



World Environment Day

5 June 2011



5 JUNE

Forests: Nature at Your Service



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL'S MESSAGE ON WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

Nearly 20 years after the 1992 Earth Summit, the world is once again on the road to Rio – the site of the June 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development. Much has changed in the past two decades, geopolitically and environmentally. Hundreds of millions of people in Asia, Latin America – and, increasingly, in Africa – have risen from poverty. Yet, evidence is also accumulating of profound and potentially irreversible changes in the ability of the planet to sustain our progress.

Rapid economic growth has come with costs that traditionally rarely feature in national accounting. These range from atmospheric and water pollution to degraded fisheries and forests, all of which impact prosperity and human well-being. The theme of World Environment Day this year, "Forests: Nature at Your Service", emphasizes the multi-trillion dollar value of these and other ecosystems to society – especially the poor.

Despite growing global awareness of the dangers of environmental decline – including climate change, biodiversity loss and desertification – progress since the Earth Summit has been too slow. We will not build a just and equitable world unless we give equal weight to all three pillars of sustainable development – social, economic and environmental. To sustainably reduce poverty, guarantee food and nutrition security and provide decent employment for growing populations, we must make the most intelligent use of our natural capital.

India, the global host of World Environment Day in 2011, is among a growing number of countries working to address the pressures of ecological change. It is also helping to pioneer a better assessment of the economic value of nature-based services, with the assistance of the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Bank. India's Rural Employment Act and the country's encouragement of renewable energy are significant examples of how to scale up green growth and accelerate the transition to a green economy.

No single day can transform development onto a sustainable path. But on the road to Rio +20, this year's World Environment Day can send a message that those with influence in government and the private sector can – and must – take the necessary steps that will fulfill the promise of the Earth Summit. The global public is watching, and expects nothing less.



MESSAGE OF THE UN UNDER-SECRETARY GENERAL AND UNEP EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ACHIM STEINER - JUNE 5TH 2011

This year marks a first for the long standing relationship between India and the United Nations. For the first time ever India will host World Environment Day (WED). With a population of 1.2 billion people, a rapidly growing economy and a diverse cultural past, present and future there is enormous potential for India to catalyze and to champion sustainable development nationally and internationally.

This year's WED theme is 'Forests: Nature at Your Service'. It speaks to the intrinsic connection between livelihoods and human well being and the health of forests and forest ecosystems.

India has shown leadership by for example by instituting a tree-planting system to combat land-degradation and desertification, including windbreaks and shelterbelts to protect agricultural land.

India has successfully introduced projects that track the health of the nation's plants, animals, water and other natural resources including the Sunderbans - the largest deltaic mangrove forest in the world, and home to one of India's most iconic wildlife species: the tiger.

Meanwhile the country is increasingly at the forefront of some of the 'green shoots' of a Green Economy that are emerging across the globe.

From its manufacturing of solar and wind turbines to its Rural Employment Guarantee Act which underwrites paid work for millions of households via investments in areas ranging from water conservation to sustainable land management, foundations are being laid in India towards a fundamental and far reaching new development path..

UNEP's recent report—A Transition to a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication underlines that such a transition not only possible but relevant to developing nations as it is to developed ones.

WED 2011 comes in advance of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development 2012 or Rio+20. Its twin themes are the Green Economy within the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication and an institutional framework for sustainable development.

Rio+20 comes against a backdrop of rapidly diminishing natural resources and accelerating environmental change - from the loss of coral reefs and forests to the rising scarcity of productive land; from the urgent need to feed and fuel economies and the likely impacts of unchecked climate change.

India is among a range of nations spotlighting different choices that represent an opportunity to fulfil the promise of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit in order to deliver development that meets the needs of seven billion people, rising to nine billion by 2050.

One that delivers growth, greater equity and employment opportunities: one that keeps humanity's footprint within planetary boundaries in order to ensure that Nature can remain at our service for current and future generations.