



DECIPHERING UNFCCC DECISIONS ON NATIONAL FOREST MONITORING SYSTEMS FOR REDD+

As a comprehensive agreement on REDD+ gets closer with each Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). It is essential that stakeholders around the world – especially in developing countries – fully understand the content, context and implications of adopted decisions. This is not always easy, with the finalisation of decision texts being notoriously rushed affairs. Also, subsequent in-country knowledge transfer is often limited by the demands on country negotiators' time and expertise. Among these areas of complexity lies the guidance on technical systems required for REDD+ implementation.

Over the past three years, the COP has agreed upon a series of decisions to guide the development of national forest monitoring systems for REDD+. Because this guidance is published cumulatively, there is no single source of comprehensive information on what these systems might look like and what they should do. It therefore becomes a case of piecing together the available evidence to decipher meanings and functions. The two documents that provide guidance on national forest monitoring systems are [Decision 4/CP.15](#) (from the 2009 Copenhagen Accords) and [Decision 1/CP.16](#) (the 2010 Cancun Agreements). Decision 4/CP.15 (paragraph 1(d)) provides methodological guidance on REDD+, relating in part to the need to establish robust and transparent national forest monitoring systems that:

- i) *Use a combination of remote sensing and ground-based forest carbon inventory approaches for estimating, as appropriate, anthropogenic forest-related greenhouse gas emissions by sources and removals by sinks, forest carbon stocks and forest area changes;*
- ii) *Provide estimates that are transparent, consistent, as far as possible accurate, and that reduce uncertainties, taking into account national capabilities and capacities;*
- iii) *Are transparent and their results are available and suitable for review as agreed by the Conference of the Parties.*

This guidance indicates that national forest monitoring system should be used to: 1) estimate emissions and removals from the forestry sector (**measurement**); 2) report this mitigation performance of REDD+ activities to the UNFCCC through the national communication (**reporting**); and 3) allow verification of the results by the UNFCCC Secretariat (**verification**) – i.e. to fulfil the MRV function for REDD+ activities. UNFCCC guidance on this technical element is built upon in Decision 1/CP.16 (paragraph 71(c)), where developing countries aiming to participate in REDD+ are requested to develop: *A robust and transparent national forest monitoring system for the monitoring and reporting of the [REDD+] activities.*

Paragraph 77 of Decision 1/CP.16 states, via a footnote, that the implementation of results-based REDD+ actions requires national monitoring systems. That is to say, monitoring of REDD+ activities is required in order to assess whether they are results-based, i.e. resulting in net positive outcomes, which is a requirement under the guidance in Appendix I of Decision 1/CP.16.

Decisions 4/CP.15 and 1/CP.16 therefore establish that countries must develop a national forest monitoring system to serve the **dual functions of monitoring and MRV**: the monitoring function will allow a country to assess whether REDD+ activities are results-based. The MRV function, on the other hand, will assess whether REDD+ activities are contributing to measureable carbon mitigation.

In summary, the tasks countries face in developing their national forest monitoring systems for REDD+ begin with deciphering the meaning of technical UNFCCC decision texts. To address this, REDD+ capacity building efforts should strive to ensure that technical decision texts are understood thoroughly. It should also be made clear that national forest monitoring systems, while following UNFCCC decisions, will look different in every country. National circumstances and existing capacities need to be fully considered and built upon in order to allow countries to ultimately achieve the mechanism's full mitigation potential.

Go-REDD+ is an e-mail listserv managed by the UN-REDD Programme team in Asia-Pacific, based in Bangkok. The main objective of **Go-REDD+** is to distribute information, synopses of research results and activities related to REDD+ in Asia-Pacific, to assist countries in their REDD+ readiness efforts. Old messages will be archived on the [Regional Activities pages](#) of the UN-REDD Programme web-site. Discussion forum on **Go-REDD+** is available through UN-REDD Programme's online knowledge sharing platform, www.unredd.net. Please note that you must be a member to join the Discussion Forum. To request membership, please contact admin@unredd.net with your name and affiliation. The **Go-REDD+** team welcomes feedback, suggestions or inquiries to goredd.th@undp.org.