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## **UN agency sets out priority steps to realize Green Economy for 21st century**



31 December 2009 – The United Nations environmental agency has identified three priority areas in the race to mitigate climate change based on harnessing the benefits of ecosystems, from coral reefs to forests, coupled with non-fossil fuel technology that exploits solar, geo-thermal and wind energy.

“It is now widely recognized that healthy ecosystems from coral reefs and wetlands to mangroves and fertile soils are a key to successfully adapting to climate change,” the UN Environment Programme (**UNEP**) said in a news release on what it called a rapidly evolving

strategy “in response to the needs of Member States and the growing number of requests on how best to realize a low carbon, resource efficient Green Economy for the 21st century.”

Calling the management and maintenance of such systems “a buffer and an insurance policy against extreme weather events and a rapidly changing climate,” UNEP stressed that ecosystems and the services they provide represent serious, multi-trillion dollar economic assets.

It cites a recent UNEP report compiled with scientists that estimates that carbon emissions equal to half the annual emissions of the global transport sector are being captured and stored by marine ecosystems such as mangroves, salt marshes and sea grasses alone.

Based on this, UNEP is helping Member States in demonstration projects such as assisting Iraq in rehabilitating the marshlands of Mesopotamia, supporting Kenya in restoring the Mau forest complex and aiding Mali in reviving Lake Faguibine. Plans are also under way for ecosystem rehabilitation in Haiti.

“UNEP is ready to support Member States in gearing up their economies to overcome policy and financial barriers and to incorporate ecosystem adaptation measures into national climate, development and sectoral strategies,” the agency said.

The second priority area concerns the so-called REDD and REDD+ programme – Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation. Emissions linked with deforestation and forest degradation may account for close to 20 per cent of current global greenhouse gas emissions and UNEP is part of the international effort to prepare developing economies for a REDD regime.

Through the **UN-REDD** Programme – a partnership between UNEP, the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (**FAO**) and the UN Development Programme (**UNDP**) – nine countries are being made ready for REDD with methodologies, monitoring and verification systems and safeguards to ensure value not only in climate and national economic terms but in terms of livelihoods for local communities.

Methodologies, monitoring and verification techniques are being tested in western Kenya, China, Niger and Nigeria. It should soon allow farmers and landowners to benefit from carbon sequestration of different farming and land management regimes including agro-forestry. By some estimates a country such as Indonesia could generate revenues of around \$1 billion a year initially if deforestation rates are halved.

The third priority area is clean technology readiness. “Investing in low-carbon energy alternatives and reducing emissions from inefficient energy consumption also make economic and environmental sense,” UNEP noted. “However, although many low-carbon technologies are already commercially viable, transferring them to new markets and mainstreaming their use globally remains a challenge.”

To bridge this gap, UNEP and its partners are already delivering via smart market mechanisms. In India, a joint project with the UN Foundation, the Shell Foundation and Indian banks has brought down the cost of solar technology loans. Within a matter of a few years, 100,000 people have accessed solar electricity in rural areas and the initiative is now self-financing.

Another project, with funding from the Global Environment Facility (**GEF**), targets more efficient geothermal exploration in East Africa. The penetration of solar water heater systems in North Africa has also been pioneered by UNEP and partners with the critical linking of loans to electricity utility bills – the key to unlocking the market.

Meanwhile, UNEP has undertaken renewable energy mapping assessments, helping 15 developing countries determine their solar and wind potential and devise policies to tap them. It has also launched an effort to help more than 35 countries determine the specific

low greenhouse gas technologies best able to meet their development needs and prepare national plans to acquire and use those technologies.

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