

(Adapted with minor modifications from THISDAY Newspaper, 30 Jun 2015)

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has asked the Nigerian Atomic Energy Commission (NAEC) to conduct standard surveys including Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) on the two sites selected by the country to host its proposed 4,000 megawatts (MW) nuclear power projects.

The two sites, Geregu in Kogi State and Itu in Akwa Ibom State were recently announced by NAEC as the two sites on which Nigeria's ambitious nuclear power plants projects will be built and operated. The federal government through NAEC was said to have selected these sites.

NAEC Chairman, Erepamo Osaisai, had disclosed this in a presentation during the recent meeting of the Phase-2 Integrated Nuclear Infrastructure Review (INIR) mission of IAEA in Abuja.

Osaisai stated then that the commission's next step would be to conduct detailed evaluation and characterisation on preferred sites on the approval of government in Geregu, Ajaokuta Local Government Area of Kogi State and Itu in Itu LGA of Akwa Ibom State.

But the 10-member INIR team had after their two weeks session in Nigeria given the nod for the EIA and site characterisation. This was contained in the preliminary draft INIR mission report presented after concluding its assessment last week.

According to the report, the team made 42 recommendations requisite for an operational nuclear power environment and they include amongst others, enacting a comprehensive nuclear law, creating an independent nuclear power regulatory body with clear authority and functions separated from promotional bodies and functions and ensuring a waste and fuel cycle management.

In addition, IAEA wants NAEC to coordinate the site characterisation, EIA, conclusion of national specification and a grid expansion to accommodate nuclear generated power in the national electricity grid.

It further recommended that while NAEC must work only as the nuclear project developer, the Nigerian Nuclear Regulatory Authority (NNRA) should play the role of licensing and oversight of constructing and commissioning the plants.

While addressing concerns over safety of nuclear waste, IAEA lauded Nigeria's draft strategy for the safe and sustainable management of radioactive waste and spent nuclear fuel, which it said was prepared with an option for use when repatriation of spent fuel is not possible.

The IAEA team stated that the final INIR mission report is however expected to be ready and made available to the Nigerian public towards the end of September.

But Osaisai in his remarks stated that the final report will be submitted to the federal government for consideration and implementation.

He added: "We need electricity in the country and that is the core mandate of this commission, we will do whatever it takes to partner with IAEA to achieve this.