

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES



Remarks

by

Ambassador Albert R. Ramdin

Assistant Secretary General

From mandates to actions: Advancing Payments for Ecological Services in the Americas

OAS Headquarters - Washington, DC

November 7, 2007



Good morning. Also to our Directors in the OAS Country Offices,
Distinguished Experts and Delegates,
Dr Scott Vaughan and Dr Richard Huber,
Colleagues from the OAS,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by welcoming you to the OAS for this seminar entitled: *From mandates to actions: Advancing Payments for Ecological Services in the Americas*. I very much like the title of this seminar, because it goes to the heart of what our work should be about: to deliver in concrete terms. I thank you for your time and personal commitment in enabling this important meeting to take place.

As you know, the member countries of the Inter-American system place the highest importance on sustainable development. The 2006 Santa Cruz Ministerial Meeting on Sustainable Development, which I had the privilege to attend and address, looked at issues such as the

valuation of ecosystem services and the potential for furthering win-win economic-environment partnerships, through emerging market-driven opportunities.

We know that payment of ecosystem services has mobilized new financing for developing countries, to help address poverty, environmental degradation, and climate change. Promising is that over the past, 3 years, there has been tremendous, well-documented growth in compliance with regulatory and voluntary carbon sequestration markets. This is an excellent achievement in a short time, and for the sustainability of these results payments for ecological service should continue and targeted to those who provide these services.

As we will hear today, the Americas have several active programs in place, for example in Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia, and Bolivia with national programs in Costa Rica and Mexico.

I hope that, in collaboration with the Inter-American Institute for Agriculture, the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank, and bilateral donors, we can establish a PES program in the Republic of Haiti, to stop further land degradation, improve forestation efforts, mitigate the impact of natural disasters and alleviate poverty. I am convinced that some of the practices established in the other parts of the Western Hemisphere can be useful in this regard and I would like to call on countries as Brazil and Costa Rica, among others, to contribute technical assistance to this program.

The OAS Department of Sustainable Development through an on-line inventory and database has been tracking advancements in payments for ecological services schemes. Moreover, analytical work is being conducted on the governance, legal and regulatory conditions that enable Payments for Ecological Systems that range from areas such as forest and water resource management to fiscal incentives, and property rights.

I understand that the objectives of the seminar are three fold:

1. Further inform member states about the Payments for the Ecosystem Services approach.
2. Advance the theory behind Payments for Ecosystem Services.
3. Hear how the Payments for Ecosystem Services approach are solving real life problems.

While the first two objectives are equally important, the third one goes to the heart of the matter. I suggest that the positive results be presented in a booklet to the member states and I would like to invite the Department of Sustainable Development to make a presentation on this matter to the Permanent Representatives during one of the upcoming Permanent Council meetings.

And while the concrete results are important and critical to improve the lives of the peoples in those affected areas, we need more efforts and commitment at domestic levels in the executive and legislative branches in at least three areas:

1. to further develop strategic and cross-cutting policies and measures on sustainable development and preservation of the environment;
2. to establish properly funded and equipped institutional mechanisms and environmental agencies to implement the policies;

3. to strengthen enforcement of established legislation and policy frameworks.

Member countries have recognized the urgency of addressing the existing and mounting threats of water scarcity, deforestation, and climate change, and of ensuring that efforts among organizations and agencies within the Inter-American system work in tandem to provide tangible deliverables to member countries.

Invariably, those that are worst affected by environmental deterioration and climate change are the poorest within our member countries. At the same time the hardship faced by families and communities in meeting basic human needs is often severe. In our view, payments for ecological services can help by compensating people in the upper reaches of drainage basins who refrain from land uses that exacerbate flooding, periodic water shortages, and water quality problems.

I believe we have an obligation to address the issue of climate change thoroughly and in a sustainable fashion. The threats emerging from that factor are likely to jeopardize the economies of member states, in particular the least developed. For those threats will engender more natural disasters, which weak havoc on our societies.

Since I took Office in 2005, I have advocated a more holistic, comprehensive and result-oriented approach to development. I believe that if we want to build in a structural manner peaceful, stable and sustainable societies and economies, we have to include in the overall development paradigm a more prominent role for policies that provide equal opportunities for all, policies that take account of the structural vulnerabilities related to size, level of development and natural disasters, and also policies that in a meaningful way incorporate the preservation and integrity of the environment.

In that regard, we need to strengthen the inter-American system by implementing existing instruments. For example, only three member states ratified the 1991 Inter-American Convention to facilitate Disaster Assistance: Panama, Peru and Uruguay. We will look into this matter and try to understand why the Convention has not been signed and ratified by so many countries. At the same time I am disturbed by the fact that almost all the countries which are annually affected by the so called “hurricane season” and actually do benefit from the disaster assistance provided by the OAS, PAHO and PADF, have not ratified this important inter-American instrument.

So I appeal to the member States to give more attention to the issue of natural disasters and to adopt instruments at our disposal to tackle the impact of deforestation and climate change.

Let me welcome you again and wish a very productive meeting and let us all commit to move from WORDS to ACTION !

I thank you for your attention.