

Independent Technical Review: Myanmar

UN-REDD PROGRAMME

Reviewer: Bernice Maxton-Lee

Date: 25th October 2015



General comments on the submission document of Myanmar (maximum 200 words):

This is an impressive and ambitious project. While some general and technical refinements are suggested, there is one serious issue which appears to have been overlooked: conflicts of interest with, and acute need for monitoring of multilateral investment projects. A particular example includes (but is not limited to), World Bank Group (WBG) energy and agriculture projects which pose high risk of land clearance, land conflict and governance risks. Given the high levels of foreign exchange represented by this and other multilateral investment projects, strong attention should be paid to identifying such conflicts of interest.

A minor error is noted on page 52 of the review document (Stakeholder Engagement Officer Competencies): technical competencies list good knowledge of social forestry in Sri Lanka, rather than Myanmar.

Assessing the submission document against review criteria **(Please refer to the TORs and supporting documents)**

1. Ownership of the Programme (maximum 150 words):

A thorough review is needed of current and planned foreign corporate and multilateral investment projects. In particular, hydropower, coal, copper, jade and energy pipeline projects agreed with the Government of Myanmar and involving multiple international stakeholders, lack consistency and coherence with the planned outcomes of the Myanmar REDD+ Readiness Roadmap. Pressure is often brought to bear on national governments by international and multilateral parties to allow development projects, compromising conservation, environmental and social goals. These conflicts of interest must be identified and clearly understood.

The Government of Myanmar is encouraging increased investment for large-scale industrial agricultural expansion, but laws and institutions are not yet able to regulate large-scale land acquisitions.

Attention should be paid to criticisms of the new Myanmar Investment Law, which favours inward investment at the expense of land rights, investor obligations and dispute settlement mechanisms. This new law undermines coherence of REDD+ goals with national strategies.

2. Level of consultation, participation and engagement (maximum 150 words):

Care should be taken to ensure effective and appropriate dissemination of information, as well as identification and selection of participating groups. How are civil society representatives currently selected, and by whom? Allowing certain interest groups to select civil society representatives may result in in-built bias within the consultation, participation and engagement process.

All terms of reference, regulations, contracts and other key written materials should be carefully translated into Myanmar (or where appropriate, other national languages) and then verified to ensure all conditions, rights and obligations are accurately represented and understood. Due care and attention, and subsequent independent verification in this process are frequently overlooked, yet are critical for ensuring consistency and for minimising the risk that conditions and rights may be downgraded in translation. This process also helps to encourage long-term engagement and sustainability of the programme.

3. Programme effectiveness and cost efficiency (maximum 100 words):

With the exception of the issues laid out in this document, the programme is well-designed and demonstrates deep understanding of the country and sector dynamics.

Cost effectiveness of this programme may be undermined because other investment projects offer much higher material incentives (see suggestions for improving technical design). Budget concerns and allocation suggestions are elaborated in the section on schedule and budget.

4. Management of risks and likelihood of success (maximum 150 words):

International infrastructure development plans should be factored into risk identification, eg large-scale hydropower on intra-national waterways. National development plans may be superseded by mega international development projects with high associated cost to local society and environment. The probability of Risk Factors #7 and 8 in the Risk Log may be higher than currently assessed.

Safeguards should be put in place to manage the expansion of plantations. This is a significant risk to success which is under-represented in the current Roadmap.

Success is contingent on the development of accurate, comprehensive and comparable maps. See suggestions for improving the technical design. Insufficient attention to consistency and adoption of maps, and to data collection, represent a significant risk to success.

Understanding ministry and intra-ministry dynamics, hierarchies and motivations is key to success and to minimisation of risk. Lack of adequate accommodation of these realities has undermined REDD+ progress in Indonesia (see stakeholder engagement and consultation).

Assessing the submission documents by element of the Warsaw Framework

(Please refer to the TORs and supporting documents)

1. National REDD+ Strategy and/or Action Plan (maximum 300 words):

The programme acknowledges the importance of assessing carbon stocks and emissions, and in running a 'Corruption Risk Assessment'. Further suggestions regarding both these points are outlined elsewhere in this document.

Understanding of regional and international political economy dynamics, in the context of national development plans, should be given more weight in the National REDD+ Strategy. Deforestation is often driven by external motivations and processes. Myanmar's forestry sector contribution to national GDP is just 1%, but timber exports alone are 10% of total exports. International and multilateral investment projects are important sources of foreign exchange earnings. For forest conservation plans to be effective, they must recognise the very great significance of this motivating factor.

The programme should also recognise the speed and aggressive nature of plantation expansion in the region. The Government of Myanmar is encouraging increased investment for large-scale industrial agricultural expansion, but laws and institutions are not yet able to regulate large-scale land acquisitions. While the programme acknowledges the important of plugging legal and regulatory gaps, the rate at which mega-plantations are expanding across Southeast Asia should be flagged as a major area of concern in the Myanmar REDD+ Readiness Roadmap.

2. National Forest Reference Emission Level and/or a Forest Reference Level (maximum 200 words):

This is key to the success of the programme. The lack of a reliable baseline of carbon stock in Indonesia is one of the biggest problems in halting deforestation in that country. Lack of coherent, consistent mapping was also a key element of disappointment in Indonesia's Moratorium.

Remote Sensing (RS) sweeps may need to be increased to compensate for temporal and resolution data gaps. Mistakes because of temporal data gaps occur when (often large-scale) land-clearance and replanting takes place between satellite data shots. It can be difficult to detect differences between natural forest cover and plantation biomass. This can mask land-use change and create a misleading impression of carbon stock. Data gaps also occur when cloud cover or haze obscures satellite shots.

RS data should be supported with ground-level verification to compensate for misleading impressions from RS data. Terrestrial measurement of baseline carbon stocks should be done as widely as possible. With appropriate training this could be done at community level, possibly creating interesting opportunities for alternative rural employment. This could then be carried into continuous national forest monitoring. It could also present a potentially powerful tool for strengthening awareness and exercise of land rights against the pressure of big corporate plantations (see National Forest Monitoring).

3. Systems for National Forest Monitoring (maximum 300 words):

In other countries across the region big corporate plantations are expanding rapidly. This expansion is associated with land-grabbing, land conflict, erosion of land rights and continued limitation of alternative livelihood options for rural communities. REL/RL terrestrial measurement of baseline carbon stocks and continuous forest monitoring at community level presents opportunities for meaningful stakeholder engagement, ownership and empowerment and provides alternative means of livelihood to communities who may otherwise face dispossession and subsequent pressure to work in plantations, as already documented in Indonesia.

Understand incentives for misrepresentation of data. Empowerment of local communities can be an important positive input, but other influences and hierarchies at district and community level should be clearly understood. Local business or government representatives, district heads and other parties may have vested interests which encourage them directly to over- or under-represent data, or to bring pressure or other incentives to bear on communities to misrepresent data. These relationships and motivations should be more clearly understood.

4. Safeguard Information System (maximum 300 words):

Safeguards should be put in place to manage the expansion of plantations. This is a significant risk to success which is under-represented in the current Roadmap.

Safeguards should check regularly for development projects at multilateral and international level which represent a threat to local society and environment. In particular large-scale infrastructure and energy projects, as well as agri-business projects, are a major threat to the integrity of forests and to the workability of any forest conservation plans.

Safeguards should be designed to assure the consistency of maps. These should pay close attention to methodology of data collection, to scale and calibration, and to agreement on what should be measured and the format of representation. Establish frequent cross checks throughout the data collection phase to ensure all maps are developing according to agreed measures.

5. Stakeholder engagement and consultation (maximum 300 words):

How will information be disseminated to civil society? What are literacy and connectivity levels? Since many rural stakeholders are unaware of their land/ownership rights, and many may lack access to online information platforms, attention should be paid to appropriate measures to engage them. However this outreach should also recognise the hierarchies and possible conflicts of interest with other stakeholders who may oppose new modes of engagement.

Understand ministry and intra-ministry dynamics, hierarchies and benefit flows to ensure long-term workability of programme. Identify possible areas of conflict. This was identified as one of the factors which undermined BP-REDD, the REDD+ agency in Indonesia. Where ministers feel threatened in terms of authority or benefit flows, engagement, consultation and cooperation will be undermined, increasing probability of Risk Factors #1 and 2 in the Risk Log.

There should be inclusive consultation of business interests at national and international levels to encourage responsible and accountable investment and to address the increasing phenomenon of land-grabbing. Pressure must be brought to bear on multilateral agencies and international corporations to conduct responsible and accountable investment.

6. Schedule and Budget_(maximum 300 words):

There is some concern that the budget allocation is too low. Certain elements of the Readiness Roadmap are likely to require higher investment if they are to be effective, in particular sections 5 and 6 (REL/RL and National Forest Monitoring and Inventory development).

Given that the National Forest Inventory is intended to become a key tool to inform national land use planning, 'by collecting and making available data on timber stocks, biodiversity and human uses of forests, in addition to carbon stocks', it may be advisable to increase resource allocation for measurement (even limited to pilot level) of REL/RL for baseline carbon stocks, accounting for more RS sweeps and broader ground-level verification. Accepting that this programme is at the level of 'Readiness', the budget may nonetheless also take into account pilot training at community levels for continuous forest monitoring. It is likely to require significant resources to achieve the GHG inventory reporting principles of comparability, completeness and accuracy (including training, coordination, reporting, analysis, feedback etc.), which further argues for an increase or reweighting of the budget.

7. Anticipated Monitoring and Evaluation Framework_(maximum 300 words):

The process of data collection regarding carbon stocks and the development of the national forest inventory should be continuously monitored to ensure consistency, accuracy and comparability and to avoid diversion from the original reference framework.

Investment activities at the international level, both ongoing and planned, should be continuously monitored and assessed for social and environmental impacts and for the pressure they might bring to national policies, strategies and development planning to deviate from REDD+ goals.

Perception of benefits of inclusion in the REDD+ should be regularly monitored at all levels. Cooperation which may initially be good, can wane if participants perceive that their direct material, social or professional gains have been undermined. The programme should include the goal of continuous improved understanding of cultural, social and hierarchical motivations at all levels to ensure long-term workability.

Suggestions for improving the technical design of the submission of Myanmar (maximum 400 words):

Forest conservation often fails to adequately recognise the drivers of deforestation. Incentives for land use change frequently outweigh, by several orders of magnitude, incentives for sustainable land management, in terms of numbers employed, benefit flows and foreign exchange earnings. Failure to map out the benefit flows of socially and environmentally destructive projects is a major reason for failure of programmes elsewhere in the region, eg. Indonesia. The stakeholder map should recognise parties whose mandate requires or often results in land-use change, including foreign investment partners and multilateral institutions. Failure to do this in Indonesia has resulted in troublesome conflicts of interest.

A common mistake in carbon stock and forest inventory mapping is lack of comparability and consistency. It is vital that the same maps are used by all parties, country-wide. Effectiveness of conservation programmes in Indonesia are fatally undermined because different parties use different maps (some of which are decades out of date). Care should also be taken that measurements from different areas are comparable and are presented in the same format. Calibrations, reference levels, sample size etc should be made explicit in the design phase, and continuously monitored throughout the data collection process, to avoid wasting funds, time, and data and to ensure the production of one, comprehensive, comparable set of maps.

Safeguards should be put in place in the design phase to account for conflicts of interest to national strategies, policies and development planning processes from multilateral and international agribusiness and infrastructure projects. These should include mechanisms to limit the size of land acquisitions, ensure crop diversity to limit monoculture development, and provide alternative means of sustainable employment for communities which might otherwise be drawn into large-scale development projects. Outward-facing measures should also be prepared at the design phase to address irresponsible, unaccountable and unsustainable behaviour by international and multilateral agencies. The rapid expansion of (predominantly oil palm) plantations elsewhere in the region have eroded land rights, and reduced the voice and access to alternative livelihoods of smallholders (although their participation and rights are defined in law). Measures should be put in place in the design phase to account for these risks.