

TAP Review of the Readiness-Package submitted by Vanuatu

**Independent TAP-Expert Review on the Self-Assessment Process of
Vanuatu's R-Package – September 2020**

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1. Objectives

This document has the following objectives:

- To provide independent technical review of the Self-Assessment Process of Vanuatu's Readiness Package (R-Package), undertaken through a participatory multi-stakeholder consultation. The review assesses REDD+ readiness progress and highlights the remaining challenges to be addressed when transitioning from Readiness to implementation of performance-based REDD+ activities; and,
- To assist the PC in its decision to endorse the R-Package.

2. Methodological Approach

This section presents the scope of the work performed for the TAP review as per the following Terms of Reference required activities:

- A desk review of Vanuatu's progress and the self-assessment report, based on guidelines in the R-Package Assessment Framework;
- Desk review of Vanuatu's documentation of stakeholders' self-assessment, including the process that was used for the self-assessment and the reported outcome;
- Desk review key outputs and documents that underpin, and are referenced in, the R-Package, including documents pertaining to the national REDD strategy and ESMF, reference levels and forest monitoring, and national institutional structures; and,
- Constructive and targeted feedback, as required to align the processes used for self-assessment and reported outcome, comparing with the R-Package Assessment Framework guidance.

Also the completeness of the R-Package was verified, including:

- i. A summary of the readiness preparation process;
- ii. A report of the national multi-stakeholder self-assessment process;
- iii. The results of the national multi-stakeholder assessment; and,
- iv. References to documentation pertinent to the nine subcomponents, prepared during the readiness preparation process.

The assessment is presented in 3 main sections:

- Section 1: Review of Vanuatu's self-assessment process and documentation, as contained in Vanuatu's R-Package;

- Section 2: Review progress on REDD+ readiness based on the submitted reports and background documents and information, with emphasis on strengths and weaknesses of each subcomponent; and,
- Section 3: Summary Assessment and Recommendations.

The purpose of the TAP's review is not to second-guess the outcomes of the country's self-assessment, which is based on a comprehensive multi-stakeholder process guided by the FCPF Readiness Assessment Framework. Rather, the review focuses on whether due process was followed, and provides constructive feedback to the FCPF Participants Committee (PC).

3. TAP Review

The REDD+ Unit of Vanuatu's Department of Forests has submitted the Readiness Package Report, prepared following FCPF's Guide to Readiness Assessment Framework (2013). The main body of the report presents the Summary of the Readiness Process, and the country's progress and approach with reference to the 4 REDD Readiness components

a. Section 1: Review of Self-Assessment Process and Documentation

Background

This section provides feedback on the process followed by Vanuatu to conduct its self-assessment, based on the documentation provided in the R-Package Report. It takes into account the documentation prepared and used for the assessment; the process for selecting and conveying stakeholders, and the process for capturing the participants' points of view and how these will be considered in future REDD+ decisions making in Vanuatu.

Before reviewing the specific Readiness self-assessment workshops' results and preparation activities, it is worth acknowledging that since 2015 Vanuatu has engaged in various multi-stakeholder consultations and socialization events regarding different specific REDD+ topics, which have helped build capacity and create a participatory process, very much relying on the civil society participation; a CSO platform, with local chapters at the main REDD+ islands has been active in helping convey participation for the various consultative processes for assessing deforestation drivers, building the national strategy, conducting the Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment, and developing the Environmental and Social Management Framework. From grant signature in April 2015 to 2020, capacity building, awareness raising, and stakeholders' engagement activities amount to 105 events. This is in addition to the SESA's consultations, and to the ones started as part of the REDD+ strategy development. Analytical studies carried out to assess key elements (i.e., land title, land tenure, property rights, forest governance, land use planning, law enforcement) required consultations, as well as the study on deforestation drivers.

Developing the Feedback and Grievance Redress Mechanism also required stakeholder consultations, which were held on five REDD+ islands, to tackle issues regarding property rights, benefit sharing, agriculture activities, and implementation arrangements. In addition, the REDD+ Civil Society Organizations platform (CSO), with chapters in various islands, carried out consultation and outreach workshops in 2016 and 2017 on Luganville (Santo), Lakatoro (Malekula), Epule (Efate), Lenakel (Tanna), Bongil (Erromango), plus additional periodical CSO REDD+ Platform meetings. Regional Department of Forest Offices also participated in the different outreach and capacity building activities.

Thus, the Self-Assessment Workshops come as an additional consultation process about the whole set of REDD+ activities that make the R-Package (ie, National REDD+ Strategy, SESA, Reference Level, Safeguards System, and MRV).

Process and methodology

The multi stakeholder Self-Assessment process thoroughly followed the recommendations included in the Guide to the FCPF Readiness Assessment Framework, with respect to the selection of participants, preparation of event, facilitation of the assessment process, outcome synthesis and dissemination and validation.

Four workshops were conducted in four of the five REDD+ priority islands (Malekula, Santo, Efate, Tanna), from August to October 2019, followed by a Validation Workshop in November, at the Department of Forests.

The workshops were organized by the REDD+ Unit, supported by the Regional Forest Offices, and the local CSO Network. The selection of stakeholders was made in consultation with the Regional Forest Officers, and CSO Network representatives, and included representatives from Government Organizations, CSO/NGO, farmer network groups, and youth groups.

The Facilitation Team was formed a week before the workshops, by experts from the REDD+ Unit and Forestry Department Officials and local NGO, who prepared for the meetings, and developed the materials and methodology. The Team was supported by Regional Forest Office officers and CSO members for logistics and for identifying and inviting participants.

The REDD+ Unit team prepared the materials that were translated into Bislama (Vanuatu's language).

There was a total of 67 participants participating in the four workshops, with a majority from Civil Society (61%), followed by government (33%), and youth (6%). In Malekula, there were 16 participants (10 male, 6 female), with 7 participants from CSO Malekula, one retired forester, 7 belonging to government departments (Agriculture, Nuts&Oiks, Fisheries, Livestock, and Water). And one to the Red Cross Society. In Santo, there were 20 participants (16 male, 4 female), with 4 participants from CSO Santo, three from Fanafo, 3 from Sara, 1 from Matantas Village, 1 from Hog Harbor, 1 from Luganville, 4 from the Forestry Department, and 1 from the Agriculture

Department, plus one from the Ombudman’s office. In Tanna, there were 20 participants (17 male, 3 female), with 11 participants from CSO Tanna, 1 from North Tanna, 2 from Central Tanna, 4 Youth, 1 from the Forestry Department, and 1 from the Cultural Center Field. In Efate there were 11 participants (7 male, 4 female), with 2 participants from CSO Efate, and the rest (9) from the Department of Forest.

The methodology at the actual workshops consisted on a presentation on the achieved progress regarding each of the components and sub-components. Participants were to express their own perception of the progress to date regarding each of the criteria and would express their views and perceptions according the assessment criteria, rating each subcomponent according to the “traffic light” indicators provided by the FCPF Readiness Assessment Framework.

No progress shown as yet	Further development required	Progress but needs to be developed further	Considerable progress made
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The Assessment Team facilitated the process, and asked participants to express their views on strengths, gaps, and need for additional work of each of the subcomponents, according to the pre-established criteria. All 34 criteria were rated individually, and then compiled. As recommended by the FCPF Self-Assessment Guidelines, the participants discussed the criteria among themselves, and in working groups, and thereafter provided individual ratings following the traffic light methodology.

Results

The overall self-assessment shows a 53% of YELLOW ratings, indicating that the work is progressing well, but further development is required. Next, the participants responded with 38% of GREEN ratings, indicating significant progress. ORANGE ratings, where further development is required, corresponded to 9% of total, while there are no RED ratings.

Most work still to be done (ORANGE) was recommended with relation to Fund Management Capacity at the national level. More training should be imparted at the PMU. Also, more work is needed on the implementation framework, especially with regards to the carbon rights, benefit sharing, procedures, and grievance management. And work is still to be done with the National REDD+ Registry.

Further development is required (YELLOW) with relation to the multi-sector coordination and cross sector collaboration, technical capacity, and the FGRM (still to be completed); on the latter it was suggested that the FGRM mechanism should be tested in the field. Information sharing and access and more public disclosure about consultations were demanded, in particular more participation of women and youth groups, other islands, as well as more awareness raising activities from the ni-Vanuatu and forest dweller communities. Therefore, the consultation outcomes should also be disseminated in Bislama language.

Also, participants felt that the mandates and roles and responsibilities of each national institution should be better developed and explained through additional more regular workshops and training. On the REDD+ Strategy, participants require more clarity about the link between drivers and REDD+ activities; and on the action plans to address natural resources rights, and governance, and the implication for Forest Law and Policy. Also, on the strategic options for REDD+ strategies, participants felt that there needs to be further development with regards to the adoption of legislation or regulation, and on the benefit sharing mechanism. On the National Forests Monitoring System, more work is needed with relation to the early system implementation, institutional arrangements, and on the information system, reporting, and capacity.

Table 1 – Self-assessment ratings of four different islands and overall validation (source: R-PP)

Components/Sub-Components	Criteria of Assessment	Malakula	Santo	Tanna	Efate	Overall validation of the ratings ¹
1. Readiness Organization and Consultations						
1a) National REDD+ Management Arrangements	1) Accountability and transparency	G	O	Y	G	G
	2) Operating mandate and budget	G	Y	O	G	G
	3) Multi-sector coordination mechanisms and cross-sector collaboration	G	O	Y	Y	Y
	4) Technical supervision capacity	Y	Y	Y	O	Y
	5) Fund management capacity	O	O	O	O	O
	6) Feedback and grievance redress mechanism	G	Y	Y	Y	Y
1b) Consultation, Participation, and Outreach	7) Participation and engagement of key stakeholders	Y	G	Y	Y	Y
	8) Consultation processes	O	Y	G	G	G
	9) Information sharing and accessibility of information	G	Y	Y	Y	Y
	10) Implementation and public disclosure of consultation outcomes	G	Y	Y	Y	Y
2. REDD+ Strategy Preparation						
	11) Assessment and analysis	G	O	Y	G	G

¹ The overall validation was done based on the ratings done by the participants and discussion with the Technical Committee Members and Ad-hoc Working Group Members

2a) Assessment of Land use, Land use Change Drivers, Forest Laws, Policy, and Governance	12) Prioritization of direct and indirect drivers/barriers to forest carbon stock enhancement	O	Y	G	G	G
	13) Links between drivers/barriers and REDD+ activities	Y	Y	G	Y	Y
	14) Action plans to address right to natural resources rights, land tenure, and governance	G	Y	Y	Y	Y
	15) Implications for forest law and policy	G	O	Y	Y	Y
2b) REDD+ Strategy Options	16) Selection and prioritization of REDD+ strategy options	O	G	Y	G	G
	17) Feasibility assessment	G	O	Y	G	G
	18) Implications of strategy options on existing sectoral policies	Y	O	Y	Y	Y
2c) Implementation Framework	19) Adoption and implementation of legislation/ regulations	Y	O	Y	Y	Y
	20) Guidelines for implementation	O	O	O	O	O
	21) Benefit-sharing mechanism	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	22) National REDD+ registry and system monitoring REDD+ activities	O	O	O	O	O
2d) Social and Environmental Impacts	23) Analysis of social and environmental safeguard issues	Y	G	G	Y	G
	24) REDD+ strategy design with respect to impacts	O	G	Y	G	G
	25) Environmental and Social Management Framework	Y	G	Y	G	G
3. Reference Emissions Level/Reference Levels						
	26) Demonstration of methodology	G	G	G	G	G
	27) Use of historical data, and adjusted for national circumstances	Y	Y	O	G	Y
	28) Technical feasibility of the methodological approach, and consistency with UNFCCC/IPCC guidance and guidelines	Y	G	O	Y	Y
4. Monitoring Systems for Forests, and Safeguards						
4a) National Forest Monitoring System	29) Documentation of the monitoring approach	G	Y	O	G	G
	30) Demonstration of early system implementation	Y	O	G	Y	Y
	31) Institutional arrangements and capacities	G	Y	Y	Y	Y

4b) Information System for Multiple Benefits, Other Impacts, Governance and Safeguards	32) Identification of relevant non-carbon aspects, and social and environmental issues	G	Y	G	G	G
	33) Monitoring, reporting, and information sharing	Y	Y	O	Y	Y
	34) Institutional arrangements and capacities	Y	Y	Y	G	Y

- TAP Assessment.** *The participative Self-Assessment Process in Vanuatu followed the FCPF Readiness Assessment Framework Guidelines. The R-Package Report, which includes sections on the Self-Assessment Process, includes all required information. It included a multi-stakeholder participation in each island, with 67 representatives from various national and regional government officials, NGOs, and Civil Society. There were participants representing the ni-Vanuatu communities, forest dwellers, women and youth groups. The Facilitation Team helped understand what has been done so far, and what is to be done, so that each participant could freely express what areas needed further work.*
- However, the TAP Review would have been easier, had the ratings on the assessment criteria been supported with specific feedback from the consulted groups; rather it had a compiled report summarizing all comments received per criteria. So, it was difficult to determine the different perceptions from the different interest groups. The proceedings and minutes from the Workshops presented the ratings resulting from the discussions, and a summary table indicating gaps and areas requiring further development. However, it did not record the different perceptions or points of view of the different interest groups. It is recommended that for future consultation processes, a record of those views and how they are or have been addressed may be available. It will help build stronger involvement from stakeholders and strengthen communication.*

b. Section 2: Review of Progress on REDD+ Readiness

This section evaluates the progress on REDD+ readiness, as per the four Readiness Components that are: (i) Readiness Arrangements and Organization; (ii) National REDD+ Strategy Preparation; (iii) Reference Emissions Level; and (iv) Monitoring System and Safeguards. The evaluation is based on the criteria used by Vanuatu in its self-assessment, following the FCPF Readiness Assessment Framework Guidelines. In this section the TAP evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of each subcomponent.

The review was based on the REDD+ R-Package Document prepared by Vanuatu's REDD+ Unit for FCPF. A good array of complete documentation about progress in the different REDD+ areas has been put together by the REDD+ Unit. This information has been made publicly available at the REDDPLUS.VU website platform.

Component 1: Readiness, Organization and Consultation

Sub-Component 1a: National REDD+ Management Arrangements (Criteria 1-6)

Accountability and Transparency (Criteria 1-2: Green) Multi-sector coordination and Technical Supervision Capacity (Criteria 3-4: Yellow) Fund Management Capacity (Criterion 5: Orange).

Vanuatu started dialogue with REDD stakeholders back in 2015, after the signing of the Grant Agreement with FCPF. A solid institutional structure was established, and a comprehensive consultative and participatory process ensued, engaging representatives from the different government agencies related to REDD+, and with a strong platform to coordinate and communicate with forest dependent communities: the REDD+ CSO platform, under the framework of Vanuatu Association of NGOs (VANGO). As a result of the REDD+ Readiness Program, the institutional capacity has been strengthened, establishing various coordination bodies. The National Advisory Board on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction (NAB) is responsible for the overall policy guidance and coordination of REDD+. It is comprised of government and non-government members. The National REDD+ Unit at the Department of Forestry is responsible for the coordination and implementation of REDD+ Readiness activities, and reports to NAB and to the Technical Committee. This committee is formed by representatives from the Departments of Agriculture, Livestock, Horticulture, Fisheries, Forestry and Environment, and CSO members. In addition, there are Ad-hoc Thematic Working Groups to deal with specific topics related to REDD+: (i) Data management; (ii) Forest Reference Emissions Level; (iii) National Forestry Inventory; (iv) National REDD+ Strategy. At the provincial level, there are also Provincial Technical Committees established in the 5 REDD+ islands: these committees have members from various government departments, Women Groups, and Youth Groups. Likewise, there are networks of CSOs at provincial level, to help coordinate and implement REDD+ activities at the local level. The CSO Networks include forest dwellers, farmer's associations, and NGOs.

The REDD+ Unit is in charge of disseminating the information produced by specific REDD+ Readiness activities, and the results from the different consultations. A web page and radio programs are the main channels for publishing and information outreach, in addition to the multiple consultations and participatory workshops. Also, the REDD+ Unit is in charge of developing the TOR for all technical studies, and for supervising consultants, coordinating workshops and meetings, and reporting; and receives assistance and technical support from the Department of Forestry at both national and provincial levels. The Department of Forestry is in charge of conducting the National Forestry Inventory, the carrying out the analysis of land use change using remote sensing data, and of producing the Forest Reference Emissions Level (FREL) and National Forest Monitoring System, with participation from the CSO Platform.

As per Funds Management, the Project Management Unit (PMU) at the Department of Climate Change, is in charge of managing and allocating the budget, and of all fiduciary responsibilities with regards to the FCPF resources. The Ministry of Finance administers the funds, according to the instructions provided by the PMU. FCPF is the only funding agency for REDD+ Readiness and has provided a total grant of USD6.1 million. The REDD+ unit has received in-kind contributions from the Government, as labor and office spaces. The CSO REDD+ Platform also covers its activities.

Self-Assessment. The self-assessment concluded that there is good progress with regards to Accountability and Transparency, and to the operational mandates. With relation to the Institutional Arrangement and Coordination there is progress but still there is room for improvement, in particular with relation to the interaction between government agencies opposing sectorial policies may still be confusing. Particularly perceived as in need of improvement is the funding capacity, procurement skills, and the transparency and accountability for budget management

- *TAP Conclusion. A good consultative REDD+ development process has been taking place, under a strong leadership by the REDD+ Unit and the Department of Forestry, and aided by the REDD+ CSO Platform. Information on Institutional and organizational setup for REDD+ is clear and the overall coordination seems to be working both at national and subnational levels involving all relevant executive authorities under the coordination of the environment, agricultural, and finance departments. Technical supervision capacity of the Department of Forestry Regional Offices need to be strengthened. Also, there should be more involvement of other sectorial departments such as Agriculture, or Livestock, as well as a better clarification of their roles. Regarding the perception of financial management weakness, better communication about the use of funds, and the contracting processes may be needed, as well as training for the PMU officers. Concur with the ratings.*

Feedback and grievance redress mechanism (criterion 6: yellow)

The study and consultations on Feedback and Grievance Redress Mechanism (FGRM) have been completed. Nine rounds of consultation workshops involving 152 participants were conducted,

including representatives from government entities, NGOs/CSOs, women and youth groups, forest dwellers and ni-Vanuatu people. It has been developed following the World Bank and Cancun Safeguard policies. However, the FGRM has not been tested in the field, as it is not yet operational, and will not be until July 2021.

Although there are customary conflict management and resolution mechanisms in place, the FGRM will include issues pertaining to REDD+ such as the distribution of benefits, or land use restrictions. The system complements the existing mechanisms, and it is to be oriented to allow people to denounce or bring attention to grievances, or claims regarding REDD+ implementation.

Self-Assessment. The rating given to the Feedback and Grievance Redress Mechanisms (FGRM) is yellow, as there is progress, but the mechanism is still to be set. In the self-assessment the participants identified that communication, education, mediation skills need further strengthening at the REDD+ Unit, the Resident Forest Officer (RFO) formally designated to receive the feedback, grievances and complaints, and CSOs (that will help conveying grievance to the RFO). Also, that potential stakeholders need to be better informed about the mechanism for reporting grievances. There is a working green line, where complaints and grievances can be manifested, but there seems to be a lack of resources to provide adequate attention, and feedback. Participants are claiming for more transparency and information dissemination, which will help enhance the system's accountability

- *TAP Conclusion. FRGM is still pending. Training and workshops are required, and the mechanism needs to be in place in order to test its effectiveness, so that it can be adjusted and enhanced. Concur with the rating.*

Sub-Component 1b: Consultation, Participation and Outreach (Criteria 7-10)

Participation of key stakeholders (*criteria 7: yellow*), and Consultation Process (*criteria 8: green*).

As presented above, the R-Readiness process in Vanuatu has been participative and all relevant stakeholders have been involved in the different development stages, as part of the preparation of the REDD+ National Strategy, SESA, FGRM, Technical Committees meetings, ad-hoc working meetings, and to present the REDD+ mechanism. The REDD+ Unit, DOF representatives, and the CSO platform has engaged stakeholders at Port Vila and at the REDD+ islands.

The process of consultation and participation started in 2015 and has involved 209 events (meetings and workshops), organized by the REDD+ Unit, where 4,290 people have participated (2,542 male and 1748 female). In addition, the CSO Platform has also conducted awareness raising activities in all 5 REDD+ islands. GIZ and the NGO Live and Learn have also supported the communications and awareness raising process. Communication and information materials have been produced in Bislama language and following adequate cultural orientations suitable for the local ni-Vanuatu people. Banners, songs, drama, and community radio have been used for

awareness raising at the local level. Consultations have also considered gender issues regarding forest land use, land tenure, and forest management.

Information sharing and accessibility of information and implementation and public disclosure of consultation outcomes (*criteria 9, 10: yellow*).

Information packages have been produced at all levels, and with due regard to culturally appropriated formats, according to the guidelines established by FCPF. Information has been shared (in presentations, flyers, brochures, and training materials) during the consultation and stakeholder engagement processes. Also, the REDD+ Website, managed by the REDD+ Unit, has a good repository of all R-Readiness relevant documents, and about the progress in implementation. It is only in English but will be translated to Bislama. Radio and the TV broadcasting network have been effective ways to reach far flung areas in Vanatu, and have helped raise awareness at the national level.

Feedback and results from the different consultations have been provided through the website and through the REDD+ CSO Platform. All final and draft reports of all key elements related to R-Readiness, such as drivers of deforestation and degradation, strategic options, benefit sharing mechanism, legal harmonization, value chains analysis of NTFP, FGRM, forest inventory and monitoring system, national REDD+ strategy, SESA, ESMF, have been published in the REDD+ website. Feedback obtained through the website have been provided to the consultants in charge of developing the instruments, such as SESA, ESMF, RPF, and PF. All study reports and safeguard instruments will be translated into Bislama.

Self-Assessment. In general, in the self-assessment process, the rating for the entire consultation, participation and outreach sub-component indicated some progress but still needing further improvement. There is concern about the land use possibilities, and about the lack of clarity regarding potential zoning for agriculture, livestock, and forestry activities. Better and additional communication is requested, in particular the technical discussions of the Provincial Technical Committees, regarding land use and related benefit sharing, carbon rights, water rights, expansion of agricultural areas. It was suggested that all these key topics be shared with the REDD+ Strategy development consultant and discussed at the next validation workshop in November 2020.

- *TAP Conclusion. As indicated in the previous section of the report, public consultation seems to be strong. All interest groups have been involved, and particular emphasis has been placed on those stakeholders representing minorities. Nonetheless, the TAP recommendation is to further strengthen the feedback part of the consultation process, especially with regards to land use choices and restrictions. This can be done through publication of consultations on the key topics and on how these have been addressed in the different documents or instruments. It will help gain additional support and participation, if draft materials can also be translated into Bislama. Concur with the rating.*

Component 2: REDD+ Strategy Preparation

Sub-component 2a: Assessment of Land Use, Land-use change drivers, Forest Law, Policy and Governance (criteria 11-15)

Assessment and prioritization (*critera 11-12: green*) Drivers and Action Plans (*criteria 13-15: yellow*).

There is good progress with relation to the assessment and analysis, and prioritization of direct and indirect drivers. A comprehensive study on land use and land use change has been carried out, using remote sensing data, and complementing the analysis with participatory consultations. Also, the study included an overview and analysis of the legal framework related to land tenure, and to forestry and environmental conservation. In Vanuatu, all forest areas belong to the ni-Vanuatu people, who have customary traditional rights.

The prioritization of drivers has been made through stakeholder participation. Participants included local farmer networks, CSOs, NGOs, forest dwellers, provincial and national government representatives. Major drivers identified are (i) subsistence agriculture, (ii) logging, (iii) fuelwood and charcoal, (iv) invasive species (*Merremia peltata* vine), (v) natural disasters, and (vi) infrastructure development for tourism and settlements. The National REDD+ Strategy, currently under development, is considering all drivers and agents, and barriers for carbon stock enhancement and conservation. Barriers include conflicting sectorial policies, weak law enforcement in forestry sector, and diverging priorities of people and government.

The sectorial action plans will include provision to address land tenure, titling, natural resources rights, livelihood and governance. The benefit sharing mechanism, not yet fully structured, is important to set incentives to the local communities for adopting REDD+ policies and activities. Also, the report recommends investments in national REDD activities before payments for performance start.

Self-Assessment. The rating from the Self-Assessment process for this sub-component acknowledges good progress for the assessment and analysis of drivers. In what relates to the Action Plans to meet drivers, there is progress with regards to agroforestry developments, but further development is needed with relation to the action plans to address natural resource rights, land tenure and governance.

- *TAP Conclusion. Concur with self-assessment ratings. There are no Action Plans for Land use and land tenure, titles, natural resources and governance (work expected for July 2021). These are the key elements of a sound REDD+ strategy, and the basis for a right benefit sharing mechanism under the ER Program. Consented participation from these*

land right holders will be the basis to claim their part in the benefit distribution, resulting from potential carbon offset sales.

Sub-component 2b. REDD+ Strategy Options (*criteria 16-17: green; criterion 18: yellow*)

Based on the recommendations of analytical studies and stakeholder engagement workshops, Vanuatu has set REDD+ Strategy Options, prioritized according to the potential for emission reductions, enhancing removals and co-benefits such as food security, community resilience and ability to adapt to climate change. The studies included an assessment about drivers, strategy options, legal harmonization, benefit sharing, feedback and grievance mechanism, value chain analysis of NTFPs. In addition, other studies in progress provided elements, such as the SESA, ESMF, NFI and activity data analysis, FRL, and NFMS/MRV.

The strategy options include: (i) land use planning; (ii) Government transformation of degraded agriculture lease to productive forest landscapes; (iii) REDD+ on customary land of smallholder farmers to support agroforestry; (iv) REDD+ on customary land to expand network of conservation areas. Feasibility assessment of strategic options has also been carried out. Inconsistencies of sectorial policies and regulation, with the REDD+ goals have been identified, and will need to be addressed as part of the REDD+ National Strategy. Vanuatu's REDD+ vision is aimed at achieving multiple eligible REDD+ activities (i.e., reducing emissions from deforestation or forest degradation, conserving forest carbon stocks, sustainably managing forests, enhancing forest carbon stocks), according to the 2 types of land tenure: (a) On degraded leased land, acquisition by government to sub-lease for agroforestry-based production and replacement to indigenous control after lease expire. (b) On customary land, two options: extension service to support uptake of agroforestry; or area-based conservation with productive alternatives such as eco-tourism, firewood production on managed forests, or NTFP. The National REDD+ Strategy is entering consultations and validation workshops through November 2020, with the aim of having a final report by January 2021.

Self-Assessment. The self-assessment indicates that there is good progress with respect to the selection and prioritization of REDD+ strategy options, and about their feasibility assessment. Nonetheless the self-assessment participants consider there is need for further development with relation to the assessment of the implication of strategy options on existing sectorial policies. In this regard the rating on Feasibility Assessment should be yellow instead of green. Concur with all other ratings.

- *TAP Conclusion. Concur with the rating. The Self-Assessment process found a clear cause-effect approach to develop the REDD+ Strategy, directly addressing the main drivers. It also endorses the selection and prioritization of REDD+ strategic options. There are still some information gaps that could be filled, as the assessment about land use restrictions, and potential carbon rights, and related benefit distribution mechanism. Also, the inconsistencies of sectorial policies and regulation with the REDD+ strategy options should be addressed so that risks and opportunities are better determined, and political feasibility can be determined.*

Sub-component 2c: Implementation Framework

Adoption and application of laws and regulation, and benefit sharing mechanism (criteria 19 & 21: yellow) Implementation guidelines & national REDD+ registry and REDD+ activity monitoring system (criteria 20 & 22: orange)

Vanuatu's National Forest Policy (2013) includes all basic provisions for forest management, conservation, land ownership, community participation, forest administration, and forest revenues; however, it needs to be amended to include provisions on REDD+ and carbon rights. Also showing good progress but still in need of further progress, it is the Benefit Sharing mechanism, that still needs to be validated by stakeholders, finalized and adopted by the Government. It takes into consideration costs (management, opportunity, MRV, social and environmental safeguards), and the need to assist land holders to transition into agroforestry and conservation of forests.

The Guidelines for Implementation need further work, they are being developed as part of the National REDD+ Strategy, and need to integrate definitions and procedures regarding i) carbon rights, ii) benefit sharing, iii) feedback and grievance redress, iv) approvals, v) disbursements or investments, etc. As per the national REDD+ registry, it has not been finalized, it is expected that the database management system is operational by April 2021, and that some functions for the registry will be ready by then. The registry should have capacity to register REDD+ initiatives, and their progress in implementation and emission reduction results.

Self-Assessment. This sub-component indicated good progress, but in need of further development (Yellow) for what relates to the adoption and implementation of regulation/legislation, and to the Benefit sharing mechanism. The implementation guidelines are not yet ready, nor is the National REDD+ registry and REDD+ activity monitoring system, and they require further work. It is expected that these mechanisms will be ready by April 2021.

- *TAP Conclusion. Concur with the rating. Vanuatu has not yet defined the framework for implementation. A mechanism to define and transfer title of carbon rights is being developed, as it is the benefit distribution mechanism, and the national REDD+ transaction and data management system. Major pieces of the National REDD+ Strategy, such as the Benefit Sharing, Registry and Implementation Framework are expected for April 2021.*

Sub-component 2d: Social and Environmental Impacts (criteria 23-25: green)

In line with the UNFCCC's Cancun Agreements, and as part of the process of R-Readiness, Vanuatu has carried out a Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment – SESA, which has helped set the basis to define the Environmental and Social Management Framework -ESMF, the Resettlement Policy Framework -RPF, and Process Framework -PF, in accordance with the World Bank's social and environmental safeguard policies. Topics of discussion included environmental

and social risks related to the interventions to address deforestation and degradation, according to the drivers and strategy options identified through the analytical studies. All reports should be ready by October 2020, and validated at a national workshop by November 2020. Consultation workshops for SESA, ESMF, RPF, and PF were held together in all locations in the 5 REDD+ islands, and involved the participation of 216 people (31% women), representing government workers, local community members, NGOs, and private sector.

The study for building the SESA identified potential positive and negative impacts related to implementing the National REDD+ Strategy. The prioritization of activities will take into account those risks, related to all activities and strategies identified. The ESMF is complete and a draft report is ready, but further work is required to determine mitigation measures, define risk screening and implementation arrangements, and capacity building needs.

Self-Assessment. Based on progress made, the rating assigned by the self-assessment is green, as showing significant progress regarding all three assessment criteria.

TAP Conclusion. *The extensive, comprehensive, and participatory approach to identifying and defining the social and environmental safeguards for the REDD+ Strategy is recognized. The SESA process is complete, and the other environmental and social instruments are almost ready, with drafts to be finalized by October 2020. As there is still important work to be done with regards to each environmental and social risk management instrument, the TAP recommendation is to rate criterion 25 as Yellow, as topics are not completed and agreed as yet.*

Component 3: Reference Emissions Level/Reference Levels

Demonstration of Methodology (criterion 26: green) Use of Historical Data, and Adjustment to National Circumstances and Technical Feasibility of Methodological Approach and Consistency with UNFCCC/IPCC Guidelines (criteria 27-28: yellow)

According to the R-Package, the Department of Forestry has started the National Forest Inventory (NFI), and the field work is expected to be ready by January 2021. FRL are being built for each of 13 islands at sub-national level, for later aggregation into the national FRL. Soil carbon has been left out for the moment being, due to the lack of data. Activity data will be estimated according to land cover for deforestation, forest degradation, and carbon stock enhancement. Emission factors will be based on NFI field plots. And an uncertainty assessment will be made.

Historical data for 2008-2018 will be used as reference period, based on Landsat data, and NFI field data. NFI has been completed in 7 islands. Enhancement of forest carbon stocks will be assessed using data from registered commercial and community plantations, and agroforestry systems. The technical approach for establishing the FRL is consistent with the UNFCCC Warsaw Framework and IPCC methodological guidelines. The FRL estimation will be ready by April 2021.

Self-Assessment. The rating for the demonstration of methodology with respect to REL or RL is of good progress, as there is a clear methodology proposing a step-wise approach, regarding uncertainty and data resolution. For the use of historic data, and the technical feasibility of the methodological approach, the participants recognized progress, but they felt there is still further work to be done. Training and capacity building is expected for forest officials.

- TAP Conclusion. *The methodological approach has been established, but there is no reference to national circumstances in the R-Readiness package. The NFI and FRL will not be ready until January and April of next year, respectively. In that case, the TAP recommends downgrading the rating in Methodology to yellow. Concur with the rating for the other 2 criteria.*

Component 4: Monitoring Systems for Forests, and Safeguards

Sub-component 4a: National Forest Monitoring System (criterion 29: green; criteria 30-31: yellow)

Work on documenting the monitoring approach is in progress and to be completed by April 2021. The proposed monitoring approach for the National Forest Monitoring System -NFMS complies with international reporting and accounting requirements. Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and quality assurance/quality control (AQ/QC) measures will be identified and documented. The monitoring approach is to align and coordinate with the procedures followed by the Departments of Climate Change, Agriculture, Livestock, Lands, Environment to produce the national GHG inventories.

The demonstration of the NFMS will allow it to identify capacity gaps in the Department of Forestry, so that it can effectively operate the system. Capacity building and training is expected to allow adequate NFMS management. Human resources to manage the system need to be prioritized.

The Department of Forests has been confirmed as the key implementing agency for implementing and coordinating REDD+ activities in the country. Key personnel from the Department of Forests has already been trained in remote sensing/GIS methods and QA/QC for the NFI and Activity Data. In any case, further capacity building will be sought to manage and adjust the NFMS.

Self-Assessment. Good progress has been assessed in relation to the documentation of the monitoring approach. As per the demonstration of early system implementation, and the institutional arrangements and capacities, participants considered that there was some progress, but in need of additional work. A team of trained personnel is working on the forest inventory, but the system is in the phase of consolidation and strengthening. Additional capacity building will be needed to ensure the NFMS can be operated and enhanced over time.

*TAP Conclusion. Although there is analytical evidence supporting the selection of methodology, it has not been finalized, so it is still a work in progress. **Therefore, the rating should be yellow.** As per the demonstration of early system implementation, and the institutional arrangements and capacities, it is clear how the institutions will be in charge of the NFMS; however, the institutional capacities need strengthening and the need for additional resources has been identified. An Action Plan to address those capacity building needs has been developed. Concur with the yellow rating for the other criteria.*

Sub-component 4b: Information System for Multiple Benefits, Other Impacts, Governance and Safeguards

Identification of relevant non-carbon aspects and environmental and social issues (criterion 32: green); Monitoring, reporting and information sharing, and Institutional arrangements and capacities (criteria 33-34: yellow)

Vanuatu's REDD+ activities provide environmental, social, and economic co-benefits that are important for the country and stakeholders. In particular, non-carbon benefits and issues have been identified during the REDD+ Strategy development workshops, and on the stakeholder engagement and consultation process for SESA, and ESMF. These include issues related to demographics and households, land tenure, access to water, access to firewood, economic conditions, culture, gender, and forest management. Benefits related to biodiversity conservation, environmental services, and forest governance are important for the ni-Vanuatu people.

In relation to monitoring and reporting and information sharing, the NFMS is still in the process of design, and will include procedures for monitoring and reporting on non-carbon benefits. Currently, information sharing is done through reports, websites, radio, and workshops. The institutional arrangements have not been defined yet.

Self-Assessment. The Self-Assessment rating from stakeholders is Green for the identification of relevant non-carbon aspects and social and environmental issues, where good progress was reported. Yellow was rated for the two remaining indicators, on the monitoring, reporting and information sharing, and on institutional arrangements and capacities, as both are still being designed. The action plan includes capacity building, and it will take place after the NFI and FRL are ready, by July 2021. Concur with the rating.

TAP Conclusion. Non-carbon benefits, and environmental and social issues have been identified. However, not much progress is noted with respect to the design of a monitoring, reporting and information sharing system, or to the institutional arrangements. The Safeguard Information System has not been completed either. Concur with the rating.

4. Summary assessment and recommendations

a. Overall R-Readiness Progress

Based on the documents consulted, the TAP Reviewer considers that the R-Readiness Package demonstrates Vanuatu's commitment to REDD+, displays transparency in its readiness preparations, and shows that potential social and environmental risks are being addressed.

In its report, Vanuatu has emphasized "that the R-Package is not the end of the preparation phase, but an indication of the relative progress, given that the country's preparation for REDD+ is a dynamic process subject to evaluation at any time".

Therefore, the R-Package information confirms that Vanuatu's progress on REDD+ readiness is well oriented and moving on all fronts. Vanuatu started its REDD+ strategy building process in 2015 and has progressively strengthened the participation of different stakeholders at all levels. Progress has also been achieved at the technical policy level, especially on the identification and estimation of forests' related carbon, deforestation and degradation drivers, and in the preparation of the NMFS, REDD+ Strategy, SESA, and ESMF.

b. Self-Assessment Process

As indicated above, the Self-Assessment process in Vanuatu has been done in accordance with FCPF Readiness Assessment Framework, it has incorporated good stakeholder participation, and has made participatory consultations possible at the National, and Subnational Levels (5 islands). Further, it has involved the participation of civil society, NGOs, farmers, youth and women groups.

The information and document preparation for the Self-Assessment events clearly convey the on-going participatory process of REDD+ in Vanuatu. The documentation integrated all required R-Package elements, with links to complementary and underpinning information. Additional documents such as the draft REDD+ Strategy, NFI progress reports, SESA, ESMF, FRGM, were also consulted.

c. Overall Assessment and Recommendations

The self-assessment ratings show a good level of acknowledgement of Vanuatu's progress in REDD+ readiness, as indicated by the Yellow and Green scores. Vanuatu has placed important efforts to disseminate the national REDD+ Strategy at the central and local level, allowing stakeholder engagement in its development process.

Local implementation of REDD+ seems to be a commonly accepted goal, which requires further capacity building and dissemination of information, especially regarding benefits distribution, land use planning, land tenure, and links between drivers and forest carbon enhancement.

Identification of co-benefits, and further workshops and consultations on the risks and economic feasibility of REDD+ activities at the local level will be important to incentivize forest conservation and carbon stock enhancement in productive activities in certain areas.

5. References

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