

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

# TRADE AND ENVIRONMENT REVIEW

2009/2010

Promoting poles of clean growth  
to foster the transition to a more  
sustainable economy



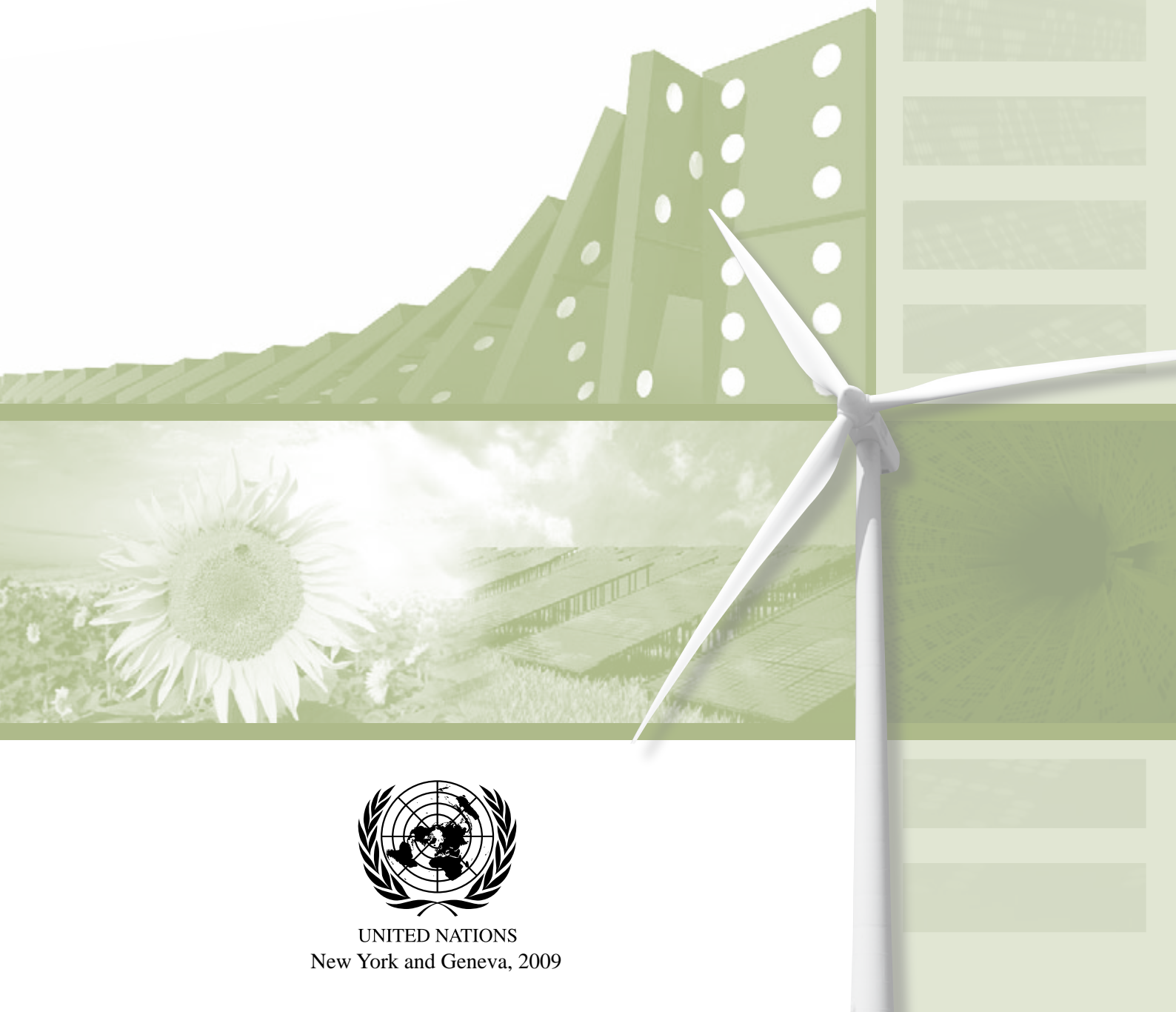
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## Preface

This Trade and Environment Review is about finding a policy response to one of the defining challenges of our times – climate change. Meeting that challenge – and reducing the greenhouse gas intensity of the global economy by any meaningful amount – will require landslide changes in the approach to economic development. It will mean a thorough rethinking of national, regional and international economic and trade policymaking. The enormity of these tasks, and the complexity of the decisions ahead, is further compounded by the current economic recession, the ongoing global food crisis and the poverty-reduction imperative, all of which are interrelated.

In the light of these challenges, analysis and capacity-building activities at the interface of climate change, trade and development have assumed higher priority in UNCTAD's work. In the first six months of 2009 alone, UNCTAD hosted one expert meeting on maritime transport and climate change and another on trade and investment opportunities and challenges under the Clean Development Mechanism. In addition, the Trade and Development Report 2009 includes a chapter on the development challenges and opportunities of climate-change mitigation. In February 2010, UNCTAD will be holding an expert meeting on green and renewable energy technologies as solutions for rural development.

As UNCTAD has repeatedly argued, major crises such as the world is now experiencing can offer opportunities for rapid breakthroughs in new technologies, production and consumption patterns, and management practices. Such crises can also make it easier to effect the paradigm shifts and broader economic structural change required for humanity to master the challenges presented by climate change. According to the Review, the macroeconomic cost is not the greatest barrier to lowering the GHG intensity of growth. Rather, what is missing are the policy, regulatory, and institutional structures to support the shift towards sustainable growth poles that combine low-carbon growth in developing countries with job and income-generation opportunities leading to self-sustained and more equitable pro-poor development.

Promoting growth in relevant sectors – including energy efficiency, sustainable agriculture and renewable energies for rural electrification – will not automatically solve the current poverty and climate imperatives. It will, however, provide multiple social, economic and environmental dividends and constitute much-needed first steps towards low-carbon social and economic development. The Trade and Environment Review 2009/2010 makes a further important contribution to efforts in this area.



Geneva, November 2009

Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi  
Secretary-General of UNCTAD



## Foreword

In light of the scientific evidence available, action to combat climate change is urgent, not only to protect the welfare of future generations but also to safeguard the security of our present generation. For developing countries where social and economic progress is fragile, climate change adaptation and mitigation are as much a necessity as a daunting challenge.

The longer governments delay taking action, the greater the mitigation and adaptation costs will be. These costs are measured not only as a percentage of GDP or a loss of habitat or species, but, most importantly, in terms of the millions of human lives that are at risk. Indeed, the rise of temperatures, changes in rainfall patterns and the more frequent occurrences of extreme weather conditions carry enormous threats for the security and livelihoods of the millions of struggling poor in developing countries.

South Africa finds itself in the continent most vulnerable to climate change – a continent facing major challenges to development and poverty eradication, in addition to multiple stresses and low adaptive capacity. Agricultural production in many African countries and regions, including access to food, is projected to be severely compromised by climate variability and change. The area of arable land suitable for agriculture, the length of growing seasons and the yield potential, particularly along the margins of semi-arid and arid areas, are expected to decline. This would further adversely affect food security and exacerbate malnutrition on the continent. In some countries, yields from rainfed agriculture could be reduced by up to 50 per cent by 2020. Food security might further deteriorate as a result of declining fish resources, in both the sea and large freshwater lakes, as a result of rising water temperatures and possibly exacerbated by continued overfishing.

Moreover, isolated and uncoordinated national action against climate change may further adversely affect developing countries, particularly if discriminatory trade policy measures are put in place. Agricultural exports from developing countries could face new and additional restrictions in developed countries

if the latter implement measures such as border tax adjustments, food miles, carbon standards and labelling. Such an outcome would add to the climate burden shouldered by the most vulnerable countries.

I cannot overemphasize the importance of implementing urgent and immediate adaptation actions to reduce vulnerability and build resilience of developing countries to impacts that are already occurring. Priority sectors include water, agriculture, food security, health, biodiversity, disaster management and coastal management. In the agricultural sector, key challenges include developing more drought- and flood-resistant crops and considering crop switching strategies. It is also critically important to find ways of communicating information about climate scenarios and adaptation options to subsistence farmers and rural communities.

The IPCC's overall message to policymakers is one of urgency, leadership and ambition. We need to act quickly, we need to make decisive policy shifts, and we need to be ambitious in embracing a basket of technological options both for adaptation and mitigation. Together, we must recognize that solving the climate problem and making the transition to a low-carbon economy will only be possible if it is undertaken with development priorities in mind. Collaboration should be real and based on a global and fair framework which facilitates dialogue, exchange of best practices, technology transfer and international solidarity.

Fortunately, the fight against climate change can bring several benefits for human and economic development. On the one hand, inaction on climate change will undermine sustainable development and our best efforts to achieve poverty reduction and economic growth. On the other hand, taking action on reducing greenhouse gas emissions will bring sustainable development co-benefits, such as reduced air pollution, savings in energy bills and increased employment.



If properly anticipated, the response to climate change also offers tremendous opportunities for change towards more sustainable and more resilient economic growth, especially if that response is based on international solidarity. Climate change policy will create new investment opportunities, highlight the employment potential of new dynamic economic sectors and offer new trading opportunities. The challenge is to minimize risks and seize new opportunities.

The good news is that it is technologically and financially possible to steer economies in that direction. Indeed, many of the attitudinal and production shifts required are in countries' best interests, because they can save costs and yield stronger economies. For instance, energy conservation and efficiency measures can help save costs for companies, governments and energy utilities, improve the overall competitiveness of developing economies, and enhance the energy security of the poorer countries. Governments can utilize climate policy as a tool to rethink their countries' economic and production systems, and make new and strategic investments that will gear their economies towards cleaner growth. If developing countries manage to rapidly initiate the shift towards more sustainable production, they can position themselves very competitively in the global economy: seizing opportunities now can benefit from a first-mover advantage.

The Climate Summit in Copenhagen in December 2009 must reach an agreement that mobilizes political will based on a shared vision for an inclusive, fair and effective climate regime. Our deal must give content to the sustainable development approach to climate change. If we are to reach a common understanding of a shared vision, a sense of solidarity in addressing the development challenges of the future will be required. A climate deal will depend on a development deal, and at the core of a development deal will be the technology-finance-capacity package.

As we prepare for Copenhagen, we must ask ourselves how we can simultaneously avoid the risks and seize the opportunities of the global transition to a low-carbon economy. In South Africa, our economic modelling has shown that taking early action is affordable, and that in the long term green growth is the best option for sustainable job creation and poverty eradication. We have found that, given our domestic circumstances, economic growth and welfare imperatives are fully compatible with the imperative to stabilize the climate.

We cannot allow ourselves to dither at the point when action and implementation are most critical. The decisions we have to take are tough, but I have never been more convinced that they are right, necessary, and possible.



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