

Independent TAP Review of the R-Package prepared by Vietnam

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INTRODUCTION: THE CORE TASK OF THE TAP REVIEW

1. This document provides a review of the R-Package Self-Assessment Report prepared by Vietnam following a process that spanned an 11-month period which started in August 2015 and ended in July 2016. The 11-month process culminated in a report; “Participatory Self-assessment of the REDD+ Readiness Package in Vietnam, July 2016”, prepared under the auspices of Vietnam’s Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. Its preparation entailed a participatory process moderated by consultants who engaged representatives of all stakeholders from each of the 6 North Central Provinces (NCC Region) in special workshops (3 community stakeholder workshops, 1 provincial stakeholder workshop, 1 network and working group workshop), in addition to 3 workshops; inception, consolidation and national workshops which were held in Hanoi. The six provinces of the NCC Region constitute the Accounting Area in the Emission Reduction Program (ER-P) that Vietnam has also prepared, as the next step after preparing the R-Package Self-Assessment Report.
2. The preparation of an R-Package provides an opportunity to a REDD Country Participant to self-assess the progress on REDD+, demonstrates a REDD Country’s Participant’s commitment to REDD+ Readiness; and generates feedback and further guidance to a REDD Country Participant through a national multi-stakeholder self-assessment and PC assessment processes on readiness. In the case of Vietnam it has declared a vision in the context of REDD+ to sustainably manage 13.4 million ha of forest and increase that forest cover to 14.3 million ha by 2015 and to 15.1 million by 2020. In the context of performance based payments it has also developed an emission reduction program which will be focused in its North Central Coast Region (NCC) as its accounting area. Within the NCC, the proposed emission reduction program aims to

reduce emissions and increase removals by approximately 25Mt CO₂-e over an eight-year period; which works out to about 17% of the current reference level estimates. However, these numbers will change with revisions to the RL and ER estimates.

3. The purpose of the review is primarily to assess both progress and achievements of REDD+ Readiness in the country using the FCPF Readiness Assessment Framework, which consists of a set of 34 readiness criteria, distributed under four main readiness components; and their respective sub-components.

TAP ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

4. To perform the assessment, the TAP conducted a desk review of key documents starting with the R-Package document itself, Vietnam's R-PP and its Draft Emission Reduction Program Document (ER-PD), and others as listed at the end of this report. In addition the TAP interviewed staff under the FCPF and UN-REDD supported programs in Vietnam, to get a deeper understanding of the issues and proposals that are in the R-Package and also the ER-PD. This was in line with the terms of reference issued to the TAP by the FCPF Facility Management Team which states the following:
 - i. Perform a review of Vietnam's progress and the self-assessment report, based on guidelines in the R-Package Assessment Framework
 - ii. Review Vietnam's documentation of stakeholders' self-assessment, including the process that was used for the self-assessment and the reported outcome.
 - iii. 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.
 - iv. Provide 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

The TAP expert is then required to verify completeness of the R-Package, including:

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

PART A. REVIEW OF THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS AND THE ACCOMPANYING DOCUMENTATION

Self-Assessment process according to the R-Package guidelines

5. The R-Package starts with an introductory part which describes in chronological order a set of processes and milestone achievements by Vietnam along the path of REDD+ readiness. This is followed by descriptions of what Vietnam has in place under each criterion, ongoing processes, and the key weaknesses that need to be address as it progresses toward readiness.
6. Vietnam began its REDD+ readiness process in earnest in 2008 after COP 13 in Bali Indonesia. The period between 2008 and 2009 described more fully in the next section, saw a series of preparatory studies, the commissioning of documents on REDD+ and even REDD+ pilot projects. The UN-REDD Phase I Program was instrumental in that regard and in addition, Vietnam prepared REDD+ Readiness Idea Note (R-PIN) and REDD+ Readiness Program Proposal (R-PP) submitted to the FCPF supported by studies, initiatives supported by agencies such as UN-REDD and JICA. In 2014 Vietnam prepared its Emission Reduction Program Idea Note (ER-PIN) and initiated the preparation of an emission reduction program document (ER-PD) for submission to the Carbon Fund (CF). As one of the requirements prescribed the FCPF's Participants Committee (PC) Vietnam prepared its R-Package which is a requirement before submitting and ER-PD. As already stated, the R-Package is structured around 34 criteria against which progress toward readiness is assessed in a participatory self-assessment format followed by an Independent Review by a Technical Advisory Panel (TAP).
7. In addition to a well-organized introductory part, the R-Package is generally well written, clear and structured in line with the R-Package Assessment Framework. Despite some editorial issues that one finds in the document (e.g., Summary Section III pages 80-81), it clearly presents progress according to each of the 34 assessment criteria and also provides relevant and useful references in the form of hyperlinks to a number of documents.

Facilitated Self-Assessment Process

8. From the readings of the chain of events that led to the preparation of the R-Package, it is clear that it has been supported by major documents that had been produced on REDD+ described in the preceding section, while the process of consultations and preparation of the self-assessment process is also well described. It is also useful that the process clearly involved participation of the key stakeholders at both the national and local (provincial levels) and the diversity of stakeholders who were involved is clearly spelt out and the lists of participants are also gender desegregated to show the mix of male and female participation.
9. So far, the self-assessments appear to have been well organized and usefully divided into stakeholder groups including local communities that participated in the REDD+ readiness process and in the process, agreed on the key achievements or milestones that have been achieved under each of the 4 major readiness components, sub-components and each of the 34 assessment criteria. In addition, key weaknesses that need to be addressed and their recommended remedial measures were agreed upon at each of the workshops. The self-assessment results shows differences between provinces as perceived by participating stakeholders. In the end the degree of achievement under each criterion were agreed upon in each workshop with green being the highest level, yellow representing medium progress, orange just below medium and red representing the lowest degree of achievement.

Time frame and development of the Readiness Process in Vietnam

The next three paragraphs provide a summary of the events and milestones, gleaned from some key early documents that have preceded the development of both the R-Package Document, that is assessed herein, and the Draft ER-PD, the development of which has overlapped with that of the R-Package. Besides the ER-PD and the R-package itself, the other documents consulted were the R-PP and ER-PIN.

10. The REDD+ Readiness process in Vietnam owes its origins to the Conference of Parties Number 13 (COP 13) held in Bali Indonesia in December 2007, after which Vietnam sent a letter of interest proposing the methods, and the process of implementing REDD+. This was soon followed by the development of a UN-REDD Vietnam Program Phase I in February 2008. The same year, Vietnam was selected to become a member of the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) and in the same the country developed an Action Plan Framework on Mitigation and Adaptation to Climate Change. Consequently Vietnam's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) established a National REDD+ Network and six Sub-technical Working Groups (STWGs) in 2009. In a parallel development, the Government issued Decree 995 which included the forest carbon sequestration and storage service in 2010. In January 2011, the Prime Minister established both a National REDD+ Steering Committee⁶ (NRSC) chaired by Minister of MARD and a Vietnam REDD+ Office (VRO) affiliated to VNFOREST. The period 2009-2011 saw implementation of activities of UN-REDD Vietnam Program Phase I, the preparation of a Readiness Program Idea Note (R-PIN) and thereafter, the submission of a Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP).
11. The UN-REDD Supported Vietnam Program Phase I focused on developing a benefit distribution system (BDS), guiding the developing the reference emission level, developing and testing Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) in a Pilot Province (Lam Dong Province) as well as building capacity and communication activities and studies on the legal basis for REDD+ implementation. With the support from the Facility Management Team of the World Bank FCPF, the R-PP was officially submitted to the FCPF on 18 November 2011. On the basis of the R-PP and support from UN-REDD Vietnam Program Phase I, the National REDD+ Action Program (NRAP) was developed.
12. The period between 2012 and 2016 saw a 'flurry' of activities supported by donors such as UN-REDD, FCPF and JICA on REDD+ related aspects such as the preparation of Provincial REDD+ Action Plans (PRAP) in pilot provinces, designing a Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment (SESA) and Environmental and Social Management Frameworks (ESMF), piloting Benefit Sharing Mechanism (BSM) in the six pilot provinces, and the development a national reference level, a national monitoring system and a Feedback and Grievance Redress Mechanism (FGRM).

National ownership for REDD+ Readiness Process

13. The self- assessment report provides a clear picture of stakeholder participation and also what appears to be a honest view of what the weaknesses are, and the improvements that should be made, which are listed in an action plan in the R-Package. From the documentation on REDD+ in Vietnam there seems to be a strong interest understanding of REDD+ and the fact that the self-assessment process was protracted over an eleven month period enabled consultations and frank expression which also promotes ownership of REDD+ at both sub-national and national levels. There is also evidence of high level political support for REDD+ through Government Decisions after Bali to implement REDD+ and the proposal to receive

payments for emission reductions that are reflected in both the R-Package and the ER-PD. Examples of such commitment and ownership are described in paragraphs 10-12 in this report. Despite what appears to be an impressive degree of national ownership by Vietnam of its REDD+ Programme, there are some technical aspects of REDD+ which could require stronger ownership, particularly those that apply to the proposed ER Program in the NCC Region. These are briefly described herein.

- The PRAPs to date have been funded and designed largely by external parties and in addition, much of the technical thinking to describe issues important to REDD+ in Vietnam has been led by bilateral donors such as JICA and BMZ and multilateral ones. The government of Vietnam, now that it has developed an ER Program and as it rolls out REDD+ to other provinces in the country should play a much bigger role in their design, implementation and in addressing policy measures that are required to support them.
 - One would expect that The ER proposals, which can have significant impacts and policy implications, should also be expressly endorsed by the government, yet it is not clear if they have been endorsed.
 - An important aspect of mainstreaming REDD+, particularly the ER Program is to fit it into the current institutional set up in Vietnam, given that currently it is under a department created for international projects. Strong ownership would suggest that it is mainstreamed into the current institutional structure of the country.
 - The government also needs to develop and propose its financing strategy for the proposed ER actions even if it anticipates donor funding, beyond what the government supports under the Forest Protection and Development Plan.
14. The above bullet points in addition to the government's decisions and actions that have led to the development of an ER-PD and the Governments' stated ambitions (see paragraph 2) to increase forest cover on a national scale, do provide evidence of good ownership that should support a sustainable program to which long-term performance based payments will apply. However, official endorsement of the proposed technical options for emission reductions or strategies that have been proposed in the ER Program would be quite useful since that would provide support for policy changes that some of the strategy options would require.

PART B1. SUMMARY OF REDD+ PROCESSES – STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE R-PACKAGE FROM THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

An overview

15. Part I of the R-Package describes a chronology of events, processes and achievements, as well as international aid that has supplemented efforts of the Government toward REDD+ readiness. The main government donors that have supported Vietnam besides the two multilateral donors (UN-REDD and FCPF) are USAID, JICA, BMUD (Germany), BMZ (Germany), Norway, the UK and others. The volume of Government foreign aid during the 2009-2014 reached a total of US \$ 38.7 million.
16. On its Strategic Vision on the implementation of REDD+ in Vietnam, it is worth noting that the country wishes to increase its forest cover to 42 % by 2020. This works out to an increase from 13.7 million ha to 14.3 million ha 2015 and to 15.1 million ha by 2020. This will entail plantings of 2.6 million ha of new forest, increase in regeneration zones to 0.75 million ha, the rehabilitation of 350,000 ha of degraded natural forests and the increase in the productivity of plantations by 25% in 2020 compared to 2011. While the figures are impressive and Vietnam is one of the few global leaders in reforestation and afforestation rates, one needs to examine its policies and the feasibility of the emission reduction options to assess whether such increases can be achieved in the stated timelines and how well its emission reduction program addresses both direct drivers of forest cover change and their underlying causes.
17. The key achievements that have been registered between 2007 and 2016 are summarized in Part I of the R-Package. Noteworthy among them are key Government Decisions on the establishment of a National Steering Committee on REDD+ (NRSC), development of a national REDD+ Network and Sub-technical Working Groups National REDD Action Plan (NRAP) and PRAPs in Pilot Provinces. Furthermore, a unique arrangement; a Payment for Forest Based Ecosystem Services (PFES) has been put in place to respond to a number of hydro-power plants and mining ventures that often affect forest areas. As such, the PFES provides a mechanism against which mining, power companies can offset losses of forest cover. Vietnam has also made a submission on its national reference emission levels (REL) to the United National Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Several studies on Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC), Benefit Sharing Mechanisms (BSM), Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) and projects on Measurement Reporting and Verification (MRV), and safeguards. Finally and in tandem with the development of the R-Package Document, Vietnam has also produced an Emission Reduction Program Document (ER-PD).

Key Gaps identified from the self-assessment process

18. The bullets below represent the gaps that the self-assessment has clearly recognized what the stakeholders participating in the assessment process agreed to. What is interesting is that they cover issues of coordination mechanisms across sectors for REDD+, which is a fundamental issues in all national programs, safeguards and carbon rights. In addition the NRAP as a national strategic policy document on REDD+ has been identified for purposes of improvement. Vietnam's self- assessment process therefore identified important gaps and should be commended for doing so. The particular gaps are listed herein as follows:
 - The current level of multidisciplinary coordination mechanisms to support an integrated approach to implementing REDD+ which is still weak and need improvement

- Deficiencies in the NRAP which in the opinion of stakeholders has failed to meet all expectations and requirements and as a result need to be updated.
- Strategic Environmental and Social Assessments (SESA) and Strategic Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) which are under preparation but need to be finalized.
- The status of REDD+ Safeguard system is under development but not yet in place to guide REDD+ implementation
- REDD+ Communication System which needs to do more to reach out to forest dependent communities in remote areas
- The need to do more on carbon rights in addition to establishing a common registry of carbon projects and carbon rights.

Summary of the self-assessment process shown by component

REDD READINESS COMPONENT AND SUB-COMPONENT	PROGRESS INDICATOR
Component 1. Readiness Organization and Consultation	
Sub-component 1a	
Sub-component 1b	
Component 2 REDD+ Strategy Preparation	
Sub-component 2a Assessment of land use, Land use changers, Drivers, Forest Law, Policy and Governance	
Sub-component 2b REDD+ Strategy Options	
Sub-component 2c Implementation Framework	
Sub-component 2d Social and Environmental Impacts	
Component 3 Reference Emissions Level/ Reference Levels	
Component 4 Monitoring systems for Forests and Safeguards	
Sub-component 4a National Forest Monitoring System	
Sub-component 4b Information System for Multiple Benefits, other Impacts, Governance and Safeguards	

Proposed REDD+ Readiness Preparation Action Plan

19. In response to the gaps and other considerations during the self-assessment process, Vietnam has proposed what they term a 'REDD+ Readiness Preparation Action Plan' in the R-Package, with a long list of actions. These in the opinion of the TAP are all valid points for further action to improve Vietnam's national REDD+ strategy and action plan in general and also in its ER-P. In this section, the TAP has added additional comments arranged by component.
 - i. The legal framework related to REDD+ such as land use, forest resource use rights, forest entitlement, carbon right, etc. need to be further developed;

- ii. The coordination mechanism between forestry, agriculture, natural resources and environment and infrastructure development, and hydropower should be established for to support REDD+;
- iii. REDD+ action plans at all levels should be integrated with the forest protection and development plan, the socio-economic development plan;
- iv. The National REDD+ Fund should be established as part of the Forest Protection and Development Fund;
- v. The legal framework related to technical aspects of REDD+ i.e. low impact harvesting procedures, forest carbon monitoring, sustainable forest management procedures forest certifications, improved land use planning and more emphasis on long rotation plantations etc. should be set up and institutionalized;
- vi. REDD+ grievance redress mechanism should be institutionalized;
- vii. FPIC guidelines should be institutionalized;
- viii. Benefit sharing mechanism in REDD+ should be approved by the Government;
- ix. There is a need to design and implement a program on capacity strengthening on REDD+ for the community, especially ethnic minorities, vulnerable groups, etc.;
- x. REDD+ communication strategy should be approved and operationalized;
- xi. Revising the NRAP, including an elaboration of action plans for the period 2016 – 2020 and improved guidance on strategy and implementation;
- xii. Official approval for SESA and ESMF;
- xiii. Establishing and operationalizing national REDD+ Portal;
- xiv. Approval of National REL and NCC RL;
- xv. Establishing and operating MRV system at all levels;
- xvi. Support for the operation of FLEGT/VPA and controlling illegal logging in cooperation with Lao and Cambodia (in which negotiations with the EU are in the final stages) ; and
- xvii. Establishing and operating the proposed Safeguards Information System (SIS).

PART B2. ASSESSMENT BY THE TAP

COMPONENT 1. READINESS ORGANIZATION AND CONSULTATIONS

Sub-component 1a. National REDD+ Management Arrangements (Criteria 1-6, Yellow)

- 1) Accountability and transparency
 - 2) Operating mandate and budget
 - 3) Multi-sector coordination mechanisms and cross-sector collaboration
 - 4) Technical supervision capacity
 - 5) Funds management capacity
 - 6) Feedback and grievance redress mechanism
20. In terms of the management of REDD+, the proposed institutional and management arrangements are well described. The description of national and sub-national entities that will manage the REDD+ are clear, despite the appearance of complexity where many institutions with multiple and overlapping responsibilities can exist. The structures created for REDD+ and which can be held accountable to the government and stakeholders include, the National REDD+ Network and six Sub-Technical Working Groups (STWGs) both established in 2009. Thereafter a Government Decree 995 created the forest carbon sequestration and storage service in 2010. In January 2011, the Prime Minister established a National REDD+ Steering Committee⁶ (NRSC) chaired by Minister of MARD and the national Vietnam REDD+ Office (VRO) affiliated to VNFOREST. For practical purposes of accountability in a REDD+ context, the above structures oversaw the development of a National and REDD+ Action Plan (NRAP) followed by a series of PRAPs. In line with government policy to ensure transparency on REDD+ actions, all government actions on REDD+ are subject to inspections by all ministries and other stakeholders. As such, all documents are supposed to be made public and to that end, a Management Information System for Forestry (FORMIS) is under development and will be structured to handle the MRV System for REDD+ and integrate aspects on information on non-carbon benefits of REDD+ and Safeguards.
21. From the self-assessment, stakeholders appreciate the level of accountability and transparency on REDD+ that is addressed under Criterion 1. This must however also apply to the data and information collected under any other institutional arrangement, including FORMIS to ensure transparency in reporting and verification. In this regard, it should be clarified how the FORMIS system will be used to meet this criteria and suggest what data/information Vietnam will make publicly available.
22. So far, Criterion 2 on operating mandates and budget has been well described in the R-Package and what needs improvement is mainly coordination at both high and local levels to plan, implement and monitor REDD+ actions.
23. On Criterion 3 which addresses the critical issue of coordination, the TAP agrees with the observation made during the self-assessment process that coordination with other sectors which are crucial to REDD+ such as agriculture, mining, transport infra-structure and hydropower is still weak or largely lacking. This is also clear in the Draft ER-PD, and requires further analysis and the proposal of a solid process to engage with other sectors and generate buy-in and enforcement at the highest levels of government policy making and planning. In fact, inter-sector coordination should be a key aspect that the new NRAP should propose since the NRAP is seen by stakeholders as a key policy document that provides a national framework for REDD+.

24. On Criterion 4, on technical supervision capacity, the self-assessment by Vietnam has observed that technical supervisory capacity for REDD+ ought to be strengthened at provincial, district and commune levels, since that is a weak point at the moment. The TAP suggests that this, together with Criterion 3 are issues that can be addressed during the current review of the current NRAP.
25. On Criterion 5, the R-package has also observed that the management of funds is also a weak area in at a National Level. The TAP suggests that starting with the NCC Region going forward, a national capacity building facility for this and other forms of institutional management should be part of the PRAPs.
26. On Criterion 6 dealing with FGRM issues, the TAP notes what the R-Package has stated that a number of laws including Vietnam's Land Law of 2013 have made provisions for FGRM even though no specific FGRM has been specifically developed for the national REDD+ Program. However, UN-REDD Program Phase II is seeking to strengthen existing mechanisms. There is therefore an opportunity for the results from the UN-REDD Program to be incorporated into the Draft and Final versions of Vietnam's NRAP and also the ERPD and should be clearly reflected alongside safeguards for purposes of monitoring

1b. Consultation, Participation, and Outreach (Criteria 7-10, Yellow)

- 7) Participation and engagement of key stakeholders
- 8) Consultation processes
- 9) Information sharing and accessibility of information
- 10) Implementation and public disclosure of consultation outcomes

27. On Criterion 7 on participation, particularly of ethnic minorities, official support is provided through the Council of Ethnic Minorities (CEMA) and an associated government decision, known as Decision 799. In addition, UN-REDD has and continues to facilitate participation of ethnic minorities in REDD+ and also promotes the application of FPIC Principles in its areas of operation. Despite these efforts, representation of ethnic minorities is still insufficient and more effort is needed to improve their awareness and capacity, to usefully engage in the implementation and monitoring of REDD+.
28. With regard to Criterion 8, the self-assessment process described in the R-Package demonstrates a clear and structured system of consultations that Vietnam has conducted at all levels for the purposes of awareness creation for REDD+, the development of the national REDD+ Action Plan and its associated Provincial REDD+ Action Plans, and their implementation. So far, stakeholders are well defined and it has been stated that consultations is provided for in government documents such as the Environmental Law of 2015 and Vietnam's Land Law of 2013
29. On a technical level, the R-package has reported that meetings, with regard to Criterion 9 and 10, of the six Sub-national Technical Working Groups (STWGs) which are conducted quarterly are made public on a REDD+ Website, and includes work plans, consultation documents, minutes of meetings and workshop reports.
30. From the R-Package and other documents such as PRAPs and the ER-PD, Vietnam has developed a good record on its consultations (Tables 5 and 6 of the R-Package). Its recognition that ethnic minority participation is still minimal is instructive. In the TAPs opinion, this will

require a long-term perspective of legal empowerment, capacity improvements and use of incentives to get Ethnic Minorities and other forest dependent rural communities to be more productively engaged in REDD+.

COMPONENT 2. REDD+ STRATEGY PREPARATION (CRITERIA 11-15, YELLOW)

2a. Assessment of Land Use, Land-Use Change Drivers, Forest Law, Policy and Governance

- 11) Assessment and analysis of land use and land use change drivers
- 12) Prioritization of direct and indirect drivers/barriers to forest enhancement
- 13) Links between drivers/barriers and REDD+ activities
- 14) Action plans to address natural resource rights, land tenure, governance
- 15) Implications for forest law and policy

31. On Criterion 11, the TAP has also observed that to understand the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation and barriers to REDD+' it would be important to provide a historical perspective of forest/land use changes in the country and with more details in the accounting area. This would help to understand the land use dynamics and the current drivers and barriers. In addition a clear linkage between the drivers and barriers that need to be overcome to address the drivers themselves will need to be further analysed. The self-assessment has pointed out that the analysis of drivers, barriers to addressing the drivers and to REDD+ in general and the prioritization of drivers were weak. The TAP can confirm that this weakness is also in the current Draft ER-PD that was also assessed. To address the identified weakness, the TAP recommends that the key issues behind the drivers, which in the ER-PD is referred to as the indirect drivers, need to be clarified, and where possible the share of each driver be quantified, and spatial maps where they apply could also be provided. This will help refine strategy options and ensure that the stated proposed interventions actually respond to the direct and indirect drivers or underlying causes.
32. On Criterion 12 and 13 which are on drivers, the TAP notes that in the revision of the NRAP and the PRAPs, an opportunity has availed itself, which should enable a more detailed assessment of drivers and their underlying causes and their policy implications than has happened before. From reading both the R-PP and the ER-PDs, the PRAPs do not examine the causal links of direct and indirect drivers, so have limited connection to key policies and plans and general governance which are the core issues behind forest/land use change. In order to address the drivers and barriers these core issues have to be tackled and would justify further investments into the assessment of forest/land use change.

It is the view of the TAP, that a more sophisticated and better articulated assessment of drivers and their underlying causes could further improve the design of strategy options to reduce emissions and sustain them both nationally and at the level of the proposed carbon accounting area; the NCC Region.

33. On Criterion 13, the TAP has also observed that the planned emission reduction actions, though detailed in the Draft ER-PD are not always directly linked to the key drivers of deforestation and forest degradation and also to the identified barriers to REDD+. Furthermore, the key interventions to reduce emissions are within the remit of the forest sector, when in actual fact some driver such as those in the energy and agricultural sectors and other drivers such as global commodity prices operate from outside the forest sector. It is however encouraging to note that in the self-assessment process, cross-sector coordination to address sectors that influence

REDD+ particularly those outside the forest sector such as mining, hydro-power and agriculture has been identified as weak.

34. On Criterion 14, the R-Package could consider developing and proposing guidelines on natural resource rights, based on a national approach which could; require legislation at the highest possible levels, preferably above a Government Decision and make recommendations on how to treat different land / forest tenure arrangements and the treatment of cases where tenure is unclear
35. On Criterion 15, seeks to ensure that a proposed program is cognisant of and takes into account the forest policy and legal implications on what has been proposed. In that regard, both the R-PP and ER-PD have explained the implications of strategy options on forest policies and laws. However, what is missing are the implication of the REDD+ Program on the policies of other sectors; which is also the issue under Criterion 18 below.

2b. REDD+ Strategy Options (Criteria 16-18, Yellow)

- 16) Selection and prioritization of REDD+ strategy options
 - 17) Feasibility assessment
 - 18) Implications of strategy options on existing sectoral policies
36. At the time of reviewing the R-Package, the most relevant documents on strategy options are the NRAP, PRAPs and the ER-PD. To date a new NRAP is currently being developed and this will be based on a much more detailed drivers (and indirect drivers) assessment to develop appropriate policies and measures. The NRAP process provides an important opportunity for the ER Program of Vietnam to fit in existing Forest Protection Plans and Vietnam's National Development Plans. This will enable the revision of strategy options, particularly the policy environment that could help sustain emission reduction programs which is the essence of Vietnam's involvement in REDD+.
 37. On Criterion 17 on feasibility, the R-package and other associated documents such as the R-PP and the ER-PD are generally silent on the feasibility assessment of the proposed ER Strategies and Actions. A feasibility assessments will not only help assess the validity of the stated ER targets but would also be a useful tool to seek and influence funding decision for an ER program.
 38. With specific reference to Criterion 18, further analyses to come up with broader issues of longer-term transformational change and that could drive its emission reduction program are advisable. In the process, Vietnam could show or demonstrate how its stated ambition to reduce emissions from the forest sector could also help drive change at a policy level. For example, there is little description of how the planned interventions could lead to changes in Government policy, and private sector and community management of forests. In general, the R-Package and certainly Vietnam's REDD+ Program at a national level could include links to other strategies and plans that could affect the proposed interventions. In particular, the ER-PD would benefit from an analysis of ongoing policies and plans that could support the proposed interventions and could help to scale the impact of the ER program. At the moment the documents that were reviewed such as the R-PP, the ER-PD and the NRAP do not articulate policy measures that could generate transformative change that could help to achieve the emission reductions envisaged in the R-Package and certainly in the ER-PD.

2c. Implementation Framework (Criteria 19-22, Yellow)

- 19) Adoption and implementation of legislation/regulations
- 20) Guidelines for Implementation
- 21) Benefit sharing mechanism
- 22) National REDD+ registry and system monitoring REDD+ activities

39. On Criterion 20, the R-Package could be clearer on what it understands to be the key tenets of implementation guidelines. The current text does not give a clear picture of what expectations the stakeholders had and to what degree those expectations have been met or not met. An example of such guidelines could be a document that acts as a framework for implementation of REDD+ programs or projects, and which provides a policy framework for REDD+ programs, governance structures, consultations, safeguards, benefit sharing mechanisms, reporting requirements, and others.
40. On Criterion 21, the current ideas on Benefit Sharing Mechanisms based on existing REDD+ Pilot projects describe Vietnam's experiences but it is still considered as a complex but important issue for which legal instruments should be put in place. Even more so, it is a critical incentive device for forest dependent groups, the cooperation of which Vietnam needs to achieve emission reductions from the restoration of degraded natural forests to enhance carbon stocks. In essence the issue of benefit sharing should be clearly linked to responsibilities to generate and sustain emission reductions and be underpinned in legislation.

2d. Social and Environmental Impacts (Criteria 23-25, Yellow)

- 23) Analysis of social and environmental safeguard issues
- 24) REDD+ strategy design with respect to impacts
- 25) Environmental and Social Management Framework

41. On criterion 23 dealing with analysis on safeguards, the R-Package does not clearly state what it considers to be the key social and environmental safeguard issue that applies to Vietnam in general or even the NCC Region in particular. However in the ER-PD, a clearer account of safeguard issues relevant to the NCC have been provided. It has also identified key gaps between what Vietnam has proposed in relation to those World Bank Guidelines have also been identified, as have been the expected positive and negative impacts of the ER-PD.
42. On criterion 24 and also 23, the social and environmental aspects and strategy designs of REDD+ in the Vietnam context needs to be reviewed. It seems that there is more that needs to be done with respect to the facilitation of participation by ethnic minorities who are forest dependent, and whose communal tenure systems are not recognized in Vietnam's Land Law of 2013. In addition and in general, basic food security and poverty alleviation is also an issue especially where a REDD+ project may restrict the use of forest land for food crops, without alternative options. On this food security aspect, the ER Program for instance, has nothing on support to agriculture as it is just focused mainly on forests and it is that focus just on forestry that should be cause for worry. It is also instructive that in discussions with communities in Vietnam, their view of non-carbon benefits of REDD+ are broad and they tend to emphasize investments that eliminate rural poverty, in addition to rights to access NTFPs and land for production forestry. This is an important issue that can help to improve the livelihoods of local people and help sustain emission reduction programs.
43. The R-Package could better highlight and address safeguards of a socio-economic nature such as poverty reduction strategies for forest dependent people, poor rural farmers, their rights to

access non-timber forest products, land and forest tenure and issues of capacity and facilitation of participation by ethnic minorities of which the NCC Region has many and their legal empowerment which are a critical Social Safeguard Issue. Environmental safeguards such as biodiversity losses and managing the risks of reversals and leakage are also relevant.

44. There should also be an explicit description of ecosystem / ecological services as a key non-carbon benefit and the protection of which should also be a key safeguard issue, alongside the social and economic ones. The potential for the further loss of the remaining natural forests is a threat which this ER-PD ought to guard against more clearly in the document.
45. The R-package is however clear on the need for SESA and ESMF frameworks and processes, including documentation to be completed and in doing so, Vietnam ought to consider the issues raised in the preceding paragraph. Currently Vietnam is working on this and an ongoing UN-REDD Program also has a strong focus not only on SESA and ESMF but also Benefit Sharing Mechanisms.

COMPONENT 3. REFERENCE EMISSIONS LEVEL/REFERENCE LEVELS (CRITERIA 26-28, GREEN)

26) Demonstration of methodology

27) Use of historical data, and adjusted for national circumstances

28) Technical feasibility of the methodological approach, and consistency with UNFCCC/IPCC guidance and guidelines

46. In the R-package, Vietnam is of the opinion that it has achieved the most progress under Component 3, despite admitting in the self-assessment that it is a subject matter that is not well understood at the level of provinces, districts and at the community level; thanks to its highly technical nature.
47. On Criterion 26, on demonstration of methodology, the self-assessment sees the exclusion of carbon pools such as dead wood, litter and soil carbon as a weakness, as is the use of default values in the estimation of below ground biomass. On forest definitions, description of carbon pools and the methodology for setting of reference levels are well described and have been guided by UNFCCC / IPCC Guidelines, a view with which the TAP agrees. It is also noted that the stratification of forest types is different in the FREL/FRL submission to the UNFCCC, but consistent with the ER-PD; which collapses several forest types into one category given similarities in carbon stock estimates and to reduce the level of uncertainties. It is also noted that Vietnam changed some of the definitions for forests and activities in response to a recently UNFCCC Technical Assessment. It will be important that these changes are reflected in the updated REL/RL in both the new NRAP and more importantly in the ER-PD to ensure consistency. One strength of Vietnam is the high level of in-country technical expertise on reference emission levels and reference levels which many other countries do not have.
48. On Criteria 27 and 28, weaknesses related to the use of Program 661 data on setting REL/RL has been reviewed and is reportedly being addressed by Vietnam's own scientists. Program 661 which became operational since the mid-1990s, was a massive reforestation / afforestation effort led by the Government of Vietnam and by October 2011 showed that 4.5 million ha had been reforested and planted, hence credited with Vietnam's phenomenal increase in forest cover. To make improvements that cover the three criteria, 26 to 28, the following could also be considered alongside the ones that were identified in the self-assessment.

49. Vietnam's reference period in the R-Package in its Draft ER-PD is 2000-2010, which is compliant with the requirement of the methodological framework, but given that we are now in 2016, retaining the 2000-2010 is no longer advisable. As such Vietnam should strongly consider shifting the reference period to a more recent time period (e.g., 2005-2015) and develop a process to collect more recent data. This would help avoid a large gap, between the reference and crediting periods and to provide a more accurate representation of expected emissions/removals in the crediting period. The R-package has made reference to the possibility of such a shift in the reference period; and it is a development which will entail the revision and setting of new REL/RL.
50. Regarding transparency, it is also advisable to demonstrate that the data and information will be made transparent and to show how the FORMIS system will be used to meet this criterion on data transparency.

COMPONENT 4. MONITORING SYSTEMS FOR FORESTS AND SAFEGUARDS (CRITERIA 29-31, YELLOW)

4a. National Forest Monitoring System

- 29) Documentation of monitoring approach
 - 30) Demonstration of early system implementation
 - 31) Institutional arrangements and capacities - Forests
51. On Criterion 29, it is important to note that Vietnam has a tradition of forest monitoring based on a system with three elements namely; National Forest Inventory, Monitoring and Assessment Programme (NFIMAP), National Forest Inventory and Statistics Projects (NFIS) and Annual Forest and Forestry Land Monitoring and Reporting Programme. In addition a national forest monitoring system for REDD+ is being developed based on the above programs/projects and will allow sub-national forest monitoring and in this regard, province will operationalize a revised Annual Monitoring of Forest and Forestry Land Program for generating activity data.
 52. The self-assessment has correctly identified the need to institutionalize a national forest monitoring system, which not only identifies and defines non-carbon benefits described below and integrates them into the monitoring system and associated databases.
 53. On criterion 30 on early testing and demonstration, it is noteworthy that the programs and projects have generated data on forest area and quality to allow the calculation of GHG emissions/removals related to forests. The development of FORMIS Phase I (from 2009 to 2013) built a system with the capacity to integrate and share data through standard interface. However, due to limited time, only a small amount of data has been integrated into the database of FORMIS Phase I. FORMIS Phase II (from May 2013 to 2018) aims to integrate the data of forest resources from NFIS project into FORMIS. <http://formis.vnforest.gov.vn>;
 54. On Criterion 31, on institutional arrangements, a national organization structure for monitoring exists and it has provision for the participation of local communities as described in section 9.2 of the Draft ER-PD but it still remains a principle since there is no evidence that community participation in monitoring has been designed or tested

4b. Information System for Multiple Benefits, Other Impacts, Governance, and Safeguards (Criteria 32-34, Yellow)

- 32) Identification of relevant non-carbon aspects, and social and environmental issues
 - 33) Monitoring, reporting and information sharing
 - 34) Institutional arrangements and capacities – Multiple Benefits and Safeguards
55. The FORMIS system will also include piloting within the Provincial Forest Monitoring System (PFMS) monitoring, verification and reporting of forest cover including the use of village-based forest patrolling teams that can report detected forest change from on the ground on both carbon and non-carbon benefits, and use tablets to record information and send it to a database.
56. While FORMIS is not used for mapping or to develop forest cover change, but can be useful as a verification system. The ER-PD suggests information from the tablet system would be integrated into FORMIS II. While it is unclear how the tablet system, which has been piloted, will be scaled up and how information will be integrated into the national monitoring system, the piloting work to date is compliant with “exploring opportunities” for community participation in forest monitoring, particularly on reversals, non-carbon benefits and safeguards.
57. What should be further strengthened is the emphasis on the description of non-carbon benefits and their monitoring alongside Safeguards under Component 2 and 4 of the R-Package, as well as in the ER-PD.

PART C. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE PC

It is evident that the R-Package self-assessment process was well managed and documented and the weaknesses were clearly stated in a frank and open manner. In addition, a number of pertinent recommendations were made by the stakeholders themselves. Despite a number of editorial issues that could improve the flow of text in the R-package, the substance of the messages were not masked and the TAP could follow the arguments and discussions put forward. The TAP has listed herein just a few recommendations which could augment what the self-assessment participants have identified. The issues that the TAP wishes to highlight are in aspects of cross-sector coordination, analysis of drivers, participation of forest dependent peoples, choice of a reference period and program design issues.

58. This is also clear in the Draft ER-PD, management arrangements at both national and sub-national levels requires further analysis and the proposal of a solid process for the forest sector to engage with other sectors on the ER-P and generate buy-in and enforcement at the highest levels of government policy making and planning. In fact, inter-sector coordination should be a key aspect that the new NRAP should propose since the NRAP is seen by stakeholders as a key policy document on REDD+.
59. Despite efforts on the inclusion of ethnic minorities in the implementation of REDD+ and the sharing of its benefits, representation of ethnic minorities is still insufficient and more effort is needed to improve their awareness and capacity, to usefully engage in the implementation and monitoring of REDD+. The fact that the R-Package has recognized the fact that ethnic minority participation is still minimal is instructive. In the TAP’s opinion, this will require a long-term perspective of legal empowerment, capacity improvements and use of incentives to get Ethnic Minorities and other forest dependent rural communities to be more productively engaged in REDD+.

60. It is the view of the TAP, that a more sophisticated and better articulated assessment of drivers and their underlying causes could further improve the design of strategy options to reduce emissions and sustain them.
61. At the moment the documents that were reviewed such as the R-PP, the ER-PD and the NRAP do not articulate policy measures that could generate transformative change that could help to achieve the emission reductions envisaged in the R-Package and certainly in the ER-PD. This is an aspect of strategy design that should be focussed on, going forward with REDD+.
62. In general, the R-package and other associated documents such as the R-PP and the ER-PD are generally silent on the feasibility assessments of the proposed ER Strategies and Actions. Feasibility assessments to make an economic case for REDD+ and will not only help assess the validity of the stated ER targets
63. On a national level as well as on the ER Program, a further articulation of environmental and social safeguards is needed as is the need to conduct a SESA and develop practical and contextualized ESMF approaches for REDD+ at a national level.
64. While the reference period of Draft ER-PD which the R-Package has referred to is 2000-2010, and is technically compliant with the requirement of the methodological framework, the fact that we are now in 2016, suggests that retaining the 2000-2010 as a reference period for the ER-P can be questioned. As such, Vietnam should strongly consider shifting the reference period to a more recent time period (e.g. 2005-2015) and develop a process to collect more recent data. This will of course necessitate the recalculation of REL /RL but has the advantage of designing a data collection system that fits the purpose of the ER-P.

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

1. CIFOR (2012) “The context of REDD+ in Vietnam: Drivers, agents and institutions”.
2. Enright, A., E McNally T Sikor 2012. SNV: An Approach to designing pro-poor local REDD+ Benefit distribution systems: lessons learned from Vietnam
3. Forest Trends (2015) “REDD+ finance flow in Vietnam in 2009-2013”.
4. Karsten Raae et al., 2010. Technical Assistance in the Development of the National REDD Programme of Vietnam Component of Collecting Information and Analysing Trends of Forest Resources and Forest Carbon Stock for Establishment of the Interim Baseline Reference Scenarios. Danish Forestry Extension and Nordeco
5. MARD 2016. Vietnam ER-PD Version 1.2 of July 2016
6. McNALLY R and NGUYEN, The Chien, 2016. Review of Viet Nam’s National REDD+ Action Programme and its Implementation
7. Pistorius and Haupt (2016) A report on carbon sequestration on both short and long rotation plantations
8. Socialist Republic of Vietnam. REDD+ Readiness Preparation Proposal, November 2011
9. USAID (2013) Country Profile. Property Rights and Resource Governance, Vietnam