

Certifying nation's REDD readiness plan

By Michael Simire *Property & Environment Editor* - 27 February 2011



- Environment Minister, John Odey (left); Cross River State Governor, Liyel Imoke; and the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Nigeria, Daouda Toure, signing the UN-REDD Declaration in, Abuja, last week

Nigeria took yet another major step in its quest towards becoming a full-fledged REDD (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation) participatory nation following the authentication last Monday in Abuja of a draft REDD Readiness Programme.

At a daylong National Validation Workshop (NVW), key governmental and non-governmental stakeholders attempted a review of core sections of the Nigeria REDD Readiness Programme (NRRP) and validate its submission to the UN-REDD Policy Board (UPB).

The NRRP will afterwards be subjected to an external independent technical review panel made up of three experts before eventual submission to the UPB, which will meet from March 21st to 23rd in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) in Vietnam, where it will decide on the approval for funding.

If the NRRP is accepted by the UPB, Nigeria's REDD participation will officially commence in June this year, while accessing a \$4 million start-off fund.

A crucial step in the development and submission of the NRRP, the NVW formed a key part of the UN-REDD mission that visited the country from February 14 to 22. It comprised Josep Gari of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Julie Greenwalt of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Matieu Henry of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO).

Other members of the mission were Salisu Dahiru (National Coordinator, Nigeria REDD Programme), Odigha Odigha (Chairman, Cross River State Forestry Commission), Tunde Morakinyo (consultant to the Cross River State Government) and Muyiwa Odele (Environment Team Leader, UNDP Nigeria).

With a focus on Cross River State, the NRRP envisions a two-track approach towards achieving REDD readiness with the development of institutional and technical capacities at the federal level and demonstration activities being carried out in Cross River State.

Consequently, a Stakeholder Appraisal Workshop (SAW) held a few days earlier on Friday (February 18) in Calabar, the state capital, courtesy of the Cross River State Forestry Commission.

At the Calabar forum, participants formed a new umbrella platform called the Cross River State Stakeholders' Forum on REDD, which will play a central role in the REDD process as it evolves. Governor Liyel Imoke restated his support for a REDD process and stakeholders' participatory engagement to guide and build it.

Participants saw REDD as a potential means to better protect the forests and strengthen the livelihoods of the people that depend on them, saying that forest communities should be properly engaged, receive training, and feel early and tangible actions throughout the programme's implementation.

They underlined the need for REDD to have a broad approach that goes beyond forest conservation to address questions of land management, afforestation and reforestation, ecosystem restoration, sustainable agriculture and community-based livelihoods.

Similarly, participants underscored the need for capacity building on forest monitoring systems, saying that the NRRP should include provisions to assess issues of land tenure, carbon rights, fair benefit-sharing mechanisms, and community conflict, providing guidance on how to address them in the context of REDD.

"We have also provided several specific suggestions and amendments to refine the document.

We look forward to the implementation of the NRRP, while highlighting the need to pay attention to issues of consultation, forest governance, community rights, enhancement of sustainable livelihoods, and gender equality," agreed the participants.

They added, "We are delighted to know that the programme envisions Cross River State to become a centre of excellence for REDD in Nigeria, producing best practices and models on REDD that can serve other states as they engage in REDD. We are eager to share our experiences with REDD with other states and abroad, as the opportunity emerges."

The Calabar gathering expressed satisfaction with the NRRP design and its operational approach. "We support its submission to the UPB, hoping the programme will soon be approved and start implementation. We need this programme to expand capacity building, public awareness, training, forest conservation and local initiatives so that REDD is well understood and can be adequately built in Cross River State and across Nigeria."

In Abuja, the NVW was presented with, and examined the key elements of the draft proposal, including NRRP's two-track approach (consisting of a combination of federal and state actions, with a focus on activities at community level), the deforestation context, the Results Framework, the proposed forest monitoring and MRV (measurable, reportable and verifiable) system, and the framework for social and environmental safeguards.

The programme's outcomes and outputs as proposed in the draft were endorsed. Several amendments were suggested at activity level, and the drafting team agreed to include them in the final draft to be submitted to the UPB.

Aspects emphasised as priority issues concerning the Nigerian REDD readiness centred around: broad capacity-building and knowledge sharing; active community participation and engagement; mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion; clarification and definition of carbon rights and land-tenure matters; encouraging private sector engagement and investment; ensuring that REDD activities and benefits reach communities equitably; consideration given issues of displacement of deforestation; and carrying out detailed work on the definition of forests.

The assessment of deforestation drivers highlighted agriculture as a major issue and the need to invest in sustainable intensification of agriculture to protect forests and enhance community livelihoods. Participants highlighted the importance of facilitating the participation of other states in REDD readiness in view of their growing interest, pointing out that the activities planned for Cross River State would serve as a model for others.

Similarly, the gathering indicated the need to strengthen the national policy and legal framework for climate change to ensure that it incorporates REDD.

The proposed work on safeguards as an integral part of Nigeria's REDD system was welcomed and deemed vital in addressing human rights issues, inequality, exclusion of communities and other potential risks.

On the premise that national-level stakeholders needed to be better organised to accompany and monitor the REDD development, participants agreed to form a National Stakeholders Forum on REDD with particular representation from civil society and non-governmental organisations.

In a chat, Gari underscored the UN's commitment to help countries to meet their international obligations on the negotiations process.

He said, "The UN is willing to support countries in getting on the REDD process which is something that is also negotiated internationally. The UN finds very interesting in Nigeria the level of political commitment to REDD, the willingness to truly grab and explore the mechanism in the country. In view of the political willingness and high interest both at the federal and in particular at the Cross River State level, the UN is responding positively as much as it can to support Nigeria to advance in that programme." On land grab controversies surrounding REDD, he said, "The critical element to manage that is to ensure transparency, to ensure a stakeholders engagement, a lot of dialogue and social environment safety on

this process. These are the mechanism to avoid to mitigate risk and to explore all the positive benefits in such environmental plan. Through the forum, there are essential work that needs to be done; such as communication, stakeholders engagement, and social and environmental safety.”

On his impression of Nigeria’s REDD prospects, Gari replied, “I think that in the case of Nigeria, we have a very interesting articulation of the federal and at the state level to advance REDD which is needed because REDD is a mechanism that needs to advance in a number of Federal g\Government capacities and at the same time it is a process that is realised at the local, state and community levels.

“The arrangement that Nigeria has done to have a joint forum that includes a capacity at the federal level and a much more intense activity at the Cross River State level will allow a very rich set of experiences, learning and lessons, which will allow the country to better advance on the REDD processes. This interesting articulation will allow the government to really advance and analyse REDD readiness and to extract specifically from the field through the model case of Cross River State.”

The Dakar, Senegal-based Gari who is the UNDP Regional Advisor, Environment and Energy Group, highlighted the importance of gender, saying that women played a very critical role in terms of forest conservation and in terms of rate of population growth.

“And at the same time the level of gender inequality in many developing countries where it happens might inhibit the benefit of REDD reaching everybody. It is very important from the beginning to put gender inequality on the threshold to the impact of the local level while envisioning that it might happen, it is not that it will not happen.”

Asked what the common man stands to gain from REDD, the Spaniard replied, “The REDD programme is going to allow a better governance for people in the private sector, better conservation for forest resources which is the basis of many ecological services to the country starting from water to rainfall and to many lives that depend on the forest.

“On top of that with the REDD process, Nigeria will better fulfil the process of international negotiation, will better abide with international policies and will better influence the international policy on climate change. So there are many prospects, better governance locally, national and internationally for Nigeria and it is an excellent means for the Nigerian society and private individuals to have a means of advancing local society in a climate resilient plan.”

Dahiru, on his part, expressed satisfaction over the progress so far made.

He said, “I feel very excited and fulfilled judging by the interest that the stakeholders have shown and the high volume of contributions, which means that the stakeholders have understood, they have identified with the project and they are willing to partner with the government in ensuring that the REDD programme is implemented in Nigeria as a key climate change mitigation effort as well as a development initiative.

“Our expectation is to propel Nigerians into putting in place the various infrastructures, institutions as well as the capacity needed to develop a REDD programme for implementation in the next two to three years, that is our vision. And with support of stakeholders and from the good climate we are having from the UN REDD+ programme, there are strong indications that Nigeria will excel not only in implementing this programme in Nigeria but to be a champion in the West African sub-region.”

On the next possible project site after Cross River, he submitted, “That is why within the document, there is a big section that is devoted to strategies for bringing additional states on-board. We have to develop a set of criteria that we will use to compare the strength and weakness of every state in terms of REDD to succeed in that particular state at that particular time. So based on that, we will see how best this state can be invited to be on-board. And on most occasions as far as REDD is concerned, you have to have the interest, zeal and the political commitment for you to want to pursue REDD.”

At a ceremony on Tuesday in Abuja to mark the formal presentation of the final NRRP, the Resident Coordinator, UN Systems in Nigeria, Daouda Toure, expressed satisfaction over the development, saying that the REDD readiness journey has been remarkable.

He said, “From the visionary leadership provided through Nigeria’s active participation in the Copenhagen and Cancun climate change summits, to the landmark inauguration of the National Technical Committee on REDD, and the eventual interagency scoping mission comprising of UNEP, FAO and UNDP that has resulted in this home-grown National REDD Readiness project document, you will agree with me that this is a tribute to our innovative partnership and collective actions in tackling climate change. I am proud to be part of this!

“I will like to specially commend the constructive partnership between the Federal Government and the Cross Rivers State Government on the issue of REDD; a partnership that is a model for others to learn from. I have been reliably informed that this innovative approach is likely to become one of the emerging best practices for REDD globally.”

While endorsing the NRRP for submission to the UPB, Environment Minister John Odey expressed appreciation over the UNDP's support in the planning and implementation of the country's REDD process right from inception. He also lauded the close cooperation of the Cross River State Government on the programme, as well as the involvement and active participation of civil societies, forest communities and the media in the entire process.

Governor Imoke stated that the choice to conserve the local forest entailed the withdrawal of revenue targets from timber exploitation. "Besides the denial of this revenue, the state has committed enormous financial resources and man hours in the enforcement of the anti-deforestation ban," he added, describing REDD as a ready vehicle embraced by the state in order to realise its aspirations.

The UN-REDD Programme is a FAO/UNDP/UNEP partnership aimed at providing technical and financial support to countries to get prepared for REDD. Nigeria has been part of the programme since 2009.

Last October, a UN-REDD Programme's Scoping Mission involved an assessment of the Cross River forests. The weeklong mission was aimed at evaluating the nation's REDD potential, in the light of its desire to be elevated from its Observer Status to a Full Participant. The mission entailed a series of workshops, courtesy visits, as well as field trips to designated REDD pilot sites in the state.

At the last UPB in Washington DC in November 2010, the country gave a presentation about progress to date and was consequently invited to submit a national programme to UPB in March 2011 for funding consideration.