



UN-REDD Asia-Pacific

Work on Methodologies for Reference Levels

The UN-REDD Viet Nam Programme has undertaken a study into guidelines and methodology for the development of Reference Levels (RLs). RLs are the yardstick against which achievements of the REDD programme will be measured and their proper elaboration is therefore critical.

Reference Levels are widely debated at the level of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and generic guidance has been developed for them. They are to be constructed using methods from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) *Good Practice Guidance*, but beyond that countries have a lot of leverage to account for conditions that are prevalent within or specific to their territory, forests, government institutions and legal framework. With this freedom comes the responsibility to do it right. The Viet Nam study identifies the options available to construct Reference Levels that are both adequate and appropriate for national circumstances.

Introduction to and Key Elements of Reference Levels (RLs)

RLs give amounts of carbon stored in forests over a period of time. They can apply to reductions in emissions from deforestation or forest degradation – so they are called **Reference Emission Levels (RELS)** – or they can apply to the other activities under REDD+: sustainable management of forests, conservation and enhancement of carbon stocks

Reference Levels can be based on past observations of the state of the forest to determine the trend in forest biomass over time. Typically, a period of 10 to 20 years is analyzed. This historical trend can be extended some 10 years into the future to provide the *business as usual* (BAU) scenario: What will happen to the forest if there is no REDD+ mechanism?

The achievements within a REDD+ country are compared against the BAU scenario, and once established, it cannot be changed during a specific implementation of REDD+ to incentivize action.

The proper development of RLs is therefore essential. If they are too stringent, the country cannot generate enough carbon credits. On the other hand, if they are too lenient, the buyers of the carbon credits will have no confidence that the carbon credits are real.

Multiple RLs can be created for a single country, but ultimately they have to cover all REDD+ activities and all forest resources within the country.

THE UN-REDD PROGRAMME

The UN-REDD Programme is the United Nations Collaborative initiative on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD), which builds on the convening power and expertise of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Development

Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The Programme assists developing countries to prepare and implement their national REDD+ strategies and mechanisms to improve forest governance.

LESSONS LEARNED

ESTABLISHING REFERENCE (EMISSION) LEVELS IN ASIA-PACIFIC

Lesson 1: National circumstances may be factored into RLs, using secondary data sets such as population dynamics and distribution, road networks or socio-economic development

In this way, RLs better reflect the local context. Therefore, countries should pay close attention to analysis of these issues in their REDD+ readiness process, and ensure that national circumstances are fully reported in their National Communications to the UNFCCC. Failure to do so increases the risk that proposed adjustments due to national circumstances are rejected by the UNFCCC.

Lesson 2: The UNFCCC requires that Reference Levels be developed using guidance from the IPCC, in particular the *Good Practice Guidance for Land Use, Land-use Change and Forestry*

Similarly, countries are obliged to follow the IPCC guidance in preparing the National Communications (NCs) to the UNFCCC. Many tools used for the analyses required under the NC are analogous to those required for RLs. Therefore, countries' experiences in preparing NCs are largely relevant to estimation of RLs.

Lesson 3: Countries should build capacity to monitor the appropriateness and relevance of Reference Levels continuously

They should then be updated whenever called for, and whenever UNFCCC rules (to be developed) permit. Reference Levels adapted over time can reflect new knowledge, policies or forest resource conditions.

Lesson 4: For RL to be most useful, a country's forests should be stratified into more uniform classes

These classes could be ecological (e.g. tropical dry, tropical wet, montane, mangrove, bamboo, etc.) or administrative (e.g. for different agencies). For each of these classes, RLs should be developed. Together they make up the national Reference Level. This means more work, but also more accurate RLs and carbon stock assessments. These classes can play a much larger role in the national REDD+ strategies, such as the development and implementation of intervention strategies for sustainable use of the forests, specific measuring, reporting and verification (MRV) approaches, diversified mechanisms of payments, co-benefits and joint implementation (e.g. REDD+ and coastal zone management in mangrove forests), etc.



Photo by Hiroshi Hiraoka, FAO

For more information, please visit www.UN-REDD.org or contact:

Mr. Petteri Vuorinen
Regional Coordinator, FAO
+66 2 697 4301
petteri.vuorinen@fao.org

Mr. Timothy Boyle
Regional Coordinator, UNDP
+66 2 288 2728
timothy.boyle@undp.org

Ms. Hanna Uusimaa
Programme Officer, UNEP
+66 2 288 2861
hanna.uusimaa@unep.org

UN-REDD
PROGRAMME

