



Labour and the Environment: A Natural Synergy



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On the occasion of the Trade Union Assembly on Labour and the Environment / WILL 2006 in January 2006, UNEP compiled a dossier of photographs from its own collection of images. These photographs were presented in an exhibition called “Labour and the Environment”, which ran concurrently with the meeting. They illustrated the close linkages between the world of work and the environment. They also showed how employees at the lowest end of the wage scale do the dirtiest jobs, have the least job security and are too often the most vulnerable to environmental risks.

The photographs in this publication come from that exhibition.

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Foreword

Labour and the Environment: A Natural Synergy was born out of the Trade Union Assembly on Labour and the Environment, which was also called WILL 2006, held at UNEP's headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya, on 15-17 January 2006.

The Assembly, organized in cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), was part of UNEP's continuing efforts to enhance participation by major groups in international environmental processes.

The Assembly was not the first occasion on which UNEP had collaborated with ILO, or with workers and trade unions. Almost ten years earlier, UNEP entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with ILO to work in four main areas of mutual interest: the working environment; human settlements; environment and development; and education and training. Moreover, during the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in 2002, a conference on "Fashioning a New Deal" was jointly organized by UNEP, ILO, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). "Fashioning a New Deal" was a global call to place humans at the centre of development, and to include a social justice dimension in sustainable development policies.

The Assembly solidified and advanced these core values. All partners were able to renew their commitments and to agree on a common agenda for future action. Indeed, the meeting's Final Resolution constitutes a commitment – by all partners – to promote more integrated approaches to the design and implementation of sustainable development policies, incorporating labour, public health and environmental issues.

The resounding conclusion of the Assembly was that we have decisively moved into a new era – and that the perception or myth that environment is somehow at odds with jobs and economic development is outdated.

Workers and their trade unions can make a significant and positive difference to the sustainable management of the environment and ecosystems. Workers are social agents directly associated with the production chain. Meanwhile, workers are all too often among the first victims of environmental damage.

This publication, entitled *Labour and the Environment: A Natural Synergy*, presents examples of the application of technical expertise, of workplace participation, and of tools that promote workers' health and safety to problems that extend beyond the workplace into areas such as environmental protection, public health and the accountability of employers.

It focuses on crucial issues ranging from climate change and energy, chemicals management, and corporate social responsibility and accountability to future involvement of workers and trade unions with the environment and with efforts to move towards sustainability.

In addition, examples are cited of the incorporation of environmental matters in collective bargaining and in agreements at the workplace, nationally and internationally.

UNEP, ILO and WHO are committed to maintaining and improving their cooperation, so as to further integrate their approaches to labour, environment and public health.

UNEP has recently begun a project to support concrete initiatives aimed at environmental protection and increased trade union capacity for participation in environmental policy-making at the international level.

Labour and the Environment: A Natural Synergy is the result of cooperation between UNEP, ILO and WHO, as well as workers and trade unions – the latter represented by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the International Labour Foundation for Sustainable Development (Sustainlabour). I hope this publication will contribute to a better understanding of the links between labour and the environment, and to shaping social and environmental policies for sustainable development.



Achim Steiner

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Introduction

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Labour and the Environment has long been perceived as an issue vested with highly conflicting interests. Most of the world population relies on natural resources and the environment for wages, if not simply for survival. Many workers share the fear that strengthened environmental policies will lead to job losses. However, perceptions of conflicting interests have evolved over the years. A number of studies, as well as practical experience, have made it clear that changing production and consumption patterns and adopting new techniques and methods – which are among the alternative ways out of the current environmental crisis – will foster job creation. Protecting our natural resource base and the environment will actually contribute to protecting employment and fighting poverty.

As an example, in 2004 there were more than 4.5 million “green power” consumers in Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia and Japan. These consumers purchased power voluntarily at the retail level or used “renewable energy certificates”.¹ Direct jobs worldwide from renewable energy manufacturing, operations and maintenance exceeded 1.7 million in the same year, including some 0.9 million jobs related to biofuels production (REN21 2005). Between 2004 and 2005, investment in the renewable energy sector worldwide grew from US\$30 billion to US\$38 billion; biomass power production grew by 50-100 per cent in several countries; biodiesel production grew by 85 per cent (with nine EU countries becoming producers for the first time); grid-tied solar power grew by 55 per cent (led by Germany, which now has more than 200 000 solar rooftops); and solar hot water capacity grew by 23 per cent in China as well as reaching record levels in Europe (REN21 2006).²

These figures demonstrate that moving towards sustainability and creating more jobs are compatible goals. In this context, it is crucial that linkages between Labour and the Environment are adequately addressed in order to build a new economic model – based on global participation, social equity and equality – which will also be environmentally sound and sustainable. Only then will we be able to meet the challenges underlined by the Millennium Development Goals adopted in 2000,³ reach the targets agreed at the

¹ Energy certificates: Tradable renewable energy certificates represent “the certified generation of one unit of renewable energy (typically one MWh). These certificates allow trading or renewable energy obligations among consumers and/or producers, and in some markets like the United States allow anyone to purchase separately the green power ‘attributes’ of renewable energy.” Utility green pricing occurs when “a utility offers its customers a choice of power

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