Executive Summary

1. Suriname is a relatively small country in South America with a forest cover of 93%. It is considered the most forested country in the world. With a small population living mainly in the coastal area, a historical low deforestation rate (oscillating between 0.02 and 0.07% annually) and a promising upcoming oil and gas industry, the country holds potential for REDD+ to contribute to Suriname’s sustainable and green development.

2. The UNDP project “Strengthening national capacities of Suriname for the elaboration of the National REDD+ Strategy and the design of its implementation framework” is the result of Suriname’s REDD+ Readiness Preparation efforts back in 2012-2013. After some failed attempts, Suriname succeeded in drafting a solid Readiness Preparation Proposal or R-PP including a broad consultation process. The R-PP was approved in June 2013 and led to funding of the REDD+ Readiness project by FCPF, with UNDP as the delivery partner.

3. Whilst the project was initially designed for a 3 years duration, the MTR did recommend a second phase, which led to a total duration of 7.5 years of the REDD+ Readiness project. NIMOS was assigned as the national institute to carry out the project, whilst SBB was the technical partner institute for certain outputs. After a difficult start in 2014-2015, the project took off and has been able to deliver many outputs that are key for an eventual REDD+ Implementation Phase.

4. This final evaluation is meant to describe the state of Suriname after more than 7 years of investment in REDD+ Readiness. Many milestones have been achieved, such as a solid MRV and NFMS system (housed in SBB), a comprehensive REDD+ Strategy and the design of a Safeguards Information System (SIS). However, there are some remaining gaps as to REDD+ Implementation, such as the need to install a sound REDD+ institutional framework and a lack of in-country capacity for attracting REDD+ Funding. Apart from these two issues, much more needs to be done with the indigenous and tribal peoples (ITP) organizations to get them on board for REDD+.

5. The main factor that affected project implementation was the lack of high-level political support for REDD+ as a tool for a green and sustainable development. Whilst pledges for preserving a 93% Forest Cover have been done at international level (including demands for payments for the standing carbon and other ecosystem services), there has been no long-term development vision that limits forest destruction and forest degradation as such. Whilst the national development plan (MOP) 2017-2021 still mentioned REDD+ as a tool for sustainable development, the word REDD+ is absent in the recently approved MOP 2022-2026.

6. In such a context, the development of a National REDD+ Strategy and REDD+ Financial Strategy including all stakeholders is possible but its implementation is complicated. High level political support for REDD+ was largely absent during the entire project period and hampered REDD+ readiness preparation. Many key technical documents have been worked out, and different tools were developed as required in the R-PP. However, it has not been possible to work out 7 all the necessary legislative reforms nor build an accompanying institutional implementation framework for REDD+ at national scale.

7. The project did a sound effort over the years regarding stakeholder engagement and public outreach at all levels of the society, in order to raise awareness on the importance of the forests and climate change. Stakeholder engagement started with the R-PP, and was taken up again by the project from 2016 onwards. Annual engagement and communication plans were developed and executed. As a result, many stakeholders both in the coastal area and the hinterland are now more aware of Climate Change and REDD+.

8. Involvement of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples has been done in a respectful way, given the complexity and tension within Suriname because of unresolved land rights issues. NIMOS/PMU mostly involved ITP’s through the REDD+ assistants in order to share information on REDD+ and/or when ITP’s were needed for consultation on products such as the REDD+ NS or the SIS. When ITP’s in the hinterland were consulted, they were subsequently asked to validate several documents.

9. Better communication and coordination with ITP organizations (VIDS, KAMPOS) during the project would have led to more project results as to FPIC, local development plans based on REDD+ and C-MRV. Both at the level of the ITP organizations, RAC and the ITP in general, there is a growing frustration about REDD+, as ITPs are still awaiting REDD+ funding for local development more than 10 years later after the launch of the REDD+ message.

10. Institutional strengthening and capacity building all have happened during the project life, especially at the level of SBB, within the Forest Cover Monitoring Unit and beyond. SBB was particularly well organized to use REDD+ project funding to attract international consultants only when needed, and to rather use funding for building internal capacity through trainings of local staff in-country and abroad. Institutional strengthening in NIMOS has happened as well, but to a much lesser extent; the division PMU and NIMOS as separate Units did not seem to be a good choice given the fact that PMU staff (trained in REDD+) will now take on other jobs.

11. A National REDD+ Strategy was developed during 2017 after a sound analysis of the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, including barriers towards REDD+ implementation. The NRS was compiled after a long and tedious process of consultation, particularly with the ITP’s of the hinterland. Whilst the NRS is a holistic document which gives 4 strategic lines and a comprehensive wish-list of relevant policies and measures (PAM’s) to implement REDD+, it does not identify which policies and measures have the lowest risks to be implemented, and where the low-hanging fruits are. In other words, there is no clear agreed timeline and process in place to resolve inconsistencies and integrate REDD+ strategy options with relevant development policies.

12. The approval of the second phase REDD+ readiness project took far too long (more than 2 years) and created confusion. As the REDD+ Strategy was finalized, it was time for implementation, and not for another readiness phase (despite elements lacking for REDD+ implementation). Project document Phase II of REDD+ Readiness included some elements of a REDD+ Business strategy and some activities towards REDD+ Implementation. The project was 8 successful in organizing a high-level HFLD conference in 2019, but since then, it was unable to build further on this, partly because of the elections and the new Government to be installed. The COVID pandemic that started in April 2020 was not helpful in this respect either.

13. Still, due to the investments in the REDD+ readiness phase, Suriname now has a strong MRV system for monitoring deforestation and forest degradation, housed in the NFMS Unit at SBB. This unit is now equipped by several local staff with a sound knowledge of GIS and remote sensing, coupled with local knowledge on land use and forestry. The NFMS system that was gradually built up is now equipped with a SFISS and other key tools for monitoring logging in the country. SBB was also capable with technical and financial support from the project to submit two FREL reports which were both approved by the UNFCCC.

14. At the level of NIMOS, several technical processes and documents have been developed that are key for REDD+ Implementation such as a comprehensive REDD+ Strategy, a Safeguards SOI and SIS portal, as well as a very sound ESMF framework. However, they all need institutional embedding in the new NMA. Some elements of the REDD+ Readiness have not been developed such as the Benefit Sharing Mechanism (BSM), a mechanism that needs strong ITP organizations as counterpart to the governmental institutes, in order to come to long term agreements on benefit sharing of REDD+ projects.

15. A transition from REDD+ Readiness to REDD+ Implementation at national level is possible depending on some milestones to be achieved. However, it is above all a political choice that goes beyond NIMOS/SBB (and UNDP). Clear commitment is needed at the highest political level in order to couple REDD+ with a Green Development, looking for investments that keep the Forest at 93%, and not short-term investments that will definitely lead to more deforestation and forest degradation. This requires -amongst other measures- Long term Development Planning coupled with a National Land Use Planning (Spatial Planning), including the demarcation of Indigenous and Tribal lands.

16. More specifically, the evaluation team recommends that: 1. At the highest level of the Government, actions are undertaken to develop a Green Development Vision and Action Plan to keep the Forest Cover at 93% and hence obtain considerable REDD+ Funding. This requires a strategic long-term development plan that refrains from large scale deforestation for cattle ranching, oil palm or other development programs except in the deforested areas of the coastal zone. 2. Green Development and Climate Change funding gets a special place at the highest political level, which is the Cabinet of the President, or at a Special Ministry for Development Planning, LUP, Climate, Environment and Forests, given the uniqueness of the country and its potential. 3. Long term Planning of Development (MOP) is coupled with Spatial Planning (Land use planning - LUP or Ruimtelijke Ordening in Dutch) at a National Scale (entire country). This will minimize ad hoc development, provide clarity on concessions (logging/mining), protected areas and land rights. 4. The relationship between the Government and the ITP organizations is strengthened by supporting their legitimate organizations and build ITP capacity beyond this project. 9 5. The Government of Suriname invests in work on Land Rights as a Cornerstone for future development (and spatial development) of the Interior with full respect of FPIC and in agreement with the ITPs. 6. The Government invests more in Climate Finance expertise, especially REDD+ Finance expertise, and allies with similar countries such as Guyana, Gabon and with international efforts such as the Coalition for Rainforest Nations (CfRN) and the Forest for Life Partnership, in order to share information and submit joint proposals for funding. 7. NMA gets the correct funding and correct staffing, following the approved Environment Act with a mandate that is limited to the needs of the law: application of a strict Environmental Framework for Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA’s) and Environmental Management Plans (including REDD+ Projects), as well as pollution regulation and control. Carbon Finance expertise (and carbon credits coupled with NDC) should be placed at a higher level than NMA. 8. The Government further strengthens the MRV capacity built up during this REDD+ Readiness project within the NFMS Unit at SBB. Internal capacity for MRV is now built in Suriname and should not get lost: it is one of the most important needed tools for any payment of carbon credits in the future, so maintenance is key. It is equally recommended that the Gonini geoportal be further developed as a national tool for transparency in concession allocation, and as a starting point for a coherent national land use planning process that goes beyond the mandate of SBB. 9. UNDP, IDB and other donors go beyond short term project investments but invest in a longterm support to the Government of Suriname for designing a Green Development Vision coupled with maintaining 93% Forest Cover.

17. It is to be hoped that this long-term development vision will be developed and implemented soon, as Suriname has some unique characteristics to implement REDD+. Few countries in the world have this potential: low population, high forest cover, low annual deforestation. Support from the international community is now needed more than ever, to keep the forests of Suriname healthy and prosperous, for the benefit of the ITPs, the Surinamese people as well as the entire world