

Media Statement

A Workshop on “*A Way Forward – Needs, Challenges and Opportunities for Papua New Guinea on Climate Change, Land Use and Forest Resource Management and Payment for Environmental Services/REDD+*” was held at the Kokoda Trail Motel from 7-8 February, 2013.

The workshop was organised and facilitated by the Institute of National Affairs (INA) together with the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) of Japan, USAID funded Lowering Emissions in Asia’s Forest Program (LEAF), CIFOR, UN-REDD Programme, and the Australian National University.

The meeting was attended by participants from within Papua New Guinea and abroad, including, international organisations, Government agencies, the private sector, Research Organisations, Universities and Resource Owners.



This 2013 workshop follows on from other annual forums convened by the INA on issues relating to climate change, its causes and implications for natural resource management and communities in PNG, especially forest resources. The workshop considered PNG’s readiness to apply mechanisms to reduce carbon emissions and other negative environmental effects, including both restraints and market-type inducements, notably through mechanisms known as Payments for Environmental Services (PES).

The INA Executive Director, Paul Barker said the purpose of the workshop was to update everyone on where the country is with climate change forecasts, status of international agreements, PNG’s readiness activities, for example, PNG’s policy on climate change and natural resources use, payment for Environmental Services, including REDD+. The workshop also gave an opportunity for both policy makers and implementers to identify key issues and opportunities and develop key strategies for joint implementation.

Mr Barker said the land and forest grabbing rush prevalent over recent years, using (or misusing) the now notorious Special Agricultural and Business Leases (or SABLs),

which has posed such a major threat to sustainable resource management in PNG, was inevitably a major concern of the previous workshops. Outcry over these SABLs, imposed without the widespread free and informed consent of the landowners, led the then government (under A/PM Sam Abal) to establish a Commission of Inquiry, which in mid-2011. Although the Inquiry undertook extensive Hearings, last week's workshop emphasised that the Report is now long overdue and must be finalised and submitted to Parliament immediately, with sound recommendations acted upon, in a coordinated manner across government.

The workshop comprised a broad range of presentations and updates by government and non-government organisations, and extensive debate and preparation of policy recommendations developed by breakout groups, taking a constructive and collaborative approach.

Key issues and recommended strategies from the recent workshop include: -

- A balanced Climate Change Policy be approved, following public release of a final draft and opportunity for final public and private sector feedback; this Policy should enable PNG to play its part in greenhouse gas mitigation (notably reducing emissions) and support adaptation (e.g. by farmers, business and households) to inevitable changing conditions, catering for needs of the present and future generations of PNG;
- The policy preparation process concerning natural resource utilisation (including land) should involve consultation and coordination and rigorous processes between all relevant Government agencies (which for too long lay blame on each other for deficient actions), as well as thorough participation of other key stakeholders (notably resource owners) in full compliance with intent and requirements of the Constitution and law;
- Undertake a thorough review of land and natural resource legislation to ensure secure clear title, not only of land, forest and other natural (excluding mineral related) resources by customary landowners, but also the Environmental Services (e.g. carbon) contained therein, to enable potential transactions over these services (including PES/REDD+) to be made in a secure and orderly manner; (this entails more than obtaining a single legal opinion and should lead to the drafting of suitable legislative amendments as may be required);
- Landowners and other stakeholders to be directly involved in the Review of the Forestry Act in 2013 (being supported by LEAF);
- A national land use planning process must be undertaken immediately, embracing necessary bottom up decision-making at the landowner/community level, with national and sub-national priorities;
- Landowners must to be part of the equation and a representatives need to be included on the Climate Change Advisory Board;
- Stronger and sustained networking should be developed between NGOs working on PES/REDD+ and climate change issues, (creating a stronger and unified voice);
- An annual climate change dialogue (as facilitated by INA with IGES and partners) between all concerned stakeholders needs to be maintained, and outcomes widely circulated in government and other stakeholders, monitoring current

policy performance and activities of different players and contributing to further policy reforms and other measures;

- Prepare and institute guidelines to govern distribution of benefits in kind (e.g. social services) ... also taking into account intergenerational equity ;
- Government must table the SABL COI Report in Parliament and implement the recommendations to take effect immediately, with Government (notably Lands with Attorney General) prospectively taking steps to have all SABLs secured without due process universally declared null and void, and minimising the burden on customary landowners in each SABL areas from having to pursue their own costly legal cases, but with the State and non-State actors facilitating the landowners in taking such measures to secure their title and authority over their land, where necessary;
- Maintain (and properly apply) the current moratorium on new SABLs, FCAs, EPs and related activities (e.g. log clearance and exporting on these SABLs etc), until transactions over customary land are properly undertaken using the amended Lands Act. (It was recognised that SABLs performed a valuable purpose and in a few cases in the past and present have been applied thoroughly in compliance with the law; but that the process has subsequently been widely abused by a combination of government Departments/Agencies, in combination with various developers/logging operators/land speculators etc).; and
- Removal of discretion powers from the Lands Minister and his alternate (notably to allocate SABL title to third parties, i.e. other than the legitimate customary landowners themselves) under the Lands Act.

Mr Barker said, the workshop has provided an excellent opportunity for all concerned parties to come together in a spirit of cooperation to discuss issues and devise strategies for addressing constraints relating to climate change, land use and forest resource management. It will be important to sustain this consultative process routinely into the future and he thanked all the participants and sponsors, especially IGES for their ongoing financial and technical support.