

Is Vietnam ready for REDD+?

The Government of Vietnam provides institutional and policy support to REDD+ efforts, indicating a certain degree of willingness to implement a national REDD+ Programme, however, it was important to examine Vietnam's 'readiness' based on the functions that need to be fulfilled in REDD+ implementation.

Key messages

- 1** Vietnam's REDD+ readiness has benefited from past reforestation and current efforts but it is only partially ready when assessed against six REDD+ readiness functions.
- 2** The country is more ready in terms of 'Planning and Coordination' but less in financing REDD+ activities.
- 3** Tenure and carbon rights/contractual arrangement are serious bottle necks; failure to address them will mean an uphill implementation of the National REDD+ Programme.
- 4** Difference in readiness assessments between State and non-State actors points to the need for addressing concerns around participation, inclusiveness and transparency
- 5** The discourse around REDD+ readiness and its activities should be re-oriented towards developing incentives to address drivers of deforestation and degradation

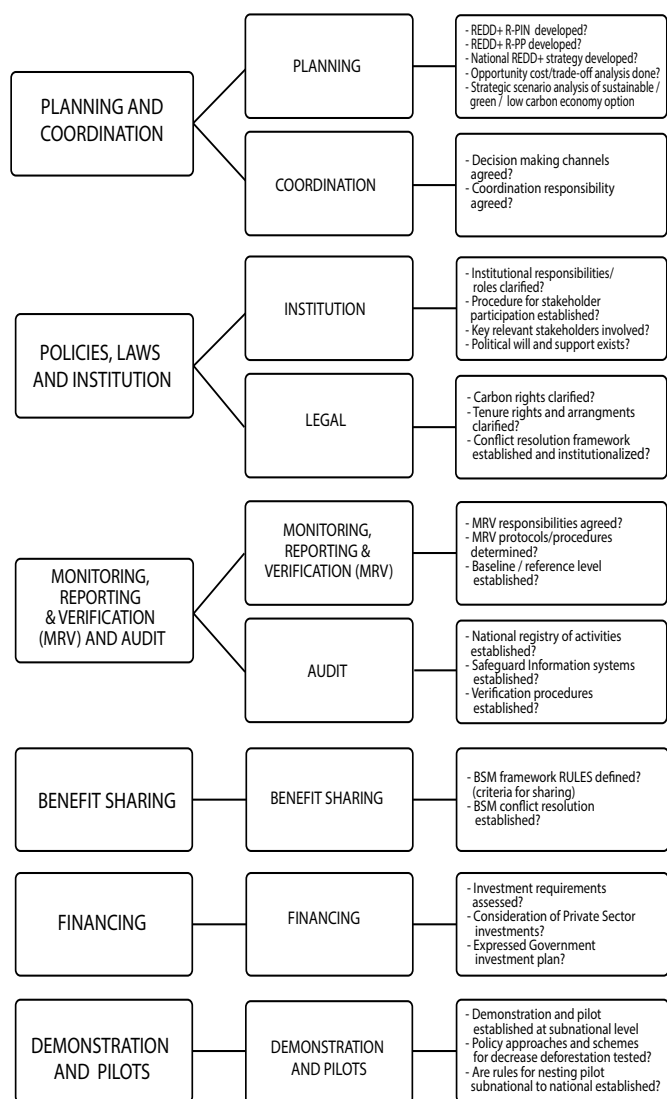
Implications

For the country to move beyond its current state of REDD+ readiness, immediate and future activities should focus on indicators where they are weak while strengthening those that are already advancing. Specifically, the following progressive actions are recommended:

- Remove policy and institutional bottlenecks through radical policy reforms that address tenure and carbon rights, equitable benefit sharing, and conflict resolution.
- Enhance inter-agency collaboration and broaden sectoral participation, including the private sector and indigenous people to increase the legitimacy and effectiveness of REDD+ readiness.
- Invest in in-house technical capacity development for REDD+ implementers
- Link REDD+ readiness with broader climate change mitigation efforts to ensure high level political commitment and expand the financial-base of its REDD+ Programme

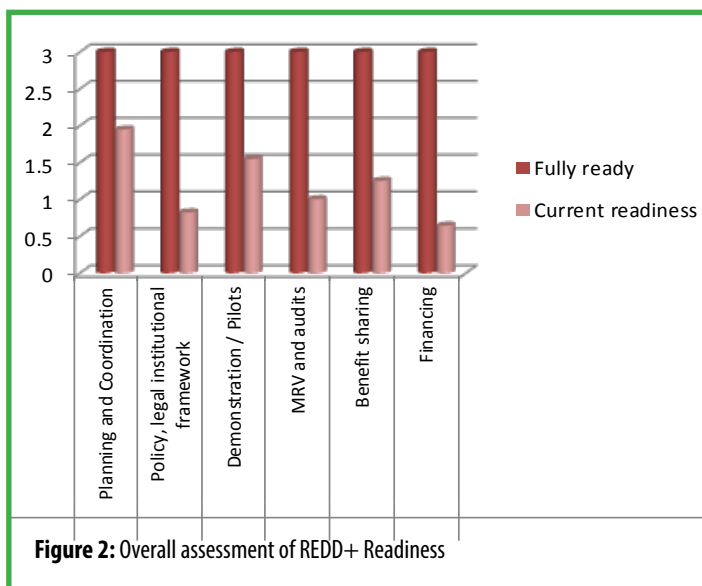
Vietnam's readiness was assessed using 19 out of 27 indicators in REDD+ readiness assessment framework (Figure 1), primarily by National REDD+ Network members, referred to as 'in situ stakeholders'. A round table discussion was facilitated with nine NRN stakeholders and NGO staff involved in REDD+ related projects, in July 2012 to: (i) discuss the REDD+ readiness assessment framework; (ii) pre-test the questionnaire; and (iii) draw preliminary insights on Vietnam's REDD+ readiness. A self-administered questionnaire was designed to assess REDD+ readiness functions and indicators using the rating scale shown in Table 1.

The questionnaire, which was pre-tested at the round-table discussion was electronically circulated to all NRN stakeholders, of which, 14 were retrieved. Stakeholders or respondents were grouped into two: (i) government organization (GO=7) and (ii) non-government organization (NGO=7).



What have been achieved?

The assessment of six readiness functions was only 'fair' or 'medium' (>1-2), which means that Vietnam's readiness preparations could take much longer than expected. Low rated indicators such as trade-off analysis, nesting rules, tenure and carbon rights, and REDD+ conflict resolution framework are crucial to REDD+ implementation, and should be the focus of readiness activities. Failure to address them would mean an uphill implementation of REDD+ in Vietnam.



(1) Planning and Coordination The development of National REDD+ Strategy, National REDD+ Action Programme (NRAP) and R-PIN and R-PP was rated 'medium', making 'Planning and Coordination' eminent amongst the six functions, while Opportunity Cost Analysis received a lower rating.

(2) Demonstration/Pilots Stakeholders' assessment of 'Demonstration/pilots' came second to Planning and Coordination (>1-2) and is attributed to past and ongoing government programmes such as 661 and Payment for Forest Environmental Services (PFES)2 as well as the presence of a number of REDD+ pilot projects implemented by international organizations, such as Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), to name a few.

(3) Benefit Sharing Benefit-sharing was again rated, 'medium/fair', and came third after Planning and Coordination and Demonstration/pilots. The UN-REDD Programme funded several studies on designing a national Benefit Distribution System (BDS) that is in line with international standards, yet appropriate to local and

Rating	Description	Conditions
0-1	Low/Poor	Indicator is not yet discussed
>1-2	Medium/Fair	Indicator is being discussed
>2	High/Good	Indicator or issues around it are agreed in principle
3	Very High/Very Good	Rules, laws or policy decisions already exist

Table 1: Rating scale (*) used in assessing REDD+ readiness functions and indicators

(*) The numerical representation of the different level of readiness was to ease the evaluation of the in-country readiness (i.e. between readiness functions). The value for each sub-function was computed by a veraging values for the indicators representing it. Similarly, the values for the readiness functions were computed by averaging the values of the sub-functions

national contexts. Despite the eminence of the 17 Policy Decisions on BDS, many stakeholders are still concerned that without a conflict resolution mechanism in place, the BDS employed by Programme 661 and PFES, will in the end, be adopted for REDD+, juxtaposing the BDS guidelines that have already been developed.

(4) MRV and Audits MRV and Audit is the least developed amongst four functions that were rated 'fair/medium' by stakeholders. The draft MRV Framework outlines the institutional arrangement of Vietnam's MRV hence, stakeholders rated this indicator at medium level (1.36). However, an important aspect that was missing in the MRV framework that was highlighted by some stakeholders is a mechanism to engage local communities and households in measurement and monitoring. The establishment of Safeguards and Information System (SIS) and national registry are much more behind among other indicators.

(5) Policy, Legal and Institutional Framework Policy, Legal and Institutional Framework is at the bottom two of the six functions (0-1). Within this function, 'clarification of institutional responsibilities' was assessed at medium level, which adequately conforms to the efforts of the government and other stakeholders to create an institutional structure for REDD+ (Figure 4); however, a big gap lies in addressing tenure and carbon rights and conflict resolution that were rated as low as 0.5 and 0.29, respectively.

(6) REDD+ Financing Financing was lowest among six functions. Few attempts were made to map donors and engage the private sector to meet the financial requirements of REDD+, but there was no comprehensive assessment of the funding requirements of REDD+. Stakeholders were clueless as to how the REDD budget was determined. It was anticipated that the figure was estimated based on donor committed funding rather than the country's actual needs. Unlike in Programme 661, the government has not leveraged substantial funding, except perhaps, in-kind contribution in form of personnel, materials and office facilities.

Tenure, carbon rights---bottlenecks to REDD+?

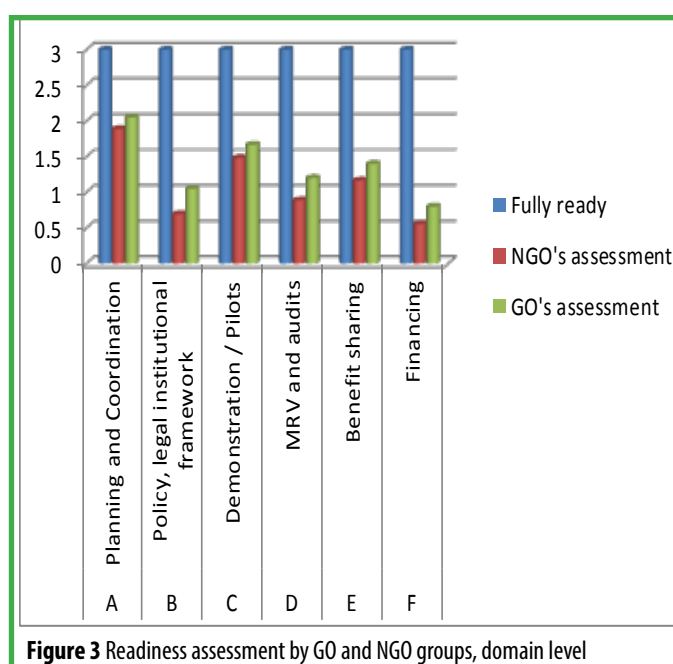
Tenure and carbon rights/contractual arrangement and conflict resolution are crucial to the future of REDD+. With unclear and overlapping forest land rights in Vietnam (UN-REDD, 2010; To et al., 2012), carbon rights may complicate the implementation of REDD+ since there is great variation in forest use between different forest groups. Tenure and carbon rights relate to all domains, and could be the bottle-neck of REDD+ implementation if left unresolved. The majority of the respondents (10/14) had no information or recall of any active discussion around these issues. However, the situation in Vietnam is not unique, as many countries preparing for REDD+ face similar issues due to ambiguity of legal framework on natural resources and property rights, on which the definition of carbon rights depends (Suzuki, 2011).

Drivers of deforestation and degradation - the sleeping giant of REDD+ unpreparedness?

Addressing drivers of deforestation and degradation through a comprehensive forest conservation and management program under REDD+ is crucial to success. REDD+ readiness activities tend to focus on developing technical and institutional capacity to demonstrate emission reductions rather than the capacity to address drivers of deforestation, which are more important than any instrumental preparedness. The National REDD+ Action Programme does not mention activities or approaches that directly address various drivers of deforestation and degradation as suggested by the UNFCCC and the World Bank. This is supported by earlier criticisms that Vietnam's RPPs and readiness activities in general, do not sufficiently pay attention to drivers of deforestation.

Differences between GO and NGO assessment of REDD+ readiness

Although both GO and NGO groups has the same tendency, significant difference in assessments were found between them in the domain of Policy, legal and institutional framework (51.20%), Benefit sharing (44.00%), and MRV and audits (35.00%). Interestingly, these were also modestly rated domains. The differences found in Planning and Coordination and Demonstration and Pilots were rather small, only 8.53% and 12.50%, respectively.



In Vietnam, the State tends to dominate over REDD+ processes. In-country financing and policy decisions are induced by international actors that inadvertently marginalize non-State actors. The NGO group expressed concerns on the quality of their participation as well as on how their recommendations will/could be taken up under a more State-driven REDD+ process.

Conclusion

Nevertheless, the institutional architecture of REDD in Vietnam, its strengths in planning and coordination, the emergence of demonstration pilots, and some policy backing, with all its nuances, may provide a 'fast start-up' of the National REDD+ Programme. However, the momentum may slow down if the bottlenecks are not removed, and the weak points of 'readiness' are not addressed. A call for immediate action is thus needed.



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World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) Viet Nam
No.8, Lot 13A Trung Hoa Street
Yen Hoa Ward, Cau Giay District
Hanoi, Viet Nam
Tel and Fax: +84 4 3783 4644/45
Email: icraf-vietnam@cgiar.org
http://www.worldagroforestry.org/regions/southeast_asia/vietnam

