

**Embargo until June 18<sup>th</sup> 2012 12:00 GMT, 08:00 BRT.**

## **Biodiversity leaders call for valuing nature's services to achieve sustainable development and poverty alleviation.**

**June 18, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil:**

Incorporating the value of nature into policy and development decisions to reduce poverty and enhance social equity is critical for the transition to a green economy, according to biodiversity and business leaders attending the International Society for Ecological Economics Bi-annual Conference's TEEB Day.

The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) is a global initiative focused on drawing attention to the economic benefits of biodiversity. It highlights the cost of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation and compiles expertise from ecology, economics and development to support the mainstreaming of biodiversity and ecosystem considerations into policy making.

"By continuing to ignore the wide range of services nature provides - from food and clean water to medicine and climate regulation - policymakers, business leaders and communities are threatening the very human welfare and livelihoods they hope to protect." said Pavan Sukhdev, Study Leader of TEEB. "For it is often the poor, particularly in developing countries, who depend upon these services the most." he added.

Biodiversity and business leaders from around the world, including Dr. Bráulio Ferreira de Souza Dias, CBD Executive Secretary, and Jochen Zeitz, CEO of Sport & Lifestyle division and CSO, PPR and Chairman of the Board, PUMA and TEEB Advisory Board member, were some of the keynote speakers at the ISEE's TEEB Day where the new TEEB summary report, highlighting the role of nature in the transition to a green economy, and the benefits that can be realized by all, was presented.

Timed to coincide with the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), the ISEE conference high level speakers focused on influencing decision-making amongst various stakeholders

and highlighting how valuing nature and its services is essential in enhancing sustainable development and reducing poverty.

A clear example of a TEEB project valuing nature and directly reducing rates of poverty can be found in India in a small community called Hiware Bazaar. In this small village in the eastern state of Maharashtra, the degradation of local ecosystems including water sources had resulted in the a decrease in land productivity, as well as rampant poverty and high unemployment as traditional farmers could no longer make a living off the land. The local government decided to regenerate degraded village forests, water catchments and to restore watershed ecosystems. As a result, many wells in the village began collecting enough water to increase irrigation. According to a survey, the number of families living below the poverty line fell from 168 to 53 in a span of three years after the project was initiated.

In the week before Heads of State gather at the Rio+20 conference, government and business leaders are meeting to discuss key issues related to the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development. Within the framework of this year's overarching conference theme "Green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication", the value of nature has been highlighted as a priority issue in a variety of programs and agendas.

The idea behind valuing nature is a critical part of any transition to a green economy, defined by UNEP as "One that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities". The concept is largely human-focused with the view that conserving nature in turn sustains its valuable services to societies, thereby enhancing opportunities to improve human welfare.

Today, however, recognizing the value of nature and the services it provides to human welfare is a practice largely nonexistent in policy- and decision-making systems around the world. Achim Steiner, UN Under-secretary General and UNEP executive director, said: "In a world fascinated by the ups and downs of GDP, valuing nature represents one of tipping the balance from damage and degradation towards rehabilitation, restoration and sustainable management of the world's nature based assets."

Mr Sukhdev, emphasized this point, adding Biodiversity is not just a luxury for the rich, it is a necessity for the poor."

The link between nature and poverty is undeniably strong yet virtually absent from current government decision-making.

The TEEB initiative seeks to rectify this by demonstrating nature's benefits to society with respect to human welfare, poverty alleviation and social equity, while reflecting those values within sustainable, just and equitable government policies, business decisions and consumer choices.

Above all, TEEB promotes valuing nature in a way that will give it a voice in economic and policy discussions. *Valuing nature*, which guides decision-making toward being more sustainable and socially inclusive, is distinctly different from *putting a price on nature*, which is geared toward creating markets and generating private profit. Whereas recognizing the value of nature and its services will lead to more sustainable, just and equitable policies, decisions and choices, the commodification of nature does not improve (and frequently worsens) conditions of poverty and social inequity.

After almost 10 years, local tribes in Papua New Guinea were awarded record compensation, in a landmark court case, for damage to their forests caused by illegal logging by a private company. Local communities depend on the forest numerous ecosystem services including for housing, food, medicines, fuels, weapons, tools, textiles, and cultural rituals. The amount of compensation was recommended by experts estimating the full cost of damage including all ecosystem services of the forest. "This result has worldwide implications" said Dr. Ian Curtis, a land and ecological economist who wrote the damage report. "Timber is only one of the 20 services provided by forest." In 2011, this groundbreaking judgment was the first to include ecosystem services in the compensation calculation. The National Court of PNG has awarded total claims over 1.5 times higher than the value of timber extracted or destroyed by the logging company.

Valuing nature clearly has development and social benefits and there is also a strong business case for incorporating the value of nature and biodiversity into corporate risk and benefit analyses.

As the keynote speaker at the Financial Times ArcelorMittal Boldness in Business Awards in 2011 Jochen Zeitz, Chairman of the-Board for PUMA and Chief Sustainability Officer of PPR said:

"Knowing what we know today, it doesn't take rocket science and boldness to recognize that a sustainable business from an economic,

social and environmental point of view is not only a responsibility and non negotiable but that it offers all of us an opportunity as well."

Mr Zeitz also said

"Analyzing a company's environmental impact through an Environmental Profit & Loss Account and understanding where environmental measures are necessary will not only help conserve the benefits of ecosystem services but also ensure the longevity of our businesses."

The new TEEB summary report highlighting the role of nature in the transition to a green economy, and the benefits that can be realized by all, is thus a timely contribution to the discussions underway for the Rio+20 Summit on 20-22 June and is available for comment on the TEEB website.

As TEEB Advisory Board member, Edward Barbier has noted,

"We use nature because it is valuable. We lose nature because it is free."

Ends

Further information about TEEB, the TEEB day and the TEEB Nature and Green economy report can be found in the attached press pack.

Contacts:

## **Interviews**

Interviews with all the TEEB speakers can be arranged by contacting Johannes Förster on +55 21 69439692 or by email on [johannes.foerster@ufz.de](mailto:johannes.foerster@ufz.de). Additional interviews with Pavan Sukdev can be arranged by contacting Sarah Wyatt on +55 21-9820 3803 or [sarah.a.wyatt@gmail.com](mailto:sarah.a.wyatt@gmail.com).

General inquiries and further information on any of the above case studies:

Anita Beck  
Head of Communications  
The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity  
United Nations Environment Programme  
11-13 chemin des Anémones  
CH-1219 Châtelaine  
Geneva, Switzerland.  
Tel: +41 22 917 8763  
[anita.beck@unep.org](mailto:anita.beck@unep.org)  
<http://www.teebweb.org>