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PROGRAMME

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Synthesis of National Programme Final Evaluations

UN-REDD PROGRAMME

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction

The UN-REDD Programme is the United Nations collaborative initiative on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) in developing countries. The Programme was launched in 2008 and 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). In 2010, as member states set out the Cancun Agreements at COP16, REDD became REDD+ to reflect the new components of not only reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, but also to the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests, and the enhancement of forest carbon stocks. Within its remit, REDD+ has the potential to simultaneously contribute to climate change mitigation and poverty alleviation, whilst conserving biodiversity and sustaining vital ecosystem services.

Since its inception, the UN-REDD Programme has offered technical support and specialized expertise on all aspects of REDD+ to over 60 countries. 26 of those developing countries are supported by the UN-REDD Programme through country programmes, helping them to implement national REDD+ strategies guided by the principles of country ownership and the UN human rights-based approach, with a strong focus on engagement of all stakeholders, including indigenous peoples and civil society involvement. Those countries include seven in the Africa region (Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, the Republic of the Congo, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia), ten in Asia-Pacific (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, and Viet Nam), and nine in Latin America and the Caribbean (Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, and Peru).

Final evaluations of those country programmes that have been concluded offer a great basis to identify best practices, solutions for bottlenecks and problems both on national and/or regional level, and provide a synthesis of key findings, conclusions and recommendations for future country programmes. Those are described and listed in more detail below.

1.1 Context and use of the synthesis note

Evaluations of UN-REDD country programmes have two primary objectives: (i) to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, and (ii) to promote learning, feedback and knowledge sharing through best practices and lessons learned among the participating UN agencies, UN-REDD implementing partners, and partner countries. Country programme evaluations should provide an independent assessment of programme performance in terms of relevance, effectiveness (achievement of outputs and outcomes), efficiency, sustainability and impact (actual or potential). Aligned with lessons learned, the evaluations identify recommendations of operational and technical relevance for the formulation and implementation of future UN-REDD Programme support in the country and/or the UN-REDD Programme as a whole.

The primary audience for the country programme evaluations is comprised of the government where the programme takes place, the three participating UN agencies, and UN-REDD Programme implementing partners. The wider audience includes other national stakeholders and the UN-REDD Programme main governing body. Programme evaluations are made public on the UN-REDD Programme workspace (http://www.unredd.net/) as well as the MPTF Gateway for the UN-REDD Programme Fund (http://mptf.undp.org/factsheet/fund/CCF00). The synthesis of findings, lessons learned and recommendations from country programme evaluations is regularly presented to the main governing body and UN-REDD Programme partner countries for discussion.

This information note is structured following standard evaluation practices and provides a synthesis of the six country programmes that have concluded, and hence are operationally and/or financially closed, and whose final evaluations were completed as of August 2016. Those six countries are: Cambodia, Ecuador, Indonesia, Panama, Tanzania and Viet Nam. Draft evaluations have been received from the Democratic Republic of Congo as well as the Solomon Islands. The submitted final evaluations provide the basis for this synthesis information note, including brief series of lessons that are hereby set out for consideration in ongoing national programmes.

1.2 Evaluation methodology and process

As defined in the UN-REDD Programme Handbook for National Programmes and Other National-Level Activities, *"all programmes supported through the UN-REDD Programme Fund will undertake a final evaluation which will assess the relevance and effectiveness of the programme, and measure the development impact of the results achieved, on the basis of the initial analysis and indicators described at the time of programme formulation"*.

In addition, the legal framework set in the Terms of Reference and the Rules of Procedure for the UN-REDD Programme Fund identifies that UN-REDD National Programmes are monitored and evaluated regularly. Based on the semi-annual and annual reporting to the Programme and the Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office (MPTF-O), a final narrative is to be submitted one month after operational closure. In support of developing a final report that takes into account all programme activities, an external final evaluation of the National Programme is then carried out by an independent reviewer, in accordance with the evaluation policies of the Participating UN Organizations. The template Terms of Reference for these evaluations can be found here.

Evaluation methodology

UN-REDD country programme evaluations have to adhere to the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG) norms[1] and standards[2] for evaluations on the UN system. They are conducted by an evaluation team comprised of independent consultants under the overall responsibility and management of the UN-REDD country team, in consultation with the government of the partner country and relevant staff of the participating UN agencies. The evaluation has to adopt a consultative and transparent approach with both internal and external stakeholders.

Findings and judgements should be based on sound evidence and analysis, and be clearly documented in the evaluation report. Information should be verified to the fullest extent possible[3]. Analyses leading to evaluative judgements should always be clearly spelled out, as should methodological limitations. Evaluations should make use of an appropriate mix of data collection and analysis tools, including desk reviews of background and project documents prepared by the UN-REDD country team, and interviews with key informants and programme stakeholders.

Country programme evaluations are expected to use a Theory of Change (TOC) approach to better understand the programme logic and assess effectiveness, sustainability and impact. The TOC depicts the causal pathways from outputs through outcomes towards impact. The TOC also identifies anticipated intermediate phases in the transition from outputs to outcomes and then impacts, as well as external factors that have the potential to influence the pace and extent of anticipated change. The evaluation teams are expected to reconstruct the TOC of UN-REDD country programmes based on a review of programme documents and inception interviews with programme managers. The evaluation teams should discuss the reconstructed TOC with key stakeholders during interviews in order to ascertain the causal pathways identified and the validity of impact drivers and assumptions described in the TOC.

Evaluation process

The UN-REDD country team is fully responsible for the evaluation process. Country programme evaluation Terms of Reference (TOR) are drafted by the UN-REDD country team based on a template prepared by the evaluation units of the three UN partnering agencies. The draft TORs are then shared with country programme partners for review and comment. The country team finalizes the TORs on the basis of comments received by all counterparts. Based on those TOR, the UN-REDD country team selects the evaluation consultants and launches the evaluation.

Before going into data collection, evaluation teams prepare an inception report containing a thorough review of the project design and evaluation framework. The inception report should detail the evaluators' understanding of what is being evaluated and why, showing how the evaluation questions can be answered, from which data sources and by means of which data collection and analysis methods. The evaluation framework should present in further detail the evaluation questions under each criterion with their respective indicators and data sources. The inception report is then shared with the UN-REDD country team for review and comment, and the final inception report is sent to relevant stakeholders for their consideration.

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[1] Norms for evaluation in the UN system: http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/21
[2] Standards for evaluation in the UN system: http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/22
[3] Individuals should not be mentioned by name, as anonymity will need to be preserved. In such rare cases, sources can be expressed in generic terms (i.e. government, donor, etc.).

Evaluation teams are fully responsible for their reports. They are expected to state their independent conclusions and recommendations, which may not necessarily reflect the views of the government hosting the particular UNREDD programme, or the three participating UN agencies. The evaluation team is required to send the first draft evaluation report to the UN-REDD country team for review and comment. The evaluation team will incorporate comments received from the UN-REDD country team as appropriate. The revised draft evaluation report will then be shared with the UN-REDD Secretariat and NP executing partners for review and comments. Comments will be sent directly to the evaluation team, who will then finalize the evaluation report taking on board the UN-REDD Secretariat, NP executing partner, and government comments as appropriate. The final report gets published on the UN-REDD workspace. In addition, there is an internal management response by the UN agencies addressing the key findings, recommendations, and how the actions will be carried out as a result.

Each of the three Participating UN Organizations has an evaluation unit. These entities have been involved in the formulation of the UNREDD evaluation function and reserve the right to periodically review the evaluations carried out on national programmes. This 'Evaluation Management Group' is periodically asked to commission and manage an external evaluation of the UNREDD programme as a whole, building from the results of the national programmes. The first of these global programme-wide evaluations was carried out in 2014.

Evaluation timing, costing and team

Final evaluations of a UN-REDD country programme should be initiated within six months after completion, and before operational closure of the programme. Countries and UN agencies need to ensure that sufficient funding is allocated in the budget for the final evaluation, as they are funded from within the overall programme budget. Hence, it is the responsibility of the country programme design team to foresee this expectation and build in an adequate evaluation budget.

The evaluation team typically consists of two or more evaluators, including one serving as team leader. The evaluation team should comprise the best available combination of skills required to assess the country programme, and therefore tailored to evaluate the key activities and focus of the programme. Knowledge of the country in question is essential, as is sound evaluation experience and good technical understanding of REDD+ concepts and approaches. Members of the evaluation team must have had no previous direct involvement in the formulation, implementation or backstopping of the programme. The final draft report is subject to comment by all main stakeholders before being validated.

Final evaluations for the six countries of Cambodia[4] (2011-2015), Ecuador[5] (2011-2015), Indonesia[6] (2010-2014), Panama[7] (2010-2015), Tanzania[8] (2010-2014) and Viet Nam[9] (2009-2014) can be found on the UN-REDD Programme workspace and the MPTF Gateway.

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[4] http://www.unredd.net/documents/policy-board-86/15th-policy-board-meeting-san-jose-costa-rica-7-10-november-2015/session-3-national-programmes/cambodia-1/14808-cambodia-final-evaluation-report.html
[5] http://mptf.undp.org/factsheet/project/00078169
[6] http://www.unredd.net/documents/un-redd-partner-countries-181/asia-the-pacific-333/a-p-partner-countries/indonesia-187/15077-final-evaluation-of-the-un-redd-programme-in-indonesia.html
[7] http://mptf.undp.org/factsheet/project/00073510
[8] http://mptf.undp.org/factsheet/project/00073511
[9] …

2. Key findings

The below list includes some of the most important key findings and identified challenges from the five concluded national programmes.

2.1 Political, social and economic aspects

- The UN-REDD Programme fosters inter-ministerial collaboration in national administration, including supporting the national commitment to REDD+ of all necessary key partners. Policies and measures associated to climate change and forestry are often not yet woven in relevant national plans. In countries where government commitment has been strongly voiced, concerns have been raised that even though the country programme's outputs are well defined, they are not self-sustaining after operational and financial closure of the programme.

- Government political dialogue and capacities related to climate change need further development before mitigation can be mainstreamed into various national policies or sub-national operations. This has to be kept in mind when setting up the framework of a country programme.

- REDD+ implementation needs to be integrated into sectors that go beyond the forestry sector, as it is a potential mechanism for attracting not only forest sector investments, but those if others as well, furthering cost-effectiveness. It has to be kept in mind that political risks need to be reduced first before public resources can be dedicated to the cross-sectoral mainstreaming. Governments might not take ownership of UN-REDD country programmes until long-term payments for REDD+ activities are established.

2.2 National engagement

- The UN-REDD country programmes have enhanced capacity development for key national partners in regard to understanding the concept of REDD+, and helped introduce key elements of national REDD+ architecture. The adaptation of different programme approaches should be a focus when setting up a country programme, as institutional disincentives are different for some governments and might limit the ability of the three UN organisations to adapt UN-REDD more effectively to the countries' context.

- All six evaluations have underlined that the rate of deforestation and the overall status of the national forestry sector in the associated programme countries will need to be stronger featured in the overall context of the global UN-REDD Programme, highlighting the importance of a country programme.

- The evaluations recognized that the strategic framework of the country programmes have only been partly appropriately designed to support the government's REDD+ national plan for both readiness, and policies and measures. Hence, outcomes, as identified in the results framework, might not have been equally relevant for programme implementation.

- Annual/final reports and lessons learned have shown that the implementation of country programmes has contributed greatly to creating the right climate for and the promotion of discussions on the need to curb greenhouse gas emissions, rehabilitate degraded forest lands and conserve primary forest.

2.3 Stakeholders and partnerships

- There is insufficient interaction with international and/or national partners and other REDD+ initiatives focusing on improving forest governance and changing national land use practices.

- Results from the six evaluations show that the programmes overall were rigid, making it difficult for the National Programme to adjust to contextual changes, including a flexible choice on national implementing partners.

2.4 Effectiveness and efficiency

- Country programmes have effectively contributed to robust national REDD+ mechanisms, including national REDD+ networks and technical working groups.

- Financial sustainability of the country programme depends strongly on international agreements for long-term financing for REDD+. Hence, it is important that the results and momentum build through the UN-REDD country programme and other REDD+ activities can be maintained.

- Sustainability and likelihood of significant impacts are in some cases imperilled by a combination of poor coordination and collaboration, lack of national strategic direction and flawed programme design, lacking in robust analysis of the national context and identification of key risks.

- At the end of the programme cycle, most countries are not ready to advance from REDD+ readiness to the next stage. The status of REDD+ readiness is moderately unsatisfactory considering the length of time the country programme and other bilateral and/or multilateral support programmes have been operating in the country.

- Country programme outcomes and outputs, as identified in the results framework, have been designed to lay the foundation for future REDD+ activities. As such, outputs have a limited direct contributed to key impacts as identified in the Theory of Change, such as increased sector participation, enhanced policies and regulations to enable stakeholder participation, capacity development at sub-national level, clarification of carbon ownership, etc.

- Limited staff numbers are causing delays in activity implementation, as the national programmes sometimes lack the ability to translate policies into operational activities, and technical and scientific material into policy advice. In addition, poor remuneration levels, coupled with competing priorities and inadequate financial incentives, are in some cases impeding performance, as staff turn their attention towards opportunities to supplement their incomes instead of focusing on country programme activities.

3. Conclusions and lessons learned – relevance, effectiveness and sustainability

The following conclusions are subdivided into different aspects such as relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability, and focus on lessons learned for country implementation as well as UN agency processes.

Relevance

All evaluations have indicated that the UN-REDD country programmes are relevant for the following:

(a) Governments and other stakeholders have increased recognition that deforestation and forest degradation is a serious development problem that REDD+ can help to address.

(b) The UN-REDD Programme has successfully provided support to REDD+ readiness in the country, and pioneers innovative processes and instruments; and

(c) The UN-REDD Programme has introduced new REDD+ concepts to a range of national stakeholders, and enhanced national capacity to access future results-based financing.

Effectiveness – programme design and implementation, and institutional capacity

All of the evaluated country programmes have promoted the concept of REDD+, and helped the government and other involved stakeholders to prepare for REDD+ activities and advance readiness. In addition, country programmes have enhanced institutional capacities, and helped identify shortcomings and gaps in the current government structure. Overall support through the UN-REDD Programme has been through technical input – normative frameworks, capacity development, engagement with civil society and Indigenous Peoples communities, and prioritisation of social and environmental benefits.

Programme Design – Programme design should incorporate a clear exit or scale-back strategy that allows national institutions to understand the handover process and structure, and understand the potential ramifications after operational and/or financial closure of the programme. Global REDD+ uncertainties have led to programme design flaws and contributed to problems in performance. Additional concerns were raised about overly ambitious and unrealistic programme design, resulting in shortcomings in the results frameworks.

Programme Implementation – Implementation challenges have mostly been operational, and slow decision-making has compounded these operational challenges. Additionally, simultaneous bilateral or multilateral support programmes have resulted in coordination challenges and risks of activity overlap and duplication, thereby increasing the administrative burden, reporting, and coordination required by governments.

Institutional capacity – Country programme implementation has enhanced inter-ministerial coordination, but concerns have been raised in more than one case that programmes should rely primarily on existing in-country capacity. The importance to choose capable and suitable implementing partners in the country has been underlined, as the development of REDD+ institutional frameworks and limited capacities of involved partners has caused slow overall progress.

Efficiency

UN agency harmonization – The final evaluations for the country programmes have all raised concerns about slow programme delivery and high transaction costs stemming (partly) from working jointly with three different UN agencies and their different internal process and operational requirements. The concept of 'Delivering as One' presents an opportunity to minimize complex and confusing operating processes, and better coordinate across agencies, especially in countries that have volunteered to pilot the Delivering as One concept.

Sustainability

It has been collectively noted that ineffective coordination capacities within and outside the various involved government units can threaten the sustainability of established activities and structures, and can severely limit the mainstreaming of REDD+ into activities directly and/or indirectly driving deforestation. Changes in the political landscape will place additional stress on programme

sustainability, unless sufficient numbers of experts and staff get trained and knowledge is maintained. In addition, financial sustainability depends on ongoing and future international agreements for long-term financing for REDD+.

4. Recommendations

Building on the findings and conclusions from the final evaluations, the following recommendations for the set-up of future country programmes have been identified for both operational and programmatic procedures.

Programme coordination

- Country programmes should be demand-driven and needs-based, with flexibility to adapt to national context, based on national drivers of deforestation.

- Noting the history of policy failures and present challenges to address the underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation, it is necessary to enhance and accelerate the REDD+ readiness process by taking a more direct approach to improve adherence to national policies and regulations.

- Comprehensive national capacity needs assessments should always be carried out as a first step to programme design.

- REDD+ readiness should be enhanced by linking forest protection measures more closely to national policies, measures and regulations, and integrating them into overall national planning processes.

- Country programmes should be designed using a Theory of Change, and with results-based performance indicators rather than output-level indicators.

- Establish mechanisms to better assess, mitigate and manage risks and benefits for REDD+.

- Develop mechanisms to buffer and adapt to external risks, such as changes in national dynamics, policies and staff.

- Better coordinate with bilateral donor initiatives and other international REDD+ initiatives, and harmonize where possible.

- Support national capacity building to engage and coordinate with a broad multi-sectoral community of REDD+ participants, including from the forestry industry, the private sector, etc.

Operational procedures

- Country programmes should be developed as a unified UN programme from the beginning – including operations, funding, reporting as one, etc.

- To increase openness and transparency, management arrangements of the main governing bodies should ensure inclusion of representatives of the following groups: civil society, private sector, Indigenous Peoples, and key provinces.

- Administrative processes should be sped up, with quicker and simplified implementation methods, and streamlined procedures.

- Clear and easily understandable transition strategies and handover processes should be developed ahead of both operational and/or financial closure.

- Development of realistic timeframes for implementation should be established, recognizing inevitable delays when piloting new concepts.

- Country programmes focusing on REDD+ readiness should provide real income for surrounding communities.

- Direct cash transfers to national institutions should be utilised when there is proven institutional capacity to financially manage a national programme.

- Address regional 'leakage' issues through regional initiatives that complement country programmes and other REDD+ readiness initiatives.