

Guidance Note: Developing a High-Quality REDD+ Safeguard Information System (SIS)

Table of Contents

<i>Introduction.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Key Principles of a High-Quality SIS (UNFCCC-Aligned).....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Defining SIS Objectives and Scope.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Developing a Robust Indicator Framework</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Institutional Arrangements and Governance</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>SIS Platform and Data Management</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Integration with Grievance Redress Mechanisms and Other Systems.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Ensuring Sustainability: Capacity, Resources, and Improvement.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Reporting and Verification of Safeguard Information.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Conclusion.....</i>	<i>11</i>

Introduction

A **Safeguard Information System (SIS)** is essentially the domestic institutional arrangement and processes for providing information on how REDD+ safeguards are addressed and respected throughout the implementation of REDD+ activities. Parties to the UNFCCC are required to develop an SIS as part of REDD+ readiness, but **official UNFCCC guidance on SIS design is broad**. At COP17 (Durban), Parties agreed that an SIS should have certain key characteristics: it should be:

- *Country driven,*
- *transparent,*
- *accessible,*
- *flexible for improvements,*
- *comprehensive (covering all Cancun safeguards), and*
- *build upon existing systems.*

Beyond these principles, countries have flexibility in how to set up their SIS.

This guidance note translates the UNFCCC's broad principles into detailed recommendations for **all jurisdictions** to develop a high-quality SIS, without focusing on any single country. The aim is to ensure the SIS is robust, meets UNFCCC requirements, and effectively informs both national and international stakeholders.

Key Principles of a High-Quality SIS (UNFCCC-Aligned)

A high-quality SIS adheres to the UNFCCC's **broad guidance** on SIS characteristics. These foundational principles should guide all design decisions:

- 1. Transparency and Consistency:** The system should provide **transparent, credible information** on safeguards, presented in a consistent manner over time. All relevant details on how safeguards are addressed must be openly available, and methodologies and reporting formats should be uniform to enable comparability across reporting periods. Transparency builds trust, so information (e.g. reports, data, criteria) should be published regularly and subject to review as appropriate.
- 2. Accessibility (Stakeholder Access):** The SIS information must be **accessible to all relevant stakeholders**. In practice, this means establishing a user-friendly platform (such as a dedicated SIS website or portal) where any stakeholder – from local communities and civil society to international partners – can easily retrieve safeguard information. Accessibility also implies using clear language (and translations if needed) and formats that are understandable to non-specialists. Regular updates are important so that stakeholders have up-to-date information on safeguards implementation.
- 3. Flexibility and Continuous Improvement:** The SIS should be **flexible to allow improvements over time**. Countries often adopt a stepwise approach: the SIS can start with basic information and progressively expand or refine its indicators and data as capacity grows. This adaptive management ensures the SIS remains relevant and “learns” from implementation, creating a positive trajectory of improvement in safeguards reporting. For example, as new REDD+ activities or policies are introduced, the SIS should be able to incorporate additional data or new indicators. Regular reviews of the SIS (e.g. after each reporting cycle) can identify gaps and lessons, which are then used to enhance the system.

4. **Comprehensive Safeguard Coverage: All Cancun safeguards** (the seven safeguards in UNFCCC Decision 1/CP.16, Appendix I) must be **addressed and respected**, and the SIS should report on each of them. A high-quality SIS is **complete** in scope – it covers environmental, social, and governance safeguards, correlating information with the nature and stage of REDD+ actions being implemented. This means no safeguard is omitted from the reporting; even if certain safeguards are less pertinent to some actions, the SIS should still note how they are considered. The information provided should demonstrate how **each safeguard is being respected in practice**, not just in theory.
5. **Country-Driven and National in Scale:** The SIS is to be **country-driven, implemented at the national level**. This principle recognizes national sovereignty and circumstances – each country's SIS will reflect its legal framework, policies, and institutional arrangements. A high-quality SIS is tailored to the country's context: it builds on national definitions or interpretations of the Cancun safeguards, aligns with national REDD+ strategies, and is integrated with existing national systems (e.g. forest monitoring, biodiversity databases, or socio-economic data systems). Being country-driven also implies that the design and operation of the SIS are led by the government, with domestic stakeholders' input, rather than imposed externally.
6. **Built on Existing Systems and Information:** Wherever feasible, the SIS should **build upon existing systems and sources of information**. Rather than creating an entirely new information silo, a quality SIS links and **leverages existing national systems** – such as environmental monitoring systems, social databases, or safeguard frameworks from ongoing projects. Utilizing established data sources and institutional mandates enhances efficiency, consistency, and sustainability. For example, if a country already has a biodiversity monitoring program or an indigenous peoples' rights database, those can feed into the SIS for relevant safeguard areas. Building on existing systems also helps embed the SIS into institutional routines and ensures it aligns with what the country is already doing in terms of safeguards compliance.

These core principles set the **quality benchmark**. In the absence of prescriptive UNFCCC rules on **how** to design the SIS, the rest of this guidance provides practical design elements to fulfil these principles in a coherent, effective manner.

Defining SIS Objectives and Scope

Begin by clearly defining the **objectives and scope** of the SIS. The system must serve **multiple needs**: domestic needs (e.g. informing citizens, guiding policymakers, improving REDD+ project implementation) and international needs (reporting to the UNFCCC, and possibly to donors or standards). High-quality SIS design starts with asking: *What questions should the SIS answer?* and *Who will use this information?* Key considerations include:

- **Domestic Objectives:** Ensure the SIS informs national audiences (government agencies, local communities, NGOs) about how safeguards are handled in REDD+ activities.
- **International Objectives:** The SIS should fulfil UNFCCC requirements by providing the basis for the **Summaries of Information (SOIs)** that must be submitted periodically to the UNFCCC. It may also support compliance with requirements of standards or results-based payment programs, if applicable.
- **Scope of REDD+ Activities:** Define the scope of REDD+ actions covered (e.g. all activities under the national REDD+ strategy). A high-quality SIS covers **all relevant REDD+ actions** – whether they are on-the-ground measures (like reforestation programs) or enabling measures (like policy reforms).

The SIS should eventually capture safeguard information across the full breadth of REDD+ interventions at national (or subnational, if applicable) scale.

By clarifying objectives and scope upfront, you set a strong foundation so that the SIS is purpose-built to meet those needs. This helps ensure the system collects the **right information** and delivers **useful reports** rather than amassing data with no clear use.

Developing a Robust Indicator Framework

Indicators and metrics are the backbone of an SIS – they define what information is collected to demonstrate that safeguards are addressed and respected. A high-quality SIS uses a well-thought-out **indicator framework** that is *aligned with the Cancun safeguards and tailored to the country's REDD+ actions*. When designing SIS indicators, consider the following best practices:

1. **Align with National Safeguard Interpretation:** Each country should have interpreted or clarified the broad Cancun safeguards in its own context (e.g. defining what “transparent governance” or “full participation” means nationally). Ensure your indicators are **in line with the country's own safeguard definitions and principles**. In other words, if the country has elaborated specific criteria under each safeguard, the SIS indicators should measure whether those criteria are being met. This alignment guarantees that the SIS is measuring the concrete aspects that the country considers important for each safeguard.
2. **Cover All Safeguards with Relevant Metrics:** The set of indicators collectively should provide evidence for **each** safeguard, ensuring completeness. Keep indicators **specific and measurable** so that the information reported is concrete and verifiable.
3. **Differentiate by Type of REDD+ Action:** It is crucial to recognize that different types of REDD+ interventions will need different kinds of information. **Differentiate indicators for direct implementation actions vs. enabling (policy) actions**, where relevant. For instance:
 - a. *Direct actions* (like afforestation/reforestation projects, forest protection, restoration activities) – these are on-the-ground interventions. Indicators here could be very site-specific or community-specific (e.g. number of hectares reforested with adherence to environmental standards, instances of obtaining Free Prior Informed Consent from local communities, absence of rights violations or disputes in project areas, etc.).
 - b. *Enabling or policy actions* (like legal reforms, land tenure clarification, governance improvements) – these are higher-level measures. Indicators for these might look at policy outputs and their implementation (e.g. the extent to which a land tenure reform process respected indigenous rights and participation).

By tailoring indicators to the **nature of the action**, the SIS can capture the nuances of how safeguards are respected in each context. *One size does not fit all*: a law reform might be assessed via qualitative indicators (policy analysis, stakeholder feedback), whereas a field activity might use more quantitative or site-monitoring indicators. Designing the indicator set in this differentiated way makes the SIS reporting far more **relevant and accurate** for each REDD+ measure.

4. **Robust and Adequate for UNFCCC Reporting:** Ensure the indicators chosen will allow the country to compile a **robust summary of information** demonstrating safeguard compliance, as required by the UNFCCC. They should be capable of capturing not just **whether** safeguards are addressed, but **how well** they are being addressed. Consider using both qualitative indicators (narrative

descriptions, case studies, process documentation) and quantitative indicators (metrics, counts, indices) in combination. This mix can provide a fuller picture. Additionally, if the country is pursuing any specific REDD+ standards or financing schemes (e.g. ART-TREES), ensure the **consistency or equivalence** with those so that one SIS can serve multiple reporting needs.

5. **Clarity and Specificity:** Each indicator should be clearly defined, with a rationale and data source. Avoid overly broad or vague indicators. For example, instead of a vague indicator like “safeguard policies in place,” specify something like “existence of a published guideline on FPIC (Free Prior Informed Consent) for REDD+”. Clear indicators will make it easier to gather consistent data and to understand the results.

In summary, a high-quality SIS indicator framework is **comprehensive, tailored, and practical**. It links back to the Cancun safeguards, adapts to various REDD+ actions, and produces information that is meaningful for assessing safeguard performance.

Institutional Arrangements and Governance

Setting up an effective SIS is not only about *what* information to collect, but also *who* collects and manages it. **Clear institutional arrangements** are a hallmark of a high-quality SIS. When designing the SIS:

- **Roles and Responsibilities:** Clearly define **who will perform each function** in the SIS operation. Key functions include: data collection (field data, reports, etc.), data compilation and analysis, quality assurance/validation, approval of information for release, and dissemination/reporting. Assign a lead entity for managing the SIS platform itself (often the REDD+ Unit or similar). Document these roles in an SIS governance plan or protocol so that all parties understand their duties.
- **Coordination Mechanism:** Establish a central coordination body or team (often a REDD+ safeguards committee or SIS task force) to oversee the SIS. This body sets standards for data quality and consistency. Regular inter-agency meetings or a coordination platform can help align efforts and troubleshoot issues.
- **Multi-Stakeholder Participation:** In line with the participatory nature of REDD+, involve **multiple stakeholders** in the SIS process. This can be achieved by establishing a multi-stakeholder advisory group or using existing REDD+ stakeholder forums to review safeguard information. Including representatives of indigenous peoples, local communities, civil society, and private sector (where relevant) can improve transparency and credibility. Such stakeholders can provide feedback on the information, help identify gaps, or even contribute data (for instance, community-based monitoring results). This participatory approach reinforces the **transparency and country-driven** nature of the SIS.
- **Quality Control and Validation:** A high-quality SIS has checks to ensure information is accurate and trustworthy. Plan for internal review of data (by the responsible agencies or an SIS safeguards committee), and consider external or independent reviews for sensitive information. Define a process for handling any conflicting information or complaints about the data (for example, if an NGO disputes a government report on safeguards, how will that be addressed?). By having a **validation process**, the SIS maintains credibility.

In essence, **good governance** of the SIS means everyone knows their role in the information supply chain, and there are mechanisms to coordinate and verify the information. This institutional backbone is critical to sustain the SIS over the long term.

SIS Platform and Data Management

To meet the principles of transparency and accessibility, a **user-friendly technological system** is needed to manage and disseminate the safeguard information. Key considerations for the SIS platform include:

- **Dedicated SIS Web Portal:** Develop a dedicated webpage or online portal for the SIS where all safeguard information is published in one place. This portal should include an overview of the SIS, the safeguards and their definitions, the indicators being tracked, and the latest information or reports for each indicator/safeguard. For example, an interactive dashboard could display current data, and a document library could provide full reports or data files. The portal is the public face of the SIS, enabling stakeholders to easily find the information.
- **Database and Storage:** Behind the front-end website, set up a secure **database** to store all collected data and documents. This could be as simple as a structured set of spreadsheets or as complex as a relational database, depending on volume and complexity of data. Ensure the database is organized by safeguard and by reporting period or REDD+ action, so that information can be retrieved and updated systematically. Data management procedures should be established – including data entry, cleaning, backups, and archiving of older information once updated.
- **Hardware/Software Requirements:** Identify the **hardware and software requirements** for running the SIS platform. This might involve a server (or cloud service) for hosting the database and website, and software for data analysis and visualization. Where possible, use **open-source or commonly used tools** to reduce costs and ensure longevity. For instance, some countries use simple Content Management Systems (CMS) for the SIS website and spreadsheets or GIS tools for data. The system should not be over-engineered; it must be something the responsible institutions can maintain with available capacity.
- **Design for Usability:** The interface should be intuitive. Use clear menus organized by safeguard or by REDD+ activity, and consider multiple languages if needed for local stakeholders. Provide explanatory notes for technical indicators so users know what they're looking at. High-quality SIS often include infographics, maps (showing project locations or forest changes), and charts to communicate data effectively. **Downloadable reports and data files** should be available for transparency, allowing analysts or researchers to examine the information in detail if they wish.
- **Regular Updates and Maintenance:** Establish a schedule for updating information on the portal (e.g. annually or biennially, depending on how often new safeguard data is collected). Each update cycle should have an assigned coordinator to gather inputs from all agencies and upload the new information. Also plan for site maintenance – ensuring links work, the site is secure, and it adapts to any new web standards. An outdated or non-functional website can undermine the transparency goal, so it's important to allocate IT support.

By paying attention to the **technological infrastructure**, a high-quality SIS ensures that all the valuable safeguard data collected is effectively **managed and shared**. The platform turns the SIS from an internal process into a **publicly accessible system**, fulfilling the transparency and accessibility commitments.

Integration with Grievance Redress Mechanisms and Other Systems

Safeguard information often overlaps with other aspects of REDD+ implementation. Two important linkages to consider are **grievance redress mechanisms (GRM)** and other monitoring systems:

- **Grievance Redress Mechanism Integration:** Many countries establish a REDD+ **Feedback and Grievance Redress Mechanism** parallel to safeguards, to handle complaints or feedback from stakeholders (e.g. a community might report a safeguard violation). A high-quality SIS should be linked with the GRM. In practice, this could mean that the SIS portal provides a channel for stakeholders to submit grievances or feedback online, which then feeds into the GRM process. Conversely, **information from the GRM** (such as number of complaints received, types of issues raised, and their resolution status) should be captured in the SIS reporting as part of demonstrating how safeguards are addressed. For example, if several grievances are filed about compensation in a reforestation project, the SIS report on the relevant safeguard should mention that and how they were resolved. Integrating these systems ensures that the SIS is not just a static report, but is responsive to stakeholder concerns in real time.
- **Linking to National Forest Monitoring Systems (NFMS) or Other Databases:** The SIS can also draw on data from the **National Forest Monitoring System** for certain safeguards (like natural forest conservation). For instance, if the NFMS provides data on deforestation rates or forest cover change, the SIS can use those as indicators under the biodiversity or emission displacement safeguards. Similarly, if there are existing systems for tracking social outcomes (e.g. a socio-economic benefits monitoring system), those can inform the SIS. **Building upon existing systems** is one of the UNFCCC principles cifor-icraf.org, and integration helps avoid double work and ensures consistency of information across platforms. Make sure to establish data-sharing agreements or protocols with owners of other systems so that the SIS can regularly obtain needed data.
- **Harmonizing Reporting Frameworks:** If the country is using multiple safeguard-related frameworks (for example, World Bank safeguards for a Forest Carbon Partnership Facility program, or voluntary standards like CCBS), consider mapping and harmonizing these requirements with the SIS. A high-quality SIS can serve as a **central hub** where information is compiled to meet various reporting needs, as long as those needs are identified in the design phase. This avoids having separate parallel reporting streams and makes the SIS more efficient.

In summary, the SIS should not exist in isolation. By **connecting it with grievance mechanisms and other information systems**, you enhance the SIS's completeness and usefulness. This integrated approach contributes to a more **coherent REDD+ safeguards regime**, where feedback loops and data flows across systems help ensure, safeguards are truly implemented on the ground.

Ensuring Sustainability: Capacity, Resources, and Improvement

For an SIS to be high-quality, it must not only be well-designed initially but also **sustainable over time**. Key factors include human capacity, financial resources, and processes for ongoing improvement:

- **Capacity Building:** Assess the current capacity of the institutions and staff who will run the SIS. Are they familiar with data management, analysis, and reporting? Do they understand safeguards in depth? Identify any gaps and undertake **capacity strengthening** efforts. This could involve training staff on the use of the SIS database, hiring or assigning a safeguards information officer, or workshops on how to analyze and interpret safeguard data. Building a knowledge base within the country ensures the SIS can be maintained and improved internally, which is essential for country-driven implementation.
- **Resources and Financing:** A high-quality SIS requires **adequate resources** for setup and operation. Develop a clear budget covering the initial design costs (consultations, software, web development, etc.) and the operational costs (staff time for data collection and management, website hosting fees, ongoing trainings). Where possible, secure long-term financing for the SIS, perhaps by integrating it into government budgets (e.g. environment or forestry sector budgets) or using REDD+ readiness/implementation grants. Lack of funding can jeopardize regular updates, so plan for financial sustainability. Even if initial donor funds support the SIS, a strategy for transitioning to domestic funding over time can be wise.
- **Piloting and Phased Implementation:** Consider piloting the SIS on a smaller scale initially – for example, testing data collection for one or two safeguards or in one region – before scaling up to full national implementation. This **stepwise approach** allows for learning and course-correction, exemplifying the flexibility principle. After a pilot, incorporate lessons learned to improve the system before rolling it out nationwide. A phased approach also spreads resource needs over time and can produce early results to maintain stakeholder buy-in.
- **Periodic Review and Updates:** Treat the SIS as a **living system**. Set a schedule for periodically reviewing the entire SIS (perhaps every year or after major reporting submissions). This review should evaluate what is working well and what is not – for example, are some indicators too hard to measure? Are stakeholders satisfied with the information provided? Use these evaluations to **update the SIS design** – you might refine indicators, add new data sources, or streamline processes. Document any changes clearly to maintain transparency about the evolution of the system. The goal is continuous improvement, showing a “positive direction of travel” in how safeguards are monitored and reported.
- **Maintaining Political and Stakeholder Support:** Finally, ensure that key decision-makers remain committed to the SIS. High-level support (from a REDD+ steering committee or a ministry) can help secure funding and inter-agency cooperation. Similarly, keep stakeholders engaged by demonstrating the value of the SIS – for instance, show how SIS findings have informed better project design or addressed community concerns. When people see that the SIS leads to **tangible improvements in safeguard implementation**, they will continue to support and contribute to it, which in turn helps maintain the system’s quality.

By planning for the long term – through capacity building, securing resources, and embedding a culture of improvement – you will keep the SIS high-quality and credible years into the future, not just at the moment of its launch.

Reporting and Verification of Safeguard Information

One of the end goals of an SIS is to **report** how safeguards are being addressed and respected. High-quality SIS design considers reporting requirements and verification needs from the start:

- **Summary of Information (SOI) Preparation:** Countries are expected to periodically submit a **Summary of Information** to the UNFCCC, detailing how all Cancun safeguards have been addressed and respected. A strong SIS simplifies this task by serving as the primary source for the SOI. Plan the **content and structure** of the SOI in advance, aligning it with the SIS structure. For example, organize the SIS information by safeguard, since the SOI will likely describe each safeguard in turn. Ensure that for each safeguard, the SIS can generate a concise narrative backed by data – this may include describing policies in place, actions taken to respect the safeguard, any issues encountered, and how they were resolved. Many countries include tables of indicators or case examples in their SOIs; designing the SIS to produce those elements (or even automating parts of the SOI from the SIS database) can greatly enhance efficiency and consistency.
- **National Communications and Other Reports:** Beyond the dedicated SOI, safeguard information may also be reported in National Communications or other climate change reports. A quality SIS can feed into these by providing up-to-date data and stories. Design your SIS outputs (even if primarily for UNFCCC reporting) such that they can be easily repurposed for **domestic reports, donor reports, or public information releases**. This might involve maintaining both detailed data (for technical audiences) and summary briefs (for general audiences).
- **Verification and Review:** While the UNFCCC does not currently mandate a formal international verification of safeguard reports, transparency is enhanced if the SIS information undergoes some form of review. Consider inviting **review the draft SOI reports** before finalizing them. Their feedback can be incorporated to improve accuracy and credibility.
- **Public Feedback on Reports:** Once an SOI or any safeguard report is published (e.g. on the SIS portal), provide a channel for **public feedback or questions**. High-quality SIS treat reporting as a two-way communication. For example, after releasing the safeguards summary, host a webinar or workshop with stakeholders to discuss the findings. This can uncover any discrepancies or concerns, which can then be addressed in future SIS iterations. It also reinforces stakeholder trust by showing that their perspectives on the reported information are valued.

Ultimately, the **credibility of the SIS is judged by the quality of its outputs** – the reports and data that demonstrate safeguard compliance. By building the SIS with reporting in mind, and incorporating review mechanisms, you ensure that the SIS not only gathers information but also effectively **tells the story of how safeguards are being respected** in REDD+ implementation. This positions the country to confidently meet UNFCCC requirements and to showcase its commitment to social and environmental integrity in REDD+ actions.

Conclusion

Developing a high-quality SIS is a **comprehensive endeavour** that goes beyond a checkbox exercise. It requires weaving together the UNFCCC's guiding principles with practical design elements – from defining objectives and indicators to setting up databases and validating information. The result of such an effort is a system that is **transparent, accessible to all, adaptable, complete in scope, and firmly grounded in the country's own systems and capacities.**

In essence, a strong SIS becomes the backbone for demonstrating that REDD+ implementation is not only reducing emissions, but doing so in a manner that safeguards communities, respects rights, and conserves biodiversity.