Summit must be red ribbon day for the environment

*By **Klaus Toepfer**, Executive Director of UNEP.*

The 2005 World Summit aims to deliver a new and strengthened United Nations in areas ranging from security to human rights.

It will also take stock of progress towards the 2015 Millennium Development Goals. These include eradicating poverty, supplying safe and sufficient supplies of drinking water, empowering women, and reversing the spread of infectious disease.

Many important advances are being made in these fields, but it is also clear that these internationally agreed targets are unlikely to be met without a new sense of urgency and greater imagination as to the solutions.

Over recent months the environment has emerged as a crucial pillar, if not a cornerstone, upon which the goals may well stand or fall.

"A more secure world: Our shared responsibility", the report of the Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, reads: "Environmental degradation has enhanced the destructive potential of natural disasters and in some cases hastened their occurrence. More than two billion people were affected in the last decade."

One of the interim reports of the UN Millennium Project, requested by the Secretary-General to inform the September review, states: "A considerable body of scientific data points to environmental degradation – the erosion of genetic diversity, the loss of species, the degradation of ecosystems, and the decline of ecosystem services – as a direct cause of many of the most pressing issues we face today including poverty, declining human health, hunger, undrinkable water, emerging diseases, rural-urban migration and civil strife."

So the environment is not a luxury, not a Gucci accessory bag or a fancy silk tie affordable only when all other issues have been resolved.

It is the oxygen breathing life into all the goals. It is the red ribbon running around our common aspirations for a healthier, more stable and just world.

It is also critical to the economies of countries and regions, a fact that governments have yet to fully take on board but which they ignore at their economic peril.

When New York city council was faced with supplying safer drinking water for its nine million customers, it also faced an up to $6 billion water filtration bill.

Instead of paying for machinery, the city plumped for better management of river banks, forests, agriculture and other ecosystems to reduce pollution into the Catskill-Delaware river system.

By working with nature, the city spent only $1bn to provide safe drinking water to New York and thus saved between $3bn and $5bn.

The recently published Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and its spin off reports also highlight similar hard economic arguments.

The work of 1,300 scientists and experts from 95 countries, it has begun to put numbers on the value on individual ecosystems and the services they provide.

It says that an intact wetland in Canada is worth $6,000 a hectare compared with $2,000 a hectare for one cleared for intensive agriculture.

Intact tropical mangroves, coastal ecosystems that are nurseries for fish, natural pollution filters and coastal defences, are worth around $1,000 a hectare. Cleared for shrimp farms, the value falls to around $200 a hectare.

The assessment also puts a value on peat bogs and marshlands. It estimates that the Muthurajawela Marsh, a coastal bog covering more than 3,000 hectare in Sri Lanka, is worth an estimated $5m a year as a result of services such as local flood control.

Losses as a result of damage by alien invasive species in the Cape Floral region of South Africa is calculated at around $2,000 a hectare.

The annual recreational value of coral reefs in the six Marine Management Areas of the Hawaiian islands ranges from $300,000 to tens of millions of dollars a year.

Studies from Algeria, Italy, Portugal, Syria and Tunisia also point to the value of intact forests.

They estimate that the value of the timber and fuel-wood from a forest is worth less than a third when compared with the value of services ranging from watershed protection and recreation to the absorption of pollutants such as greenhouse gases.

The burning of 10m hectares of Indonesia's forests in the late 1990s cost an estimated $9bn due to factors including increased health care and tourism losses.

There are also new findings on the link between the spread of disease and environmental destruction. The provision of treated bed nets, the better availability of low cost anti-malarial drugs and the development of vaccines are crucial but so are healthy ecosystems.

Studies in the Amazon by researchers at Johns Hopkins University in the United States have concluded that for every 1% increase in deforestation, there is an eight per cent increase in the number of malaria-carrying mosquitoes (see also map on page 12).

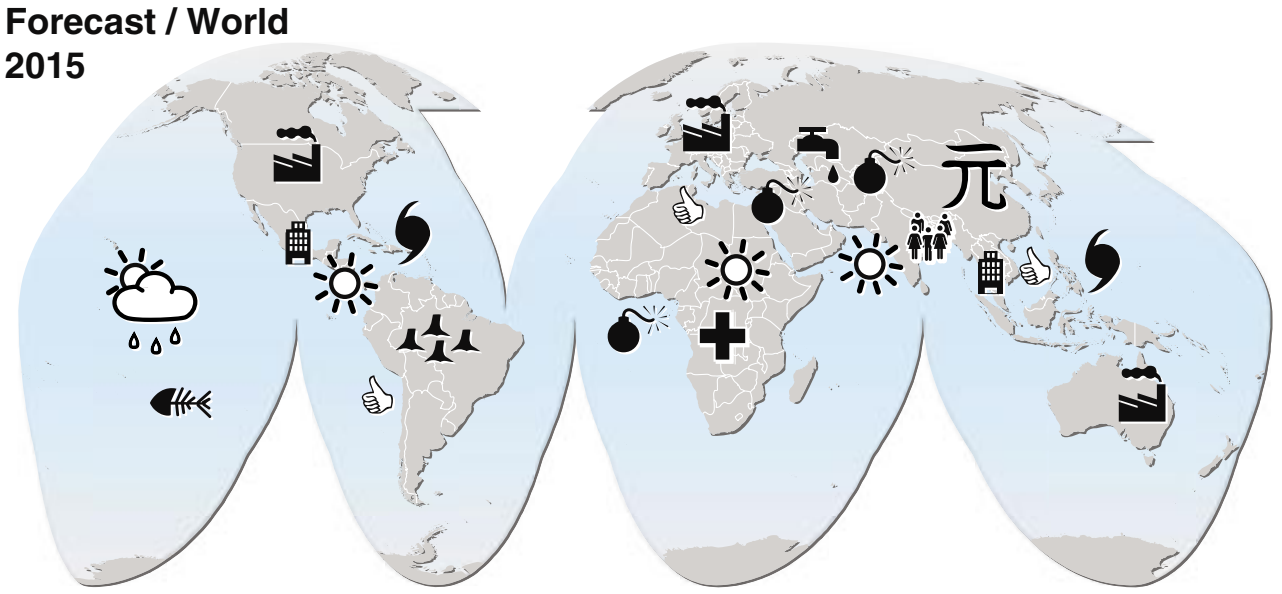
This has implications for human health but also to economic development. It is calculated that Africa's gross national product (GNP) in 2000 could have been 25% or $100bn higher if malaria had been eradicated 35 years ago.

So we sincerely hope that when Heads of State meet in New York that they put "natural or nature's capital" right up there with human and financial capital.

And that they also recognise that significant, targeted investments in the environment including the restoration and rehabilitation of damaged and degraded wetlands, forests, mangroves, coral and the like provides a high rate of return and will go a long way towards meeting the eight goals.

Anything less will undermine our attempts to defeat poverty and deliver sustainable development and will shortchange current and future generations.

Forecast / World 2015



Water governance disputes

Urban problems

Good progress on the MDGs

Overfished seas

Economic progress

Hurricane warning!

HIV/AIDS

Industrial pollution

Conflicts and tension

Loss of biodiversity

Overpopulation

Rising temperatures

The overall outlook for the upcoming period is overall fairly gloomy, with occasional bright spots. It is still not too late, though, to do something about it.

The forecast for Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as North Africa and large parts of Asia is generally good. Current trends indicate that these regions are on track to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. However, these and other regions will feel the increasing effects of climate change, such as rising temperatures and increased occurrence of extreme events (like hurricanes).

Increased urban populations will lead to new problems, primarily in Southeast Asia and Latin America, while destruction of ecosystems happen everywhere, like the deforestation in the Amazon or overfishing of all seas.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, HIV continues to be a problem. Achieving the Millennium Development Goals will be further complicated by climate change and conflicts.

The potential for conflicts and tension will affect the conditions in Central Asia and Western Asia, particularly in the area of water resources.

The economy will continue to grow and become stronger. China and Southeast Asia will emerge as new major players in the international market.

The developed countries will continue to pollute and abuse the global environment, but trends indicate that measures are being taken to reduce pollution and help the rest of the world.

Population forecast 2015:

World	7.22 billion	+12%
India	1.26 billion	+14%
China	1.39 billion	+5.8%
Bolivia	10.9 million	+18%
Zambia	47.9 million	+1%
Australia	22 million	+10%

Life expectancy at birth 2015:

Laos	59 years	+8.3%
USA	78 years	+1.6%
Kyrgyzstan	71 years	+4.1%
Gabon	61 years	+7.6%
Peru	73 years	+3.9%
Mozambique	39 years	+3.1%

Data sources: United Nations Common Database, through http://globalis.gvu.unu.edu

Environment and human well-being

Our lives on this planet depend on nature's provision of stability and resources. Current rates of human-engendered environmental destruction threaten those resources and leave death and misery in their wake. But we can avoid this. To do so, we must act in concert and with a sense of urgency to make the structural and policy changes needed to maintain ecosystems and their services, control water and air pollution, and reverse the trends leading to global warming. This must be done if we are to achieve the level of environmental sustainability necessary to meet the UN Millennium Development Goals addressing poverty, illiteracy, hunger, discrimination against women, unsafe drinking water, and environmental degradation. Environmental sustainability is essential to achieving all other Millennium Development Goals. By environmental sustainability we mean meeting current human needs with-out undermining the capacity of the environment to provide for those needs over the long term. Achieving environmental sustainability requires carefully balancing human development activities while maintaining a stable environment that predictably and regularly provides resources such as freshwater, food, clean air, wood, fisheries, and productive soils and that protects people from floods, droughts, pest infestations, and disease. Therefore, environmental sustainability is necessarily a fundamental objective in the pursuit of the seven other Millennium Development Goals. As stated in the UN Millennium Declaration, we must "spare no effort to free all of humanity, and above all our children and grandchildren, from the threat of living on a planet irredeemably spoilt by human activities, and whose resources would no longer be sufficient for their needs."

Source: Millennium Project sub taskforce

Dear reader,
The Editorial Team

Thank you for picking up this edition of Environment & Poverty Times, an edition that more then anything focuses on the linkages between the MDGs and our common environment. So, whats the news, you might ask? So did we when we started the process of making this paper. We were well aware that the links between the environment and the MDGs had already received some attention. But it also seemed very clear to us that environmental issues are intrinsically linked to the achievement of any of the goals and that the separation of environment into one of eight goals is one of the weaknesses of the MDGs as a framework for poverty reduction and sustainable development. How can we fight poverty without considering the balance of our ecosystems? How can we talk about improving the health of children and mothers without talking about natural resources?

Regions of the world facing the most serious decline in the services provided by ecosystems are the same areas showing the slowest progress in achieving the MDGs. In sub-Saharan Africa, Central and South Asia and parts of Latin America, the burden of poverty, hunger and disease coincides with acute deterioration of natural services such as the provision of fresh water, the formation of soils to grow corps and the availiability of natural resources such as fish, fuel-wood and medicine derived from plants. We believe that certain things in life cannot be mentioned enough, and a paper shedding light on the linkages between our environment and the MDGs still stands out as highly relevant.

Even though the world has made significant progress in achieving many of the goals, progress has been far from uniform across the world-or across the Goals. There are huge disparities across and within countries. One can ask if the goals merely are targets set but never met? The environment might just be the pillar upon which all the goals and hence a more sustainable development may well fall or stand. And the environment is not a luxury only affordable when all other issues have been resolved. It is, as stated, the red ribbon running around our common aspirations for a healthier, more stable and just world. Essential for all and everything!

Good reading!

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