Opening Remarks
by
Dr. Thomas W. Gittens, Country Director, UNDP Suriname
at
Consultation with Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Representatives
Suriname Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP)
Lalla Rookh Conference Center
29th April 2013

Mr. Moderator
Mr. John Goedschalk, CEO, Climate Compatible Development Agency and Project Manager, Project Management Team (PMT)
Other Members of the PMT
Representatives of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of Suriname
Representatives of Government Ministries and Institutes
Member of the R-PP Project Group
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to welcome you this morning to this most important consultation and to address you at this Opening Session. As you all know, Suriname’s Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP) was successfully presented to the Participants Committee (PC) of the World Bank’s Forest Carbon Partnership Committee (FCPF) during the last PC Meeting 19th – 21st March 2013. The R-PP was favorably reviewed by the PC and the decision taken to allocate funds to Suriname to enable it to move ahead with preparations for readiness. In so doing the PC determined that seven (7) Key Issues listed need to be addressed by Suriname before entering into a readiness preparation project document with UNDP. Suriname needs to address these seven Key Issues and re-submit the R-PP for final No Objection by the PC.
Among the Key Issues to be addressed are the following that are indeed the focus of this two days Consultation with Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Representatives. I quote:

**Key Issue # 2:**
Include, in collaboration with indigenous and tribal peoples representatives, in the work plan in component 1.c of the R-PP a process to identify the need for and to provide capacity building in government institutions with respect to indigenous and tribal peoples issues.

**Key Issue # 3:**
Revise the R-PP to outline a revised process to collaboratively design, together with indigenous and tribal peoples representatives: (a) a plan for their ongoing consultation and participation ensuring that sufficient budget is allocated for implementation of this plan; and (b) a budget line in the Project Document budget to support activities identified, managed and implemented by indigenous and tribal peoples representatives.

**And that is why we are here today.**
Ladies and gentlemen, UNDP believes that it is important to reflect on the significance of what transpired at the PC 14 meeting and the importance of the above two Key Issues as inscribed in the PC Resolution.

I was privileged to participate in the PC 14 meeting in Washington, DC, 19th – 21st March 2013, and to be in the negotiations in the Contact Group sessions during which the Key Issues in the PC Resolution on the Suriname R-PP were negotiated. Quite a few persons from Suriname were present at the meeting, many of whom are here today, including the official Government Delegation led by John Goedschalk, and representatives of the Indigenous and tribal peoples – Parliamentarians Hugo Jabini and Lesly Artist, and Marie-Josee Artist of the VIDS. There are a number of things that struck me about the negotiations and interaction in Washington that I wish to share with you:

1. They were intense and focused almost exclusively on the issue of recognition of indigenous and peoples rights including collective land rights;
2. There was a real and understandable concern that not much movement has been secured in recent years in implementation of the Saramaka Judgment of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, in particular the requirement that the State of Suriname enact legislation to recognize the collective land rights of the tribal peoples – and by extension all indigenous and tribal peoples in Suriname. I will return to this point shortly since there is another Key Issue in the PC 14 Resolution that addresses the implications of the Saramaka Judgment for REDD+ in Suriname;
3. The determination by the indigenous and tribal peoples representatives that while the R-PP should not be held hostage to the larger issues of collective land rights and full implementation of the Saramaka Judgment, that nevertheless approval of the R-PP should take into account and should include processes that would ensure attention to indigenous and tribal issues and the Saramaka Judgment in the early stages of implementation of the R-PP;

4. A recognition on the part of the State of Suriname that while there has been some progress on the land rights issue and mechanisms or processes that have brought all sides to the negotiation table, not enough has been done to definitively resolve these issues;

5. Further to the above, a willingness on the part of the State of Suriname to include language in the PC Resolution that would support processes that could lead to a mutually beneficial resolution of these outstanding issues; and equally importantly to engage with the indigenous and tribal peoples representatives in dialogue to ensure that the R-PP is strengthened in terms of the participation and consultation plan and capacity building for engagement on indigenous and tribal peoples issues.

In that regard, ladies and gentlemen, the ‘provisional approval’ of the R-PP at PC 14 was a victory for all of Suriname. All of the participants at the meeting support the importance of sustainable forest management which is the core of REDD+. All of the participants at the meeting recognize the need for inclusion, consultation and full participation of all stakeholders in crafting an appropriate framework for sustainable forest management in Suriname. Equally, important, all of the participants recognize the need to address the burning and unresolved issue of collective land rights, legislation to secure indigenous and tribal peoples rights as human rights, and of course those elements of the Saramaka Judgment that touch on these issues.

So let us celebrate what was achieved at PC 14 in Washington, DC. In that regard, I again congratulate on behalf of UNDP, John Goedschalk, the Cabinet of the President, the PMT, the Project Group, representatives of indigenous and tribal peoples, and all those who took the time to attend the various meetings and to provide inputs and comments on the R-PP.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is another Key Issue in the PC 14 Resolution that I alluded to above and which I promised to return to and it is the following:
Key Issue # 4:
Revise the R-PP to reflect that the Saramaka Judgement of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and indigenous and tribal peoples rights have implications for REDD+ in Suriname. UNDP, during its due diligence, will commission a review to evaluate these implications, and incorporate its recommendations in the Project Document in collaboration with the government and indigenous and tribal peoples representatives.

This is powerful language. And it squarely places an obligation on UNDP to respect and support implementation of the Saramaka Judgement. But, as important as that is, this Key issue in the PC 14 Resolution does more than that. It reminds UNDP of our mandate and responsibility, as a UN agency, to be guided by, uphold and support the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, in which all of the principles of inclusion, participation, respect for collective rights, enactment of legislation and respect for rights of indigenous and tribal peoples, free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) and much more, are clearly articulated.

UNDP Suriname takes this mandate and responsibility seriously. That is our commitment to all of you here in this room today. We are here in Suriname at the request of the Government of Suriname and have for many years provided support to the Government and Peoples of Suriname in pursuit of your development goals and objectives. We will continue to do so. We recognize the great challenge both to support the implementation of the R-PP as Suriname moves into the readiness phase for REDD+ - in this case sustainable forest management. We are equally cognizant of our mandate and responsibility to support a REDD+ process that fully respects the collective land rights of indigenous and tribal peoples, that is based on voice and inclusion for all stakeholders, and that respects the right of free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous and tribal peoples, and other stakeholders, in processes and decisions that affect their interests.

I wish you a most cordial, beneficial and fruitful consultation as you deliberate on the Key Issues in the PC 14 Resolution where the voice of the indigenous and tribal peoples representatives must be heard and given expression in the revised R-PP.

I thank you for listening.

Thomas W. Gittens
Country Director