

People and Our Planet: The Road to Sustainable Development

Affordable energy and water services are a prerequisite for halving the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day by 2015, as called for in the MDGs. Yet these services elude the grasp of the impoverished. While 800 million people have plugged into power grids in developing countries over the last 20 years, two billion people still burn wood, dung and agricultural byproducts to heat their homes and cook their food. Shortages of water—about two billion people go without clean supplies and struggle with inadequate sanitation—have escalated dramatically.

Lack of energy services severs people from some of the benefits of the modern world. There is no refrigeration to preserve food, no hope of using technology for distance education. Lack of water and sanitation spawns death and otherwise preventable diseases, which burden health systems and curtail economic productivity.

The environment also feels the impact of skewed development patterns, which include the highly unequal consumption rates between North and South. Poor water management contributes to natural disasters and soil erosion, while inefficient energy systems spew air pollution, acidify soil and water, and emit greenhouse gases that have perilously thinned the ozone layer. Other worrisome trends include disruptive changes in climate, the destruction of aquatic ecosystems, and the rapid disappearance of species—a tearing of the rich diversity of life on earth.

UNDP Responds

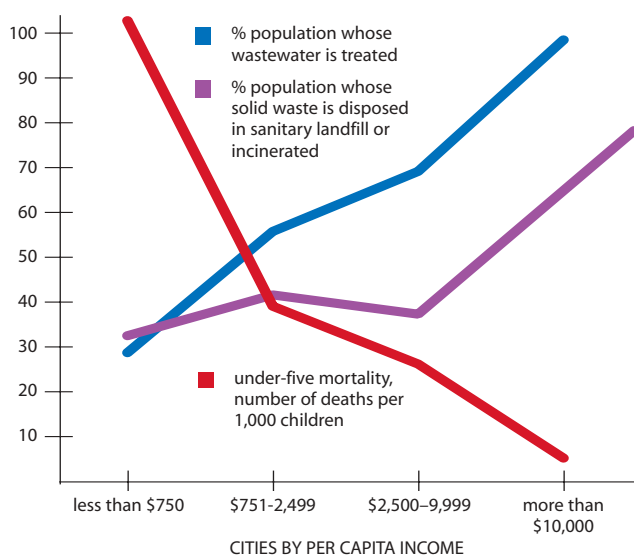
Reducing poverty and achieving sustainable development rest upon a careful balance of concerns: consumption and protection of resources in ways that sustain both people and the world they live in. With extensive experience in integrated development solutions, UNDP assists countries in striking this balance. We circulate best practices from our wide network, provide innovative policy advice, and rally partners to find methods and financing for bringing sustainable livelihoods to poor communities.

Progress toward sustainable development comes through improved access to energy services for the poor, equitable management of water and land, sustainable use of biodiversity and measures to address climate change—so these form the core of our work on energy and the environment. The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development reaffirmed these priorities. In the months leading up to it, UNDP made major contributions to global debates on water, energy, health, agriculture and biodiversity—priorities set by the Secretary-General that shaped the Summit's final agreement. Governments in turn called upon UNDP, through the Capacity 2015 programme, to strengthen local capacities for sustainable development, an important component in reaching the MDGs. Before the Summit, we also launched the Equator Initiative with seven other institutional partners. Through grants, a prestigious award and the exchange of practical experiences, the initiative will foster poverty reduction along the equatorial belt through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

Since modern energy services yield better livelihoods and spur more equitable economic growth, UNDP pays particular attention to ensuring this access. In 2002, with members of the donor community and private sector, we established the Global Village Energy Partnership to provide energy services in rural areas. We took on water issues in 90 countries, emphasizing that water crises can often be traced to bad governance. In Argentina, the Public-Private Partnerships for the Urban Environment project worked with community organizations, municipalities, the Water Regulatory Board and a private company to set up a new collaborative model for delivering water and sanitation to poor communities.

With the European Commission, we brought together practitioners, policymakers and researchers to identify concrete policy recommendations and practical measures for responding to the environmental concerns of developing countries. In Nairobi, our Drylands Development Centre helped 16 African and Arab states determine how to reduce vulnerability to climatic shocks and improve natural resources management.

WHEN SANITATION IMPROVES, CHILDREN LIVE LONGER

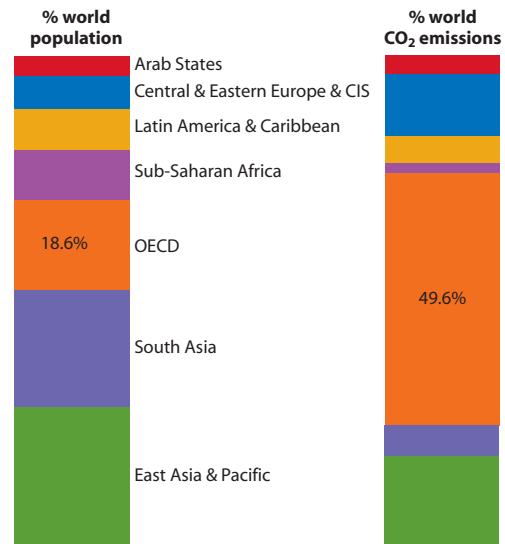


Source: World Development Report 2003, World Bank



UNDP and local governments in Macedonia solve two problems with one programme, cleaning cities and creating jobs. Here workers pull a rusty car from a river.

HIGH INCOME COUNTRIES PRODUCE MOST OF THE WORLD'S CO₂ EMISSIONS



Source: Human Development Report 2002

Nepal: Partnerships for Energy Usher in Prosperity

With 6,000 streams and rivers, Nepal has rich resources of water that could be harnessed for power. But a lack of funding and difficult mountainous terrain, along with periodic disruptions from a guerrilla movement, make this a distant dream in isolated villages. Over 90 percent of the people in rural areas still depend on wood or animal waste for energy.

So UNDP has brought together communities to develop local alternatives under the Rural Energy Development Programme, starting with the establishment of 93 water wheels across 15 districts. Built with funding from local people, the central government and UNDP, and managed by community organizations, the wheels now provide more than 11,000 households with electricity. UNDP has backed the project with training to help district committees implement rural energy policies and programmes.

For many villagers, electricity has meant that time once spent collecting fuel can now be used to expand their household income, whether through tending livestock or running small businesses. Padma Devi Khadka points out that a previously unimagined prosperity has come to her village of Duni, in far western Nepal. “The energy has changed our life,” she says.

Project partners agree on its success. Nepal has incorporated the approach in its tenth five-year plan, and in 2002 the programme expanded into 25 districts as a joint initiative between the central government, UNDP and the World Bank.

Macedonia: Jobs for a Green Environment

Fallout from conflict, through the crisis in neighbouring Kosovo and the ensuing influx of refugees, has worn down the economy and the environment in Macedonia. Unemployment has been high, random dumpsites have littered public lands, and rusting car parts have adorned the river banks. In the city of Tetovo, the population doubled almost overnight from the stream of refugees, which seriously strained water and sanitation services.

UNDP, working with local government authorities, devised a programme to help solve these problems. Clean and Green Macedonia recruited unemployed workers to clean up waste in municipalities that needed these services most. An added benefit: with over 100 cities soon participating and through a blitz of media coverage, citizens across the country learned about the advantages of caring for the environment. Based on this initial success, other donors stepped forward to expand the programme to include all Macedonian municipalities.

Today, Clean and Green has eased the economic strains on thousands of families. Local governments have also benefited, most recently through a grant programme for infrastructure improvements and youth employment that resulted from a UNDP partnership with USAID. And UNDP, through its global network, has successfully replicated the project in Albania.

“UNDP encouraged me to think far more about the cleaning of my municipality,” says Stefche Jakimovski, the mayor of the town of Karposh, “Now we have 40 people who are employed continuously, and regular truck service for hauling waste.”