

SAFE, CLEAN AND GREEN ENVIRONMENT WITH CASH – THE RWANDA POVERTY AND ENVIRONMENT INITIATIVE MAKES THE ENVIRONMENT EVERYBODY’S BUSINESS

”It is possible to eradicate poverty in Rwanda. However, in order to succeed we need to safeguard the natural resources and the environment which a majority of Rwandans depend upon for their livelihood”, says Dr Rose Mukankomeje, Director General of Rwanda Environment Management Authority (REMA).

REMA is the implementing body of Rwanda Poverty Environment Initiative (PEI). PEI aims to integrate sustainable management of environment and natural resources into national planning processes and more specifically through the implementation of the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS).

One of the major problems linking environment to poverty is that poverty forces people to utilise their natural resources in an unsustainable way to meet their day to day needs. This is especially true in Rwanda where the majority of the population lives in rural areas with their livelihood systems depending on natural resources. According to ‘Guidelines for Mainstreaming Environment in the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy’, a recent document published by PEI – subsistence agriculture provides food security and employment to about 90 percent of the population.

Poverty and environmental degradation are linked in a vicious circle forcing poor people to engage in practices that have adverse impact on the environment as they seek basic provisions to improve their livelihoods. A degraded environment produces less, so people become more vulnerable.

An example of this link, given in the ‘Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy 2008-2012, is the use of biomass such as firewood. Over 94 percent of the rural households in Rwanda today depend on firewood as their primary source of energy for both domestic and industrial uses. But since the 1960s more than 63 percent of forests have been lost in Rwanda which means that wood as a fuel is becoming scarcer. This deforestation results both in soil erosion which causes further declining levels of well being among Rwandans and that women and children spend longer hours collecting firewood.

To curb this vicious circle the Rwanda Poverty and Environment Initiative (PEI) supports the Government in its efforts to raise awareness about environmental issues to reduce poverty and improve the lives of poor and vulnerable groups through incorporating environmental issues and concerns into national development processes.

So far the programme that runs up to December 2009 has taken important steps to break this circle. Environmental issues are, for example, now ensured to be integrated in Rwanda’s Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS) both as a sector in itself and as a cross-sectoral issue.

Mr Cyrille Turatsinze, Technical Officer at PEI, explains that this is a major step forward and that it is a very important foundation for Rwanda to operate a successful transition towards long-term human and economic development.

”Environmental issues must be integrated in all sectors when plans are developed if we are to respond to challenges posed by current environmental degradation”, he says.

He also stresses that these environmental considerations are more about identifying opportunities from good environmental management rather than protecting the natural resources such as forests.

Another major achievement from the Rwanda PEI programme is that the process of incorporating the environment into the EDPRS has involved a lot of people from government bodies at national as well as district and local levels which ensures a broad ownership.

”Safeguarding the environment is everybody’s business”, says Dr. Rose Mukankomeje. ”Every single Rwandan needs to be involved one way or another if we are to achieve the objective of having a safe, clean and green environment with cash”.

Note to the editor: About the Poverty Environment Initiative (PEI)

Safe, clean and green environment with cash

The Poverty and Environment Initiative (PEI) is aiming to reduce poverty and improve the livelihoods of poor and vulnerable groups through mainstreaming environment into national development processes. This increases budget allocations for environment and builds capacity at central and decentralised levels in understanding the environment’s importance for sustainable social and economic growth. Activities include environmental data collection, awareness rising of the public and training of sector planners. As a result of PEI, environment is taken as pillar as well as cross-cutting issue in the EDPRS and most sectors now have included environmental actions. Budget allocations for environment protection and land conservation have also increased with 40% for the 2008 budget.

The PEI was launched in November 2005 and will run until December 2009. The project is executed by Government of Rwanda through MINITERE and implemented by REMA in close collaboration with MINECOFIN. The PEI in Rwanda has been funded through UNEP with funds from the Government of Belgium, Norway and Ireland with contributions from UNDP Rwanda.



Caption: Dr Rose Mukankomeje, Director General of Rwanda Environment Management Authority (REMA) implementing body of Rwanda Poverty Environment Initiative (PEI) says that ecology and economy goes hand in hand. The objective of REMA is to have a ‘safe, clean and green environment with cash’.

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