

Lessons learned from creating and assessing Forest Reference Levels for UNFCCC

Josefina Braña Varela, World Wildlife Fund



Creating and Assessing Reference Levels



- **15** countries have submitted reference levels to the UNFCCC. **6** reference levels have gone through technical assessment.
- Countries offered lessons about reference level interpretation and showed feasibility of reference level construction.
- This is a “learning-by-doing” effort, so understandably, there are areas for improvement.

Workshop in Bonn, Germany in May, 2016



- Workshop brought together reference levels creators and assessors as a group for the first time.
- Participants agreed that other countries could benefit from sharing information about challenges and lessons learned.

Lessons: Transparency and Accuracy

- Since transparency underpins the credibility of reference levels and REDD+ itself, REDD+ countries should be acknowledged for efforts to provide full access to all relevant information.
- Donors and REDD+ countries should work together on harmonized approaches to deal with high uncertainties, as with FCPF conservativeness factors.
- Efforts to remove bias in estimates are potentially more important than efforts to reduce uncertainties.
- A well-designed stratification approach may be an important tool in efficiently developing unbiased estimates.

Lessons: Consistency and completeness

- Though not required, REDD+ countries may benefit by maintaining consistency between national inventories, MRV systems, and reference levels. This may require careful planning in advance.
- Existing techniques to identify the most significant sources/sinks may help REDD+ countries develop robust and complete reference levels.
- REDD+ countries can use default values and country specific activity data to fill in data gaps for significant sources/sinks, such as degradation.
- Due to the high potential for leakage, countries should provide as much information as possible about emissions in areas or activities not included in the reference level.

Lessons: Comparability and the assessment process

- Though comparability is not assessed, donors may have an interest in understanding the relative scope and quality of reference levels across countries.
- Donors should financially support REDD+ countries to collect and improve data, especially where gaps exist.
- To accelerate the learning-by-doing process, REDD+ countries could include additional information about new activities or areas in supplemental annexes and request comments on the annex from technical assessors.
- Additional resources may be needed in order to maintain and expand the pool of qualified technical assessors.
- REDD+ countries may need assistance in building capacity and ownership, to avoid an overreliance on consultants.

Key takeaways

- In addition to supporting results, donors may need to provide **finance to** help REDD+ countries **collect and improve data**, especially **for gaps** such as degradation.
- Donors and REDD+ countries need to find a **balance** in accepting current levels of **uncertainty**, while making progress toward **improving data quality, completeness** of coverage, and **cost-effectiveness** of MRV.
- The contributions from REDD+ activities, as measured against the assessed reference levels, may be **key pieces** of information **for measuring global progress toward the goals of the Paris Agreement**.

Thank you



Dedicated to Dr. Jim Penman, who passed away on September 9, after more than 20 years of contributions to climate science and policy.

Josefina Braña Varela
Senior Director,
Forest and Climate,
WWF's Forest Program
Josefina.Brana-Varela@WWFUS.ORG
Skype: josefinabrana



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