What is the role of African Governments to stimulate commercial plantation Initiatives? Darlington

Background

Liberia holds a significant amount of the remaining forest in the Upper Guinea Forest Ecosystem of West Africa. The National Forestry Reform Law of 2006 sets the basis for the National Forestry Policy and Implementation strategy of 2007 which provides three strategic approaches (3-C approach) for achieving the overall mandate of the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) which is to ensure the sustainable management of Liberia’s forests and related natural resources for the benefits of today and future generations.

During the 1980s, the Government of Liberia initiated an expanded reforestation program with the establishment of over five forest plantations around Liberia. These plantations were initially intended as replacements by logging companies for logs cut during the logging operations, but were later expanded to produce poles and raw materials for pulp wood in order to feed European mills. However, due to the absence of specific policy and strategy for Forest and Landscape Restoration, the existing tree plantations are facing severe threats from agriculture, charcoal production, development, etc.

As a panelist, I have been requested to address the following points/questions specific to my country, Liberia:
A. Liberia’s strategy regarding Reforestation and Landscape Restoration and whether we had ambitious and/or set targets?

- The NFRL of 2006 establishes the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Friday of May each year as National Tree Planting Day intended to create awareness on the importance of trees to human survival.

- Since the commencement of reforms in the forest sector, the GOL has made several interventions intended to inform the development of policies and other legal instruments to guide restoration efforts in Liberia. These include the development of a reforestation policy as well as an ambitious afforestation strategy focused on Landscape Restoration in degraded landscapes. These legal instruments are intended to avoid mistakes made in the 1980s when we arbitrarily cleared natural stands of forest to establish plantations.

- The GOL has also identified highly degraded, deforested and mosaic of fragmented forest areas to be restored/reforested as well as initiated studies to understand the extent of invasion by the savannah grasses on forested habitats.

Ambitions/Set Targets:

- The FDA, with the little allotment from the GOL, is currently piloting reforestation/restoration project in a degraded landscape bordering Sierra Leone and Guinea where we intend to plant
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approximately 200,000 hectares of degraded landscapes (FIRE). This area is a top priority for our restoration initiative.

- At the last two Bonn Challenge meetings, as well as at the COP 21 during the launch of the AFR 100 million hectares by 2030, we ambitiously committed to restoring one (1) million hectares of deforested/degraded landscapes.

**B. GOL involvement with private sector investment in sustainable forestry through public-private partnerships (PPPs)**

- The GOL is currently developing a PPP policy taking into account international instruments like HCV, HCS, TFA principles.

- The FDA is a State Own Enterprise (SOE) contributing immensely to revenue generation and has been tasked to contribute $13 million for FY 15/16. The Authority, in the conduct of its mandate, has maintained a thriving forest estate with strong coordination between all technical departments especially the 3 Cs;

- Our Commercial Contract holders have been given Forest Management Contracts intended to sustainably manage a piece of forestland for a period of a 25 years cycle. Their operations are strictly followed through Chain of Custody that will be embedded in the Legality Verification System of the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA);

- The Authority is also partnering with Arcelor Mittal Mining Company to support conservation initiatives in their mining
footprint areas as well as supporting community management of their forest in a sustainable manner. They also support the conduct of scientific research activities in the East Nimba Nature Reserve which borders their concession area.

- We recently signed a Letter of Intent with the Kingdom of Norway to enhance our effort in ensuring sustainable forest management. The Norwegians introduce to us; IDH, the Sustainable Trade Initiative of the Netherlands who are working closely with the private sectors on an initiative geared towards working with private sectors companies (agriculture and mining) in order to gauge their support and involvement in agroforestry practices (cocoa and oil palm) that will provide jobs and sustainable livelihoods opportunities to the communities. These include the establishment of out-grower schemes that will empower the communities. This partnership also expects to further introduce improved farming/agricultural practices that will ensure sustained food security and at the same time enhance environmental stability; and

- Lastly, the Authority is in discussion with other conservation organizations seeking to do business in ecotourism, Safari hunting and other environmental wildlife conservation initiatives.

**C.GOL expectations from other stakeholders (Business community, Banks, International donors, NGO’s, Development agencies etc.) to enable us boost investments in Sustainable Forestry?**
Owing to the global financial crisis, our government like most other governments has suffered constraints (Iron ore and rubber prices) in meeting some of its development objectives. The Authority remains grateful to all stakeholders including the communities, other local and national authorities, our development partners and donor community for the high level of support and cooperation we continue to enjoy. We however strongly look forward to increased collaboration and supports to enable us attain our ambitious 1 million hectares restoration target as well as our 3Cs goals.

These supports can be in the form of:

- Financial assistance;
- Equipment and planting materials
- Low interest rate loans to the private sectors and community organizations (enterprise development);
- Technical capacity development;
- Technology transfer;
- Among others

D. **Next steps needed to boost private investment**

- Strengthening of the FDA to take ownership of process;
- Increased political will and creating the enabling legal and policy environment for investment in restoration initiatives;
- Establish a platform to bring together private investors around the table with Governments and Communities;
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- Institute implementable policies on deforestation and restoration
- Provide market access
- Ensure leveraging of finances (Government and Private investments)
- Preparedness to take high Investment risks
- The provision of financial and technical assistance to improve the operational capacity of the private sector;
- Revision and where possible, amendment of some of the legality frameworks to create an investment friendly environment within the forestry sector; and
- Increase investment in value addition to increase employment and revenue generation.
- Etc.

In conclusion, the Authority will embark on the development of a restoration atlas intended to inform partners to practically contribute to the GOL efforts towards achieving our restoration target. We are therefore looking forward to engaging the involvement of all stakeholders including other Government actors, banks, NGOs, bilateral agencies, donors, private sector companies, as well as community in order to assist us in promoting a collaborative and participatory approach.

Thanks