

# UN-REDD PROGRAMME SUCCESS STORIES



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## Ecuador: successfully positioned to implement national REDD+ Action Plan

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### Introduction

Ecuador, a partner country of the UN-REDD Programme, has now become one of the most advanced developing countries to establish REDD+ readiness. This is due to the country's clear political vision, strategic inter-governmental coordination, strong local-level capacities, and transparent participatory and communications processes – together with the technical and financial support of the UN-REDD Programme. With its REDD+ readiness capacities now in place, Ecuador is now positioned to implement its REDD+ Action Plan, which is built on the country's commitment to fight climate change and promote sustainable rural development. Through the implementation of this plan, Ecuador will demonstrate its emissions reductions from deforestation and gain access to results-based payments. In this UN-REDD Programme Success Story, Ecuador shares its experiences of developing and implementing its REDD+ readiness phase, and concluding its UN-REDD National Programme.

### Ecuador's REDD+ vision and enabling framework

Ecuador's journey towards REDD+ preparation began in 2009 with the early development phases of the National Forest Inventory and pilot initiatives on REDD+ social and environmental standards. In 2012, Ecuador launched its UN-REDD National Joint Programme under the leadership of the Ministry of Environment. The programme provided technical and financial support to develop the processes and initiatives necessary to **identify and prioritize policies and measures (PAMs) to address drivers of deforestation.**

Ecuador's significant advances in the four pillars of REDD+ preparedness were then advanced through a clear vision of REDD+ which is aligned with national development goals, and the country's enabling political, legal and institutional framework.





The country's **REDD+ vision is articulated within the framework of national policies oriented towards environmental sustainability.** The main framework document, the *Plan Nacional para el Buen Vivir 2013-2017 (National Wellbeing Plan)*, is supported by comprehensive national strategies in areas including development, land use, climate change, manufacturing and energy. Within this framework, Ecuador understands REDD+ as a *means* to contribute to national efforts to reduce deforestation and forest degradation – and to promote biodiversity restoration, conservation and sustainable rural development – through the integration of compatible objectives into national policies and strategic sectors.

**From a legal perspective,** constitutional rights recognized in the national legal framework and *National Wellbeing Plan* incorporate environmental sustainability as part of Ecuador's development model. This necessitates that activities should be framed in a context of respect towards both the environment and present and future generations, with forward-looking actions that seek to reduce pressures on the environment.

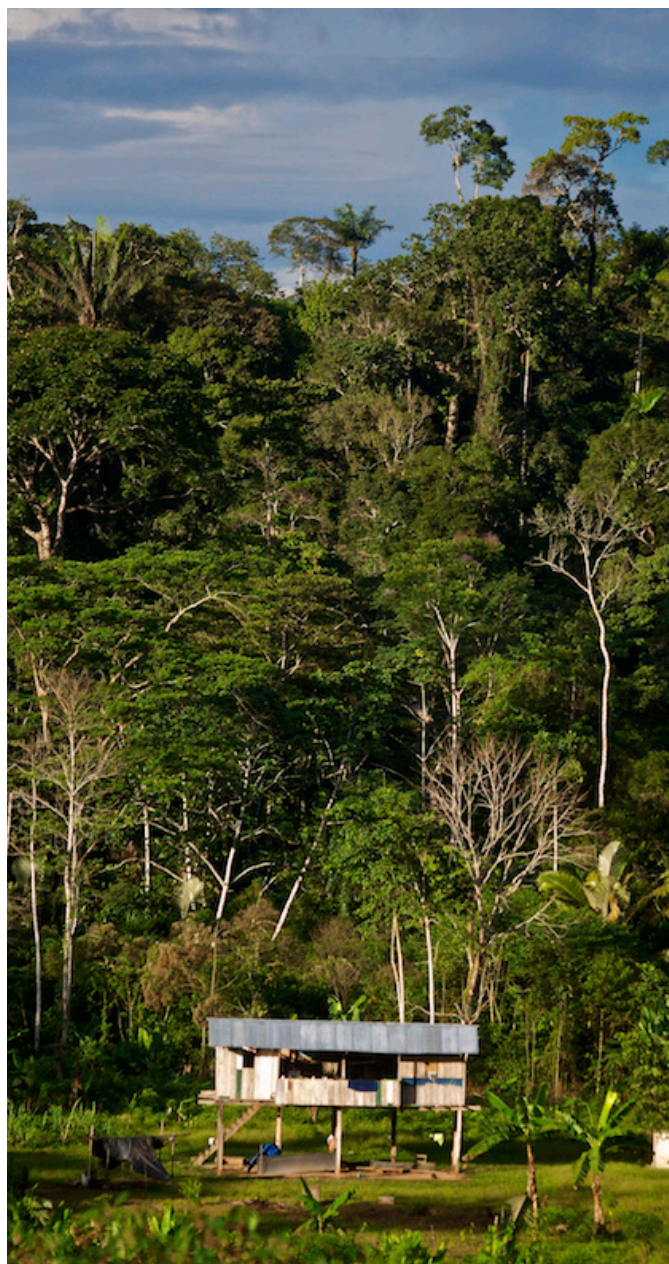
This was supported by strong governance and transparent participatory processes established by the REDD+ National Stakeholder Platform (Mesa REDD+). Multiple key stakeholders were invited to take part in this platform in order to facilitate the rich technical discussions that led to the development of key elements of Ecuador's REDD+ Action Plan.

## Key achievements of Ecuador's REDD+ readiness process

### The REDD+ Action Plan

One of the main milestones of Ecuador's REDD+ readiness process was the systematic and participatory development of its REDD+ Action Plan. This plan serves as the umbrella under which other REDD+ readiness elements are integrated and articulated.

The development of this plan included the engagement and capacity building of relevant social, political and technical stakeholders; the identification of drivers of deforestation and forest degradation; the analyses of the country's political, legal and institutional frameworks; and the identification of potential environmental and social benefits for the country.



As a result, Ecuador's REDD+ Action Plan is comprised of policies and measures which are clearly identified and prioritized along five programmatic areas: 1) Land use and institutional management policies; 2) Transition to sustainable development 3) Forest management and increased value of forests; 4) Forest restoration; and 5) Monitoring, safeguards and knowledge management.

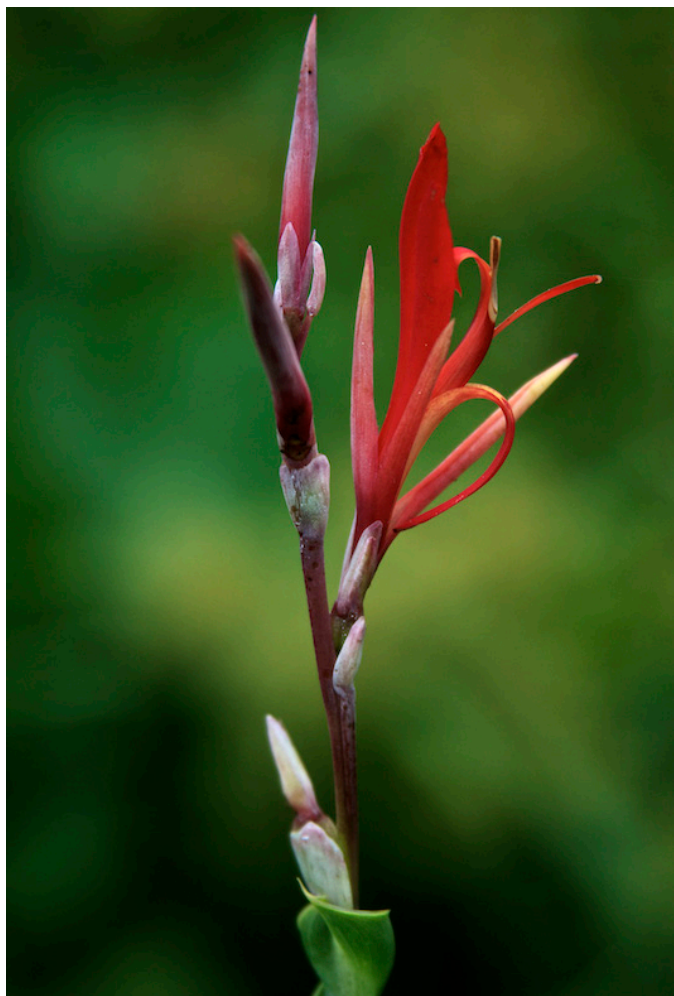
The implementation phase of the REDD+ Action Plan is designed to orient execution over time **considering three key criteria:** 1) *spatial*, implying a geographical prioritization; 2) *measures and actions*, identified territorially according to the main drivers of deforestation and forest degradation; and 3) *implementation mechanisms*.

### Financial Sustainability

It is also important to highlight that in addition to the REDD+ Action Plan, Ecuador has developed a financial strategy that includes a combination of public resources and international sources of financing.

The public funding is made available through the alignment of the REDD+ Action Plan with existing national plans and programmes, as well as the implementation of enabling policies. Additionally, it is expected that other activities will be funded through international sources such as the Forest Investment Fund (FIP), REDD+ Early Movers (REM), the Green Climate Fund (GCF), and the Global Environment Fund (GEF).

Ecuador may request REDD+ results-based payments in the future to co-finance the REDD+ Action Plan, as a means to fast-track implementation and the reduction of emissions. However, given that results-based payments mechanisms are yet fully established, Ecuador will ensure that its REDD+ Action Plan does not rely entirely on this funding source.



### National monitoring and measurement, reporting and verification system

Ecuador acknowledges that a solid national monitoring and measurement, reporting and verification system (M-MRV), built with the national capacity of the Ministry of Environment, is necessary to receive results-based payments. As such, Ecuador developed, through its UN-REDD National Programme, a national forest reference emission level (FREL). This was submitted to the UNFCCC for evaluation in December 2014 and was approved in October 2015.

Ecuador's REDD+ Action Plan is also supported by a national forest monitoring system (NFMS) and a safeguards information system (SIS) that are in advanced stages of development.

Additionally, to ensure sustainable and effective implementation of the REDD+ Action Plan, all of these elements are supported by a stakeholder engagement plan that includes specific actions to continue strengthening capacities and the management of knowledge.

With these key building blocks of REDD+ in place, the country is now ready to implement its PAMs and demonstrate effective emission reductions to access results-based payments.

## Lessons Learned

### 1. Start with a clear vision for REDD+

During this process it was critical for Ecuador to clearly understand why the country wanted to prepare for REDD+, and how REDD+ can contribute to the national agenda. This has enabled REDD+ to become a tool for mainstreaming climate change actions and supporting the government's sustainable development objectives at both the local and national levels in Ecuador.

### 2. Understand and integrate UNFCCC requirements within the national context

A country needs to take UNFCCC requirements into consideration within its own political, social, economic, cultural and environmental contexts. In Ecuador, this took place by considering existing elements, processes, laws and regulations at the national level that were specifically applicable to the REDD+ Action Plan – as well as to safeguards and stakeholder engagement processes.





### 3. Consider sequence during the development of REDD+ readiness activities

In Ecuador, it was evident that predefining the REDD+ Action Plan PAMs before having a detailed analysis of direct and indirect drivers of deforestation would not allow for a comprehensive and strategic approach. Similarly, Ecuador identified that the implementation of social and environmental safeguards without having prioritized PAMs for reducing deforestation in a national strategy would be a theoretical exercise with limited applicability.

### 4. Recognize that a change in the intervention scale has implications

Analyzing how to stop deforestation at the national level represented a radical conceptual shift for Ecuador compared to the previous approaches, in which often-disconnected local-level projects were implemented.

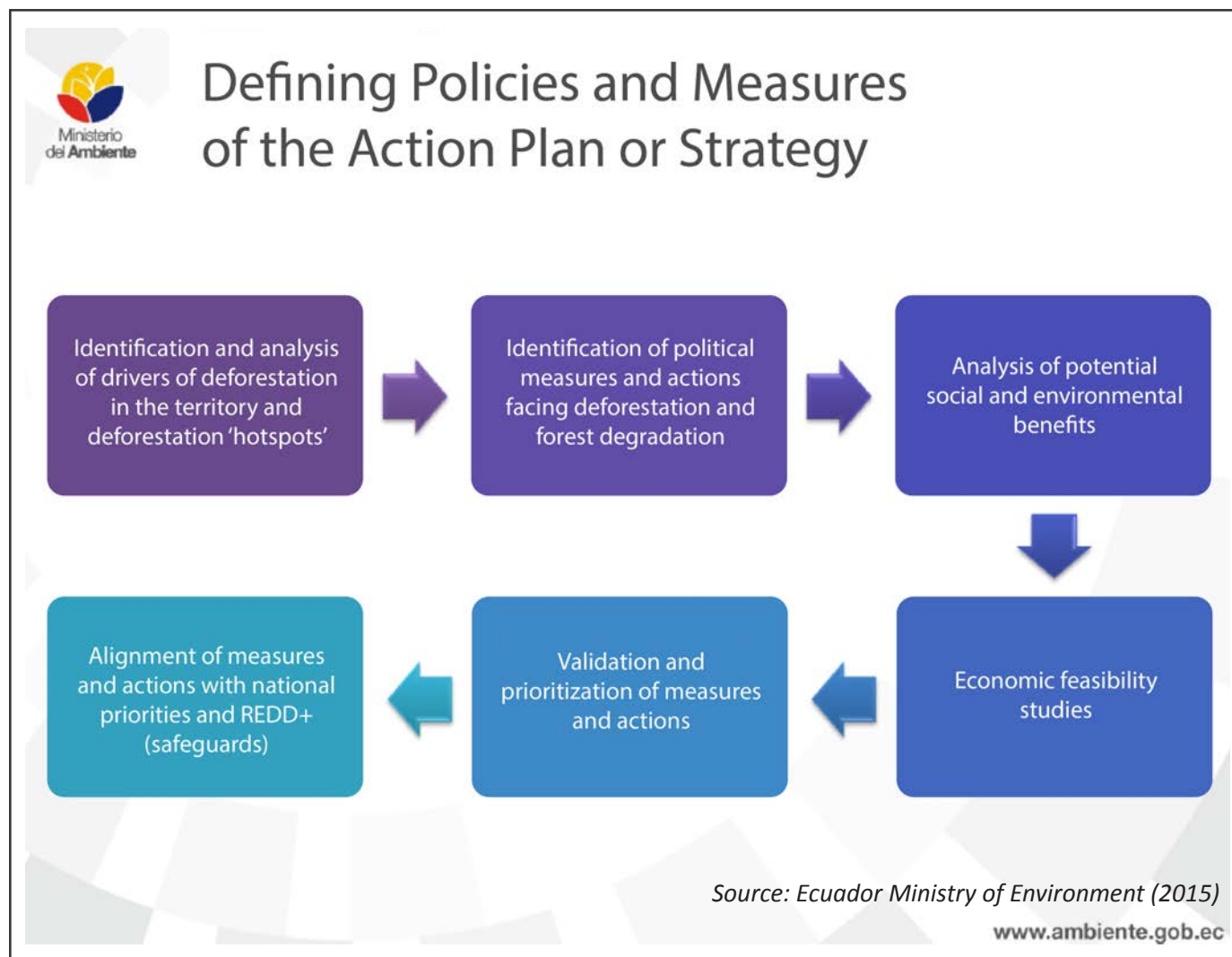
This **change in the intervention scale for the measurement of results** had various implications during the REDD+ readiness phase. For example, issues such as carbon rights

and benefit distribution were initially discussed from a local benefits perspective, while the final approach was a national vision to finance PAMs for national and local implementation to confront drivers of deforestation. However, a local vision has also been fundamental for the analysis of drivers of deforestation, and has subsequently allowed for the identification of areas for intervention with prioritized PAMs that were coherently articulated in the REDD+ Action Plan.

### 5. Recognize the importance of the political dimension of REDD+

Ecuador's experiences demonstrated that in order to finance and implement a REDD+ national plan, the plan needs to be aligned with existing PAMs and contribute to the national agenda and current initiatives, rather than duplicating efforts.

Achieving results on emissions reductions at the national level, the country learned, requires a coordinated inter-governmental and multi-sectoral approach, especially given the fact that the main drivers of deforestation originate outside of the forest sector.



## 6. Acknowledge the importance of Knowledge management and capacity building at individual, technical and institutional levels.

Based on its experience, Ecuador recommends considering national needs, capacities, strengths and limitations in the design of technical solutions for the development of a NFMS, FRELS and PAMs. Its experiences also showed that institutional strengthening and the institutionalization of forest management information is critical for the sustainability of the political and forest governance processes related to climate change and land use planning.

The learning process for REDD+ preparation, which has evolved during the last five years, has been lengthy and gradual. Ecuador identified that the exchange of knowledge and experiences among countries is a very useful exercise to understand various challenges and approaches and to assist in accelerating the preparation process.

## 7. Use clear, audience-oriented communications

Ecuador's experiences showed that a communications plan is essential to manage stakeholder expectations and facilitate the construction of a common agenda. It is crucial to have clarity on the importance of REDD+ readiness for the country, and to understand the preparation phase requirements and how the country plans to develop them.

The key communications lessons learned from Ecuador included the importance of using clear, concise and strategic messages that do not generate false stakeholder expectations, and the relevance of using audience-oriented and culturally adapted approaches to both communications and capacity building.



**Photos: Ecuador Ministry of Environment.**

**Editor:** Patricia Toquica (Knowledge Management Regional Specialist, UN-REDD Programme), **with contributions from** Patricia Serrano (Main Technical Advisor, UN-REDD Targeted Support Ecuador), Cristina García (REDD+ Focal Point, Ecuador's Ministry of Environment).

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**UN-REDD Programme Secretariat**

International Environment House,  
11-13 Chemin des Anémones,  
CH-1219 Châtelaine, Geneva, Switzerland.

Email: [un-redd@un-redd.org](mailto:un-redd@un-redd.org)

**Website:** [www.un-redd.org](http://www.un-redd.org)

**Workspace:** [www.unredd.net](http://www.unredd.net)

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