



With breaking stories and  
newswire products from

**UN NEWS CENTRE**



## **Restoring damaged ecosystems can generate wealth and employment – UN report**



Rehabilitating nature-based assets generate jobs and combat poverty

3 June 2010 – Repairing forests, lakes and other types of nature reserves that have been damaged or depleted can generate wealth, create jobs and become a vital means of alleviating poverty, the United Nations Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)), says in a report released today.

The report identifies thousands of ecosystem restoration projects worldwide and showcases over 30 initiatives that are transforming the lives of communities and countries across the globe.

Entitled **[Dead Planet, Living Planet: Biodiversity and Ecosystem Restoration for Sustainable Development](#)**, the report underlines that far from being a cost on growth and development, many environmental investments in degraded, nature-based assets can generate substantial and multiple returns.

“The ecological infrastructure of the planet is generating services to humanity worth by some estimates over \$70 trillion a year, perhaps substantially more,” said Achim Steiner, UNEP Executive Director.

“This report is aimed at bringing two fundamental messages to governments, communities and citizens on World Environment Day (WED) and in 2010 – the UN’s International Year of Biodiversity. Namely, that mismanagement of natural and nature-based assets is undercutting development on a scale that dwarfs the recent economic crisis,” Mr. Steiner said.

“Well-planned investments and re-investments in the restoration of these vast, natural and nature-based utilities not only has a high rate of return, but will be central, if not fundamental, to sustainability in a world of rising aspirations, populations, incomes and demands on the Earth’s natural resources,” said Mr. Steiner from Kigali, Rwanda, the main host for this year’s global WED events. The Day will be officially marked on Saturday.

Nature restoration activities include rehabilitating water flows to rivers and lakes, improving soil stability and fertility for agriculture and combating climate change by sequestering and storing carbon from the atmosphere.

The report underlines that maintaining and managing intact ecosystems must be the key priority. However, given that more than 60 per cent of the ecosystems, ranging from marshes and coral reefs to tropical forests and soils, are already degraded, restoration must now be an equal priority.

Rehabilitating ecosystems also generates jobs in a world where currently 1.3 billion are unemployed or underemployed, while supporting international goals to substantially reduce the rate of loss of biodiversity, a key theme this year.

The report cites evidence that well-planned, science-based, community-supported programmes can recover between 25 and 44 per cent of the original services alongside the animals, plants and other biodiversity of the former intact system.

As an example, it points to a study on restoring degraded grasslands and lands around river systems in South Africa’s Drakensberg Mountains. It estimates that the project will bring back winter river flows to communities amounting to close to 4 million cubic metres of water, cut sediment losses and store carbon.

In Peru, the theme of ecosystem restoration underpins the Projeto Agua Limpa or Clean Water Project co-launched by UNEP Goodwill Ambassador Gisele Bündchen and her father in 2008 in her hometown of Horizontina.

The project is aimed at restoring the health of water supplies while boosting biodiversity by restoring forests and rehabilitating river banks and riverside vegetation in river basins.

“UNEP’s report on ecosystem restoration spotlights the enormous opportunities for communities to invest in their future development,” said Ms. Bündchen after the report was released.

“Restoring degraded environments is among the best gifts we can give and hand on to current and future generations – we need to bring to the attention of everyone the central link between forests, wetlands and other natural systems and our survival and prosperity in this extraordinary world,” she added.

The report makes several recommendations, including urging overseas development agencies, international finance agencies and regional development banks to factor ecosystem restoration and long-term management assistance into development support, food security initiatives, job creation and poverty alleviation funding.

It also recommends that one per cent of a country's gross domestic product (GDP) be set aside annually for conservation, management and restoration of the environment and natural resources, with the precise figure linked to national circumstances.

Ecosystem restoration should be guided by experiences learned to date to avoid unintended consequences such as the introduction of alien invasive species and pests, the report suggests. It also posits that infrastructure projects that damage an ecosystem have funds set aside to restore a similarly degraded ecosystem elsewhere in a country or community.

Speaking in Kigali, Mr. Steiner urged the world to move towards a "common goal of a healthy, productive and well-managed planet that can give everyone the opportunity to flourish under the theme of 'Many Species, One Planet, One Future'."

**News Tracker: past stories on this issue**

**Boosting agricultural biodiversity could pay dividends for rural poor – UN**