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## Resource-rich Africa well placed to transition to ‘green economy’ – UN official



28 March 2011 – Africa is well poised to take advantage of a host of opportunities on the continent for building a ‘green economy,’ one that generates decent jobs in an environmentally sustainable way, a senior United Nations official said today.

“This continent is in many ways the envy of the 21st century world,” Achim Steiner, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)), told African ministers of finance, planning and economic development gathered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

“Africa is rich in the kinds of natural resources that in many parts of the world have been over-exploited and diminished by centuries of unsustainable development,” he [stated](#).

This includes not just precious and semi-precious metals, but also nature-based resources such as forests and biodiversity, which support tourism and could also underpin inventions and pharmaceutical breakthroughs.

At the same time, many parts of the continent are rich in so-called natural fuels such as wind, solar and geothermal.

“The fundamental question,” said Mr. Steiner, “is how will all this potential be harvested for the benefit of Africa’s citizens and in a way that promotes stability in Africa and beyond.”

He noted that the green economy is not a substitute for sustainable development, but a way of realizing it. “It is as relevant to developing economies and it is to developed ones; it is as central to more state-led economies as it is to more market-led ones. It is not a straitjacket, nor is it prescriptive.”

In February UNEP released a [report](#) outlining how investing 2 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP) in 10 sectors can catalyze the transition to a green economy.

It also provided a global compilation of case studies from across the globe, including Africa, where forward-looking policies by governments are “watering the green shoots” of the global green economy.

One example is South Africa, whose Green Economy Plan focuses on investments that create more decent jobs, and where nearly \$1 billion is being spent on railways, energy-efficient buildings, and water and waste management.

He also highlighted Kenya’s new green energy policy, including a feed-in tariff and 15-year power purchase agreement, which is catalyzing an initial target of 500 megawatts of energy from geothermal, wind and sugar wastes systems.

Later this week, [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon will visit Kenya’s main geothermal sites, located north-west of Nairobi, to learn first-hand how these developments have been achieved, as well as how they are set to generate thousands of new jobs in the clean energy sector while reducing dependency on imported fossil fuels.

“The rest of the world can learn from Africa, but Africa can also learn from other continents,” said Mr. Steiner.

He added that the upcoming UN Conference on Sustainable Development, set to be held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012 – 20 years after the Earth Summit of 1992, could prove to be one of the most transformative moments in international affairs.

“In 1992, we could only perhaps glimpse the scale some of the challenges emerging on the radar from climate change and the loss of healthy, productive cropland,” he noted.

“But in the world of the here and now, many of those challenges have become all too real. There is an urgency to swiftly and decisively evolve the sustainable development agenda onto a far more focused and far reaching level.”

He said that the question now emerging is not whether a green economy is desirable but how to realize a green economy in practical terms.

“Rio+20 offers an opportunity to accelerate and scale-up transitions, already under way across this region and indeed across the world in order to catalyze growth and employment opportunities for around nine billion people by 2050,” he stated. “But in a way that also maintains and enhances the regional and global planetary services that underpin wealth generation in the first place.

“Africa’s experience on what has worked and what has not worked over the past two decades offers an invaluable foundation upon which a transformational outcome next year can be built.”

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