**Country report: Design, Implementation and Assessment of REDD+ SES in Ecuador (2010-2012)**

*Translation to English of sections 8 &9 of the Country report: Design, Implementation and Assessment of REDD+ SES in Ecuador (2010-2012).*

Full report available in Spanish: Félix-Novoa Cristina y Aurélie Lhumeau, 2013, *Informe País: Diseño, Implementación y Evaluación de los Estándares Sociales y Ambientales REDD+ en el Ecuador.* Ministerio de Ambiente, CARE Ecuador, Conservación International. Quito.Ecuador

**Lessons learned**

**Governance**

**Facilitation team**

* It is important to ensure that the facilitation team members have additional knowledge and capacity and work together. A correct interaction among members invigorates the initiative and provides a coordinated and accountable work dynamics.
* Considering the experience of countries where the initiative is in advanced stages, it is important to assess implications in terms of time, effort and financial resources for the work of the facilitation team and the International Secretariat.
* In Ecuador, an average of five people has worked in the second stage of the initiative. A full-time employee responsible for the coordination of activities and equipment should be hired.
* Establishing ongoing open communication is essential to coordinate activities, clearly define roles for each member, monitor progress, and take next steps.
* It is important to consider adequate transfer of information to new members of the facilitation team when there are structural changes.
* The facilitation team work should be characterized by adaptiveness and seriousness so that they can adapt themselves to changing political circumstances and solve any issues that may arise during the implementation of the initiative.
* The performance of facilitation teams in pilot countries may be strengthened by continuous interaction with the International Secretariat in order to obtain constant technical support. This can be achieved by using communication strategies that complement the exchange of experience as considered in stage 2.

**Standards Committee**

* Establishing a transparent application process, with the required application criteria and period, makes it possible to ensure transparency and credibility of the National Standards Committee. This process should be complemented by a results report available to the public.
* During the application process, the facilitation team should have a strategy to ensure the representativeness of stakeholders in the event that no applications are received from key sectors.
* Committee members should be involved at an early stage to maximize training efforts and participate in the country-level interpretation, implementation and assessment processes. One way to ensure the continued participation of members is to create the NSC composed of regular members and alternates. Regular members and alternates should maintain close coordination to ensure a joint intervention.
* Participation of the NSC members is strengthened by defining clear rules of work, where roles and responsibilities are established. These rules should include important aspects such as membership and delegation of alternates, decision-making, modalities of meetings, position of spokesperson, information management, and accountability to those represented (joint responsibility).
* It is necessary to regularly provide trainings in REDD+, human rights and standards in order to level up the knowledge of NSC members, thus increasing their participation and decision-making.
* The role of agencies such as SENPLADES and the Secretariat of Peoples, Social Movements and Citizen Participation (or similar) in the accompaniment of mechanisms of national interest, such as REDD+, should be strengthened.
* A lesson learned regarding representatives of communities, peoples and nationalities, as well as private forest owners, is that an additional criterion for the creation of the NSC should have been included: assess the potential of their territories or lands to form part of REDD+ and consider not only their participation in the Forest Partners Program.
* It is necessary to ensure there is adequate time to approve the country-level interpretation in the Committee, thus gathering concerns and feedback.
* The preparation of meeting reports makes it possible to monitor the NSC activities, so it is important to validate them in the presence of all members, and distribute them through a medium of public access such as the Ministry of Environment website.
* Accountability processes and joint responsibility are factors that should be strengthened. In this way, members of spaces such as the NSC will fully meet their role as legitimate representatives of communities, and provide support for the ME by constantly sharing relevant information and receiving feedback from those represented.
* The voluntary nature of participation by the NSC members may weaken interest, so it is important to associate the selection of members to their personal and organizational motivations. A feasible strategy is to assign members the responsibility to participate in international events such as COPs or exchanges of experience.
* The decision-making role played a major role within the initiative and should be considered for other REDD+-related participation platforms.
* It is important to find a mechanism to facilitate access for alternates to information since they usually attend meetings without knowing the process. It is very important to set more strict rules of joint responsibility of members to avoid this kind of problems with delegations.
* There should be clear rules of participation by new representatives in decision-making considering that they have not been involved in the process.
* For future participation processes it is important to have more strict rules of participation in spaces and workshops in general, which include respect for the space and for other members.
* It is recommended to hold meetings not only in Quito but other locations in order to invite local stakeholders from different areas to attend meetings.

**Country-level interpretation**

* It is critical to take into account the disparity in knowledge of REDD+ and its additional definitions in the group of stakeholders that participate in the process. It was essential to organize training events that included key information on climate change, REDD+, and the standards before starting the actual country-level interpretation process. This strategy should not only focus in communities, peoples and nationalities but also other interested parties. A different methodology will be required for each group.
* In addition to training in specific issues, participations should also be trained in the methodology used for the country-level interpretation process, particularly explaining what a principle, a criterion and an indicator is, and the characteristics of each one. It is also important to explain what type of information can be added to an indicator, separating 'political' from 'technical' elements.
* In addition to participants, the facilitation team should also be given training in the methodology for the country-level interpretation process. The international Secretariat may provide technical support.
* It is important to use several means of public consultation. In Ecuador, the use of Internet has not allowed to receive feedback due to the lack of access to it and because the system was not user-friendly. Alternative methodologies may be developed, such as videoconferences or work meetings under different schemes, based on the group to be consulted.
* During the country-level interpretation process indicators should come with footnotes and the glossary to prevent unnecessary reviews.
* The translation of the standards from English to other languages should be reviewed by the countries themselves in order to avoid any mistakes or misunderstandings.
* A methodology for systematizing and processing comments needs to be established before the initiation of the country-level interpretation process. This methodology should include clear criteria that must be shared with key stakeholders at the beginning of the stage.
* Establishing clear objectives for participative workshops is crucial. A clear methodology must be put forward to ensure, on one hand, the dissemination of knowledge on standards and, on the other hand, the definition of the workshop output (indicators developed for country-specific context or comments / suggestions /concerns, so that they can be included in the final version of indicators).

**Implementation and Assessment**

* Prior to implementation of the REDD+ SES in the National REDD+ Program, the need for validation of indicators in the field was identified. In the case of Ecuador, the Forest Partners Program (PSB) was selected for the validation of indicators in the field, which required the development of a monitoring plan.
* Since specific knowledge of the programs and existing social and environmental policies, as well as experience of gathering information in the field, were required to develop a pilot, the assistance of a consultant was sought.
* The definition of the sample for the pilot implementation of REDD+ SES in the Forest Partners Program was based on a number of criteria that enabled to take into account the diversity of partners, types of forests and regions, among others. Additionally, the time and amount of resources available for the pilot implementation were limiting factors for the definition of the sample.
* After validation of indicators in the field some technical changes should be made to them, before the evaluation of the National REDD+ Program (PNREDD+) based on REDD+ SES.
* The pilot of REDD+ SES in the PSB enabled to understand the Ecuadorian context in terms of implementation of safeguards, and the recommendations for each principle based on findings relevant to strengths and weaknesses of not only indicators, but also potential partners for REDD+ activities. Furthermore, the SMART analysis made it possible to reduce indicators in terms of numbers when they contained similar information, which will make implementation, monitoring, reporting and verification easier.
* The implementation and evaluation of REDD+ SES has caused different reactions among stakeholders. On one hand, there has been a perception that the work in REDD+ SES in Ecuador was ahead of the development of general guidelines for REDD+ activities in the country. This generated uncertainty, particularly on how to address indicators specifically associated to national policies that are not yet developed. On the other hand, the presence of the Forest Partners Program (PSB )was considered as an opportunity to pilot REDD+ SES, thus using field results as reference guides, for their timely incorporation in the design of the PNREDD+ in the country

**Challenges in Ecuador**

**Articulation with other initiatives**

* In order to articulate REDD+ SES with other related initiatives, particularly the tools developed by the UN-REDD Program, *Social and Environmental Principles and Criteria* (SEPC) and *Participatory Governance Assessment* (PGA), to be implemented as a pilot in Ecuador, an analysis of complementarity at a conceptual level between REDD+ SES and SEPC has been carried out. After the approval of SEPC version 4 on 4 March 2012, the publication of an accompanying tool, *Benefit and Risks Tool* (BeRT) is expected. Once this tool is published, we will work in close collaboration with the UN-REDD Program to determine how governance processes and structures may be integrated, which will also form part of the third stage of the initiative in Ecuador.
* The first exploratory workshop on Participatory Governance Assessment was held in November 2011, which highlighted the need of having a single participation platform responsible for following up on all REDD+-related initiatives. Examples of integration at conceptual level were presented, particularly how indicators of REDD+ SES may be used to monitor governance issues and how the PGA may enable to report on governance processes in more detail. The conceptual-level integration will be completed once the PGA process identifies governance areas to be monitored in Ecuador.
* The stage of institutionalization of REDD+ SES in the National REDD+ Program will be completed through the development of a National REDD+ Safeguard Information System, which will articulate the different safeguard mechanisms mentioned above to enable Ecuador to report on the compliance with Cancun safeguards and secure multiple benefits.

**Participation in Ecuador**

The implementation of REDD+ SES has allowed to create a formal platform for participation, the National Standards Committee, and to strengthen the relationship between representatives of civil society and communities, peoples and nationalities. The NSC was formed to follow up on the second stage REDD+ SES processes. Given the diversity of REDD+-related initiatives requiring participatory processes, it is necessary to create a formal platform with the responsibility to follow up on all the initiatives, thus avoiding duplication of efforts.

It is necessary to define the level of stakeholder involvement in processes in order to ensure a balanced and meaningful participation, and time and resource limitations to develop these processes. Additionally, there is an identified need for the institutionalization of a mechanism of joint responsibility between the Ministry of Environment and representatives of civil society and communities, peoples and nationalities to ensure stakeholder representativeness and dissemination of information relevant to the processes and decisions made by the formal participation platform.

The Ministry of Environment is currently conducting a review of applications to create the REDD+ Roundtable, which will be a formal platform for stakeholder dialogue, involvement, participation, discussion, consultation and follow-up of the processes that the Ministry of Environment may carry out, during the stage of development and implementation of the REDD+ mechanism in the future. The REDD+ Roundtable is expected to start operating in August 2012.