

Urgent agricultural reform vital to avert looming African food crisis – UN report



Farming in Madagascar

14 May 2009 – With Africa’s population set to rise by an additional one billion people over the next four decades, the continent risks being plunged into a deepening food crisis without urgent changes to the management of its natural resources, warned a new United Nations report.

Agricultural yields in Africa have already fallen in some cases by up to 50 per cent as a result of invasive pests, land degradation, erosion, drought and climate change, according to the report, released today by the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)).

It also underscored the increasing scarcity of water in Africa despite studies by UNEP and the World Agroforestry Centre that estimated there would be enough rainfall on the continent to supply the water needs for 13 billion people, twice the current world population.

However, little of the rainfall is collected or stored through sustainable methods, such as small and large-scale rainwater harvesting, stressed the “Environmental Food Crisis” report.

“The economic models and management regimes of the 20th century are unlikely to serve humanity well on a planet of 6 billion, rising to over 9 billion by 2050,” warned UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner.

“This is particularly true with respect to agriculture and especially valid in Africa,” he added. Reversing environmental degradation and “investing in ecological infrastructure, such as forests, soils and water bodies is one part of the Green Economy solution,” said Mr. Steiner. “The other key is managing them and the food chain in far more efficient ways.”

The report pointed out that over half of food produced worldwide is lost, wasted or discarded as a result of inefficiency in the human-managed food chain, from the farm and the seas to the urban market and the kitchen.

Mr. Steiner also underscored the “enormous opportunity to diversify livelihoods and incomes” through emerging carbon markets, including renewable energy and farmers earning an income by conserving forests, soil and vegetation cover to sequester carbon.

Clean energy projects, such as wind, off-river hydro and solar power are beginning to take off in Africa, with an estimated 100 projects in over 20 countries up and running or in the pipeline, noted the report.

The head of UNEP noted that Kenya has plans to generate 1,300 Megawatts of geothermal electricity by around 2020, “But this is only scratching the surface.”

Kenya is also a windy country, he said. In Turkana, in the north of the country, “a private consortium is developing an initial 300 Megawatts of wind energy, following the Government’s introduction of new legislation, equal to around 25 per cent Kenya’s current installed energy capacity.”

Mr. Steiner said that by some estimates, Kenya might have enough windy sites to produce over 30 Gigawatts of wind energy for domestic consumption and export.

The UNEP report was launched today at the 17th session of the UN Commission for Sustainable Development, which wraps up in New York on 15 of May. The meeting’s main focus is on finding solutions to the current environmental, financial and food crisis in Africa.

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