



KEY MESSAGES

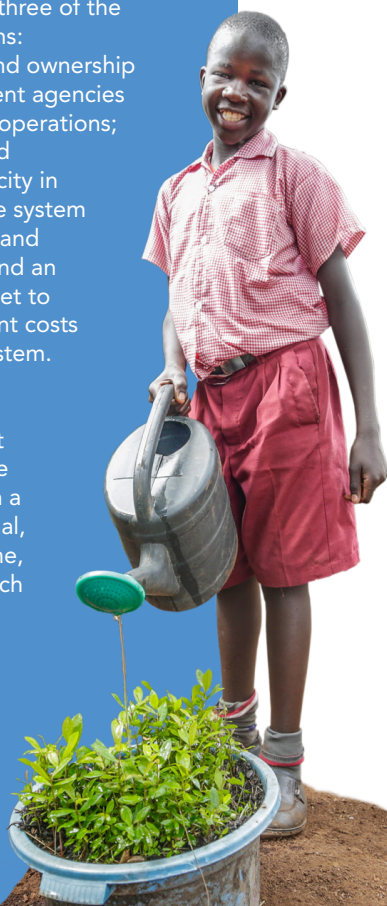
1.
Safeguards information system (SIS) operations require the definition of institutional arrangements and procedures to manage, analyze, validate and disseminate diverse types of environmental and social information from different government agencies and sectors, and across all scales of REDD+ implementation – national, subnational and project level.

2.
A key technical challenge is the development of a new, or modification of an existing, database or online platform for the management and dissemination of safeguards information in ways commensurate with available information and country capacities.

3.
An operational SIS requires investing across all three of the following dimensions:

- political capital and ownership among government agencies implicated in SIS operations;
- human capital and institutional capacity in country to run the system year in, year out; and
- financial capital and an operational budget to cover the recurrent costs of running the system.

4.
Perfection need not be the enemy of the good - starting with a simple and functional, and at the same time, flexible system, which can accommodate stepwise updates, improvements and future needs, facilitates getting the SIS up and running.



INFO BRIEF

GLOBAL

REDD+ SAFEGUARDS INFORMATION SYSTEMS: MOVING FROM DESIGN TO OPERATION

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AUTHORS: CORDULA EPPLE, CHARLOTTE HICKS,
VICTORIA SUAREZ, STEVE SWAN AND JUDITH
WALCOTT

READ THIS BRIEF...

- [If you are involved in processes in your country to meet safeguards requirements](#) for REDD+, particularly if your country is designing a SIS or if it has a SIS design in place and is now looking to make it operational.
- [If you are looking for technical assistance](#) or want to gain a better understanding of what other countries have experienced in trying to get their SIS operational.

INTRODUCTION

Under the policy and incentives mechanism for climate change mitigation that is [REDD+](#), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) requires participating countries to develop a 'system for providing information on how [the 'Cancun'] safeguards are being addressed and respected throughout the implementation of REDD+ activities' ([UNFCCC Decision 1/CP.16](#), paragraph 71d). This system, commonly known as the safeguards information system (SIS), constitutes a prerequisite for results-based payments from REDD+, both under the Convention and its funding arm – the Green Climate Fund (GCF).

Some general characteristics for the SIS have been agreed under the UNFCCC ([Decision 12/CP.17](#), paragraph 2); the system needs to:

1. [provide transparent and consistent information](#) that is accessible by all relevant stakeholders and updated on a regular basis;
2. [be transparent and flexible](#) to allow for improvements over time;
3. [provide information](#) on how all of the safeguards are being addressed and respected;
4. [be country-driven](#) and implemented at the national level; and
5. [build upon existing systems](#), as appropriate'.

In recent years, there has been significant global progress on SIS design and several countries ([Argentina](#), [Brazil](#), [Chile](#), [Ecuador](#), [Ghana](#), [Indonesia](#), [Liberia](#), [Mexico](#), [Pakistan](#), [Paraguay](#), [Philippines](#), and [Vietnam](#), as of 2019) have

launched online platforms to share information with domestic and international audiences on how safeguards are addressed and respected. Many other countries, however, still need to finalize the design of their systems and get them operational.

In addition to the UNFCCC guidance, the UN-REDD Programme identified four key SIS design considerations based on country experiences and consultations with key stakeholder constituencies (donor governments, civil society and REDD+ countries). These key considerations are elaborated in the UN-REDD Technical Brief [REDD+ safeguards information systems: practical design considerations](#) and are summarized below (see Figure 1):

1. [SIS objectives](#) that respond to domestic needs and international requirements.
2. [SIS information needs and structure](#) to report on how safeguards are being addressed and respected that determines how the information is compiled, managed and disseminated in an organized way.
3. [SIS functions and institutional arrangements](#) that explain the relevant mandates, procedures and capacities for SIS functioning, as well as the roles of government institutions and non-state actors.
4. [SIS technological systems requirements](#) that relate to the development or strengthening of an online interface, design of a database, and considerations of storage and access to information.



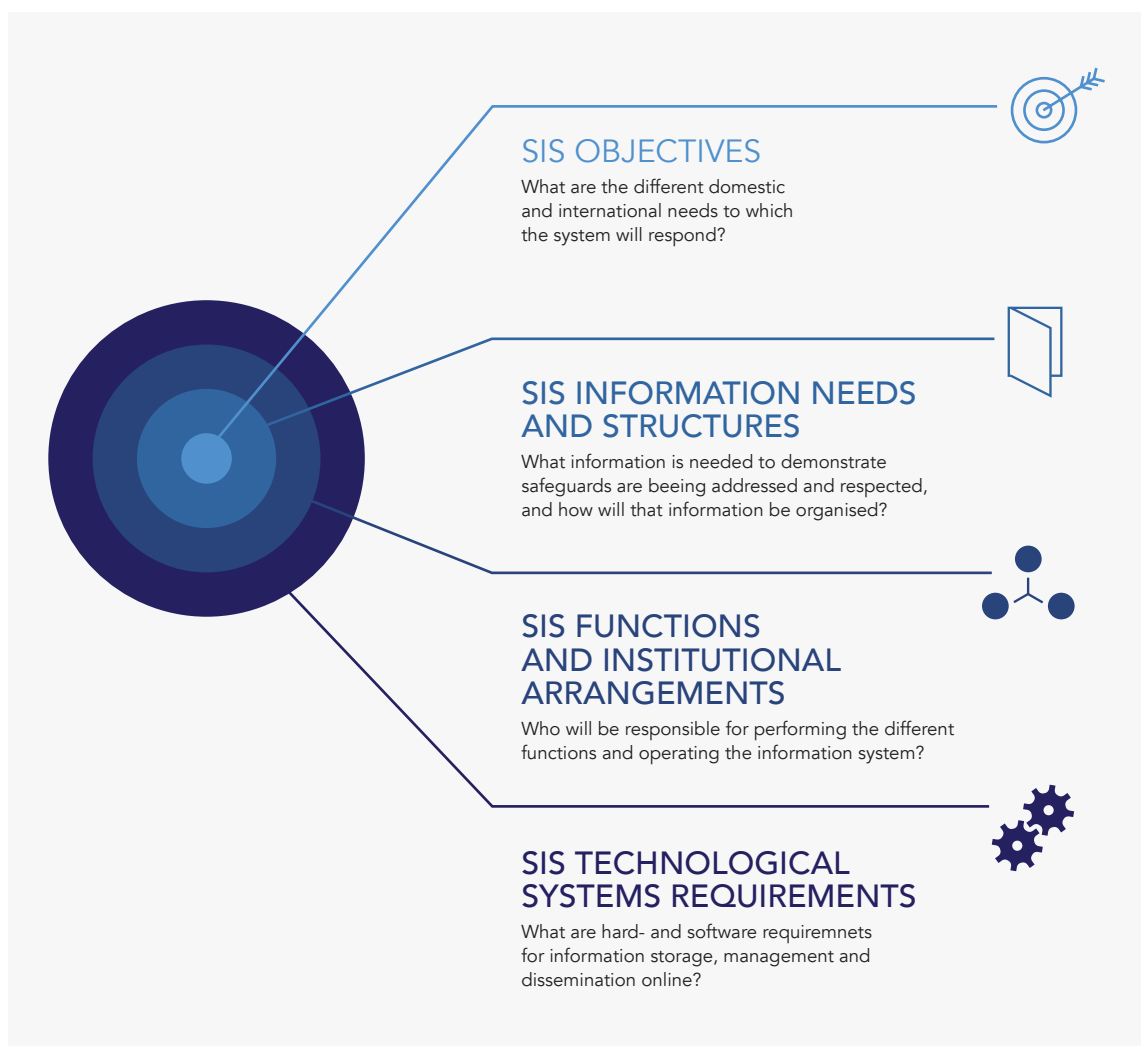


Figure 1: Key design considerations for REDD+ safeguards information systems

SIS design choices and processes are likely to incorporate iterative improvements over time – with a view to expanding or refining system objectives, structure, functions, institutional arrangements and technological platforms over time – in line with the progress of REDD+ implementation. In addition, there rarely is a clear differentiation between SIS design and SIS operation stages. Countries can choose to combine the design considerations with complementary elements needed for putting the system into operation.

This technical brief builds on, and attempts to summarize, key considerations synthesized from initial country experiences for putting a SIS into operation. The brief is aimed at an audience

of developing country government institutions preparing for, or moving into the implementation phase of, REDD+. It is hoped that the brief can also be of value to civil society organizations, international development partners, donors and other stakeholders that are involved in ensuring that all safeguards are addressed and respected throughout the implementation of REDD+. The brief is structured around the four-paired functional responsibilities identified as key SIS design considerations (Figure 2), i.e. how to:

- Compile and manage;
- Analyze and interpret;
- Assure quality and validate; and
- Disseminate and use safeguards information.

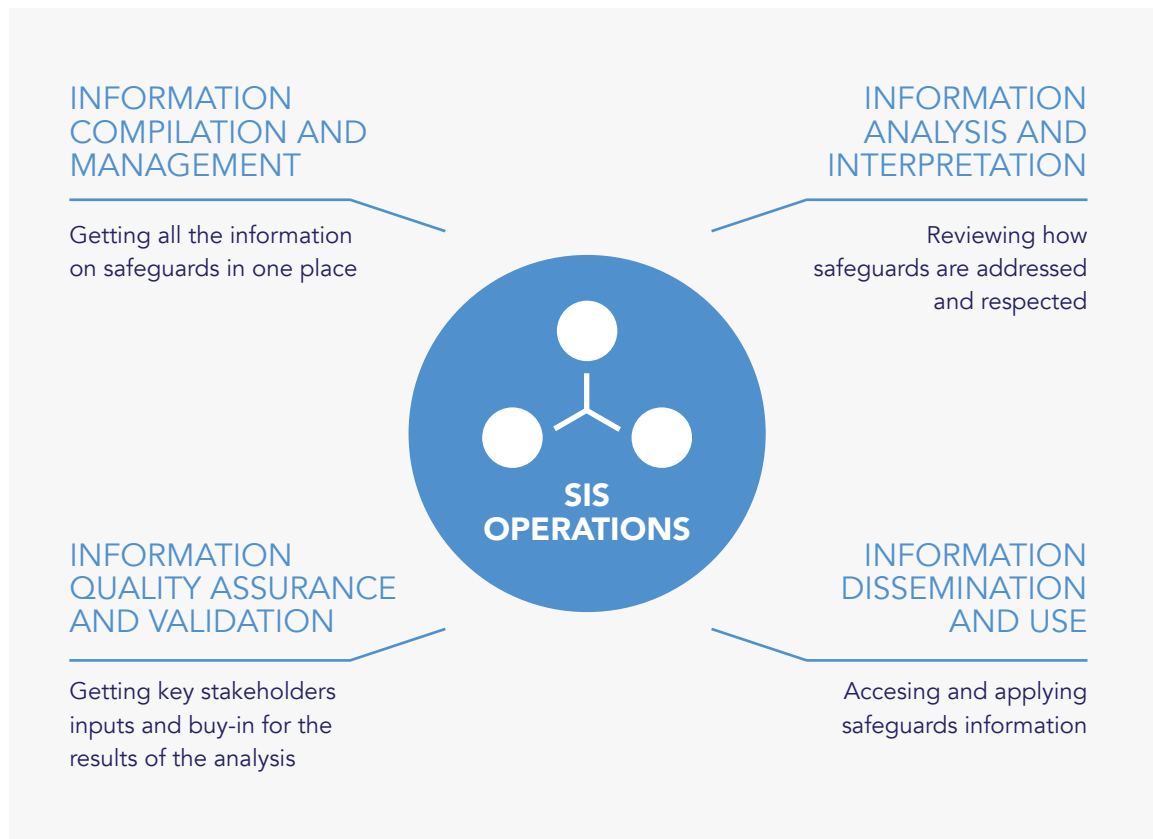


Figure 2: Key operational considerations for REDD+ safeguards information systems

INFORMATION COMPILATION AND MANAGEMENT: GETTING ALL THE INFORMATION ON SAFEGUARDS IN ONE PLACE

As part of their approaches to meeting UNFCCC REDD+ requirements, countries have unpacked the substantive content of the Cancun safeguards in the context of their particular national circumstances. National interpretations, or clarifications, of the generic Cancun safeguards often take the form of principles, criteria and indicators, a narrative description or a set of definitions of key terms. These national interpretations can help define what information is needed to demonstrate how safeguards are being addressed and respected, and what information will be reported in the SIS.

As a consequence of the inherently broad nature of the Cancun safeguards, the information encompassed in a SIS, based on the national interpretation of the safeguards, can be a diverse

mix of environmental and social, qualitative and quantitative, narrative, spatial and statistical information all coming from a variety of different sources. The information may also differ in terms of timeframes, geographical coverage, and collection methods. This poses the operational challenge of how to compile different types of information from different institutions that have a role in implementing REDD+ actions and applying safeguards. The information should be compiled in ways that are technically efficient and politically viable, as well as appropriate to national circumstances.

The system needs to coherently aggregate information horizontally, from across diverse sectors and line ministries, as well as vertically, from smaller to bigger levels of administration and implementation – e.g. national, subnational, and project levels. Once compiled at the national level, a country may choose to aggregate, synthesize and present general and broader

information for the whole country. Detailed case-, location- or REDD+ action-specific safeguards information can also be presented to illustrate specific cases or experiences of safeguards application to REDD+ actions, or to allow for comparison between different locations within the country.

Some countries have found it challenging to consider other safeguards frameworks as the basis for the information that will be reported in the SIS, e.g. Work Bank and Green Climate Fund safeguards frameworks, particularly when the themes and geographic scales in which these frameworks are applied differ from the national safeguards approach for REDD+ under the UNFCCC. Compiling information requires additional effort to be able to report on safeguards in a way that complies with different commitments.

Tools for compilation and management of information

In order to allow an efficient and organized compilation of information, certain tools – such as templates, protocols, direct technological solutions for establishing links between existing information systems and, ultimately, some form of database – will be needed for sharing and storing safeguards-relevant information. Templates and protocols promote standardized compilation of information and can support information processing and facilitate entry into a database.

It can be useful to develop protocols that indicate who (which institution or stakeholder) is reporting what (scope of information), when (periodicity), how (template or form to capture the information), and through which channel (e.g. physical documents or online system). The responsible parties for submitting and receiving the information should be clearly identified. The process of developing templates and protocols should engage and gather feedback from the key information providers and statistical offices in charge of defining standards for information management.

A template can include multiple choice options, sections for reporting on predetermined

indicators, or a format that allows gathering more detailed information. There might be a need to tailor the templates to accommodate the specific procedures and capacities of key information providers, e.g. definitions of key terms, technical guidance, explanation of the purposes for which the information will be used.

If necessary, countries can start by using physical analogue templates (i.e. pen and paper forms) filled by the information providers, and gradually move towards an automated information technology (IT) solution, which would allow information providers to complete and submit forms online. The use of manual processes versus automated processes for the operation of the SIS will be guided by the capacities of the different stakeholders contributing and managing information, the architecture of existing information systems upon which the SIS is built, and the type and availability of the information itself.

Some countries have formulated SIS or safeguards indicators. Countries can think about what is needed to move from a generic indicator focused on a particular topic to an operational indicator with clear and specific determination of what will be measured and reported, how this will take place, and the tasks and responsibilities associated with such reporting. It is advised to start with a manageable number of indicators for which data are available, and adjust or add new ones based on the needs and capacities in a country.

In order to compile and support information management, developing a new, or modifying an existing, database is likely to be central to SIS operations. It allows the information related to safeguards to be organized, stored and aggregated based on the reporting needs. Some considerations that can inform the development and operation of a database, and choices of corresponding software applications, include:

- preference for an online versus offline, or basic spreadsheet-based, database;
- information structure to be used, e.g. organization of the information according to indicators or other elements such as narrative text;

- functions that the database are expected to perform, e.g. searchable by year or location;
 - types of information to be included (e.g. narrative, spatial or map-based, statistical) and whether only official or published information can be shared;
 - how information should be presented in the end-user application;
 - expected storage capacity;
 - decisions on security, privacy and access to information, e.g. are logins or access levels needed;
 - update needs and timeframes, which may differ across different information sources;
- existing or proposed information workflows, e.g. who should check and sign off on uploads or changes to the database; and
 - existing capacities of database managers and end-users versus training needs.

A detailed operational manual or protocol can be developed to document the structure and functioning of the SIS database and any corresponding web platform.

COUNTRY EXAMPLE 1 – ZAMBIA

Compilation of information

Zambia's SIS online platform shares information through a website and stores it in a database. The system includes safeguards information on the application of relevant policies, laws and regulations as well as the identification and implementation of gap-filling measures. The scope of the information is defined by the national interpretation of the Cancun safeguards that states key concerns associated to each safeguard. This information is generated at the national level by key institutions – such as Forestry Department, Central Statistics Office and other members of the National Climate Change Committee – , and by projects that contribute to REDD+ implementation at the subnational and local levels.

The information is being compiled to be part of the database of the SIS, hosted by Zambia Environmental Management Agency (ZEMA), through the application of standardized templates for reporting on safeguards. In the future, the SIS may include the report of outcomes of the application of safeguards.



Institutional arrangements

In some countries, information sharing across sectors is mandated by an existing policy or regulation, but in many cases, the SIS will require that requests for information are institutionalized and that the various agencies involved agree on what information is provided, how it is used, and any standards to be applied. Certain countries may need to formalize the creation of the SIS and the corresponding mandate of the hosting institution. This also contributes to the sustainability of the system.

While the SIS hosting institution is responsible for running the system, as well as for future improvements, as needed, the operational management of the SIS will entail other roles and responsibilities, and other institutions may be involved. For instance, the national statistics office may be the SIS host institution, but the national REDD+ focal point or steering committee can decide on the scope of information that will be included in the SIS, determine if all or part of it will be publicly available, and help understand the linkages between the information and REDD+. Putting the SIS in operation could involve reviewing, updating or formalizing the institutional arrangements once it is clear how the system will function and who will be involved. Building or strengthening inter-agency information-sharing agreements often represents a challenge for SIS operation, as this process can require a significant amount of time, effort and political buy-in. Thus, clear and efficient institutional arrangements are a vital element of operationalizing SIS. It may be necessary to review mandates related to information sharing, as well as other regulatory requirements associated with confidentiality, transparency and sensitive data.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF INFORMATION: REVIEWING HOW SAFEGUARDS ARE ADDRESSED AND RESPECTED

Once the information is compiled, an analysis is needed to interpret it and review how safeguards are being addressed and respected throughout the implementation of REDD+ actions. The starting point of this analysis is a country's

national interpretation of the Cancun safeguards. The analysis of how safeguards have been addressed and respected can be informed by: i) the legal and institutional frameworks relevant for addressing each safeguard; ii) how the policies, laws, regulations, mandates, and procedures are applied in practice; and iii) what were the environmental and social outcomes of REDD+ implementation.

In addition to understanding how the Cancun safeguards have been addressed and respected, the analysis can also allow for the identification of gaps, recommendations and future actions needed for strengthening the application of safeguards. Analyzing and interpreting information on how safeguards have been respected will also yield an understanding of whether, and to what extent, non-carbon benefits were obtained. Although not explicitly included in any of the Cancun safeguards, it is important that the analysis and interpretation of safeguards information incorporate a gender dimension both in terms of gender-responsive processes, as well as disaggregation of safeguards information on the basis of gender, where relevant.

Countries would benefit from defining the periodicity for the analysis and interpretation of safeguards information (e.g. once a year, biannually, every quarter), and the analytical methods to be employed, which could be a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, depending of the objectives of the SIS. These should be specified either in the SIS web platform or in the manual of the system's operation to provide an explanation on how findings were reached.

COUNTRY EXAMPLE 2 – MEXICO

Analysis of safeguards information

REDD+ safeguards in Mexico are addressed and respected according to the applicable legal framework and the general measures identified in the State Safeguards Plans, which is the instrument determined for supporting the application of, and reporting on, safeguards at the subnational or state level. The analysis of information takes place at an initial level, local or state scale, which seeks to inform how the State Safeguards Plans will be implemented. Stakeholders and institutions in charge of collecting the information are also in charge of this initial analysis. At a broader (national) scale, the SIS will report on the compiled information from multiple State Safeguard Plan analyses, which requires another, more general, layer of analysis and interpretation of information for the whole country.

After Mexico put its SIS online, the country has assessed the system's operations to identify opportunities for improving it. This allowed determining the need to simplify the analysis and reporting of information, and to be more precise in the content included in the system. The country plans to develop further guidance for implementing safeguards actions, efficient safeguards information analysis and quality control, and simplifying the reporting on safeguards information. Also, this seeks to standardize the information, taking into account the particularities of each state and the efforts previously made.



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