



UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

Programme des Nations Unies pour l'environnement Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Medio Ambiente

Программа Организации Объединенных Наций по окружающей среде برنامج الأمم المتحدة للبيئة

联合国环境规划署



UN System Provides Its Perspectives on a Green Economy

A “People-Centered” approach emphasized

New York, 14 December 2011 – Against a backdrop of the multiple crises of the past four years -- financial, economic, food and energy -- the United Nations today launched a report that offers UN agencies and its member states guidance for coordinating the transition to a Green Economy at the international and country levels.

In the first-ever inter-agency report on the Green Economy, the Environment Management Group (EMG), representing the work of UN agencies, the Bretton Woods Institutions and other intergovernmental bodies -- many of whom have a human and social development mandate – outlines steps and policies for pursuing a green economic transformation that generates new sources of sustainable and equitable economic growth that will assist in a global economic recovery.

Such action will require investing in not only clean-technologies and natural capital, but also in human and social capital, including education, health care, cultural development and social protection.

The new report, *Working towards a Balanced and Inclusive Green Economy*, reflects a growing recognition of the shortcomings of business-as-usual practiced by both the public and private sector institutions over the last two decades and assesses how the UN system can coherently support countries in transitioning to a Green Economy.

It highlights the need for more integrated approaches between different international agencies and government departments, as well as more targeted investments across the environmental, economic and social domains.

It also emphasizes that a Green Economy has to be a “people-centered economy” as it requires a healthy, educated and informed workforce and it must improve the daily lives of billions of people, including those living in poverty, those who are unemployed, the working poor and youth.

Urging both agencies and governments to use the forthcoming UN Conference on Sustainable Development (or Rio+20 Summit) to turn their commitments into reality, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said:

“United Nations entities are keenly aware of the resource challenges that countries face in meeting the needs of a growing and urbanizing world population. The human and economic toll of natural disasters and the volatility of commodity prices reflect worrying trends in global climate change, the growing scarcity of some natural resources and the decline of many ecosystems.

“This report highlights how these challenges can and must be addressed as part of integrated development models that focus on poverty and human well-being.”

The report promotes a UN system-wide understanding of the Green Economy approach to achieve sustainable development and offers a range of instruments that governments can use to impact investment choices and consumer behavior. These include mobilizing financial resources, full cost pricing, regulatory instruments, sustainable trade and green markets, innovation and technology, and indicators for measuring progress towards transition.

“There is ample evidence today that business-as-usual is simply not an option for the decades and generations to come,” said Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Chair of the Environment Management Group.

“The report highlights the fact that policies and policy mixes need to be reoriented and implemented better. The need for regulatory reform is evident, ensuring that market signals are better aligned with the sustainability imperative,” added Mr. Steiner.

Public spending can be used to provide urgently needed public goods and services and leverage private investments and social and environmental projects.

The report also calls for public spending to target green infrastructure and research and development that can spur green technologies and innovation, as well as better health care and education.

In addition, governments need to align their laws, regulations, standards, taxes, labeling and reporting requirements to reinforce the incentives for the private sector to direct their finance and investments towards green, responsible business and a Green Economy.

The absence of appropriate regulation and pricing is causing a failure to create high potential markets in carbon trading, ecosystem services and environmental goods and services, the report explains.

Many governments have responded to the global economic crisis with stimulus packages, which are paving the way for longer term policy reform. Investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency, sustainable transport and agriculture, as well as other areas, can contribute to the global economic recovery, apart from generating environmental and social benefits, adds the report.

Such investments also have the potential to create new growth paths and avoid locking capital in carbon-intensive, inefficient and polluting technologies.

In developing countries, the World Bank estimates that the need for investments in greening infrastructure, such as buildings, energy and transport sectors, could reach US\$264-\$563 billion by 2030. An additional US\$100 million might be needed for climate adaptation.

While the UN agencies, programmes, regional commissions and funds contribute to different aspects of sustainable development, including humanitarian, business and trade aspects, most of these activities reflect the national economic realities, priorities and decisions of its member states.

The report notes numerous UN-backed initiatives already underway, such as:

- Climate Smart Agriculture by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
- Cleantech Investment by the International Finance Corporation/World Bank
- Recycling of Ships by the International Maritime Organization (IMO)
- Green ICT standards of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU)
- Green Jobs by International Labour Organization (ILO)
- Green Economy Initiative by UNEP
- Resource Efficient and Cleaner Production by UNEP and the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)
- Education for Sustainable Development by UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- Cities and Climate Change by UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)
- Green Economy e-Learning by UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)
- Safe Access to Fuel and Alternative Energy by the UN World Food Programme (WFP)
- Greening the Health Sector by the World Health Organization (WHO)
- Green Technology Markets by World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)
- Energy Solutions by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

The report finds that the UN entities, along with the Bretton Woods Institutions and other intergovernmental agencies, are well-positioned to support the movement towards a balanced and inclusive Green Economy at the national level where they can provide a range of technical advice and capacity support to governments.

Furthermore, following the Rio 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, the upcoming UN Conference on Sustainable Development in June 2012 will be an important milestone along this journey as countries seek green growth solutions that will ensure sustainable development.

“The Rio+20 Summit is an opportunity to adopt the Green Economy approach as a practical solution to multiple challenges facing a world in economic recovery,” the report

states, and calls on member states to make collective commitments that will facilitate a global transition.

Notes to the Editors:

Rio Earth Summit: In 1992 the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, popularly known as the Rio Earth Summit, was convened in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to address the state of the environment and sustainable development. In June 2012, there will be the follow up meeting or Rio+20 in Brazil, where one of the main themes governments are expected to address is Green Economy “in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication”.

The Environment Management Group is a UN coordination body consisted of the specialized agencies, programmes and organs of the United Nations including the secretariats of the Multilateral Environmental Agreements. It furthers inter-agency cooperation in support of the implementation of the international environmental and human settlement agenda. www.unemg.org

The UN Development Group unites the 32 UN entities that play a role in development. The group’s common objective is to deliver more coherent, effective and efficient support to countries seeking to attain internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

For a copy of the full report, see:

<http://www.unemg.org/MeetingsDocuments/IssueManagementGroups/GreenEconomy/GreenEconomyreport/tabid/79175/Default.aspx>

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