governance—while maintaining a clear legal mandate, stakeholder engagement, and technical robustness. This institutional clarity has proven essential for scaling REDD+ efforts and preparing for carbon market engagement under the Paris Agreement.

3.5 Drafting as a collaborative process

Drafting should be coordinated by the REDD+ lead institution but must reflect the voices, evidence, and priorities gathered during the analytical and consultation phases. A good drafting process:

- Builds on background studies, PAM prioritization and stakeholder inputs.
- Is led by a small core team or consultant(s) with facilitation and synthesis skills.
- Integrates content from multiple contributors into a coherent structure.
- Engages technical reviewers (across ministries, IP/CSO reps, academia).
- Prepares summaries and visual versions for wider audiences.

Countries often use a modular approach — drafting sections in parallel (e.g., PAMs, safeguards, finance) and integrating them through a final synthesis round.

Validation and political endorsement

Validation is critical for legitimacy and ownership. This can include:

- Technical validation workshops (with sectoral ministries, academia, IP/CSO reps).
- Public validation events or consultations.
- Internal review by climate or REDD+ committees.
- Formal political endorsement — through ministerial signature, cabinet approval or publication in official registers.

Endorsement mechanisms vary by country but should aim to:

- Formalize the strategy as a national reference document.
- Empower the leading agency to coordinate across sectors.
- Enable access to results-based finance.
- Embed the strategy into climate and development planning cycles.

For public launch and communication

After endorsement, the strategy should be:

- Publicly launched with a communication strategy.
- Translated into local languages or user-friendly formats.
- Uploaded to the UNFCCC REDD+ Web Platform and/or national portals.
- Used in donor dialogues and finance negotiations.
- Shared across ministries and implementation partners.

The launch moment is an opportunity to build momentum — especially if tied to broader climate, biodiversity or development initiatives.

3.6 Integration into national policy

For a NS/AP to have a lasting impact, it must be integrated into a country's **formal policy and planning architecture** — not remain a stand-alone or donor-specific document.

This section explores options and pathways for embedding the strategy into:

- Laws and regulations.

- Climate and development plans.
- Institutional mandates.
- Budget and investment processes.
- Monitoring and reporting systems.

Integration pathways

Countries can formally integrate their NS/AP through:

A. Legal instruments

- > Presidential decrees or executive orders.
- > Sectoral legislation (e.g., forest or climate laws).
- > New or amended regulations under existing frameworks.
- > Acts of Parliament in countries with REDD+ laws.

B. Policy frameworks

- > National Development Plans (NDPs).
- > Climate change strategies or NDC implementation plans.
- > Green growth or sustainable land-use strategies.
- > Biodiversity or restoration frameworks (e.g., NBSAPs, Bonn Challenge).

C. Planning and budgeting cycles

- > Medium-Term Expenditure Frameworks (MTEFs).
- > Climate budget tagging systems.
- > Sectoral investment plans.
- > Public-private finance mechanisms.

D. Benefits of formal integration

Embedding the NS/AP in formal policy frameworks offers several advantages:

- Durability: Survives political transitions and donor cycles.

- Legitimacy: Strengthens institutional mandates and enforcement.
 - Alignment: Harmonizes forest-sector action with national goals.
 - Access to finance: Facilitates budget allocation and eligibility for RBPs.
 - Policy coherence: Reduces overlap and contradiction with other land-use policies.
- E. Risks of weak integration**
- If they are not properly integrated, REDD+ strategies may:
- Be sidelined during political changes.
 - Struggle to access domestic funding.
 - Compete with contradictory policies (e.g. agriculture, infrastructure).
 - Be viewed as “project-based” rather than national priorities.
 - Lose traction once donor funding ends.



Key takeaways

- A long-term REDD+ vision aligns forests with national development and climate goals. Defining a vision ensures REDD+ is not just about emissions reductions but also about supporting SDGs, NDCs, and broader economic, social, and environmental priorities. Countries like Chile, DRC, Ecuador, and Mexico have embedded REDD+ into national strategies to secure political and institutional ownership.
- Scope and scale decisions shape REDD+ strategy design – Countries must define:
 - › Scope- which of the five REDD+ activities to prioritize (reducing deforestation and forest degradation, e.g., conservation, enhancement, sustainable management).
 - › Scale- whether to implement at national, subnational, or nested levels.
 - › These decisions influence finance flows, monitoring systems, private sector engagement, and access to results-based finance.
- Linking actions to drivers makes REDD+ actionable – The strategy must directly target the real drivers of deforestation and degradation (e.g., agriculture, fuelwood, tenure issues). Policies and Measures (PAMs) should be prioritized based on effectiveness, efficiency, feasibility, equity, and co-benefits, with clear roles, financing, and safeguards built in.
- Strong institutional, legal, and coordination frameworks are non-negotiable – Effective REDD+ strategies require:
 - › Clear institutional mandates and responsibilities across ministries and local actors.
 - › Legal frameworks that define carbon rights, benefit-sharing, and safeguards.
 - › Coordination platforms across sectors and scales to avoid overlapping and strengthen accountability.
- Integration into national policy ensures durability and finance access – Embedding NS/APs into laws, national development plans, and national or jurisdictional budget cycles increases their resilience to political shifts, strengthens legitimacy, and unlocks both domestic and international climate finance. Without this integration, REDD+ risks remaining donor-driven and unsustainable.

Module 4



Approach to financing



This module

This module highlights that financing is one of the most critical, — and often most challenging, — dimensions of NS/AP operationalization. Without a clear and credible financing strategy, even the most well-designed plans risk stalling at the implementation stage. This section outlines how to develop a robust, multi-source REDD+ financing framework that draws on domestic budgets, bilateral and multilateral climate finance, private sector investment, and innovative financing instruments.



You will be able to...

- Identify and assess diverse funding sources for NS/AP implementation.
- Design transparent, equitable, and performance-based financing mechanisms that build trust and attract investment.

A brilliant strategy is meaningless without resources to implement it. Financing is one of the most critical — and most challenging — dimensions of NS/AP operationalization. This section outlines how to develop a credible, multi-source REDD+ financing framework, including:

- Costing PAMs and enabling actions.
- Identifying funding sources (public, donor, private, carbon).²⁰
- Linking to national budgets and planning systems.
- Enhancing readiness for results-based and market-based finance.
- Tracking expenditures and reporting to stakeholders.

1. Costing the strategy

Start with a costed implementation plan, showing:

- Estimated costs per PAM (design, rollout, scaling).
- Costs of enabling activities (monitoring, safeguards, institutional reform).
- Administration, coordination and M&E costs.
- Disaggregated costs for different time horizons (e.g., 5- or 10-year phases).
- Good practice includes sensitivity analysis, cost ranges, and assumptions for unit costs (e.g., \$/ha of restoration).

2. Identifying and mobilizing finance sources

A diversified financing strategy includes multiple streams. The NS/AP should not only identify these sources, but also assess potential access challenges and plan for mitigation:

A. Public domestic finance

- National and subnational budgets.
- Forest, climate, or environmental funds.
- Budget lines in relevant sectors (e.g. agriculture, rural development).

→ Challenge: Limited fiscal space and low prioritization of REDD+ in public budgets may hinder sustained allocations.

B. International public finance

- Readiness and implementation grants (e.g. GCF, FCPF, bilateral donors).
- Results-Based Payments (e.g. GCF, REM, CAFI, LEAF).
- GEF, adaptation funds, or climate resilience programs.

→ Challenge: Bureaucratic delays and complex application processes can slow access, particularly GCF and LEAF.

C. Private sector and market-based finance

- Jurisdictional carbon crediting (e.g. ART TREES, Verra JNR).
- Corporate offsetting and setting (e.g. zero-deforestation supply chains).

- Blended finance and green bonds.
- Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) or environmental service markets.

→ Challenge: Legal uncertainty around carbon rights and benefit sharing can deter private investment.

- Transparent benefit-sharing and registry systems.
- Institutional capacity for implementation and fiduciary management.
- Alignment with donor or market standards (e.g. GCF, ART, VCM integrity initiatives).

A good NS/AP links these options to specific PAMs, enabling activities and results.

Some NS/APs include a “finance readiness roadmap” with clear institutional milestones and legal reforms.

3. Readiness for results-based and carbon finance

4. Institutional arrangements for finance

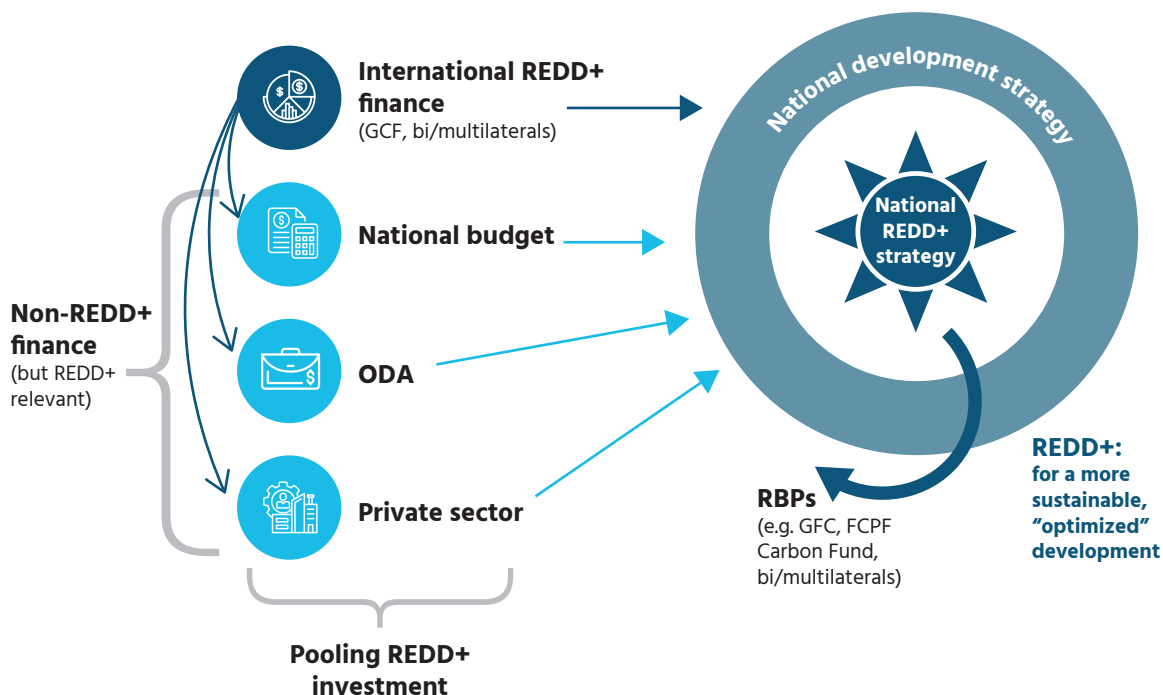
Countries aiming to access performance-based REDD+ finance must demonstrate:

A REDD+ financing framework must include institutional clarity, addressing:

- A credible FREL and MRV system.
- A functioning SIS and safeguards framework¹⁹.

- Who manages incoming funds (e.g., a national REDD+ fund, treasury, environment ministry).
- Who allocates resources to PAMs,

Figure 6: Necessity to pool and align REDD+ and non-REDD+ funding sources for NS/AP implementation



- safeguards, or stakeholders.
- Who oversees fiduciary compliance and financial reporting.
- How coordination with climate finance focal points (e.g. NDA for GCF) is handled.
- Whether decentralized or project-based finance is integrated into national accounting.

Countries may use:

- Existing climate finance mechanisms.
- New trust funds.
- Sectoral budget frameworks.
- Results-based finance contracts with nested jurisdictions or projects.

5. Transparency, tracking and accountability

NS/APs should include or refer to mechanisms for:

- Budget tracking (e.g. climate budget tagging systems).
- Expenditure reporting by PAM or region.
- Independent oversight or audits.
- Financial reporting linked to safeguards and MRV.
- Transparent benefit sharing is tied to finance disbursement.

Transparency builds trust with communities, donors, and the private sector — and positions REDD+ as a credible part of the country's climate finance portfolio.



Key takeaways

- Financing is the backbone of REDD+ implementation – Even the best National Strategy/Action Plan (NS/AP) will fail without resources. A clear, credible, and multi-source financing strategy is essential to move from planning to implementation.
- Costing the strategy is the first step – Countries must develop a costed implementation plan that:
 - i. Breaks down costs per Policy and Measure (PAM).
 - ii. Includes enabling activities (MRV, safeguards, governance reforms).
 - iii. Accounts for coordination, administration, and M&E.
 - iv. Uses sensitivity analysis and cost ranges for credibility.
- Diversified funding sources reduce risks – A robust NS/AP draws on domestic, international, and private finance, including:
 - i. Public domestic finance (budgets, environmental funds, sector allocations).
 - ii. International public finance (GCF, FCPF, bilateral donors, GEF, CAFI, REM).
 - iii. Private/market-based finance (jurisdictional carbon crediting, offsets, PES, blended finance).

This diversification helps reduce reliance on a single funding stream.
- Each financing source comes with challenges
 - i. Domestic finance → constrained fiscal space, low prioritization.
 - ii. International finance → bureaucratic delays, complex access requirements.
 - iii. Private sector → uncertainty around carbon rights and benefit-sharing discourages investment.

Recognizing and planning for these risks is key to unlocking funds.
- Readiness for results-based and carbon finance is critical – To attract results-based payments and market finance, countries must:
 - i. Establish transparent MRV systems.
 - ii. Define legal frameworks for carbon rights and benefit sharing.
 - iii. Show strong institutional capacity and safeguards. This readiness builds trust and confidence for investors and donors.

Module 5



Safeguards, risk management and social inclusion



This module

This module highlights the importance of addressing the social and environmental consequences of REDD+ activities. If not carefully managed through robust environmental and social safeguards and risk management measures, these impacts can adversely affect both communities and ecosystems, potentially undermining the very objectives the NS/AP seeks to achieve.

To mitigate these risks, safeguards should be incorporated from the earliest stages of planning, design, and implementation.



You will be able to...

- Explain the purpose and scope of environmental and social safeguards in ensuring that REDD+ activities “do no harm” and “do good,” while promoting equity, rights, and resilience.
- Apply practical approaches for integrating safeguards into NS/AP planning and implementation, including stakeholder engagement, grievance redress systems, and monitoring for compliance.

All policies, programmes and projects related to land-use rights, forest conservation, natural resource management and related governance may inherently carry risks of social and environmental consequences. If not carefully managed through robust environmental and social safeguards¹⁹ and risk management measures, these impacts can adversely affect both communities and ecosystems.

To mitigate these risks, **safeguards** should be incorporated from the earliest stages of planning and implementing these activities. Broadly speaking, safeguards are principles or measures that aim to protect or to avoid risks (“do no harm”), while promoting benefits (“do good”) (UN-REDD. 2020. Info Brief: Safeguarding People and Nature).

Consistent with this principle, the implementation of REDD+ NS/AP can also pose potential risks of negative environmental and social impacts. Acknowledging these risks and opportunities, at the 16th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16) of the UNFCCC, held in Cancun¹¹ in 2010, seven safeguards—known as the “Cancun safeguards” were adopted (UNFCCC Decision 12/CP.16, Appendix I, Paragraph 2).

Therefore, safeguards are not just compliance tools — they are essential for ensuring REDD+ contributes to inclusive, equitable and rights-based development. They also help manage risk and build trust across actors and sectors.

This section explores how safeguards, risk management, and social inclusion can be woven into the heart of the NS/AP — from planning and design to implementation and reporting.

1. The UNFCCC Cancun Safeguards¹⁹

Under the Warsaw¹⁵ Framework, countries are expected to promote and support seven safeguards, known as the Cancun Safeguards:

- Consistency with national forest governance.
- Transparent and effective forest governance structures.
- Respect for knowledge and rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.
- Full and effective participation.
- Conservation of natural forests and biodiversity.
- Avoidance of reversals (permanence).
- Reduction of displacement of emissions (leakage).

According to the same Cancun Agreement, countries aiming to access finance under the Convention must address three core safeguard requirements for REDD+:

- I) Safeguards must be promoted and supported throughout the entire REDD+ process.
- II) Develop a Safeguards Information System (SIS).¹⁹
- III) Submit Summaries of Information on how safeguards are addressed and respected.

As part of the safeguards requirement (i), the design of REDD+ actions to be included in a National Strategy or Action Plan (NS/AP) must comply with the seven Cancun Safeguards.¹⁹ In line with the overarching purpose of this policy instrument, the NS/AP formulation process

should place particular emphasis on ensuring the effective participation of all relevant stakeholders (Cancun Safeguard D), using culturally appropriate methods that enable the meaningful engagement of Indigenous Peoples and local communities (Cancun Safeguard C). These safeguards must also be addressed through a gender-responsive and socially inclusive approach, allowing REDD+ actions to reflect and accommodate diverse perspectives, interests, and realities to the extent possible, including elders, youth and other groups frequently unrepresented in policy-decision taking procedures.

Moreover, beyond addressing these safeguards requirements during the design phase, it is essential that REDD+ actions—and the broader processes and tools institutionalized within NS/APs—embed the Cancun Safeguards throughout REDD+ implementation, follow up and reporting in a cross-cutting manner. In this context, safeguards should not be viewed solely as mechanisms to avoid negative impacts, but rather as measures and tools for enhancing the overall quality, equity, and effectiveness of REDD+ implementation. NS/APs can thus serve a strategic function in maximizing non-carbon benefits (NCBs), including improved forest governance, biodiversity conservation, and the recognition and protection of the rights of Indigenous Peoples and marginalized groups (concept further developed in title 5 below), among others.

By structuring and mainstreaming safeguards¹⁹ and NCBs into the core objectives of REDD+, NS/APs can align REDD+ implementation with national contexts, domestic policy priorities, and complementary frameworks at national and subnational levels.

2. Developing a country approach to safeguards

A country approach to safeguards is a nationally tailored framework that utilizes a country's existing governance systems—such as policies, laws, regulations, and institutional arrangements—to meet the safeguards requirements of REDD+ under the UNFCCC and other initiatives relevant for the NS/AP. It enables countries to align these requirements with their national goals and provides a unified strategy to accommodate the expectations of various donors, investors and stakeholders. This approach facilitates a shared understanding of what REDD+ safeguards mean in each specific national context, helps shape more sustainable policies and measures (PaMs), and fosters country ownership while enhancing confidence in REDD+ implementation outcomes that benefit both people and nature.

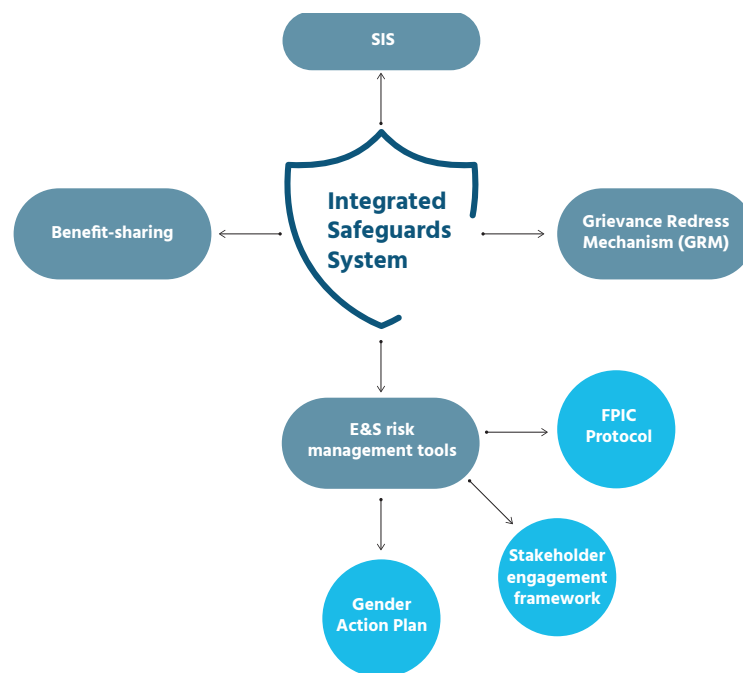
Translating the high-level principles of the Cancun Safeguards into practice at the national and subnational level requires coordinated efforts across multiple sectors and stakeholder groups and involves the development of context-specific and culturally appropriate implementation tools. These may include inclusive stakeholder engagement strategies, and the design of gender-responsive and culturally sensitive indicators for monitoring and reporting on safeguards implementation, among other mechanisms.¹⁷

This may take on additional complexity in countries implementing nested approaches—where multiple REDD+ initiatives coexist at national and subnational levels, often linked to diverse safeguards frameworks (see *Nesting Learning Journal*, UN-REDD 2024). In response, some countries are shifting from national-level safeguards systems focused mostly on reporting, developed during their REDD+ readiness phase (e.g., SIS and Sol), toward more integrated Safeguards Systems. These can help manage

environmental and social risks and monitor non-carbon benefits (NCBs) across the entire REDD+ cycle and across various financing streams (including carbon markets, result-based payments and others) and safeguards requirements.¹⁹

Such integrated systems address the foundational requirements of the Cancun¹¹ Safeguards and may also help provide a more comprehensive response to the environmental and social management of REDD+ implementation on the ground. Typically, these systems include the following components (see figure 7 for a visual summary):

Figure 7: Integrated Safeguards Systems



With support from the UN-REDD Programme, during the REDD+ readiness phase, countries have been developing their own approach to safeguards — tailored to their legal systems, institutional capacities, and stakeholder needs. Depending on the maturity of the REDD+ implementation, a country approach to safeguards may include:

- A clear interpretation of each Cancun Safeguard in the national context.
- A review of relevant policies, laws, and regulations (PLRs).
- Institutional roles and responsibilities for safeguards oversight.

- Design and rollout of the SIS.
- Feedback and grievance redress mechanisms (GRMs).
- Benefit-sharing mechanisms and/or guidelines or framework.
- Environmental and social management frameworks.

Tools and/or action plans for the implementation of specific safeguards, such as, gender,⁷ IP and LC consultations, FPIC and others. UN-REDD's support includes a focus on enhancing the environmental and social integrity of REDD+ emission reductions, recognizing this integrity

as a prerequisite for unlocking results-based finance, market access, and broader support for forest and climate policy goals. By helping countries meet safeguards requirements aligned with their selected financing pathways—whether result-based payments, carbon markets, or other mechanisms, this integrated approach contributes to strengthening the credibility, inclusiveness, and long-term sustainability of national and jurisdictional REDD+ strategies. For further information on safeguards systems and tools, see the *Updated REDD+ Safeguards Learning Journal* (UN-REDD, 2025).

3. Operationalizing safeguards in NS/AP

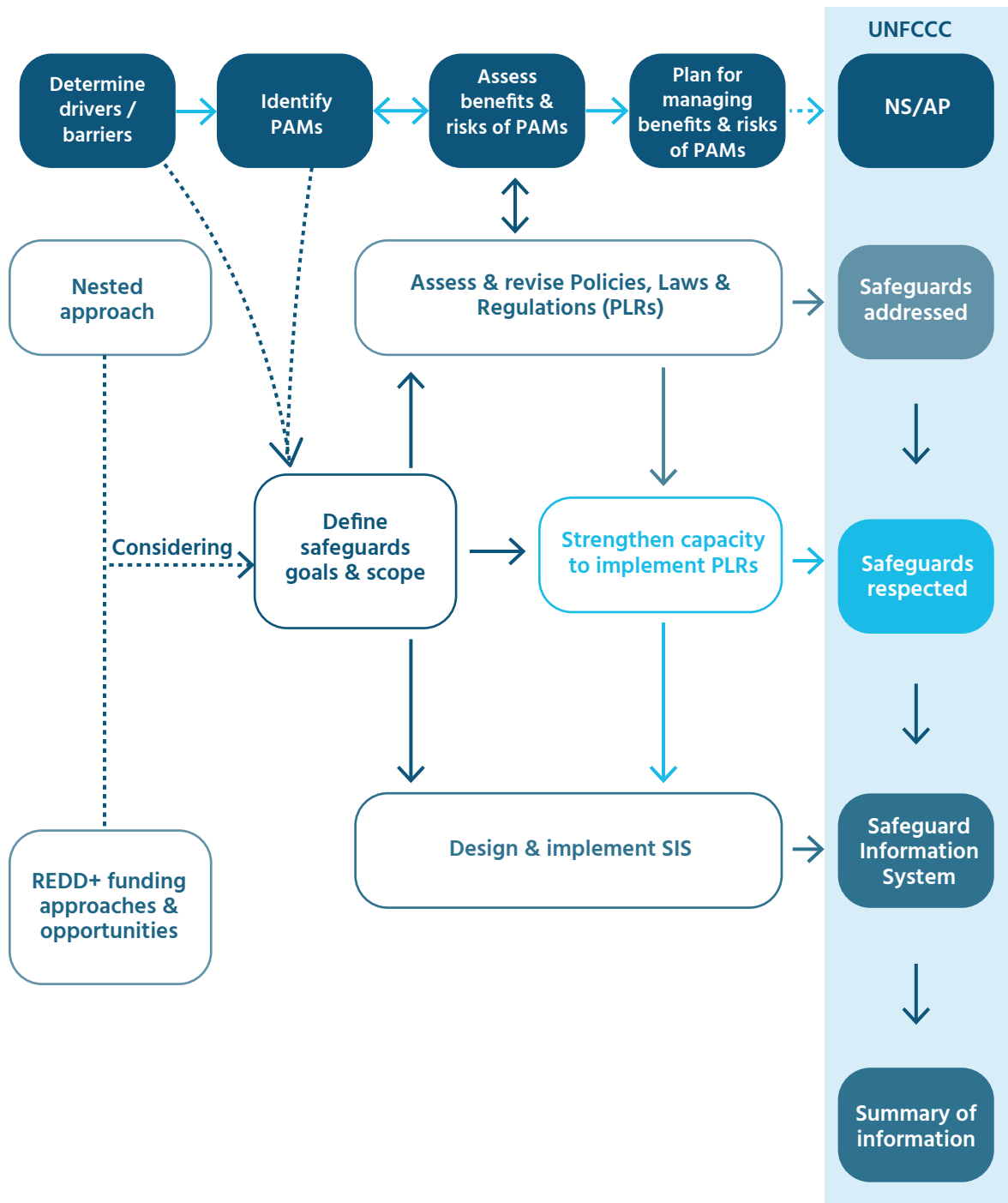
Safeguards play a critical role in ensuring the environmental and social integrity of REDD+. For this reason, NS/AP should integrate safeguards across all stages of REDD+ planning and implementation. This means not only aligning with the Cancun¹¹ Safeguards but also treating them as cross-cutting elements in the identification, design, and execution of REDD+ actions.

When safeguards are used as proactive tools for governance, and environmental and social management across scales and financing sources—rather than limited to reporting requirements, they can help identify and address risks early on, improve outcomes for people and nature, and generate broader non-carbon benefits. Embedding safeguards from the beginning strengthens transparency,¹⁶ builds stakeholder trust, and enhances the credibility and inclusiveness of REDD+ efforts.

Safeguards should not sit in a separate chapter — they should be embedded across the NS/AP, including:

- In the vision and principles of the strategy: framing REDD+ around the Cancun Safeguards’ rights and associated cultural, environmental and social aspects criteria
- As a lens for REDD+ policies and measures (PAMs) prioritization and risk screening: safeguards guide the selection and refinement of PAMs by identifying potential risks and enhancing co-benefits early in the planning process.
- Through safeguards-relevant performance indicators: including indicators linked to social inclusion, participation, and biodiversity that allow systematic monitoring of safeguard outcomes.
- Linked to grievance redress systems and institutional accountability.
- Reflected in subnational strategies and nested frameworks: safeguards must be operationalized consistently across scales to ensure coherence between national and subnational implementation.
- Included in financial risk assessments and investment proposals: to ensure that the costs of environmental and social risk management are adequately considered, and that appropriate mitigation measures and institutional arrangements are planned and budgeted for from the outset.

Figure 8: Linkages between NS/AP an Safeguards/SIS



4. Social inclusion and rights-based approaches

Effective stakeholder engagement is fundamental to the legitimacy, equity, and sustainability of REDD+ PAMs. It ensures that the voices, rights, and needs of all actors—particularly Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, and other groups in vulnerable situations—are recognized and meaningfully incorporated into REDD+ decision-making processes.

Participation is not only a safeguards requirement, but also a prerequisite for ensuring that the actions defined in a NS/AP are legitimate, culturally appropriate, and aligned with the interests and rights of those most directly affected. Involving stakeholders in defining PAMs from the outset increases the likelihood that these actions will be embraced, implemented effectively, and sustained over time. It is also essential to uphold the principles of the Cancun¹¹ Safeguards—particularly those related to inclusive participation (D) and the respect for Indigenous Peoples and local communities (C).

Inclusive participation contributes not only to the fulfillment of safeguards, but also to stronger ownership, reduced conflict risks, and improved environmental and social outcomes.

Considering the above, effective NS/AP should consider:

- Rights-based approaches, including recognition of customary land tenure.
- Gender equality in participation, decision-making, and benefit sharing.¹⁷
- Youth and intergenerational inclusion.
- Cultural heritage protection in indigenous territories.
- Free, Prior, and Informed Consultation (FPIC) as a standard for engagement.

This requires:

- Inclusion of IP and LC, and gender¹³ representatives in REDD+ governance bodies.
- Tailored consultation methods (languages, tools, timing).
- Disaggregated indicators and monitoring.
- Partnerships with local organizations and traditional governance systems.

5. Risk management and non-carbon benefits of REDD+

The implementation of REDD+—as a territorial and multi-actor policy—carries potential environmental and social (E&S) risks due to its interaction with diverse land-use systems and local contexts. This makes it essential that risk management be integrated into the very design of REDD+ actions, particularly during the definition of PAMs in a NS/AP. Rather than treating safeguards as a parallel or retrospective reporting obligation, their principles—such as respect for rights, participation, equity, and cultural appropriateness—must be embedded in the content and implementation approach of each PAM.

In the context of REDD+ implementation, “E&S risk” can be defined as the potential for unintended negative impacts resulting from REDD+ activities, policies, or measures. Environmental risks typically include threats to biodiversity, ecosystem integrity, and resilience, such as the displacement of deforestation pressures, ecosystem degradation, or loss of native biodiversity. Social risks may involve adverse effects on IP and LC, including disruption to traditional livelihoods, displacement or loss of access to land and natural resources, inequitable distribution of benefits, and infringements on rights and cultural identity.

It is worth highlighting that social risks are particularly significant for IP, local communities, small-scale farmers, and other groups with deep connections to their territories, forests and

natural resources. Such groups are frequently especially vulnerable to climate changes affecting their livelihoods, cultural heritage, and rights; with women, elders, and youth often experiencing compounded disadvantages due to cultural norms and legal frameworks influencing social relations and rights that increases their exposition to climate impacts.

NS/APs should include a risks and mitigation matrix — identifying key risks across:

- Land and resource conflict.
- Exclusion of vulnerable populations.
- Misuse of REDD+ finance.
- Emissions leakage or reversals. Legal uncertainty or institutional collapse. Risks paired with a mitigation action and monitoring indicator.

A robust safeguards framework should therefore offer a suite of appropriate context instruments to support the identification, assessment, mitigation, and monitoring of E&S risks from the outset. These tools not only help prevent harm but also enhance the potential for non-carbon benefits (NCBs), such as improved governance, strengthened land tenure, and biodiversity conservation. A detailed overview of these instruments is provided in Module 3, “REDD+ into Practice”.

Non-carbon benefits

A safeguards approach should not only prevent harm from REDD+ PAMs, but also to foster positive outcomes by enhancing social and environmental benefits, collectively termed “non-carbon benefits” (UN-REDD, 2020).

NCBs—also referred to as co-benefits or multiple benefits—are the positive impacts of REDD+ beyond emissions reductions. These may include biodiversity conservation, enhanced ecosystem services (e.g. water regulation, soil protection), improved forest resilience, secure land tenure, strengthened Indigenous and local governance, gender⁷ equality, and greater respect for rights

and participation, particularly for vulnerable groups.

While the UNFCCC does not require NCBs for accessing results-based payments, countries are encouraged to identify and promote them through their SIS, and to consider their value in REDD+ incentive mechanisms.

Incorporating NCBs into the design of an NS/AP is essential to ensure that REDD+ PAMs actively promote these benefits—not as secondary outcomes, but as integral objectives. Doing so helps build broader stakeholder engagement, secure political buy-in, and align REDD+ strategies with national and subnational development priorities. In many contexts, NCBs offer direct contributions to poverty⁹ reduction, job creation, conflict mitigation, and the recognition of Indigenous and local governance systems—issues often at the center of political agendas. Furthermore, there is a growing trend among donors and climate finance mechanisms to prioritize REDD+ initiatives that can demonstrate tangible co-benefits. Designing PAMs to maximize NCBs thus enhances not only the social legitimacy of REDD+, but also its strategic appeal and access to diversified funding opportunities

For more on how to integrate and monitor NCBs in safeguards frameworks, see the *UN-REDD 2025 Safeguards Learning Journal*.

5.1 Updating and aligning with the Paris Agreement

A National Strategy or Action Plan is not a one-time deliverable. It is a **living instrument** that must evolve alongside national priorities, global expectations, and implementation lessons.

This section explores how to structure updates, revisions, and alignment of the NS/AP with:

- Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).
- Long-Term Strategies (LTS).

- Biennial Transparency Reports (BTRs).
- Lessons from implementation and finance.

1. Planning for regular updates

Good practice suggests NS/APs should be:

- Reviewed every 3–5 years.
- Updated in sync with NDC cycles or planning reforms.
- Responsive to changes in drivers, data, or political context.
- Based on monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) systems.

The update process should:

- Include stakeholder re-engagement.
- Use implementation performance data.
- Review financing, legal and institutional shifts.
- Document links to new REDD+ activities or scaled PAMs.

2. Linking to the Paris Agreement architecture

The NS/AP is a key instrument for aligning REDD+ with the Paris Agreement, especially in the following areas:

a. NDCs (Article 4)

- NS/APs should clearly show how PAMs contribute to forest-sector mitigation targets.
- Some countries reflect REDD+ priorities directly in their NDC¹⁰ implementation plans.
- PAM-level indicators can be used to report on NDC progress.

b. Enhanced Transparency Framework (Article 13)

- Reporting under the ETF includes both the implementation of REDD+ activities and where applicable, REDD+ results through a technical annex to the Biennial Transparency Reports (BTRs).¹⁶
- NS/APs support institutional readiness for MRV, safeguards and PAM tracking.
- NS/AP performance frameworks can feed into ETF indicators.

c. Long-Term Strategies (LTS)

- Forests are a key component of carbon neutrality goals.
- NS/APs help define land-sector transitions, restoration pathways and long-term sinks.
- Some countries integrate REDD+ into LTS as a major land-use decarbonization pillar.

3. Alignment with Article 6 and carbon markets

If countries choose to engage in cooperative approaches (Article 6.2) or international crediting (Article 6.4 or voluntary markets), the NS/AP can:

- Expand guidance on how REDD+ activities align with Article 6.2 authorizations and Article 6.4 methodologies, reflecting their increasing relevance for countries
- Set out rules for nesting, baseline alignment, and methodology eligibility. As discussed during the May 2025 meeting of the Article 6.4 Supervisory Body, project-level REDD+ activities must be explicitly included in the national REDD+ strategy or action plan, FREL, monitoring system, and safeguards system to be eligible under Article 6.4. Clarify emissions accounting attribution, and the authorization process for applying corresponding adjustments, particularly for REDD+ activities intended for international transfer.

- Clarify emissions accounting attribution and the national authorization process for corresponding adjustments, particularly for REDD+ units intended for international transfer.
- Address how benefit sharing and safeguards are integrated within carbon market participation
- Enhance market integrity by ensuring transparent planning, coordinated institutional roles (e.g. between national REDD+ entities and designated Article 6 authorities), and consistent tracking of REDD+ results across voluntary and compliance frameworks
- Note that under current draft guidance, leakage requirements apply only to project-level REDD+ activities, not to jurisdictional programs.
- Integrated REDD+ into national policy frameworks.
- Engaged in jurisdictional crediting or private sector partnerships.

Cross-cutting lessons

1. Strategy design is political

REDD+ strategies are more likely to succeed when they reflect national priorities and political realities — not just technical best practice (e.g. Colombia¹ and Indonesia).

2. Ownership matters

Strategies with strong government leadership — especially involving ministries of planning and finance — tend to be better implemented and funded.

3. Inclusion drives legitimacy

Early and meaningful participation by Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and civil society builds trust and long-term support.

4. Institutions enable scale

Without clear mandates and institutional coordination, REDD+ efforts risk fragmentation or duplication.

5. Finance is a litmus test

Strategies must be costed, realistic and linked to credible finance pathways — from domestic budgets to jurisdictional carbon markets.

5.2 Lessons from country implementation

Over a decade of REDD+ implementation has produced a rich body of experience — showing not only what works, but also what can go wrong. This section distills **practical lessons** and **illustrative country cases**, highlighting how strategies evolve in real-world contexts.

It draws insights from countries that have:

- Transitioned from readiness to implementation.
- Accessed results-based payments (RBPs).



LEARNING TOOL

Review what you have just learned. Go to the [REDD+ Academy Platform](#) to watch the video with key messages and important takeaways regarding National Strategies or Action Plans.





Box 4

Five pitfalls to avoid

- ✘ Designing strategies without implementation plans
- ✘ Treating safeguards as “annexes” rather than design principles
- ✘ Relying solely on donor funding
- ✘ Ignoring subnational or community-level realities
- ✘ Failing to adapt over time



Your learning journey is concluded: What do you know now about National Strategies or Action Plans? Go to the [REDD+ Academy Platform](#) and answer the questions to assess your actual knowledge.



**LEARNING
TOOL**



Key takeaways

- Safeguards are central to REDD+ credibility and success – REDD+ activities can create social and environmental risks if not properly managed. Safeguards ensure REDD+ actions “do no harm” and “do good”, by protecting communities, rights, and ecosystems.
- The Cancun Safeguards form the global benchmark; Countries must address and respect the seven Cancun safeguards
- Safeguards must be embedded across the NS/AP cycle – Safeguards are not an afterthought; they must be integrated from planning to implementation and reporting. They guide:
 - i. Vision and principles of REDD+.
 - ii. Selection and prioritization of PAMs.
 - iii. Development of performance indicators.
 - iv. Financial risk assessments.
 - v. Subnational and nested strategies.
 Embedding safeguards enhances transparency, accountability, and investment credibility.
- Social inclusion and rights-based approaches are essential
 - i. Meaningful, culturally appropriate participation of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, youth, and other marginalized underrepresented groups is a requirement.
 - ii. Tools include FPIC (Free, Prior, and Informed Consent), tailored consultations, gender-responsive design, and inclusion in governance structures.
 - iii. This strengthens ownership, reduces conflict, and improves long-term sustainability of REDD+.

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Web resources

27. FAO Development Law Service <http://www.fao.org/legal/home/legal-office/en/>
28. REDD+ Web Platform, at <http://redd.unfccc.int/>. The UNFCCC's hub for sharing information and lessons learned about REDD+ activities.
29. UNFCCC website, at <https://unfccc.int/2860.php> (not unfccc.int). A source of background information on the convention and, in its 'Land Use and Climate Change' section, on REDD+.
30. UN-REDD Programme, at: <http://www.un-redd.org/>, and its Collaborative Online Workspace, at <http://www.unredd.net/>. Provides resources and a discussion forum to support countries engaged in REDD+ and promote stakeholder engagement.



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