

ACTION PLAN



ECUADOR

Forests for Good Living

Ecuador's response to the challenges
of climate change



**Fact sheet of the “REDD+ Action Plan Ecuador
Forests for Good Living“. Ecuador’s response to the
challenges of climate change.**

**Ministry of Environment of Ecuador
Undersecretary of Climate Change**

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INTRODUCTION

The evidence of climate change is increasingly apparent and tangible in the daily life. Both the perception that citizens have about this phenomenon, as well as the scientific evidence that shows the increase in the average temperature of the planet, alert us about a reality that we cannot avoid.

The Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), finalized at the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21) held in December 2015, demonstrates the existing global understanding of the threat that climate change poses. The agreement outlines the commitments the countries should adopt for combating this phenomenon. The rapid entry into force of the Paris Agreement is a clear political sign of the commitment of the nations of the world to act decisively on this issue.



As of early June 2017, 195 Parties signed the Paris Agreement and 147 of them had deposited their instruments of ratification, thus reaffirming the responsibility of countries to take concrete actions to fulfill the objective of this Agreement, which is holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C, taking into account the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of differing national circumstances.

In terms of legislation, the Ecuadorian government has shown a high commitment towards protecting the environment. At the international level it is important to emphasize that Ecuador signed the UNFCCC in 1994, ratified the Kyoto protocol in 1999, and signed the Paris Agreement in 2016. At the national level, Ecuador was the first country in the world to recognize Nature as a subject of rights in its Constitution of 2008, and it declared climate change adaptation and mitigation as policy of State¹.

These objectives are reinforced in the National Development Plan (Plan Nacional del Buen Vivir 2013-2017) and in other key framework instruments such as the National Environment Policy (2009) and the National Climate Change Strategy (2012).

Even though Ecuador has a robust national legislation, it is fundamental to consider that addressing climate change implies major transformations in the country regarding the management of natural resources, production, energy and land use policies.

¹ Executive Decree No. 1815, July 2009.



Why are forests fundamental to combat climate change?

Forests and natural areas fulfill a very important function in the maintenance of natural processes. Besides being one of the largest carbon deposits, they maintain the carbon cycle, the water cycle and other natural processes; therefore their conservation and protection is imperative.

Forest ecosystems are the source of essential environmental goods and services. These goods include non-timber forest products (NTFP) that have been used for centuries, mainly by the ancestral communities, as a basis for subsistence through the provision of food, energy, tools, handicrafts, medicine and construction materials for housing, among others (MAE e IITO, 2011).

As forests extract carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the atmosphere, and while their deforestation and degradation are a source of emissions, their role for mitigation and adaptation to climate change is key.

Scientific studies indicate that between 10% and 20% of all the CO₂ released into the atmosphere as a result of human activities comes from forest destruction (IPCC 2014). According to Ecuador's National Greenhouse Gas Inventory of 2010, emissions from deforestation accounted for approximately 30% of total emissions (MAE 2016b). The loss and degradation of forest ecosystems have a significant impact on human populations, particularly on those whose livelihoods depend directly on the access to various natural resources.



Ecuador is one of the 17 mega-diverse countries of the world. Deforestation is one of the most important causes of biodiversity loss in the country (Bisby *et al.* 2011).



The context of deforestation in Ecuador

The continental surface of Ecuador has an approximate area of 24,898,059 hectares. Native forests, 74% of which are located in the Amazon region, cover 51.2% of the national territory (MAE 2015).

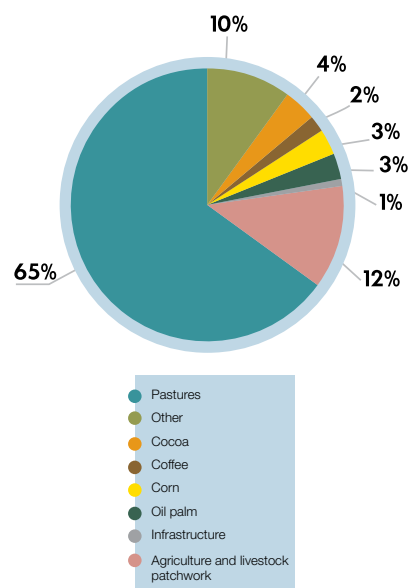
Ninety-nine percent of the deforested area in the period between 1990 and 2008 was transformed into agricultural land, mainly for pastures (Castro *et al.* 2013). However, this process is also influenced by various political, economic, social and environmental aspects.



Dynamics of the forest cover of Ecuador in 2014

Ecuador has a deforestation rate that results in the deterioration of biodiversity, water reserves and environmental services, as well as in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Percentage of area under different land uses from deforested area between 2008 and 2014



Source: Ecuador's deforestation map (MAE 2015) and Ecuador's land cover and land use map (MAGAP-MAE 2015).

Between 1990 and 2014, around 2.2 million hectares of natural forest were lost in the country. The native forest cover decreased from 14,587,771 hectares in 1990 to 12,753,387 hectares in 2014.



Deforestation and forest degradation affect water availability and quality (Echevarría 1999).

During the 2008-2014 period, the highest rates of deforestation occurred in the provinces of Esmeraldas, Guayas and El Oro – in the Coast – and in the provinces of Morona Santiago and Sucumbíos – in the Amazon region. Despite evidence of a downward trend in gross deforestation, its rate remains significant, given that during the same period, an average of 97,917 hectares were deforested annually.



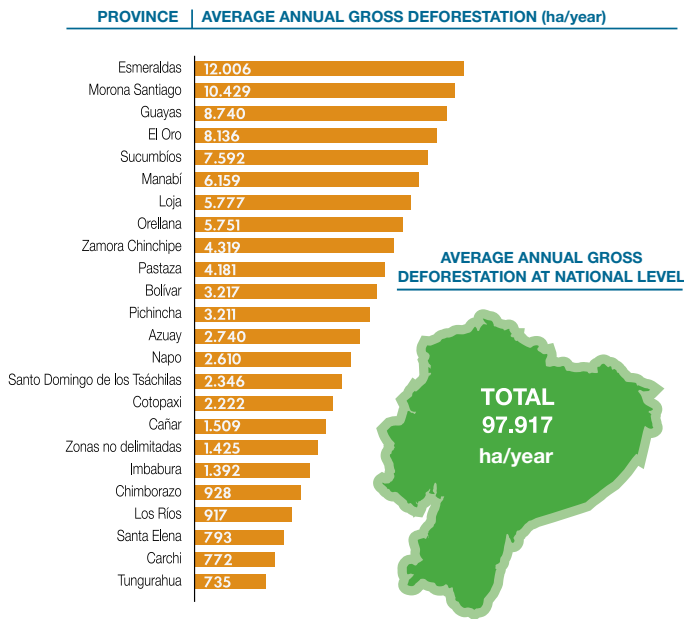
REDD+ as an initiative to address climate change challenges and Ecuador's progress

The UNFCCC “Encourages developing country Parties to contribute to mitigation actions in the forest sector by undertaking the following activities, as deemed appropriate by each Party and in accordance with their respective capabilities and national circumstances:

- a) Reducing emissions from deforestation;
- b) Reducing emissions from forest degradation;
- c) Conservation of forest carbon stocks;
- d) Sustainable management of forest;
- e) Enhancement of forest carbon stocks”².

The clear political will of Ecuador to combat climate change and reduce emissions from the forest sector has positioned the country as a pioneer in preparing for REDD+, under a national approach that considers the implementation of REDD+ measures and actions inside and outside forests.

Deforestation by provinces in the 2008-2014 period



Source: MAE 2016.

2 UNFCCC decision 1/CP.16.



To address deforestation and contribute to the transition towards sustainable production, among other objectives, Ecuador has developed the REDD+ Action Plan “Forest for Good Living³ (2016-2025)”.

The REDD+ Action Plan is framed on the National Climate Change Strategy, which provides guidance on how to implement measures to reduce GHG emissions in the country, create favorable conditions for their adoption in the priority sectors, and promote carbon capture and storage. The National Climate Change Strategy is implemented through measures and actions that include those established in the REDD+ Action Plan.

In addition, Ecuador has made notable progress in REDD+, which comprises the submission of the

Forest Reference Emission Level for Deforestation to the UNFCCC, calculated at a national level; the development and strengthening processes leading to a robust and transparent national forest monitoring system, and the construction of an information system for addressing and respecting safeguards, based on the national approach and scope. Likewise, transparent processes were promoted to allow the inclusive participation and involvement of stakeholders, politicians and technicians. This is exemplified by the functioning of the REDD+ Working Group, a dialogue space involving stakeholders from civil society, communities, peoples and nationalities of Ecuador.

Considering these advances, Ecuador is ready to implement REDD+ in 2017.

3 “Good Living” is the translation of Buen Vivir, which in Spanish refers to the way of life that allows happiness and the permanence of cultural and environmental diversity; it is harmony, equality, equity and solidarity” (<http://www.buenvivir.gob.ec/presentacion>). As pointed out in, for example, www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/blog/buen-vivir-philosophy-south-america-eduardo-gudynas and <https://anotherworldreal.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/compilation-on-buen-vivir-concepts.pdf>, it is difficult to find an English equivalent in this context.



REDD+ approach in Ecuador

The fight against deforestation and forest degradation contemplated by the REDD+ Action Plan is linked to the country's sustainable development model. This approach seeks to contribute to the national efforts towards poverty reduction, the transformation of the energy and production matrices, reforestation and conservation of biodiversity.

Ecuador defined an implementation approach taking into account the development priorities of the country and the guidelines from the UNFCCC. It includes policies and measures that address the direct and indirect causes of deforestation at the national and local levels, prioritizing the implementation of measures and actions geographically. Through this approach, interventions and actions to mitigate climate change are implemented on the ground in priority areas, as defined in the REDD+ Action Plan.

The objective of the REDD+ Action Plan is to:

Contribute to national efforts for the reduction of deforestation and forest degradation through conservation, sustainable forest management and optimization of other forms of land use that reduce pressure on forests, thus aiding in the reduction of GHG emissions.

The specific objectives of the REDD+ Action Plan are to:

- Integrate climate change actions in favor of forests into national policies and territorial development plans;
- Support the transition to sustainable and deforestation-free production;
- Improve sustainable forest management and the use of non-timber products;
- Contribute to the sustainability of forest conservation and regeneration initiatives.





Participative and inclusive construction of the REDD+ Action Plan

The REDD+ Action Plan was developed during a five-year period under the leadership of the Ministry of Environment of Ecuador (MAE by its Spanish initials), with the support of the UN REDD Program and other stakeholders. It included setting up a solid participation process at the national and local levels.

The inter-agency coordination between MAE and the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG by its Spanish initials) and various other institutions related to planning, land use and natural resources, was fundamental to obtain official information and develop the REDD+ Action Plan with an intersectoral vision, in response to the causes of deforestation inside and outside the forested areas. This process also involved other national and local government institutions, such as the Autonomous Decentralized Governments (GAD by its Spanish initials).

Legal, political, institutional and economic studies were carried out from a technical point of view, and their results were integrated to assess existing initiatives, risks and opportunities for the implementation of REDD+. These studies included: analyses of opportunity costs, implementation

mechanisms, analysis of causes and factors of deforestation, development of future deforestation scenarios, studies of the international context, legal and political frameworks, amongst others.

Regarding participation at the national level, the process ensured the involvement of various stakeholders whose livelihoods and lives depend on the forests, including those directly or indirectly linked with the forestry, productive and agricultural sectors. For this purpose, a national participative space called the REDD+ Working Group, was set up in 2013. It incorporated several sectors of civil society, including representatives of communities, peoples and nationalities of Ecuador. This platform was established during the preparatory phase of REDD+; it played a fundamental role by enabling dialogue and consultation processes, and an effective involvement of local stakeholders in the efforts led by MAE. The REDD+ Working Group comprised a large representation of national and local level stakeholders, in line with the country's diversity. During its first phase (2013 to 2015) the Working Group held 16 meetings with 10 organizations.

In 2016, the platform was restructured into the "REDD+ Working Group: Forests for Good Living", which includes 29 national and local organizations. It enables the dialogue and follow-up carried out by key stakeholders during the implementation of the REDD+ Action Plan led by MAE.



and culturally appropriate methodologies. For example, informative materials were created in collaboration with the communities (in Spanish and in ancestral languages such as Kichwa and Shuar).

The REDD+ Action Plan, which resulted from the mentioned participatory processes, subsequently went through an inter-institutional review and validation phase, which was carried out by the entities and stakeholder in charge of its implementation.



Benefits for the environment and society from the implementation of the REDD+ Action Plan

Thus, the Working Group has had two management periods: the first from 2013 to 2015, and the second, after its restructuring, from 2016 onwards.

At the local level, spaces were created to strengthen the capacities of local stakeholders, civil society, communities, peoples and nationalities of Ecuador. These included 25 workshops held in different regions of the country. In addition, communication activities were promoted, taking into consideration the diversity of audiences and their contexts, and implementing participatory

Ecuador seeks a high-quality REDD+ implementation, known for its emphasis on fostering social and environmental co-benefits.

In addition to the reduction of emissions, the measures established to reduce deforestation also generate environmental co-benefits such as the conservation of biodiversity and the protection of water, soil and other associated resources.

REDD+ measures and actions also promote social co-benefits such as maintaining ancestral cultures

and practices of communities that take care of natural resources, strengthening governance, contributing to poverty reduction and socio-economic development, and diversification of the rural economy.

drivers of deforestation both inside and outside the forested areas. They also consider the local needs and development priorities of the country.

The measures and actions to address deforestation and forest degradation are linked to land use changes and productive development, and they include:



How will the REDD+ Action Plan be implemented?

The Plan consists of a set of measures and actions that will be implemented in the country territory. These are linked to national agendas and sectoral policies, and have been defined to address the

- Contributing to a low emission sustainable production transformation, enhancing environmental and social benefits as well as economic diversification and economic risk minimization;
- Improving forest income and provide opportunities for its owners (individual and collective, public and private) to ensure sustainability.

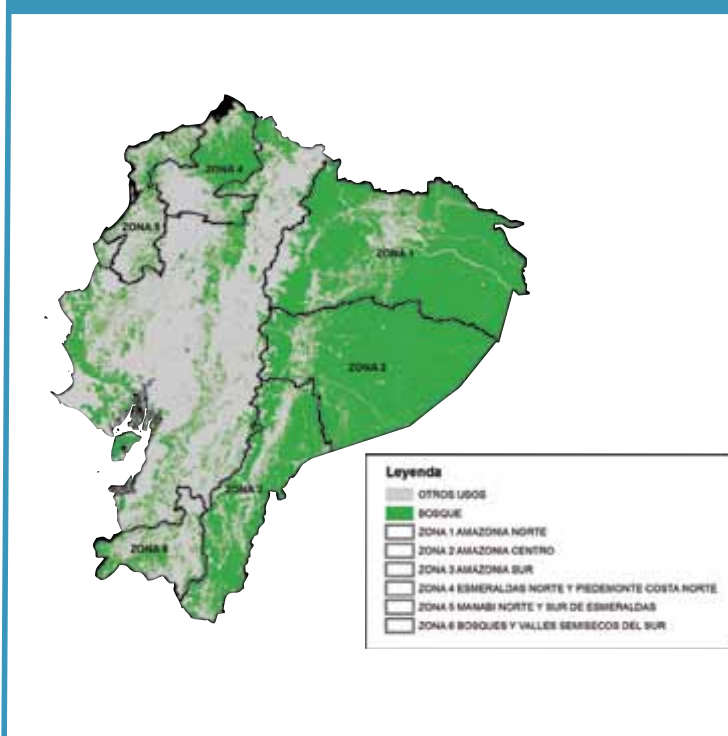


- Integrating the protection and improvement of ecosystem services in activities aimed at sustainable production transformation and value enhancement of the forest.

The execution of the REDD+ Action Plan will take place through the Implementation Plans of REDD+ Measures and Actions, along with other projects that are currently under development. The Action Plan will be gradually implemented with the participation of different stakeholders and levels of government.

The Implementation Plans of REDD+ Measures and Actions are instruments developed in collaboration with a diversity of partners, and will define in detail activities, geographic scope strategic partners, beneficiaries, institutional arrangements, schedules, budgets and financial mechanisms.

Priority areas for REDD+



Source: MAE, 2016.



Priority areas for REDD+ implementation

For the implementation of the REDD+ Action Plan, priority was given to areas that include the Amazon region, Esmeraldas, northern Manabí, northwestern Pichincha and Loja. Specifically, six priority areas for REDD+ actions were selected.

These areas were chosen taking into account criteria such as: forest potential, deforestation rates, regeneration trends, presence of indigenous territories and priority groups, as well as the importance for biodiversity, water regulation and maintenance of carbon stocks.

Other areas could be included with the gradual implementation approach of REDD+, taking into consideration the National Territorial Strategy of the National Development Plan. In addition, some national policies and incentives to which REDD+ contributes will be applied throughout the country.



The components of the REDD+ Action Plan

The Plan entails four strategic components that frame the deforestation reduction measures and actions. These are:

- 1) **Policies and institutional management** aimed at mainstreaming climate change and REDD+ in national public policies and in the main instruments of land use planning. This will be achieved through:
 - a. Political-institutional articulation for the implementation of measures and actions.
 - b. Land use planning and zoning of the agricultural, livestock and forestry boundaries.
 - c. Strengthening of land tenure legislation.
 - d. Forest control and regulatory reforms.
- 2) **Transition to sustainable and deforestation-free productive systems** related to:
 - a. Productive agriculture and livestock conversion.
 - b. Improved productivity and application of agricultural best practices.
 - c. Traceability and certification of agricultural and livestock products that are deforestation-free.
 - d. Responsible purchasing, securing markets and integration of producers into value chains.
- 3) **Sustainable forest management** which focuses on increasing the sustainability of areas under forest management and on increasing initiatives for the use of non-timber forest products, forest governance, bio-knowledge and biodiversity, through:
 - a. Best practices in sustainable forest management.
 - b. Traceability, certification and responsible public and private purchases.
- 4) **Conservation and restoration** aimed at increasing carbon stocks according to the targets of the National Development Plan and specific national programs, through measures that comprise:



- a. Biodiversity conservation and protection of environmental services.
- b. Restoration and reforestation.

In addition to its strategic lines, the REDD+ Action Plan has five crosscutting operational components, which facilitate its implementation:

1. Coordination between institutions

The undertaking of REDD+ measures and actions includes the inter-institutional

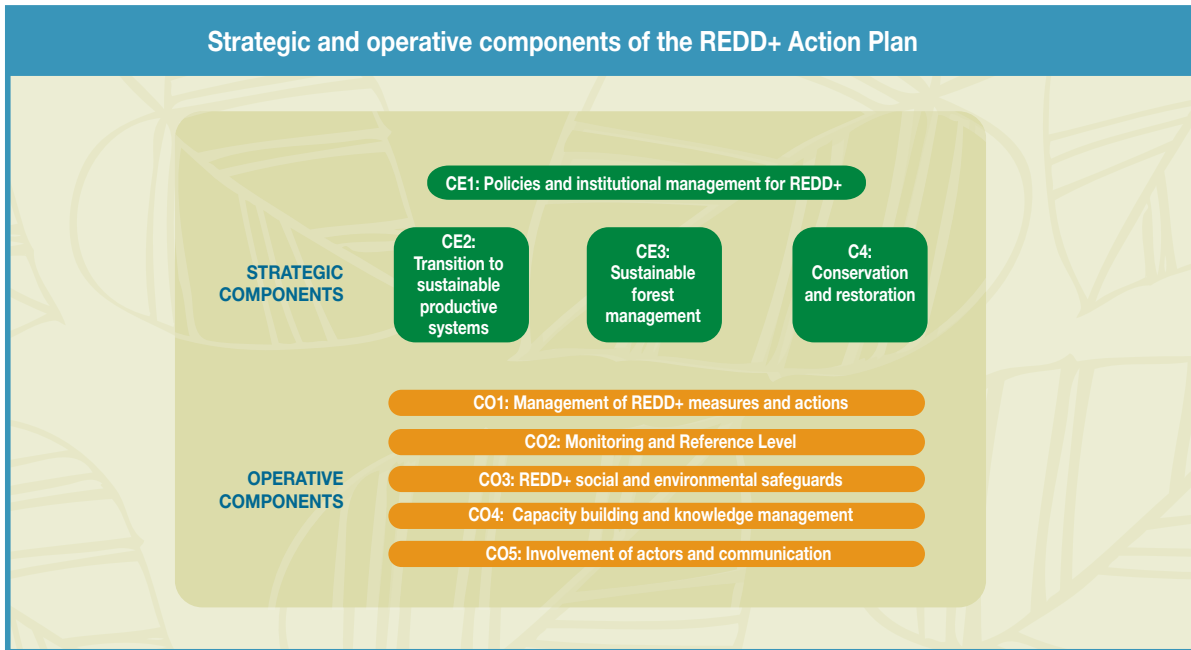
structure for the implementation of the REDD+ Action Plan, taking into account processes for interaction and cooperation, exchange of information and coordination of actions between institutions.

2. Measurement of results

Monitoring and Reference Level are carried out using the National Forest Monitoring System of the Ministry of Environment, which is responsible for monitoring, measurement, reporting and verification (M-MRV) of the results of the REDD+ measures and actions, at the national level.

This system will also generate valuable information for the design and implementation of policies for land planning, land use, forest governance and natural resource management.

As a basis for this process, Ecuador has developed the **Forest Reference Emission Level for Deforestation (NREF-D)** according to the international guidelines of the UNFCCC. This allows measuring progress against the emission reduction targets set by the country, in order to access results-based payment schemes developed internationally (for example the resources of the Green Climate Fund).



3. Addressing safeguards and respect for rights

The **REDD+ social and environmental safeguards** seek to avoid or minimize potential risks of implementation and to enhance the REDD+ social and environmental benefits.

Ecuador's national approach to safeguards is based on the country's legal, political and institutional framework, based on the current national Constitution, which guarantees and recognizes individual, collective and

nature's rights, and is in line with international commitments assumed by Ecuador.

The safeguards seek to promote the implementation of REDD+ through an inclusive process, highlighting the role of local communities, peoples and nationalities of Ecuador, as well as the participation of women and priority attention groups.

In addition, Ecuador will share information on how safeguards are addressed and respected through its REDD+ Safeguards Information System (SIS).

4. Capacity building and knowledge management

The REDD+ Action Plan includes **capacity building and knowledge management processes**, under a multi-level and multi-stakeholder approach. In particular, they assist in the rescue, maintenance and protection of collective knowledge related to the forest and the communities that inhabit it, their sciences, technologies and ancestral knowledge.

The objectives of this component are to ensure that key stakeholders have the necessary capacities to implement REDD+ measures and actions, and to foster innovation and knowledge management processes that ensure long-term sustainability for an effective implementation of the REDD+ Action Plan.

Likewise, it is proposed to develop capacities based on institutional competencies, so that the agents or entities that implement REDD+ measures and actions have information for correct decision-making. In addition, this component addresses the formation of local leaders in response to technical challenges.

5. Involvement of stakeholders and communication

The active participation of stakeholders who have interests or rights over forests is considered in the different measures of the REDD+ Action Plan. This component promotes the integral participation of key sectors and actors through various mechanisms in order to ensure the proper implementation of REDD+ at national and local levels.



Also, in order to transparently inform, and liaise with actors involved in the processes of deforestation and regeneration, a communication strategy is contemplated to contribute towards strengthening of capacities and the positioning of REDD+ in the public debate, at the national, sub-national and international levels.



Next steps

Ecuador's current emissions reduction potential will allow the country to leverage financial resources from various international sources, through bilateral and multilateral agreements as well as to access "results-based payments", as defined by the UNFCCC.

In order to continue advancing these processes, several steps are contemplated, including the following:

- Institutionalizing processes for REDD+ implementation.
- Strengthening the monitoring, measurement, reporting and verification processes according to national circumstances and capacities in order to generate periodic information on greenhouse gas emissions in the forestry sector.
- Strengthening the technical capacities of implementation partners of REDD+ actions and measures, involving collaboration with other relevant actors.
- Promoting the generation of social and environmental co-benefits that contribute to the country's development objectives.
- Establishing mechanisms for the efficient channeling of REDD+ resources within the country.
- Undertaking efforts to disseminate information to relevant stakeholders at the national and international levels, aiming at the promotion of the country's efforts that enable the access to results-based payments.





ACHIEVEMENTS DURING THE REDD+ ACTION PLAN FORMULATION

1. SOLID STUDIES AND TECHNICAL ANALYSIS

Guiding and supporting the development of the REDD+ Action Plan requires a robust technical basis of studies and situational analyses of the national context, including, among other things, the legal, political and institutional framework; deforestation data; and economic and cost analyses.

2. INTER-INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION

It is fundamental to have proper coordination, gathering of inputs, and cooperation with governmental institutions that are competent in the areas relevant to the implementation of the Plan and who will implement the REDD+ measures and actions.

3. INFORMED PARTICIPATION OF RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS

The involvement of sub-national and local actors in the development of the REDD+ Action Plan allowed incorporating different needs, interests and priorities, as well as considering different contexts in which REDD+ actions will be implemented.

4. STRENGTHENING CAPACITIES AT ALL LEVELS

It is essential to strengthen capacities at the institutional level of implementing partners and of local actors,

to promote and facilitate the implementation of the REDD+ Action Plan.

5. COUNTRY DRIVENNESS

It is essential to frame the REDD+ Action Plan within the country context and circumstances, according to the existing institutions and capacities.

6. LONG-TERM SCOPE AND NATIONAL APPROACH WITH MEASURES AT LOCAL LEVEL

For the REDD+ Action Plan to serve as the guiding tool for REDD+ implementation in the country, it is necessary to understand the key elements that influence deforestation at a specific level that supports the definition of concrete measures and actions in the territory, as well as at a general level, to allow for a national strategy remaining in force for a considerable period of time.

7. EMPHASIS ON ADDRESSING AND RESPECTING SAFEGUARDS, A CROSS-CUTTING REDD+ ELEMENT

The definition of REDD+ measures and actions and the development of the necessary implementation and follow-up mechanisms requires considering principles of the social and environmental safeguards.

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