



An Expanded UNDP-UNEP Partnership on Mainstreaming Poverty and Environment into National Planning Frameworks to Achieve the MDGs

Environmental conditions and access to environmental assets are closely linked to the livelihoods, health and security of people living in poverty – particularly women and children. Greatly expanded public and private investment in the productivity of these environmental assets can generate strong returns for poverty reduction, contribute to pro-poor growth and accelerate progress towards attaining all of the Millennium Development Goals.

Yet, despite their critical importance, environmental assets continue to be degraded at an alarming rate. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment found that 60% of ecosystem services are used unsustainably and concluded that “any progress achieved in addressing the goals of poverty and hunger eradication, improved health, and environmental protection is unlikely to be sustained if most of the ecosystem services on which humanity relies continue to be degraded.” Integrating poverty-environment concerns into the mainstream of national development policy, planning and investment is an urgent priority.

The UNDP-UNEP Poverty Environment Initiative

In the context of the 2005 MOU between UNDP and UNEP, the two organisations formed a partnership to merge their respective poverty-environment activities aimed at country level capacity building to mainstream environment in national development planning, under the banner of the **UNDP-UNEP Poverty Environment Initiative (PEI)**. This partnership has become a successful example of how UNDP and UNEP can work together to provide operational support to countries – using joint missions, pooled funds and jointly designed programmes implemented through UNDP Country Offices.

The PEI has successfully launched operational programmes in nine countries (Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Vietnam), following a programmatic approach to country level environment mainstreaming and has accumulated extensive best practice experience and lessons learned. The approach has given high priority to achieving real country ownership, backed up by the commitment of the UNDP Country Office and key donors involved in country-level donor coordination on the environment. The results have been significant leveraging of funds from key donors to support sustained country led mainstreaming programmes.

The UNDP/UNEP partnership for mainstreaming poverty-environment linkages into national planning frameworks has been given even greater significance in the light of the **2005 World Summit** commitment to support the implementation of MDG-based national development strategies and the recent **UN Reform** process and “one UN” approach at country level. In particular, UNDP and UNEP have committed to work together on integrating environment effectively in the UNDP MDG Support initiative. Accordingly, UNDP and UNEP have committed to a significant scaling-up of the PEI.

The Proposed Scaling Up of the UNDP-UNEP PEI Partnership

The growing body of practical experience from the PEI reveals many effective approaches to reducing poverty and improving the environment – from successful community-level interventions to macro-level policy changes aimed at protecting and expanding the environmental assets of poor and vulnerable groups.

But these are often isolated successes, and there are significant policy and institutional barriers to their wider application. These barriers are linked to broader issues of governance and economic and social policy that strongly influence how the environment is managed and how benefits and costs are distributed – and often are beyond the control of environmental institutions. For environmental management to contribute fully to poverty reduction, pro-poor growth and the MDGs, a profound shift in policy making and implementation is needed.

Some significant achievements have been made but much remains to be done. There are many countries who have not yet managed to integrate environment into their national planning frameworks. It is, however, evident that government and civil society actors who are motivated to achieve mainstreaming face real challenges – they have limited capacity, they have restricted access to key government decision making and they lack experience of the relevant implementation processes. They also have inadequate resources and struggle to convince financial ministries of their case for investments. The challenge, therefore, is to address these gaps and needs.

To meet this challenge, UNDP and UNEP are now committed to expanding and strengthening the PEI Partnership. The strategy is to:

- Expand the number of countries which the PEI can support, including in priority MDG Strategy countries and One UN pilot countries;
- Strengthen joint UNDP-UNEP capacity at the regional level to provide technical and organisational support to countries and to ensure full integration of environment in the MDG Support initiative;
- Establish a joint Poverty Environment Facility in Nairobi to act as a hub for partnerships with key donors and practitioner organisations, to develop and disseminate global best practice, to provide direct technical support when needed and to mobilise resources to support country poverty-environment mainstreaming programmes;
- Through the Facility and its management structure, to institutionalise the partnership between UNDP and UNEP further.

Key donors have already indicated willingness to provide financial support and the operational collaboration between UNDP and UNEP at the regional level has made rapid progress. The target is to secure funding for a scaled-up programme over the period 2007-2011 which would expand the number of countries being supported to between 20 to 30.