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Conservation projects in Guatemala and Nepal win UN environment prize



2011 UNEP Sasakawa Prize

Theme: "Forests for People,
Forests for Green Growth"

23 February 2011 – A forest conservation initiative in Guatemala and a sustainable development project in Nepal are the recipients of this year's Sasakawa Prize, the United Nations Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)) announced today.

The [UNEP Sasakawa Prize](#), worth \$200,000, recognizes the most innovative, groundbreaking and sustainable grassroots environmental initiatives in developing countries.

The Asociación Forestal Integral San Andrés, Petén (AFISAP) in Guatemala and the Manahari Development Institute in Nepal (MDI-Nepal) [won](#) the award, whose theme this year is "Forests for People, Forests for Green Growth" in support of the 2011 International Year of Forests.

The theme highlights the central role of forests in the pursuit of a global 'green economy' as key economic resources whose real value has all too often been excluded in national accounts of profit and loss, according to UNEP press release.

Estimates from The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) indicate that deforestation and forest degradation are likely costing the global economy between \$2.5 and \$4.5 trillion a year, more than the losses of the recent and ongoing financial crisis.

AFISAP, which was founded in 1999, is focused on preserving the forests on a 52,000-hectare concession within the Mayan Biosphere Reserve in the San Andres area in Guatemala, which plays a critical role in regional conservation. According to an AFISAP study that used remote cameras, the Mayan Reserve has the highest-density of jaguars ever reported in the world.

The organization, which has distinguished itself as one of the most successful community groups in Guatemala, has also introduced projects to extract the lucrative xate, the popular foliage used for floral arrangements worldwide. Xate, which has been used for 40 years and is exported, has brought enormous economic benefits for the rural communities in the area.

MDI-Nepal, a non-governmental organization founded in 2001, has introduced agroforestry to help improve crop productivity and water irrigation systems as well as reduce soil erosion on the forested hills and mountainous areas.

Apart from making up most of the country's land mass, the slopes are also home to 18 million people. The agroforestry measures have significantly improved food security and living standards of the rural communities living on the steep slopes of Nepal, said UNEP.

In a related development, a forest conservation scheme in Kenya is one of the projects to benefit from a new partnership between UNEP and the European Union (EU).

The partnership, announced today at the UNEP headquarters in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, by UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner and the EU Commissioner for the Environment, Janez Potocnik, covers funding from the European Commission (EC) to UNEP up to 2013 and identifies key areas of joint activities.

Under the partnership, the EC will provide funding for the restoration of the north-western part of the Mau forest complex in Kenya.

The project, which supports the strategy of the Kenyan Government to rehabilitate one of sub-Saharan Africa's largest closed canopy forests, will contribute to maintaining nature-based assets worth an estimated \$1.5 billion a year to the Kenyan economy.

"Today we are also announcing support to the Government of Kenya, through UNEP, towards rehabilitation and restoring one of Kenya's and East Africa's key pieces of natural infrastructure," said Mr. Potocnik.

"The Mau forest complex is a living example of where economy and environment intersect and reflects not only our cooperative work with UNEP, but the EU's overall vision for a sustainable 21st century at home and abroad," he added.

Mr. Steiner said: "The Government of Kenya has embarked on a remarkable transformation of its economy in which renewable energy and improved management of its nature-based assets are at the core of its sustainable, 2030 Vision, development path.

"Realizing that vision however requires the support of committed partners – and I would like to thank the Environment Commissioner for the EC's commitment in the UNEP-Kenya partnership in support of conserving and restoring Kenya's vital water towers," added Mr. Steiner.

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