

INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE INITIATIVE

Regional project Climate Protection through Forest Conservation in Pacific Island Countries

On behalf of



Federal Ministry for the
Environment, Nature Conservation
and Nuclear Safety

of the Federal Republic of Germany



REDD+ Pacific Regional Information Platform Conceptual Considerations

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On Behalf of

SPC/GIZ Regional Project

Climate Protection through Forest Conservation in Pacific Island Countries

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REDD+ Pacific Regional Information Platform

Conceptual Considerations

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1 Summary

As part of their regional project *Climate Protection through Forest Conservation in Pacific Island Countries*, the implementing organizations SPC and GIZ plan to develop an online platform for stakeholders dealing with REDD+ in the Region. When operational, the planned regional platform shall provide web-based basic information on REDD+ and related forest management activities in the Pacific, serve for knowledge transfer and the exchange of lessons learned and provide support for all relevant stakeholders.

After assessing the interests, needs and wishes of project partners and stakeholders, now various questions in regard to the concept and technical implementation of this platform can be addressed.

There are four main issues:

- What kind of information shall be provided? What features and tools shall be included?
- Should the platform follow an interactive community approach for user generated content or should it offer selected and edited content generated by an editorial team?
- Where and how should the platform be hosted? Who shall be in charge for sustainable operation?
- How should the platform be technically implemented?

Some of the main points for deciding these questions are collected in this report.

2 Introduction

The regional project *Climate Protection through Forest Conservation in Pacific Island Countries* focusses on developing regional and national policies as well as technical and institutional capacities for the implementation of REDD+ in the Pacific Island Region.

One important component of this project is to enhance capabilities in understanding REDD+. While there are numerous sources of information available online on climate change in the Pacific Islands and on REDD in general, a structured source of relevant and valid information on REDD+ in the Pacific Island Region is still missing. The project seeks to fill this gap by providing access to information and offering support for stakeholders through a regional *REDD+ Information and Support Platform*.

In various meetings and workshops¹ the needs, interests and wishes of the stakeholders and possible target audiences were assessed (see table on next page). The next step is to design a concept for the platform that meets the interests of the stakeholders and the project implementing agencies and that is technological feasible, practical, functional and reasonable.

The conceptual considerations provided in this report result on the findings of a consultancy undertaken for GIZ in June and July 2012. These results are based on project reports, the needs assessments and the input by core project staff. Stakeholders and targeted users could not be included. While all findings of the previous assessments were considered, the individual view of specific stakeholders might vary.

Parts of the functions to be offered by the *REDD+ Information and Support Platform* already are provided by the project website, such as relevant documentations or the offer for support through a help desk feature.

The program *Coping with Climate Change in the Pacific Island Region*, also implemented by SPC and GIZ supports the development of a Pacific Climate Change Portal in cooperation with SPREP that should provide similar features in regard to all issues relates to climate change mitigation. A cooperative approach for both online projects could be considered.

¹ e.g. Pacific Regional Forestry Technical Meeting (Nadi, Fiji September 21, 2011); National Project Planning Meetings (For Papua New Guinea in Port Moresby, June 21-22, 2011; for Solomon Islands in Honiara, June 29-30, 2011; for Vanuatu in Port Vila, June 15-16, 2011); Inception Workshop and Regional REDD+ Strategy Framework Development (Suva, Fiji, November 22-24, 2010)

	Pacific Regional Forestry Technical Meeting (Nadi, Fiji September 21, 2011)	PNG National Project Planning Meeting (Port Moresby, June 21–22, 2011)	Solomon Islands National Project Planning Meeting (Honiara, June 29–30, 2011)
General considerations:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> slow speed, costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> internet access difficult, slow and costly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SPC regional office as an access point for those with limited internet accessibility
Articles / Documents			
technical information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Climate change MRV methodology 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic information about REDD+ Different REDD+ models
policy development, initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> policy briefs policy frameworks 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> updates on the international discussion
Project reports and case studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> road maps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> project profiles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information on REDD+ projects, Case studies
Research output and analysis			
Training material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training manuals 		
Best practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> REDD+ readiness processes 		
Instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> field manuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> tools, guidelines 	
Technology transfer			
Profiles			
Experts, consultants		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directory of experts that is kept up-to-date 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directory of experts
Organizations and institutions		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contact details for REDD related persons in relevant organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directory of relevant institutions
Projects and programs		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> project profiles 	
Communication			
Newsletter		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Email service to inform about new documents 	
Help desk			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> help desk
Forum			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Topical discussion forums
Additional Features			
Calendar		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Calendar of events 	
Tenders		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publication of tenders 	

Needs, wishes and recommendations assessed at stakeholder meetings – categorized

Vanuatu National Project Planning Meeting <small>(Port Vila, June 15–16, 2011)</small>	Inception Workshop and Regional REDD+ Strategy Framework Development <small>(Suva, Fiji, November 22–24, 2010)</small>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no internet access at work, emailservice available 		General considerations:
		Articles / Documents
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exchange of information on carbon estimation factors Set standards, design template for carbon stocks (regional) Use standard tech -> info integration Info on carbon markets 	technical information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> REDD+ policies, strategies, initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy development/briefings 	policy development, initiatives
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pilot projects 	Project reports and case studies
		Research output and analysis
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> capacity development Trainings on Collection of data Interpretation /analysis of data Storage of data Reporting, e.g. on how to fill FRA tables (carbon stocks) 	Training material
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> REDD+ experiences, lessons learned 	Best practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> tools 		Instructions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> technology transfer 	Technology transfer
		Profiles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> listing of staff and consultants with a (verified) description of their expertise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List of available capacities database of experts (national, regional, international) 	Experts, consultants
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contacts persons in the partnering countries 	Organizations and institutions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Particular REDD and related projects of SPC and international REDD projects (e.g. GIZ) (scoping, eligibility criteria, financing, methodologies (tools, checklist of steps), approaches, validation, policy position) 	Projects and programs
		Communication
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional REDD newsletter 	Newsletter
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> help desk that takes in requests for information or assistance and refers these to the proper personnel 		Help desk
		Forum
		Additional Features
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> calendar of events to help planning regional and national events and travel. 		Calendar
		Tenders

3 Target Audience

The *REDD+ Information Platform* addresses various target audiences which encompass all stakeholders involved in all aspects of REDD+ in the region.

The following stakeholders were identified (this list is not necessarily exhaustive):

- Policy Stakeholders
 - Policy and decision makers (in SPC member countries)
 - Regional organizations (SPC, USP, SPREP, PIFS, MSG)
 - International organizations (UNFCCC, REDD+ partnership, UNFF)
 - Donor agencies
- Technical Stakeholders
 - Forestry Departments
 - Implementation agencies
 - Research institutions
 - NGOs
 - Private sector
- Community Stakeholders
 - Resource and land owners
 - Community based organizations
 - NGO
 - Educational institutions
 - Faith based organizations

It can be assumed that all relevant stakeholders are already well connected in various official and informal communication and exchange networks. To make sure, the *REDD+ Information Platform* can provide additional value, it must focus on its unique selling points: Provide comprehensive data and information needed for developing REDD+ approaches in the Pacific Island Region.

Although most of the targeted users could also provide useful information and contribute to the contents of the platform, the needs assessments and experience with previous or other online projects in the region indicate that users have a higher interest in being provided with a searchable information repository rather than being part in an interactive community that requires contributions from the users.

4 Features

The main goal of the *REDD+ Information Platform* is to collect and provide all available relevant information on REDD+ in the Pacific Island Region.

There are various and numerous sources for information available online and offline already that would have to be included in this platform. A collection of additional data, like a directory of regional projects or stakeholders, might be useful for the targeted users and would add a unique value to the platform. Finally, specific services such as help and support in research or networking should be considered.

4.1 Articles / Documents

Main feature would be a document repository that provides a comprehensive collection of available information on REDD+ relevant for the region.

The information could encompass:

- General and technical information on REDD+
- News and reports on policy development, strategies and initiatives
- News and information on projects and programs, project (interim) reports and case studies
- Research output and analysis
- Capacity development and training material
 - Best practices, lessons learned
 - Information instructions and manuals for methods, tools and instruments
 - Technology transfer

To provide a useful resource for the users, it must be ensured, that the provided data is as comprehensive as possible, up-to date, valid and relevant. The following features therefore should be considered:

- **Edited contents and abstracts**

The provided documents should be checked for relevance. To provide added value, a short abstract and maybe a review of the provided document should be included. Regular research for additional available information must be ensured. Contributions from members should be encouraged, however, since they cannot be expected in high quantities in the beginning and since a review of provided information is recommended, members should get the opportunity to suggest articles to the platform rather than uploading it directly.
- **Search and Structure**

A full-text search function is essential for the document repository. To facilitate finding relevant information, a clear filing structure is also important. Documents can be provided in a folder structure, where similar files are sorted into the same folder. This approach is used right now at the project web site. As a different (or additional) feature it is recommended to define tags or labels for the documents because in contrast to folders, documents can be assigned to different tags. Tags could be defined for regional relevance (e.g. Fiji, Tonga, inter-

national), the document type (policy brief, lesson learned) or the content (carbon assessment, financing). Searching for specific tags than helps finding all documents from a specific area or for a specific content.

- **Links vs. hosting**

The platform should not just create redundant structures to other document libraries – but in regard to regional relevance and comprehensiveness the platform can create added value. Documents that are provided by other sources online do not necessarily have to be hosted on the platform but can be linked to. Advantages to linking to initial sources are that the file sources (and thus the number of possible different versions) are limited, that data traffic for the portal is reduced and that copyrights are not compromised. However, if a document is deleted at the initial source, it will not be available for the platform anymore. Therefore, links must be checked (automatically) regularly to prevent dead links.

- **Rating**

To help users in assessing the relevance and quality of provided documents, a rating and commenting feature might be useful. To provide the possibility to users to comment and rate documents or links requires interactive membership or community features and a proactive user group. This feature would also add to the perception of ownership for the user group. However, as this is not essential, it can also be added as an additional function later.

4.2 Profiles

In addition to the document and resource library, the platform should provide support for networking and cooperation and support the users in finding necessary expertise. Therefore it will provide directories of relevant stakeholders, organizations and institutions as well as relevant projects in the area.

The following stakeholders should get the opportunity to present their profiles:

- Experts, consultants and service providers
- Organizations and institutions (including contact persons)
- Projects and programs

To make sure the data is relevant, comprehensive and comparable, a clear structure of content categories should be developed (e.g. name, contact data, experiences, offered services for individuals; or location, implementing agencies, goal, context, approach, methodologies, financing, and results for project profiles)

The profiles of organizations and individuals can either be added and up-dated by the users themselves or by an editorial team. Since especially in the beginning it cannot be expected that stakeholders will make use of this opportunity, it is recommended that the data input will be done by the editorial team. In addition it might be necessary to check and validate information provided by organizations and service providers in order to avoid expertise claims that are not true.

In addition, if an online community approach is considered, every user or member of the community could present his or her individual user profile.

4.3 Communication

▪ Newsletter

The platform should not only provide a searchable repository of information but also inform the users about new developments. Therefore, it is recommended to provide a regular newsletter to subscribers, providing information on new resources on the platform and news from the field.

▪ Help desk

For users with specific requests for information or assistance, a help desk feature should be included. The help desk would be the primary contact point for questions in regard to REDD+ in the region and would refer inquiries to appropriate experts. A help desk feature is already in use on the SPC/GIZ project website, however knowledge about this service and service requests are still limited.

▪ Forum

As an additional feature to encourage discussion and dialogue, a forum could be considered. Advantages of a forum would be that questions and requests would be public and could therefore benefit from the expertise of other users and the responses could be beneficial for others readers. (Confidential requests or information could still be directed to the help desk or discussed in personal messages.) An online-discussion feature would – again – require an active user community as well as monitoring (and – if necessary – editing) by the editorial team. However, a forum is the best feature to facilitate communication and collaboration, maximise synergies and reduce duplication between stakeholders.

4.4 Additional Features

▪ Calendar

In addition to general news, information and communication, all relevant national and regional events, meetings, conferences, and trainings could be announced and promoted through a calendar feature.

▪ Publication of tenders

General tenders could be published by stakeholders and directed to the experts' and consultants' directory.

- Documents
 - Local Resources
 - REDD Policy development
 - REDD Instruments
 - Project Reports
 - Training materials
 - ...
- Projects
 - Local projects
 - Content specific pilot sites
 - Project map
- Service Providers
 - Organisations
 - Expert Directory
- Calendar
 - Trainings
 - Conferences and Meetings
- Forum
 - Forum Category 1
 - Forum Category 2
 - ...
- Help/Contact
 - Contact persons
 - Add/suggest resources
 - Help desk
- Membership
 - Edit Profile
- Register / Login
 - Newsletter subscription
- Search
 - Full text search
 - Document search
 - Contact search

A possible structure of the REDD+ Information and Support Platform

5 Issues

5.1 Hosting and Operation

It is essential for reliable and sustainable operation of the *REDD+ Information Platform* to clarify who is in charge for hosting and editing. The following points must be considered:

- Who is in charge for content? Are additional skill sets required for adding and editing information? Is additional staff needed?
- Who has the mandate for technical operation? Are additional skill sets required to implement, configure and manage the platform?
- How can continuity and sustainability of the platform be ensured? How can costs for staff, technical requirements and bandwidth be covered, especially after expiration of the project duration.

As of now, SPC and GIZ can consider various options:

- The platform can be a part of the project website hosted and serviced by SPC
- The platform could be part of a collaborative approach with the Pacific Climate Portal hosted by SPREP
- The platform will be a stand-alone website hosted by any independent service provider and serviced by assigned staff
- The different features could also be provided by different providers, such as the document repository by the climate change portal, the help desk by SPC, etc.

	SPC	Pacific Climate Change Portal	Stand-alone	various features at different locations
Cooperation Partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SPC Land Resource Division 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SPREP Climate Change Portal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ n/a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ various
Admin and Editors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SPC IT and PR (maybe plus editorial team) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SPREP and editorial team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Editorial team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ various
Advantage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No additional coordination necessary ▪ Sustainability and continuity after project ends ensured 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ One stop-shop for climate change resources in the Pacific ▪ Technical features ready and adaptable, compatible approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No coordination or cooperation necessary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Easy to implement into existing systems ▪ Limited additional workload
Disadvantage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Additional workload for SPC staff ▪ Individual programming necessary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sustainability and continuity of Climate Change Portal after project ends is not ensured ▪ Need for coordination between SPC/GIZ and SPREP ▪ Platform features must be coordinated with Climate Change Portal ▪ Community approach (focussing on user generated content) ▪ Very broad and complex website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sustainability and continuity of platform after project ends not ensured ▪ Assigned staff necessary ▪ Additional costs ▪ Individual programming necessary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No integrated portal ▪ Sustainability and continuity of platform not ensured ▪ Coordination of various features necessary

If an easy start and less technical investment are favored, cooperation with the Climate Change Portal is a good option.

If an individual approach and continuity with only one organization in charge is preferred, the hosting by SPC (or the stand-alone) approach are recommended.

5.2 Technical Approach

The *REDD+ Information Platform* integrates various online features into one comprehensive website. However, since the main features are quite common and used on numerous web applications, various simple but powerful content management systems can be used to implement the platform.

The appropriate system depends on different factors:

- What are expected costs for coding and developing the platform?
- Who will be the hosting agency? Does this require adapting a specific content management system?
- What skill sets are available or necessary for editors and administrators of the platform?

While most of the core features (providing structured information that can be easily edited, searched and commented) can already be implemented by a simple blogging-tool, it is recommended to choose a CMS that can be extended by installing additional features (plugins, modules or extension) rather than customized coded applications.

SPC's Land resource division uses Joomla, a free open source CMS with various available extensions that can easily be integrates to offer all described features².

The Climate Change Portal is using Drupal, also a very powerful and extendable CMS supposed to be a little more developer-oriented and to require more technical skills. Since the Climate Portal features are compatible with the platform features, the platform can easily be integrated into this system.

Both CMS can be recommended especially if the skills for implementing and maintaining are available.

An important requirement for coding and implementing the platform is to keep the site simple in terms of necessary bandwidth to enable users with slow internet connections to use all features.

² To name a few examples: Community Builder for Social Network features, Akeeba Forum, CB Profile Pro for different profiles, joomdoc or Remository for documents, proforms or breezingforms for simple contributions and jevents for an event calendar. Various more or different extensions are available.

5.3 Community Approach

The appropriate level of interactivity of the *REDD+ Information Platform* is very important for the structure of the website.

On the one hand, all information could be collected and uploaded by a centralized editorial team to provide the users with comprehensive, up-to-date validated information.

On the other hand, the platform could follow a community approach that offers membership features and enables users to contribute to databases and discussions and thus, benefits from mass collaboration. Community based information and communication community platforms (like online social networks), however, very much depend on the activity of the users.

The following questions therefore need to be considered:

- Who can access what level of information? Do users to be registered to access documents? To access a forum?
- Who can contribute? Do users have to be registered to contribute documents or links? To leave comments or ratings?
- Who adds or up-dates experts' or organisations' profiles? The individual users or organisations' representatives or the editorial team?

Registration often is a barrier preventing possible users from accessing a site at all. However, the quality of contributions probably increases if contributing members need to login. Thus, less editing is needed and less spam must be expected.

A user registration at least is necessary to include a mailing list feature to collect email addresses of subscribers.

To limit the dependency from user contributions and to ensure easy access to data, it might be recommended to make a user registration optional. However, for active users special membership features will provide additional value for both, the platform and the user. These features can also be added at a later stage.

6 Recommendations

- The *REDD+ Information Platform* must avoid creating duplicates and being redundant. In regard to the unique selling point of the *REDD+ Information Platform for the Pacific* it is important to focus on information relevant to the Pacific Island Region. That does not only include information focusing on the region or provided from actors in the region, but also all kind of information that is necessary for stakeholders in the region such as methods and tools – even if these are of a general, non-localized nature. This could encourage users to use the *REDD+ Information Platform* as a main research tool for all REDD+ related needs.
- The assessment of needs and wishes for the *REDD+ Information Platform* resulted in a detailed list of features and contents. If an extendable system is being used it is possible to start with the core features of the platform (document repository, mailing list) and extend the platform later according to growing need and usage.
- The previous assessments as well as the best practices from similar information websites in the region indicate specific need for user-friendly presented information and resources for various areas and topics. However, the assessments also show that an interactive approach that encourages (or even requires) a lot of contributions and user-generated content from the target community is not demanded at this time. Implementation and operation, thus, requires editing staff that researches the necessary information and provides abstracts or assessments. On the other hand the technical requirements are lower if users do not directly contribute their contents but have it added through the editorial team.
- The *REDD+ Information Platform* features can be provided by using standard Content Management Systems. Selecting the appropriate CMS should be done in close cooperation with the technical staff of the project partner in charge for hosting and technical implementation. For developing and design of the platform, external experts should be contracted. After an initial briefing, the editing and maintenance can be done by project or IT staff. Coding of layout templates and features must focus on simplicity to allow users with a low bandwidth to access and use the platform.



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