REPORT ON
MINI-GRID DEVELOPERS’ WORKSHOP
OCTOBER 31, 2017

Implemented by
giz Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
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LIST OF ACRONYMS

B2B     Business to Business
BMZ     German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
DKTI    German Climate Technology Initiative
ERA     Electricity Regulatory Authority
EU      European Union
FiT     Feed-in Tariff
GIZ     Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH
MEMD    Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development
MoFPED  Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development
NDP     National Development Plan
PREEEP  Promotion of Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Programme
Q&A     Question and Answer
REA     Rural Electrification Agency
RESP    Rural Electrification Strategy and Plan
RfP     Request for Proposal
SDGs    Sustainable Development Goals
SPV     Special Purpose Vehicle
UEGCL   Uganda Electricity Generation Company
UGX     Ugandan Shilling
URA     Uganda Revenue Authority
VAT     Value Added Tax
INTRODUCTION

Background

The Rural Electrification Agency (REA) launched an open tender for the Promotion of Mini-Grids in Northern Uganda in September 2017. The Pro Mini-Grids NU project is co-financed by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) under the German Climate Technology Initiative (DKTI) and the European Union (EU). The project is implemented by GIZ, the Ugandan Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development (MEMD), the Rural Electrification Agency (REA) and the Electricity Regulatory Authority (ERA). The project’s objective is to promote private sector investments into off-grid renewable energy projects in Uganda.

As part of the open tender process, GIZ held a stakeholders workshop for interested bidders on October 31, 2017 at Speke Resort and Conference Centre in Munyonyo, Kampala. The attendees included private companies, non-governmental organizations, development partners and Government agencies. This report presents an account of the workshop proceedings.

Objectives

The workshop provided an opportunity for a diverse group of stakeholders to discuss the implementation of mini-grids for increased energy access in Uganda. The initiative is aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal no. 7 and the Uganda Government’s Vision 2040, towards ensuring universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services.

The workshop’s key objectives were to:

1. Present the potential of private sector involvement in the development of renewable energy mini-grids in Uganda
2. Provide additional information to interested bidders on the Pro Mini-Grids NU initiative
3. Obtain information from the private sector on the implementation of the solar PV mini-grids under the Pro Mini-Grids program
4. Provide a networking platform for private companies, government agencies, and financing institutions towards potential business collaborations.

Agenda

The workshop agenda was comprised of an official opening by the Permanent Secretary of MEMD, followed by targeted presentations on Uganda’s policy and regulatory framework on mini-grids by REA and ERA. The open tender launch session had presentations from GIZ, REA, the Tender Agent and the
Uganda Revenue Authority (URA), followed by a Question & Answer (Q&A) session. The interactive Business-to-Business (B2B) session was held in the afternoon, followed by the wrap up and closing of the workshop. The full workshop agenda is annexed to this report as Appendix 1.

All presentations made during the workshop were circulated separately to workshop participants.

WORKSHOP PROCEEDINGS

Welcome

The workshop started at 9.30 am with a brief overview by the Moderator, Dr. Geoffrey Bakkabulindi, on the wider rural electrification context of the workshop, as well as its objectives and agenda of the day.

Dr. Markus Francke, Head of GIZ Energy Program, officially welcomed the workshop participants and thanked all attendees for their interest in Uganda’s rural electrification, particularly through mini-grids. He gave a brief background of GIZ’s involvement in mini-grids implementation in Uganda since 2007, and the lessons learnt on private sector involvement and the need for economies of scale. He emphasized the contribution of mini-grids to increased electricity access, and reiterated GIZ’s commitment to support the Government of Uganda and private sector in achieving the country’s access targets. He then invited the Permanent Secretary, MEMD to officially open the workshop.

Mr. Robert Kassande, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development, officially opened the workshop and gave a keynote address on Promoting Private Investment in Renewable Energy Mini-Grids. He outlined the Government’s priorities for the energy sector as well as the key challenges in achieving universal energy access. He informed stakeholders of the Government’s strategies to address the challenges through the formulation of various policies and plans, including the Rural Electrification Strategy and Plan (RESP) covering the period 2013 to 2022. Additionally, the Government has put in place various mechanisms and guarantees to ensure a conducive investment environment for private developers, e.g. bankable Implementation Agreements and a transparent regulatory framework, among others. The full speech is annexed to this report as Appendix 2.

Policies and Regulatory Framework

This session was aimed at providing details on the Government’s policies and regulatory framework for the implementation of solar PV mini-grids in Uganda. The presentations were given by REA and ERA respectively.

The first presentation on Rural Electrification Plans and the Role of Mini-Grids was made by Mr. Benon Bena, Ag. Deputy Executive Director, Rural Electrification Agency (REA). Mr. Bena gave an overview
of the current opportunities in off-grid renewable energy, and the agency’s ongoing activities and plans for mini-grids. He shared practical experiences, challenges and legal requirements for implementing mini-grid projects in the country. He further presented the RESP in more detail, highlighting the strategy’s combined approach on grid extension, mini-grids and standalone systems.

Eng. Ziria Tibalwa, CEO of the Electricity Regulatory Authority, presented an overview of the regulatory framework for solar PV mini grids. She outlined the role and mandate of ERA in increasing access to electricity and the requirements from the regulatory perspective for developers to implement, operate and maintain mini-grid projects. She gave an overview of the challenges, licensing requirements and legal basis for tariff setting in off-grid systems. She noted that developers should give due consideration to local social and cultural norms, and ensure compliance with environmental and technical obligations to the communities.

**Launch of the Open Tender for Mini-Grids**

This session was aimed at providing useful information to potential bidders and interested stakeholders on the Pro Mini Grids NU tender process. The session was comprised of presentations from GIZ, REA, the Tender Agent and URA respectively, followed by a panel discussion and Q&A session where implementing agencies provided clarifications on key issues presented by developers.

Mr. Moses Kakooza, Technical Expert on the GIZ Energy program, presented the concept and structure of the Pro Mini-Grids program. He informed participants on the four components of the project, including the identification of project locations; development of instruments for selection of concessionaires to implement and operate the mini-grids; award of concession and capacity building; and the promotion of productive use of electricity.

Mr. Michael Ecatre, Assistant Procurement Officer at REA, presented in detail the steps and timelines of the procurement process by REA, the applicable laws, stakeholders and key processes involved in the tender. The guidelines provided will have to be strictly adhered to by interested bidders towards the selection of six pre-qualified firms and eventual award of the concession.

Mr. Aurelien Agut, Tender Agent for the Pro Mini-Grids project, presented the *Technical Data, Financing Structures, and Project Implementation*. He provided background information on the tender and its design. He explained the format of the project, i.e. the 10 year concession period, the backing of investments by Implementation Agreements, and the tri-partite developer financing agreement between GIZ, REA and the winning developer. He clarified the financing aspects of the project with regard to the subsidy amount which will cover up to 50% of the capex amount.

Representatives from the Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) presented on the *Applicable Taxes in Solar PV Mini-Grid Projects*. They confirmed that all inputs of goods and services for the development of mini-
grid projects are exempt from VAT. They also clarified the scope and type of the equipment that qualify for customs duty exemptions, and the obligations of all tax payers in Uganda. They emphasized that developers can obtain information and advice from URA offices countrywide free of charge.

There followed a panel discussion and Q&A session, details of which are presented in the next section.

**Discussions and Q & A**

The Q&A session had panelists from REA, ERA, GIZ, URA and the Tender Agent answering questions from the workshop participants on the Pro Mini-Grids project and tender process. The questions raised and corresponding responses are presented below.

**Will the concessionaire have to pay rent to REA for the use of the distribution infrastructure?**

REA clarified that there will be a nominal rent for use of the distribution infrastructure. The Request for Proposal (RfP) documents for the selected prequalified companies will include details of this to enable developers factor these costs into the project financing arrangements.

**Will there be a conflict with the Uganda Electricity Generation Company (UEGCL) regarding ownership of the generation infrastructure built by the mini-grid concessionaire?**

REA clarified that there will be no conflict with UEGCL which is mandated to oversee the residual generation assets of the defunct Uganda Electricity Board, as well as finance some of the larger generation projects. REA is mandated to oversee the implementation of off-grid projects whereby one developer deals with generation, distribution and sale of electricity.

ERA further confirmed that there is no risk from UEGCL since the mini-grids projects are being packaged under the Renewable Energy Policy (2007) which specifically covers such investments. One of the biggest risks for mini-grids was cited as poor sizing and demand forecasting, and the high cost of unserved energy.

**Has REA purchased the project land or do developers have to purchase the land?**

REA confirmed that they have not purchased the project land, and informed that land will be required for two purposes. The first is the acquisition of wayleaves for the construction of distribution infrastructure, and the second is the leasing of land for the generation facilities. REA will be responsible for acquiring the wayleaves for distribution, whereas the developer will be responsible for acquiring leases for the land on which the generation facilities will be built. REA will, however, support the developer with the necessary social mediation with local communities in this process.
In a previously implemented mini-grid project reported by REA, who covered the difference between what customers paid for electricity and the actual cost of the service?

REA informed that there was no difference to be covered. The rural consumers paid the agreed price which experience had shown was higher than what grid connected consumers paid. The mini-grid consumers wanted to pay comparative rates with grid connected consumers, which was not economically feasible in the mini-grid.

ERA informed that a reduction in the said mini-grid’s tariff from UGX 1,500 to UGX 1,000 increased demand and fostered higher customer satisfaction and revenues for the developer. ERA also informed that Uganda has a policy of implementing nearly cost reflective customer tariffs that cover all generation, transmission and distribution costs, even for on-grid consumers. The exceptions are capacity payments for the larger thermal plants and costs for new transmission projects.

**How will consortium arrangements be treated in the tender process?**

The Tender Agent informed that bidders will not be required to have formed consortia or have registered Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) companies at the time of application. However, prequalification documents shall indicate intended contracting structures with companies, suppliers, financiers, etc. After the award, an SPV will have to be formed before starting project implementation, as required by Ugandan law. The full details will be given in the RfP documents.

**Will customers pay connection charges, including pole installation costs?**

ERA clarified that this project will benefit from the government’s initiative on free connections, to be confirmed by REA. The Regulator is also advocating for a credit scheme where connected customers do not have to pay high upfront connection fees, but can pay these gradually as they use the electricity.

REA confirmed that connections will be made by the developer as part of the subsidy. The payment will be pegged to milestones and the connection costs will be agreed upon with REA. Reimbursements for connections made during operation and maintenance (O&M) will be given based on the agreed cost.

**Is there an annual tariff increment over the 10 year project life time, and is it tied to the annual increments set by the Regulator?**

ERA informed that the previous solar feed-in tariffs (FiTs) did not include annual tariff increments. However, details of any such annual tariff variations will be included in the RfP documents.

**Are there stipulations that would allow for the subsidy to be revised in case of increases in demand for initially under-sized projects?**

ERA informed that demand forecasts are not expected to be exactly accurate. Widely inaccurate forecasts can lead to the renegotiation of the license with ERA and an amendment may be granted to increase
generation capacity accounting for demand changes. The Regulator is keen to maintain a conducive investment environment and will aim to balance the varying requirements of both consumers and developers. Developers will also have to post performance bonds to ensure timely achievement of financial close and project commissioning.

REA informed that a mechanism is being developed to adjust the subsidy for unexpected changes in demand to enable developers recoup their investments.

**Are there any guarantees for foreign exchange fluctuations given that subsidy payments are made in Euros yet customer payments are made in Ugandan shillings (UGX)?**

ERA informed that there is quarterly tariff adjustment by the Regulator available on the ERA website (www.era.or.ug). The methodology accounts for inflation and foreign exchange variations in operation and maintenance costs.

The Tender Agent informed that there is no instrument to cover foreign exchange risk but further details will be given in the RfP documents.

**Is there a guarantee to the developer for minimum uptake by consumers?**

REA informed that there is no guarantee to the developer for minimum uptake of energy supplied. The design risk lies with the developer and there will be no guarantee of the market. Developers will be responsible for undertaking detailed design of the project after receiving the indicative information on the project sites from REA and GIZ.

**What is the definition of a mini-grid? What is the fate of micro grids that started as research projects but continued to operate?**

REA defined the mini-grid as an isolated grid that serves a community. He informed that all sales of power to third parties must be registered with ERA regardless of how they were started.

**Can details of the selected 25 villages be revealed at this stage?**

The Tender Agent informed that the details cannot be divulged at this stage. However, further details will be provided in the RfP.

**Will the tender aim to promote rural development for production?**

GIZ confirmed that productive use of electricity will be a key focus of this electrification initiative, and funds have been set aside for capacity building and equipment purchase for the local communities. It is in the interest of the developer to encourage productive use of energy for increased revenue and reduced costs. GIZ will only support developers in this regard.
Is there categorization of the tariff according to different consumer categories, or is an average tariff considered?

The Tender Agent informed that the tender is based on the lowest tariff. It is up to the developer to decide the best way to present their tariff in the application documents.

ERA informed that the tariff will be computed to recover the revenue requirement. It is not possible to establish the cost allocation per consumer category at this stage. The average tariff will be considered at this stage and the categorization can be done at a later stage.

Is metering included in the connection costs?

REA clarified that applications will have to include the developer’s approach on the best way to implement this. The internal wiring details will be considered and communicated in the RfP.

Are all components exempt from VAT? Is the O&M of the solar mini-grids also exempt from VAT?

URA confirmed that all components related to the development of mini-grids will be exempt from VAT. After commissioning, normal taxation will be imposed on income from operations and maintenance, including VAT where applicable.

URA informed about the Government’s policy of Buy Uganda, Build Uganda and encouraged developers to purchase materials locally to the extent possible. Investors were also encouraged to look into spin-off opportunities such as establishing manufacturing facilities locally for required solar components.

Is the tax law expected to change in the future to the detriment of developer investments?

URA informed that it is the Ugandan Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development mandated to amend the tax law. However, the Government is fully committed to the access agenda and developers may in fact lobby for additional incentives if well justified.

Can additional revenue streams be considered to supplement the tariff? Will the lifeline tariff or service charge be considered in mini-grids O&M?

ERA confirmed that the energy charge will be considered to be the only source of income for the developer. Whereas other options may be available, this will be the position for the purposes of this tender.

Will contract documents be shared with the RfP documents?

The Tender Agent confirmed that standard contracts will be part of the RfP documents and participants will have to initial these to indicate that they agree with the conditions therein.
What will happen to all the equipment that will have a residual value after 10 years? Will the developer be able to negotiate another concession after 10 years?

The Tender Agent stated that cash flows will be calculated over 10 years, following which the concession contract may be extended or re-negotiated based on performance and satisfaction of the customers.

REA informed that concessions on islands where the main grid is not likely to reach may be given for over 10 years. However, on the main land, concessions will initially be limited to 10 years.

Who will repair and maintain the distribution system in emergency situations, given that a nominal rent will be charged on distribution infrastructure?

REA responded that the nominal rental fee for the distribution assets will be related to the use of the assets, but not to operation and maintenance. Developers should include the costs of generation and distribution maintenance in the project costing and tariff.

CONCLUSION

Following an interactive B2B session among participating companies and stakeholders, the workshop was closed at 4.30 pm by Mr. Ashley Wearne, Policy Advisor at GIZ. Mr. Wearne subsequently invited participants to a networking cocktail which concluded the day’s proceedings.

APPENDICES

1. Workshop Agenda
2. Keynote speech by the Permanent Secretary, MEMD
# MINI – GRID DEVELOPERS’ WORKSHOP
31 October 2017 at Speke Resort Hotel Munyonyo, Kampala – Uganda

*Promoting Private Investment in Renewable Energy Mini-Grids*

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<td>COFFEE and MINI GRID TECHNOLOGY FAIR</td>
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<td>9.00 – 9.10</td>
<td>SETTING THE SCENE – Dr. Geoffrey Bakkabulindi, Moderator</td>
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<td>9.10 – 9.20</td>
<td>WELCOME REMARKS – Dr. Markus Francke, Head of GIZ Energy Program</td>
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<td>9.20 – 9.30</td>
<td>KEYNOTE ADDRESS &amp; OFFICIAL OPENING - Mr. Robert Kasande, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development</td>
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<td>9.30 – 10:30</td>
<td>POLICIES AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK FOR SOLAR PV MINI-GRIDS IN UGANDA</td>
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<td>9.30 – 10.00</td>
<td>Rural Electrification Plans and the Role of Mini-Grids – Mr. Benon Bena, Ag. Deputy Executive Director, Rural Electrification Agency (REA)</td>
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<td>10.00 – 10.30</td>
<td>Regulation of Solar PV Mini-Grids – Eng. Ziria Tibalwa, Chief Executive Officer, Electricity Regulatory Authority (ERA)</td>
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<td>10.30 – 11.00</td>
<td>COFFEE BREAK</td>
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<td>LAUNCH OF THE OPEN TENDER FOR MINI-GRIDS</td>
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<td>Promotion of Mini-Grids for Rural Electrification – Mr. Moses Kakooza, Technical Expert GIZ Energy program</td>
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<td>11.20 – 11.30</td>
<td>Tender Framework &amp; Procurement Process – Mr. Michael Ecatre, Procurement Officer, Rural Electrification Agency (REA)</td>
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<td>11.30 – 12.00</td>
<td>Technical Data, Financing Structures, Project Implementation – Mr. Aurelien Agut, Tender Agent</td>
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<td>12.00 – 12.15</td>
<td>Applicable Taxes in Solar PV Mini-Grid Projects – Domestic Taxes and Customs Department, Uganda Revenue Authority</td>
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<td>12.15 – 13.15</td>
<td>Panel Discussion and Q&amp;A – Responding to developers’ clarifications – REA, ERA, GIZ and Tender agent</td>
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<td>14.15 – 16.00</td>
<td>B2B SESSIONS – Networking for Companies– Dr. Geoffrey Bakkabulindi, Moderator</td>
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<td>16.00 – 16.10</td>
<td>CLOSING – Mr. Ashley Wearne, Policy Advisor, GIZ Energy Program</td>
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<td>16.30 – 18.30</td>
<td>COCKTAIL and MINI GRID TECHNOLOGY FAIR</td>
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MINI-GRID DEVELOPER’S WORKSHOP
Promoting Private Investment in Renewable Energy Mini-Grids

OPENING SPEECH

BY

MR. ROBERT KASANDE
THE PERMANENT SECRETARY,
MINISTRY OF ENERGY AND MINERAL DEVELOPMENT

SPEKE RESORT MUNYONYO
KAMPALA, UGANDA

31st OCTOBER 2017
The CEO, Electricity Regulatory Authority - ERA,
The Deputy Executive Director, Rural Electrification Agency - REA,
The Director, GIZ’s Energy Programme,
Development Partners,
Representatives of International and Local Private Sector Companies,
Invited Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

INTRODUCTION

1. It gives me much pleasure to be here today, officiating at this Mini-Grid Developer’s Workshop under the theme: Promoting Private Investment in Renewable Energy Mini-Grids.

2. Access to modern forms of Energy is crucial, if Uganda is to achieve its development goals. When people gain access to energy, they change the way they behave and the way they live. Energy also improves people’s levels of productivity.

3. In line with this, our priorities in the energy sector include:
   - increasing generation capacity,
   - increasing the quantity of renewable energy in the energy mix and
   - promotion of energy efficiency and power loss reduction.

4. The Promotion of Mini-Grids project, as implemented by the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development, with support from the German Federal Government will contribute to increase in energy access.

   Key Challenges in Achieving Universal Energy Access

5. In the area of increasing energy access, Uganda is still faced with various challenges that include:
   - Low levels of access to modern energy services, with the current electrification rate at about 22%,
   - Widely scattered settlements which make it hard to connect communities to the main electricity grid, and
   - Limited financing for electrification projects.
The Strategies to Address the Challenges

6. To address these challenges, Government put in place the Rural Electrification Strategy and Plan (RESP) covering the period 2013 to 2022. This strategy is aimed at facilitating accelerated access to modern energy services for the rural communities.

7. The overall objective of the Rural Electrification Strategy and Plan is to position the electrification program on a path that will progressively advance towards achievement of universal electrification by the year 2040. By 2022, we hope to have achieved a rural electrification level of 22% and have in place a robust enabling environment and springboard for achieving this ambitious target.

8. Under the Rural Electrification Strategy and Plan, the implemented Rural electrification Projects are categorized as follows:-
   - Large and medium scale grid extension projects.
   - Small community schemes within proximity of service provider footprints.
   - Independent renewable energy mini-grids for closely settled communities which are not anticipated to connect to the main electricity grid in the near future.
   - Provision of solar Photo voltaic systems for dispersed households and buildings.

9. In line with this, Government through the Rural electrification Agency is developing a country-wide electrification master plan which will support identification of viable mini-grid sites. The Master Plan ensures that mini-grids are constructed only in villages where grid extension is not viable, hence protecting the developer's investment.

Progress on Mini-grid development

10. To support this process, the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development is revising the Energy Policy to include mini-grids.

11. ERA has also standardised the license application forms and is currently revising the grid code to include mini-grids. The issues of interconnection and cost reflective tariffs are being addressed.

12. Mini-grids to be developed are tendered out as concessions by REA to private companies to build, own and operate for 10 years.
13. We are glad to note that, the European Union and the German Federal Government are financing the following; feasibility studies for 40 mini-grids, of which 25 are in Lamwo and 15 are in the South; development of instruments such as tender documents and environmental frameworks and financing of Capital Investment subsidies to reduce tariffs in projects, making it easier for customers to pay.

The Mini-Grid Developers’ Workshop

14. This workshop has therefore been arranged to provide more information to potential mini-grid developers about the REA mini-grid tender for 25 mini-grids in Lamwo district, which was launched in September.

15. REA and Government of Uganda will continue to run more mini-grid tenders including an upcoming 15 mini-grids in Southern Uganda financed by the German Government and another 6 mini-grids to be financed by the EU through World Wide Fund for nature (WWF).

16. We are glad to note that other development partners like Kfw are willing to support this programme.

Concluding Remarks

17. I wish to conclude by noting that Government has prioritised investment in the energy sector and has put in place strategies to facilitate increase of energy access.

18. I wish to assure all private developers of Government’s support in development of private mini grids and encourage them to invest in these renewable energy mini-grids.

19. I thank all development partners, including the EU, the German Federal Government, USAID, and AFD for their continued support in efforts to achieve our rural electrification access goals. I also thank all the other development partners for their continued support in the energy sector.

20. Let me conclude by thanking the staff of my Ministry, REA, ERA and GIZ for organizing this very informative workshop.

21. With those few remarks, I thank you all for your kind attention and wish you fruitful deliberations.