

CDM-EB90-AA-A09

Concept note

Improving the user-friendliness of the sustainable development co-benefits tool

Version 01.0



United Nations
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1. Procedural background

1. The Executive Board of the clean development mechanism (CDM) (hereinafter referred to as the Board), in its CDM Management Action Plan 2011, decided to “improve the standards, procedures, guidelines and tools to enhance objectivity and environmental integrity, using, where possible, new and innovative approaches, while ensuring the contribution of CDM project activities to sustainable development.” Consequently, at its sixty-seventh meeting (EB67), the Board requested the secretariat to develop a tool for voluntary use by project participants to report on the sustainable development co-benefits of their projects and programme of activities (PoA) (hereinafter referred to as the SD-tool).
2. The development and implementation of the SD-tool was discussed at several Board meetings, and the tool was launched in early 2014. Reflecting on the first two years of operation, the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP) encouraged the Board to improve the user-friendliness of the SD-tool. This request is contained in decision 6/CMP.11, paragraph 22.
3. In response to the CMP mandate, the Board approved the activity “Sustainable development co-benefits, including reporting and promotional activities” under objective 1(a): “Operate efficient project and entity assessment processes” of the CDM two-year business plan 2016–2017 and management plan 2016 (EB87, annex 1).

2. Purpose

4. This concept note provides a list of recommendations with the objective of improving the user-friendliness of the SD-tool, for review and acceptance by the Board.

3. Analysis of key issues

5. To date, only 32 CDM projects/PoAs out of over 8,000 projects and PoAs have used the SD-tool to voluntarily report on sustainable development co-benefits. Improving the user-friendliness of the interface should lead to an increased use of the SD-tool, which would be reflected by an increased number of submitted SD-tool reports.
6. The reports submitted through the SD-tool are intended to serve the needs of various stakeholders. Therefore the further improvement of its user-friendliness should take into account the needs of all stakeholders.
7. To identify options for improvement, the secretariat carried out an internal technical review of the SD-tool and considered proposals made by an external independent assessment “*Reforming the CDM SD Tool – Recommendations for improvement*” carried out by the German Emissions Trading Authority in partnership with the Wuppertal Institute and the United Nation Environmental Programme (UNEP). Based on these two reviews, three areas for improvement have been identified:
 - (a) Improving the workflow efficiency of the SD-tool;
 - (b) Enhancing the usability of the SD-tool online interface;
 - (c) Improving the identification, categorization and comparability of co-benefits.

3.1. Proposals for improving workflow efficiency

8. The analysis of the process for submitting and publishing SD-tool reports identified several possibilities for improvements:
 - (a) To reduce the time for authorizing access to the online interface, the SD-tool could be integrated into the new UNFCCC user-credential system, which provides a single point of access to the different services of the secretariat's information systems;
 - (b) To improve the system's security, the user-credential provisioning could be automatically linked to the latest information in the Modalities of Communication statement for the project/PoA as contained in the secretariat's Customer Relationship Management system;
 - (c) The workflow could be extended to support:
 - (i) The updating, changing or withdrawing of already submitted reports;
 - (ii) The completeness check of the submissions; and
 - (iii) The communication with submitters on the status of their submissions.

3.2. Proposals for enhancing the usability of the online interface

9. The online user interface for filling the SD-tool report form could be redesigned based on best practices adopted by popular survey website providers (e.g. surveymonkey.com, typeform.com, jobform.com). The following modifications are proposed:
 - (a) Automatic saving of all data entered by the user;
 - (b) Improving the online guidance for users on filling the form by adding standard controls such as breadcrumb navigation, colour-coded buttons, pop-up notifications and automatic validation rules;
 - (c) Feeding in information available in the CDM database directly in the form interface such as project and contact details;
 - (d) Making the online version of the SD-tool report form identical with the published PDF report version (in terms of its structure and content).

3.3. Proposals for improving the identification, categorization and comparability of co-benefits

10. The relevance of the SD-tool reports becomes significant only if stakeholders use the reports widely when selecting projects for funding or offsetting. The usefulness of the SD-tool reports depends on the clarity and the relative objectivity of the information included. It also depends on how simple it is for stakeholders to obtain the information they are seeking.

11. To improve the clarity and objectivity of information in the reports, the following enhanced surveying techniques could be implemented:
 - (a) Reformulating the questions in the report form so as to increase the number of questions based on “Yes/No” answers (binomial questions);
 - (b) Adding the possibility to quantify (at least approximately) information on concentrations, emissions or reductions of different elements mentioned in co-benefits descriptions;
 - (c) Adding a co-benefit conformity level “Completely” to the current conformity levels of “Slightly”, “Partly” and “Highly” and assigning percentage ranges to each conformity level, e.g. “less than 20%”, “between 20% and 70%”, “between 70% and 90%” and “greater than 90%”, as per the gradation of the conformity levels;
 - (d) Linking information on co-benefits in the project design document (PDD) to the co-benefits in the SD-tool report, which could be achieved by adding a PDD reference page field in the SD-tool report form. For registered projects, the PDD has been validated by a designated operational entity and this linking would enable stakeholders to confirm a third-party assessment for the respective co-benefits.
12. Building on improved identification and categorization of co-benefits, the SD-tool should enable users to search co-benefits and compare SD-tool reports between different projects/PoAs. The following capabilities could be introduced:
 - (a) Search filters for co-benefits and project attributes (e.g. project type, project status, host-Party, availability of certified emission reductions);
 - (b) Ordering projects based on categorization of co-benefits (e.g. availability of a co-benefit and level of conformity for a co-benefit) and as per the user preference (e.g. the external user specifies if availability matters, or both availability and conformity);
 - (c) Automatically transforming the information in the SD-tool report to align with the categories of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

4. Impacts

13. Improved user-friendliness of the SD-tool online interface should enable project participants to fill in the report form in an easier and more guided manner. Improved SD-tool workflow would allow already submitted reports to be updated, changed or withdrawn, and an improved communication mechanism would help track the status of submissions. Improved quality of the information captured in the reports would enable project participants to better demonstrate the performance of their CDM projects/PoAs with respect to co-benefits. Taken together, these improvements should facilitate an increase in the number of SD-tool submissions.
14. The improvements related to identification, categorization and comparability of co-benefits would benefit the information needs of various stakeholders.
15. Finally, the workflow efficiency gains would result in a faster, more secure and scaled-up processing of submissions by the secretariat.

5. Subsequent work and timelines

16. The secretariat can complete the work on all proposed changes within six months.

6. Budget and costs

17. It is expected that the information technology development costs will be covered within the limit of the engagement agreement of the Sustainable Development Mechanisms programme with the Information and Communication Technology programme.

7. Recommendations to the Board

18. The secretariat recommends that the Board approve the implementation of all proposed improvements to the SD-tool.
19. The Board may wish to provide any further guidance as appropriate.

8. Reference

20. External assessment report: “*Reforming the CDM SD-tool – Recommendations for improvement*”, the German Emissions Trading Authority in partnership with the Wuppertal Institute and UNEP.

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