



# Environmental Alert

## Sustainable Environmental Management; a Key Remedy for Addressing Climate Change Impacts in Uganda

As we commemorate the World Environment Day 5th June 2010 we should take note that the world's biggest challenge is climate change. World Environment Day is celebrated every year in respect to the United Nations General Assembly resolution in 1972 to mark the opening of the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment. World Environment Day is a platform for awareness creation on environment issues and also an opportunity for soliciting political support among member countries for environmental sustainability and protection.

Therefore, as we celebrate this year in the context of the national theme, "Biodiversity for National Prosperity: Conserve it," it's important for all stakeholders to reflect on the climate change impacts in the country. Take for instance the land slides in Bududa and other areas in Eastern Uganda in 2010 and Teso floods in 2007. Many lives and property have been lost due to these impacts and hence the need for developing pragmatic long-term solutions for living (i.e. adaptation) and preventing (i.e. mitigating) these impacts. Climate change is the change in the statistical distribution of weather over periods of time that range from decades to millions of years. Climate change causes loss of biodiversity and degradation of environment and natural resources (e.g. land, soil, forests, wetlands, water). This is additionally, associated with release of green house gases (such carbon dioxide and methane) into the atmosphere thereby perforating the ozone layer, which protects the earth from direct heat from the sun. When this layer is depleted, sun rays hit directly on the earth resulting in temperature raises which influence climate on the earth and these changes manifest as global warming, prolonged droughts, and unreliable rainfall among others.

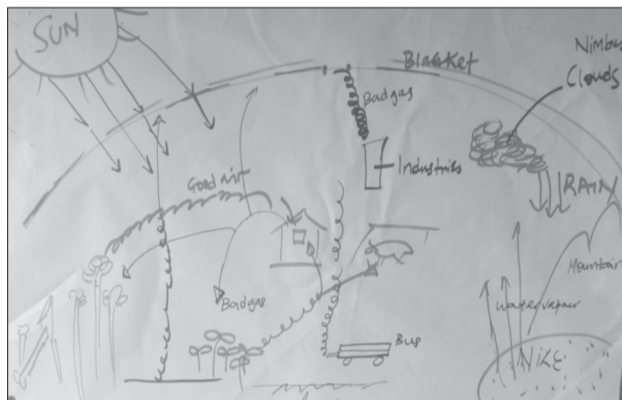


Photo by Environmental Alert

An illustrative explanation of the climate change phenomenon during a community awareness interaction in Zoka, Adjumani district, West Nile, Uganda

However, sustainable environmental management and biodiversity conservation locks up substantive amounts of carbon and in addition removes green gases released in the atmosphere there by stabilizing climate change in the long term. In Uganda, there are various initiatives focusing on sustainable environmental management and biodiversity conservation which need to be promoted and enhanced. Such initiatives contribute to the reduction of emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD). For instance, forests on average forests store up to 168 tones of carbon per hectare (Inter Governmental Panel on Climate Change, 2006); Wetlands only cover about 6% of the Earth's surface, but contain about 35% of the global terrestrial carbon (Coates, 2008).

At this point in time, Uganda is in the process of developing a REDD+ readiness plan for Country. This process is led and coordinated by the Ministry of Water and Environment through the National Forestry Authority



Photo by Environmental Alert

Bare hills in Moyo district

(NFA). It involves consulting all stakeholders so that their views can be integrated in the plan during formulation and subsequent implementation. The process is supported by the World Bank and Norwegian Agency for

Development among other donors. According to X.N. Mugumya, National Focal Point for REDD+ in Uganda, there are several reasons why Uganda

### Critical Issues to consider in the REDD readiness plan development process

- Awareness creation and access to information on REDD+ at various levels;
- Integration of REDD+ initiatives in the wider development strategies at various levels
- Tree and carbon rights and related implications for land tenure;
- Limited capacity related to implementation of REDD+ projects/initiatives;
- Limited funding/investments in REDD+ and how can it be sufficient, sustained, locally owned and viable to the invest;
- Who determines the price of carbon? Will the determined market price offset the costs related to REDD+ activities;
- Clarification of benefit sharing and distribution mechanisms at various levels;
- Lack of supportive legal and policy frameworks to guide implementation of REDD + initiatives.

should engage in REDD+ and he responded to this among others as follows:

#### What is REDD+?

REDD+ is understood to include the policy approaches and positive incentives on issues relating to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries; and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks (Bali Action Plan, 2007).

#### Why should Uganda engage REDD+?

First, Uganda is a signatory to the international agreement known as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and has been actively participating in all the negotiations including those related to REDD+. This means that Uganda takes its obligation with due seriousness and would like to contribute its share of responsibility.

Secondly, considering the Climate Change negotiations in Copenhagen in 2009, REDD+ is so far one of the few items that was agreed upon. The seriousness of the developed and developing countries to tackle REDD+ financing was shown by the 15th Conference of Parties follow-up meeting in Paris, in March 2010 and then the recently concluded REDD+ Conference held on 27th May 2010 in Oslo. The Oslo REDD+ Conference concluded with the adoption of the REDD+ Partnership to provide a voluntary, non-legally binding framework within which the Partners may develop and implement collaborative REDD+ actions or support efforts. Over 50 countries drawn from both developed and developing countries welcomed the establishment of the Partnership, Uganda inclusive. Hon. Maria Mutagamba, Minister of Water and Environment, represented H.E the President of Uganda in this high level Conference convened by the Prime Minister of Norway. A total of close to US \$ 4 billion has been pledged by a number of developed countries towards this initiative. In order for Uganda to benefit from the opportunities expected from REDD+, Uganda has embarked on planning and undertaking REDD+ actions.

Thirdly, Uganda's forest cover is currently 17% of total land area. Given an annual rate of forest loss of 1.9% (National Forestry Authority biomass study, 2008), it means in a few years it's highly likely that all the forest cover will be lost unless urgent actions like REDD+ among others are advanced.

#### What are the critical elements in this getting ready for REDD+?

In order for Uganda, and indeed other developing countries to be "ready for REDD+", three elements are critical. As a country we have to develop:

- A national strategy or action plan and, as part of our low-carbon emission strategy;
- A national baseline over which to estimate any actions on REDD+;
- A robust and transparent national forest monitoring system for the monitoring and reporting of REDD+ activities.

Notably, when developing and implementing our national strategy or action plan, we have to address the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, land tenure issues, land use change forest governance issues, gender considerations and a number of safeguards, ensuring the full and effective participation of relevant stakeholders including forest dependant peoples and local communities.

#### What should Ugandans Expect?

In this process, Uganda should identify existing land use, land-use change and forestry activities particularly those that are linked to the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, and shall estimate emissions and removals resulting from these and associated activities. We shall also assess their potential contribution to the mitigation of climate change as part of our National Communications Reporting to the UNFCCC.

#### Where is the Uganda REDD+ processes now?

- A National REDD Working Group comprising of key stakeholders on REDD issues from the Government, Civil Society, Private Sector, Academia

among others was formed and it has so far held its first meeting (March 25-26);

- The first draft of the REDD+ readiness Plan Proposal will be submitted to the World Bank in August 2010 so that it can be considered in the participants committee meeting of October/November 2010 in Washington D.C;
- Consultations at regional and national levels have began and are continuing;
- Close interaction is happening with the Forest Sector Support Department, which is coordinating another process to review the National Forest Plan; to ensure that both process are interlinked to minimise any contradictions and duplications;
- Collaboration is also high with the Climate Change Unit under the Ministry of Water and environment and is mandated with overall coordination of climate change activities in the Country;

### Critical safeguards for consideration in the development of the REDD+ readiness plan for Uganda

- REDD+ actions should complement or are consistent with the objectives of national forest programmes and relevant international conventions and agreements;
- Transparent and effective national forest governance structures, taking into account national laws and policies;
- Respect for the knowledge and rights of forest dependant peoples and members of local communities, by taking into account relevant international obligations, national circumstances and laws;
- Full and effective participation of relevant stakeholders, including in particular forest dependant communities, marginalized peoples and local communities in REDD+ actions;
- Actions that are consistent with the conservation of natural forests and biological diversity, ensuring that REDD+ actions are used for the conversion of natural forests, but are instead used to incentives the protection and conservation of natural forests and their ecosystem services, and to enhance other social and environmental benefits;

- Advanced collaboration with Civil Society Organisations in the Environment and Natural Resources Sector.

What Environmental Alert is doing to support climate change adaptation? Environmental Alert (EA) envisions a poverty and hunger-free society, able to manage and sustain its natural resources base for attainment of sustainable livelihoods including addressing climate change. EA's new program, titled, 'Harnessing the Environment for Inclusive and Sustained Development,' 2009-2011,' is focusing on actions which will build resilience to climate change at community, local and national levels. This is done through creating awareness, training, policy analyses and policy dialogue targeting key stakeholders at all levels. EA implements her development programs in West Nile, Eastern, Central and South Western regions of Uganda with targeted national level policy and planning engagements.

EA has enhanced capacities of rural poor communities to attain sustainable livelihoods and adapt to climate change through natural resources enterprises. We have facilitated climate change actions and initiatives for mainstreaming climate change adaptation actions in planning and development programs implementation at various levels including community, local and national. At the community and local level these interventions have been implemented in the West Nile region specifically Moyo, Adjumani and Yumbe districts in the River Nile basin. Further more, particularly in respect to REDD+ issues in Uganda, EA in collaboration with other civil society organisations facilitated a one day National dialogue in March to advance REDD+ readiness processes and related engagements among the different stakeholders at national and local levels. This workshop was a turning point because it came up with practical actions which have advanced the ongoing consultative process in the development of the REDD+ readiness plan for Uganda.

There is a clear link between biodiversity loss and visible climate change impacts in Uganda. Thus the continuous loss of biodiversity and natural resources degradation is highly likely to worsen the current climate change impacts in the country. It's therefore, important for all stakeholders as we celebrate the World Environment Day to reflect and rethink in support of appropriate actions that advance sustainable natural resources management. The REDD+ readiness process in Uganda provides a strategic window which will additionally contribute to biodiversity conservation and sustainable utilization and management of the environment while delivering goods and services. Equally all stakeholders are encouraged to participate actively by submitting their views, concerns and proposals during the scheduled consultative meeting to inform the development of the REDD+ readiness plan for Uganda. We also congratulate the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) on their 15th anniversary and the associated contribution to environmental management and conservation in Uganda.