

Ecosystem Marketplace

Nigerian State Sets REDD Pace for Entire Continent

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The tiny state of Cross River, Nigeria, has managed to preserve large swathes of endangered rainforest despite lucrative – and often intimidating – offers from loggers and other interests. It's also laid the groundwork for a state-wide program designed to earn international carbon credits by saving trees, thus securing its spot in an elite network of states that are moving forward as UN talks stall.

17 February 2011 | In September, 2010, the United Nations REDD Program (UN-REDD) sent three representatives to Nigeria to determine whether the nation could become a pilot country for UN-sanctioned projects that funnel carbon offsets to people who save endangered forestland and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and forest degradation ([REDD](#)). By becoming a pilot country instead of just an observer country, they could eventually channel billions to the country's rural poor – and save large swathes of virgin rainforest.

After spending a few days in Cross River State and then visiting the capital, Abuja, the team invited the country to prepare a REDD readiness plan, which UN-REDD will support to the tune of \$3-4 million.

The promise of donor support for a national REDD strategy is the culmination of 15 years of environmental activism in Nigeria, centered mostly in one state: Cross River, and championed by two men: [Odigha Odigha](#), now the chief executive of the state's Forestry Commission, and, more recently, Governor Lionel Imoke.

Both have fought hard to preserve Cross River's rainforest, which today accounts for 60% of Nigeria's total, and their leadership is largely credited with Cross River's entry into the [Governors' Climate and Forests Task Force \(GCF\)](#), a sub-national collaboration on REDD that spans 14 states and provinces from the United States, Mexico, Indonesia, Brazil, and now Nigeria.

Moving Forward Despite Global Stagnation

For many, the GCF represents the intermediate future of REDD: a global linkage of like-minded sub-national governments that are moving ahead with a REDD infrastructure even as national governments and the United Nations struggle to forge a larger consensus. For the system to work, however, they must do so in a way that is compatible with whatever national and international mechanisms evolve down the road.

This so-called “[nested approach](#)” to implementing REDD at a sub-national level means working only with states that can deliver emission reductions that are real, measurable, and verifiable. It also requires a complex docking procedure that will unfold over time as Cross River's system folds into whatever national mechanism Nigeria itself eventually develops, and Nigeria folds into a global mechanism.

From Cross River to [Acre](#), Brazil, and [Peru's San Martin region](#), sub-national jurisdictions are working with groups like the [Katoomba Incubator](#), the Voluntary Carbon Standard and other NGOs to catalyze a new expertise around shared emission baselines and jurisdictional

accounting.

Some regions in Latin America – as members of the GCF and early actors on the nested approach – are already seeing a pay-off for cooperation and leadership on nesting mechanisms. The states of Acre, Brazil, and Chiapas, Mexico, signed an MOU with the US State of California in late 2010 that kick-started efforts to integrate the regions' REDD credits into California's emerging cap-and-trade scheme.

The Importance of Strong Leadership

“Cross River is way ahead of the pack in Nigeria and in Africa,” says William Boyd, who heads the GCF Secretariat. “That’s largely down to Odigha and Governor Imoke.”

John-O Niles agrees. Director of the Tropical Forest Group, an NGO that has worked with Odigha and Cross River for 20 years, Niles introduced Odigha to Boyd just under two years ago, largely because he was impressed with Odigha's win-win attitude towards sharing information and resources, but also because of the courage that Odigha and Imoke showed when loggers tried to circumvent the state's moratorium on logging.

“They’re not pussy-footing around the problem,” he says. “They went right at it. They put people in jail; they took their trucks; it’s been hand-to-hand combat.”

Boyd lauds the two for taking on the fight even though it may cost them in the short term and may not deliver pay-offs until both men have retired.

“It’s not like there is a big and immediate payoff to joining the GCF,” he says. “Our members recognize that it’s something that’s part of a much longer process and that they can learn from what state-of-the-art programs are doing in terms of accounting, MRV etc.”

For Cross River, that process could be even longer than for other GCF members – especially those in Latin America, where [REDD has been evolving for decades](#). The Brazilian state of [Acre, for example, recently enacted a statewide payments for ecosystem services law](#), which will likely make it one of the first two GCF states to actually sell REDD credits into a US-based compliance scheme.

“I think in terms of political commitment, Cross River is as advanced as anyone,” says Boyd. “In terms of legal framework and technical capabilities, they are not quite as far along as Acre but they’re advancing very rapidly.”

He believes that Odigha, Imoke, and other emerging Cross River leaders can help spread the word to other African states.

“We would like to organize a workshop or a meeting for Africa that would be hosted by Cross River,” he says. “It would give them a chance to explain what they are doing with the GCF and REDD and allow us to ramp up our presence in Africa.”

Boyd says that the continent is their new frontier. The Tanzanian state of Kigoma wants to join by 2012 – thanks in part to encouragement from the Jane Goodall Institute – but Central Africa, where much of Africa's rainforest lies, remains a difficult part of the world to operate in.

There is much the region could learn from Nigeria however – itself a fairly unstable and complex nation – starting with the stakeholder meeting that Cross River organized in 2008. The conference gauged the level of support for forest protection in the state. Niles says this was a defining moment because it gave Odigha and Imoke the mandate they needed to push ahead with concrete measures; even more importantly however, they followed it through with a two-year logging ban.

“If a state asked me what Cross River has done right and what they should do, I would say: organize a stakeholder meeting; allocate resources to tackle the drivers of deforestation directly and immediately; engage the national/federal government; bring in outside legal and technical capacity; and pass a law that will reassure the donor community that things are moving forward,” says Niles.

With the ban now about to expire, UN-REDD’s endorsement couldn’t have come at a better time.

“We don’t intend to lift the logging ban immediately,” says Odigha. “We are trying to work with the communities: if we extend it, they will want to see alternative revenues, and this is where we rely on the carbon market.”

The Road to REDD Readiness

Odigha and his colleagues at the National Technical Committee on REDD are now working overtime to get their REDD readiness proposal up to speed for the March deadline. The document will contain Nigeria’s two-year roadmap to become REDD-ready, with initiatives on monitoring, reporting and verification, stakeholder engagement, awareness raising and co-benefits such as biodiversity.

The greatest challenge will be to build up a critical mass of expertise, understanding, and awareness on the ground.

“The education system in Nigeria is relatively poor, and the country suffers from a substantial brain drain,” explains Niles. “It’s hard to find people who can analyze remote-sensing images or produce the kind of detailed reports that UN-REDD or the FCPF require.”

Odigha says that there are also huge capacity needs within communities.

“Carbon finance is a new market and farmers need to understand it: they must learn how to transact in it, how to measure the carbon in their trees, and how to do demonstration projects,” he says.

Institutional strengthening is another priority. In its field trip report, the UN-REDD scoping mission highlighted the shortcomings of Cross River’s Forestry Commission, something Odigha acknowledges needs addressing.

“Our main issue at the commission is that we’ve shifted from an organization dedicated to logging to an organization dedicated to conservation,” he says. “We need to put the right structures in place to support this change in paradigm, from board level right down to operating staff in the field.”

Considering the vast needs and size of Nigeria, it's clear that the \$3-4 million earmarked by UN-REDD will not be sufficient, although how much exactly will be needed is not clear either. Tunde Morakinyo, an environmental consultant and member of Nigeria's National Technical Committee on REDD, puts a price tag of \$100 million on REDD readiness, but Niles is skeptical.

"Nigeria probably wouldn't know what to do with \$100 million," he says. "They couldn't absorb that money; \$4 million is a good start and if we can track it well, we'll get a better understanding of the country's needs."

Either way, Salisu Dahiru, national REDD+ coordinator, says that it is clear Nigeria will need to look for additional funding from other development partners. Nigeria took the opportunity of the COP conference in Cancún in December to co-sponsor the official GCF side event with the Tropical Forest Group. The sponsorship was an opportunity to demonstrate the country's commitment to REDD and to prospect for new funders.

National Leader

A substantial share of the REDD budget will find its way to Cross River. Julie Greenwalt, one of the UN-REDD representatives who took part in the scoping mission, says that a lot of the readiness adjustments in Nigeria will likely be structured based on what Cross River has already achieved. With its extensive forest cover, it will also host a number of pilot projects.

Considering the many tensions that exist in Nigeria (ethnic, religious, political etc), there are concerns that these could flare once the money starts flowing. But Dahiru remains optimistic.

"Nigeria operates a federal system in which the functions and roles of each tier of government are clearly defined," he says. "The National Forest Policy recognizes states as chief custodians of the forest while the federal government is responsible for formulation of policies and regulations and oversight functions, including enforcement."

Odigha says that Cross River is keen to share their leadership with other forested states in Nigeria. The states of Ondo, Ogun, Edo, Akwa and Tarab could all benefit from REDD+ activities. In fact, the governor of the latter was part of a Nigerian delegation that travelled to Washington DC in October to meet the UN-REDD policy board. Morakinyo also adds that Odigha has worked extensively with Abuja right from the beginning.

Political Uncertainty

In fact all observers agree that the political commitment to REDD in Nigeria has been a key ingredient for its success to date.

"Nigeria is a risky place whatever you do. It's hard to get things done so UN-REDD was really impressed to have people in front of them who had been genuinely pro-active," says Niles.

It is therefore understanding that the forthcoming national, presidential and state elections (on April 2, 9 and 16 respectively) are expected with some trepidation: there are concerns that a change in leadership might undermine progress.

“We may be delayed if the president doesn’t get re-elected because all ministries will change and we’ll have to re-engage with the new representatives, but that’s just the way it is,” Morakinyo says.

Niles is less concerned. “I don’t think the presidential elections will affect the REDD process much. The rainforest is pretty low down the agenda. There may be some unraveling if the governor in Cross River doesn’t get re-elected but the state has put so much momentum behind this issue that any let up will be met by a groundswell of activism that should keep things on track.”

Others, such as Dahiru, are confident that REDD preparations will carry on regardless.

“Nigeria is a signatory to the UNFCCC and is therefore committed to taking concrete actions to address climate change nationally and internationally, and will continue to do so irrespective of changes in governments,” he says.

Niles adds that the new UN-REDD funds, along with the many activists at grassroots and political level, will provide some sort of guarantee that the project doesn’t grind to a halt if leadership changes.

Testing Times

With Cancún’s positive outcome on REDD+, Nigeria will have the wind in its sail, which is just as well considering the issues at stake and the forthcoming elections.

“Nigeria is a heavy weight of the African continent,” says Morakinyo. “UN-REDD know that if they can bring Nigeria on board, it will change the landscape of REDD negotiations in Africa. They know that Nigeria’s voice, which is very influential, will be backed by substance.”

On the ground, stakeholders are keen to get started.

“It will be nice to have the opportunity to try,” says Niles. “We have hobbled this together so far and having resources will make a big difference. There will be challenges but we just have to make sure we are transparent with our financial flows.”

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