

ENVIRONMENT FOR PEACE

In preparation for the 2005 World Summit, the UN Secretary-General constituted a High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change. The panel identified six clusters of threats to human security, including the economic and social threats posed by poverty, infectious disease and environmental degradation. Ninety per cent of current conflicts are found in the poorest 30 per cent of countries. The poorest countries have the greatest environmental challenges. Environmental degradation also intensifies poverty. This is why UNEP maintains that protecting and sustainably managing the environment and placing a true value on the planet's natural assets is the peace policy of the future.

According to the UN Millennium Project, “environmental sustainability is the foundation on which strategies for achieving all the other Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) must be built.” The UNEP Poverty and Environment Project is designed to integrate environmental sustainability into national development processes and poverty reduction strategies so that economic and social development is not undermined by environmental degradation. Work plans are now being implemented in seven pilot countries—Mali, Mauritania, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania and Mozambique—to demonstrate why the environment matters in terms of development and how environment can be included in national development processes.

ENVIRONMENT FOR THE MDGS

A key aspect of the Poverty and Environment Project is UNEP's cooperation with the UN Development Programme (UNDP). The UNEP-UNDP Poverty and Environment Initiative was launched at the High Level Poverty and Environment Partnership ‘Environment for the MDGs’ event at the 2005 World Summit, in September in New York. The Initiative is a flagship for cooperation between the two UN agencies, and essentially means that UNDP and UNEP have combined their separate poverty and environment activities to demonstrate that an integrated approach should be taken to environment and development.

UNEP and UNDP have joint poverty and environment projects in Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda, and are also working together to help other countries to mainstream environmental considerations into their national MDG implementation plans. UNEP and UNDP share concerns that the environment has not been taken as seriously as it should have been in MDG-related activities to date, a point that was strongly made by some ministerial delegations at the UNEP Governing Council meeting in February.

In response to findings from the Millennium Project, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and the UNDP 100-country study on the implementation of the MDGs, UNEP organized two workshops in July and October 2005 on mainstreaming the environment into the MDGs through the institutional frameworks and mandates of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). Based on the outcome of these consultations, a workshop organized in London in October 2005 explored the development of pro-poor markets for ecosystem services using the MEAs. These meetings have now resulted in the creation of UNEP-wide task force on conservation finance.

ENVIRONMENT FOR COOPERATION

There is a growing understanding that environmental degradation, inequitable access to critical natural resources and the transboundary movement of hazardous materials all represent potential flashpoints for conflict. However, history has repeatedly shown that they are also catalysts for cooperation. Problems of shared resources regularly produce shared solutions.

UNEP is working with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), UNDP and NATO on the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) to help countries in Central Asia, the southern Caucasus and southeastern Europe to assess and address environment and security hot-spots that pose security risks to communities within and across national borders. An ENVSEC assessment in eastern Europe (Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine) started in late 2005.



Narmin Othman Hassan, Iraq's Minister of Environment, poses with the UNEP Assessment of Environmental 'Hot Spots' in Iraq report, during a press conference at the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, Thursday, 10 November 2005. © Associated Press/Keystone/Laurent Gillieron

UNEP-led ENVSEC assessments help to identify environmental threats, such as sources of cross-border pollution, and necessary actions for their mitigation and elimination. They also serve to build confidence between countries and ethnic groups by facilitating dialogue on common environmental problems and offering possibilities for cooperation. The ENVSEC portfolio currently includes 40 projects prepared and implemented in cooperation with national governments, research institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

In May 2005, ENVSEC organised a sub-regional conference in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, in cooperation with Romania's Ministry of Environment and Water Management on Reducing Environment and Security Risks from Mining in South Eastern Europe and the Tisza River Basin. The conference adopted the Cluj Declaration emphasizing the need for cooperation at all levels to assess and find solutions to environmental problems related to mining, many of which could become sources of regional conflict. The

publication *Mining for Closure: Policies and Guidelines for Sustainable Mining Practice and Closure of Mines* presents a basis for the development of corporate practice, regulatory frameworks, governance guidelines and financial and insurance markets suitable for the support of a modern mining industry in the region.

Central Asia's Ferghana Valley claimed global attention in early 2005 due to political developments in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. At the time, ENVSEC partners were finalizing a one-year process of identifying environmental threats to regional security and opportunities for cross-border dialogue in the area. The in-depth assessment for the Ferghana Valley was launched at the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention in Almaty on May 27, 2005, and at the International Conference on Regional Cooperation in Transboundary Water Basins, in Dushanbe, in June 2005.

Elsewhere, UNEP convened an expert group in March 2005 to help to define strategies for its

Initiative on Environment and Conflict Prevention. UNEP started regional assessments in Latin America and the Caribbean and in the Asia-Pacific region in 2005. A similar assessment will be conducted in Africa in early 2006. The reports will be compiled and presented to the UNEP Governing Council in 2007 and will feed into the next Global Environment Outlook report, GEO-4, also scheduled for 2007.

ENVIRONMENT FOR SECURITY

Nowhere is the importance of the environment as a foundation for development more obvious than in countries where the environment has been severely degraded. In Afghanistan, more than two decades of conflict, military activity, refugee movement and the collapse of national, provincial and local governance and institutional capacity have seen Afghanistan's natural environment severely degraded. In a country where more than 80 per cent of the population relies directly on the country's natural resource base for daily subsistence it is therefore crucial that peace building, environment and development go hand-in-hand.

In 2002, UNEP started work in Afghanistan by developing a Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment, which was published in January 2003. Based on identified environmental needs, UNEP was asked by the newly established Ministry of Irrigation, Water Resources and Environment

UNEP-led ENVSEC assessments help to identify environmental threats, such as sources of cross-border pollution, and necessary actions for their mitigation and elimination.



to initiate a Capacity and Institution Building Programme for Environmental Management. The purpose of the five-year programme is to develop a stand-alone and self-sufficient environmental administration with the required technical capacity to implement newly developed environmental law and policy and re-establish sustainable resource management across the country.

Recognizing the importance of a strong environmental administration, UNEP has focused its assistance to the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA), the successor institution to the Ministry of Irrigation, Water Resources and the Environment. Sustainable management of environmental resources can only happen when national and local-level institutions have clear mandates, effective and coordinated structures, technically skilled staff and sufficient financial resources. To achieve these goals, UNEP provided technical support to NEPA for ongoing reform and reorganization.

Concurrent with the development of the environmental institutions is the development of environmental policy and the establishment of a realistic environmental legal framework. In this regard, UNEP provided environmental legal support to NEPA during the drafting and review of key natural resource laws. The main focus was to support the development of the Environmental Act while ensuring Afghan ownership and sufficient consultation between relevant ministries and stakeholders. During the drafting of the act, UNEP also helped to ensure Afghanistan fulfilled its legal obligations under various multilateral environmental agreements. The new act, which came into force in late December 2005, is a fundamental step forward for environmental governance, and provides the legal backbone for NEPA to develop effective policies and regulations in 2006. Two priority areas include environmental impact assessment and pollution control.

Moving away from Kabul into the provinces, UNEP and NEPA are seeking to reestablish community-based natural resources management structures and incentive programmes. In 2005, two pilot sites were identified near Herat where UNEP, in cooperation with UN-HABITAT, are supporting community-led reforestation efforts and restoration of local underground irrigation systems. UNEP is also contributing technical expertise to the Green Afghanistan Initiative, which aims to

coordinate activities, mobilize funds and provide technical expertise for UN, non-governmental and governmental projects aimed at 'Greening Afghanistan'.

At the regional level, UNEP broke new ground by hosting a technical meeting between the Islamic Republics of Iran and Afghanistan on the shared Sistan Basin wetlands. The meeting helped to initiate a constructive dialogue on restoration and sustainable development strategies for the Sistan region between senior technical representatives. The two delegations committed to establish national advisory committees as well as to develop a joint Global Environment Facility (GEF) project for the restoration of the Sistan wetlands.

All of the above activities have included extensive technical and professional training to 25 national staff as well as the provision of equipment, including computers, internet connections and office furniture. In 2005, technical in-country training focused on environmental impact assessment, pollution control, multilateral environmental agreements and environmental law. Additionally, 10 staff were sent to the Asian Institute of Technology in Bangkok for training in environmental management, geographic information systems, library management and report writing.

SUPPORT FOR AFRICA

The challenges facing Afghanistan are not unique to that country. A number of countries in Africa with severe conflict-related environmental challenges have requested UNEP's help. UNEP opened its field office to provide post-conflict environmental assistance to Liberia in April. Liberia is the first African country to receive post-conflict environmental assistance from the organization and UNEP has become the focal point for environmental issues within the UN Country Team and Common Country Assessment process.

The 14 years of conflict in Liberia displaced approximately 500,000 Liberians, either as Internally Displaced Persons or as refugees. UNEP is working to mitigate the current environmental impacts of displacement and also to provide environmental assistance for contingency planning undertaken by the UN Country Team to deal with possible future events. In the course of the year UNEP worked with UN agencies, the Government

of Liberia and national and international NGOs to raise the profile of the environmental considerations of displacement in Liberia. This culminated in a two-week training workshop for 20 Liberians specialists to identify and address key environmental issues relating to the siting and management of camps. In light of Liberia's history of timber-funded conflict, UNEP is also providing technical assistance to the Liberia Forest Initiative, a body conducting forest sector reforms, to ensure the transparent management of forest resources.

In Sudan, the signing of a comprehensive new peace agreement on 9 January 2005 has brought renewed hope for political stability and development after a period of protracted armed conflict. Key issues to be addressed as Sudan moves towards reconstruction include food security and livelihoods, support of internally displaced persons and returnees, the rule of law and governance, education, mine clearance and infrastructure repair. UNEP has already successfully integrated \$18.8 million for environmental capacity building in the Joint Needs Assessment. The prominence of the environment on the development agenda reflects the importance of natural resources in Sudan.

Following the Joint Needs Assessment, UNEP began a post-conflict assessment of the environment in Sudan in November 2005. A fact finding mission was conducted in July, followed by a technical mission in September and October to hold discussions with key UN agencies and government stakeholders. UNEP has completed an environmental sector plan for Sudan and is providing technical environmental support to other UN agencies as needed. UNEP is currently working to establish field offices in both Khartoum in North Sudan and Juba in South Sudan. A full post-conflict environmental assessment is being planned for early 2006.

In October UNEP responded to a request from the UN country team in Sierra Leone to provide assistance to the government's plans on creating a new National Commission on Environment and Forestry. UNEP is also participating in a Joint Needs Assessment for Somalia, led by the World Bank. Somalia is one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world and as such presents unique challenges in terms of natural resource management. Due to the protracted civil war, up-to-date environmental data is

scarce. UNEP is the lead agency responsible for identifying key environmental issues in Somalia. In addition, UNEP is providing support to other agencies and is helping to identify cross-cutting environmental issues relevant to other sectors.

A NEW FUTURE FOR IRAQ

UNEP has been working to support the rehabilitation of Iraq's environment and environmental management infrastructure since 2003. UNEP is part of the UN Country Team for Iraq. It screens all programmes and projects for environmental impacts, and assists with mainstreaming environmental issues in the Iraq Trust Fund cluster system. During 2005, UNEP's work emphasized strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of Environment through a series of ministerial consultations and training of Iraq's government officials. A variety of targeted workshops were organized on environmental topics such as MEAs, emergency response during oil spills, environmental site assessment, environmental law, biodiversity and natural resources management, remote sensing and environmental impact assessment.

UNEP has also helped the Ministry of Environment to identify training and other human resources needs. Progress has been made, in cooperation with the World Health Organisation (WHO), towards the establishment of an Environmental Information Centre within the Ministry of Environment to provide a central depository for baseline data. In October 2005, UNEP trained four staff from the Ministry of Environment in library and information management at UNEP's headquarters in Nairobi.

Among the most high-profile environmental issues related to Iraq is the fate of the Iraqi Marshlands, the most extensive wetland system in the Middle East. By 2002 they were almost completely destroyed as an ecosystem as a consequence of massive drainage works and upstream damming in the 1980s and 1990s. Hundreds of thousands of Marsh Arabs were displaced, threatening a centuries-old culture. The impact on biodiversity was also catastrophic, with the possible extinction of a number of species. Since 2004, UNEP's Support for Environmental Management of the Iraqi Marshlands project has worked to help restore and manage the Marshlands environment, and to provide clean water and sanitation systems

in an environmentally sustainable manner. This project is administered through the UNDG Iraq Trust Fund, with funding from the Government of Japan. In 2005, the project launched pilot projects in six communities, bringing immediate relief to 15,000 inhabitants by improving their basic living conditions. In addition, it has improved the capacity and knowledge of approximately 190 Iraqi decision-makers, technical experts, and community leaders in various elements of Marshland management. The project has also supported community-level initiatives, and trained community representatives on how to identify needs and put together proposals that reflect local priorities.

UNEP has also been improving dialogue and access to information and management tools, above all through the Marshland Information Network, which provides an Internet-based forum for data and information sharing. UNEP has also introduced the Iraq Marshlands Observation System for systematic monitoring of the re-flooding of the Marshlands. Such data analysis efforts have revealed that the total extension of wetland vegetation and surface area has reached approximately 50 per cent of the pre-drainage marshland extent.

Iraq also has an estimated several thousand contaminated sites from a combination of general industrial activity, military activity and post-conflict damage and looting. During 2005, UNEP conducted a site assessment of five priority contaminated sites with the Iraqi Ministry of Environment. The assessment was managed remotely by UNEP's project office in Amman due to security constraints, with the on-the-ground work done by teams of Iraqi experts from the Ministry of Environment. The Assessment of Environmental Hot Spots in Iraq report, released in November 2005, identified the cyanide-contaminated Al Qadissiya site south of Baghdad, which is openly accessible to the public, as needing immediate risk reduction measures. In response to the report, a clean-up project at this hotspot site was formulated and funded by the Iraq Trust Fund as a 'quick impact project'. UNEP started the clean-up of the site in late 2005.

To address the large number of remaining contaminated sites, UNEP provided technical training to 300 Iraqi experts to support the development of an Iraqi-managed contaminated

site assessment and remediation programme. In addition, 16 experts from the Iraq Ministry of Environment's Radiation Prevention Centre were trained in depleted uranium field measurement techniques, reconnaissance, sampling and site clean-up measures during two workshops organised in association with the International Atomic Energy Agency and WHO.

OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

In 2005, UNEP conducted a series of capacity building workshops on waste management and environmental impact assessment for Palestinian experts from the Environmental Quality Authority. UNEP also acted as the lead agency for the environment in the UN Common Country Assessment process for the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The major event in the region in 2005, however, was the disengagement by Israel from Gaza. It was agreed that UNEP would carry out an environmental assessment in Gaza following the disengagement.

The objective of the assessment was to identify areas of environmental interest and concern and use the results for interim corrective measures, if required, and long term resource planning. UNEP sent a team of eight UNEP staff members, plus external environmental experts experienced in asbestos, contaminated land, hazardous waste, marine and coastal environment, and water resources, to Gaza between 9 and 18 December 2005. The field work covered all 21 disengaged settlements and the Erez industrial site. Samples were taken and shipped to an independent laboratory in Europe. UNEP's partners were the Palestinian Environmental Quality Authority (EQA) and the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) on the Palestinian side, and the Ministry of Environment on the Israeli side. Given that UNDP will be in charge of the work related to sorting, recycling and removal of rubble originating from demolished buildings, UNEP is also providing environmental expertise to UNDP on matters related to the disengaged areas in Gaza. The assessment report will be published during the spring of 2006.

Palestinian civil servants and UNEP experts taking samples in Gaza in December 2005. UNEP was invited to carry out an environmental assessment following Israel's withdrawal from Gaza. The field work covered all 21 disengaged settlements. ©UNEP

