

Forming the pathway to Suriname's climate policy implementation

By Kevin Headley

A roadmap for addressing climate change challenges and for accessing different climate finance options available to Suriname— this is the aim of the National Climate Agreement. The Ministry of Spatial Planning and the Environment, ROM, is now busy with the process of producing a National Climate Agreement. The aim is to finalize and sign the National Climate Agreement at the beginning of the third quarter of 2023. According to Ivette Patterzon, deputy director of Climate Change at ROM, the ministry is aware that it will not be easy to reach a climate agreement because you will have to convince people to commit to the agreements made in the climate agreement.

“You have to be sure of what you can and cannot do as a country. So, that's going to be one of the challenges. Meetings are now being held with the various governmental and non-governmental organizations about the climate agreement, and discussions are being held with them about what should be included in it,” Patterzon added.

The Ministry of Spatial Planning and the Environment was established by presidential decree in 2020 in response to the call for more attention to spatial planning and a more decisive environmental policy in Suriname. Silvano Tjong-Ahin has been the minister of this ministry since July 16, 2020.

“The ministry is a policy body, which means that policy is formulated, and its implementation is monitored,” says Patterzon . There is no execution. It is ensured that the tools and capacity are there to implement the policy. If the ministry has the opportunity to create the preconditions, it will do so. A lot of capacity has been built up in recent years. Unfortunately, this capacity is being broken down, for example people moving away from the government or material that has disappeared due to poor management. You then always have to start from scratch to build up capacity, and that causes stagnation.”

At the moment it is also unclear who will be the new minister of ROM since the NPS, the political party of the current minister of ROM, has left the coalition and the ministers nominated by the party had to hand in their portfolios. The president has asked minister Tjong-Ahin to sit down for a while, but his decision is yet to be seen.

Agreements on climate change

Suriname's ratification of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, UNFCCC in 1997 and the Paris Agreement in 2019 is a sign of the country's commitment to addressing climate change in collaboration with the international community. To give

direction to climate policy, a number of documents have been developed: the National Adaptation Plan (NAP), Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Action (NAMA), Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), National REDD Strategy, Safeguard Information System (SIS), and the Forest Reference Emission Level report. The REDD strategy, SIS and FREL are seen as preconditions for Suriname in the context of the negotiations to arrive at climate finance for the sustainable management of our forests. With the adoption of the 2020 NAP and NDC, Suriname is introducing a more systematic approach to addressing both mitigation and adaptation that will enable to strengthen resilience, conserve carbon stock, reduce emissions while improving Suriname's to develop the economy sustainably, and to limit the costs of the effects of climate change. The NAP marks an important step forward towards building resilience, improving risk management and adapting to climate impacts. However, it is a challenge for the ministry to carry these out without a framework.

Lack of frame

At present, Suriname has the limitation of human resources to help collect the needed data in policy formulation from various ministries. "You can have human capacity, but then you have one person who has to do all the work. Sometimes training is needed and that is identified. There are plenty of training courses offered by the secretariat of the UNFCCC for which experts are nominated by the Ministry of ROM. But another problem is that experts who have acquired the knowledge sometimes leave for another workplace within the government or even leave the government," says Patterzon.

According to her, the government must realize that built-up capacity must be cherished and maintained where it is. "There are also really few people who consciously choose to work for the government because the facilities at the government are less than at large private companies. In the government, you also often work under a lot of difficult and stressful circumstances that certain people do not accept and that is why they choose to leave government service. It is therefore important that new people are recruited who are also committed and who follow the necessary training to do the job well."

Combination of hiring national and international consultants

Currently, the Ministry of ROM hires consultants (local or international) where help is needed. "For example, in the Third National Communication, NC3, project, which aims to compile the third national report under the climate treaty, local consultants have been chosen," says Patterzon. "For training, we do hire international consultants to supervise the various teams with the processing of the data. National consultants are often chosen to increase the capacity of Suriname and also to provide Surinamese (locals) with work."

Patterzon explains that it is not always easy with international consultants, because they sometimes work remotely. “If the international consultant is recruited, it is only available for that period and sometimes even limited because they have multiple assignments. In addition, you also invest in their knowledge by paying for training that is necessary to do the job. Finally, it is important for a country like Suriname that we increase and strengthen national capacity, especially when it comes to compiling national reports under the various environmental conventions, so investing in your locals, especially government employees, is preferred.”

The ministry also has good cooperation with the Anton de Kom University of Suriname for research, attracting graduates to enter the service and selecting students to participate in projects and training courses of the Ministry. It also cooperates with other ministries and NGOs. For example, while retaining the environmental theme, ministries are approached to make a nomination from their ministry for participation in the environment, workshops and training courses abroad. “It can always be better, but for now the cooperation is going reasonably well”.

Negotiate diplomatically

Patterzon explains that although developed countries are the major emitters of carbon dioxide and often fail to comply with the agreements made at climate conferences, one cannot demand a country to reduce emissions.

Instead, “Based on the partnerships you have or the agreements that already exist, you can request specific matters, such as instead of financing, you can ask for experts to assist with activities of ministries, e.g. developing policy plans and implementing projects”, Patterzon says.

Patterzon continued, “In bilateral cooperation with developed countries that contribute to high greenhouse gas emissions, the government will always have to negotiate diplomatically so that agreements made in the context of climate change, for example included in UNFCCC and PA, are still fulfilled.

As a specific example, she mentions water management, which the Netherlands is known to be very good at. For a project that has to do with water management, it is therefore useful to look at exchange options such as exchange of human resources and knowledge exchange. “This is also a form of how you can get developed countries to contribute to addressing the effects of climate change in your country.”

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