



Haiti – Dominican Republic

Environmental challenges in the border zone





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United Nations Environment Programme
P.O. Box 30552, Nairobi, KENYA
Tel: +254 (0)20 762 1234
Fax: +254 (0)20 762 3927
E-mail: unepub@unep.org
Web: <http://www.unep.org>

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HAITI – DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

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United Nations Environment Programme

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Foreword

The joint management of transboundary natural resources: a first step towards the resolution of binational environmental and social conflicts

The issues in the border zone of Haiti and the Dominican Republic are perceived in different ways by people living and working in the region. Some feel that despite the problems that may arise here, the area provides an opportunity for the people of our two countries to cooperate, share experiences and find joint solutions to shared problems. At the same time, others consider the border zone as a region where development opportunities are limited by poverty and isolation.

Notwithstanding these different perspectives, addressing the challenges in the border zone is important not only for the development of local communities, but also for the implementation of cooperation strategies and joint initiatives between the two countries. For this reason, the governments, development actors, and civil society in both countries have strengthened their efforts in the border zone and are building on successful initiatives that have already taken place.

Among these efforts, we would like to mention those initiatives adopted at both the community and government levels that seek to address the diverse challenges in the border zone, some of which have stemmed from the short-sighted exploitation of natural resources. At the same time, we welcome the efforts of the Joint Dominican-Haitian Bilateral Commission, a flagship initiative which will guide the implementation of joint interventions in the border zone. This initiative, which originates from the highest levels of both States, has catalyzed the development of an increasing number of binational programs.

In the environmental sector, momentum for joint programs has also grown. On 16 May 2011, the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources of the Dominican Republic, the Ministry of Environment of Haiti, and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, signed a Declaration of Intent, in Ouanaminthe, for the Triangular Cooperation between the three parties, to support the Frontera Verde Programme. The first step in this cooperation was to implement the first phase of the Transboundary Natural Resource Management and Restoration Project, focusing on the Massacre and Pedernales Watersheds. Technical support in the implementation of this work is being provided by UNEP and UNDP. This commitment further highlights the willingness of our two governments to jointly address the problems associated with natural resource management in the border zone.

We are aware that in order to effectively address the challenges faced in the border zone, a deep understanding and an accurate analysis of the driving forces that have contributed to the present situation is necessary. For this reason, we welcome this report and analysis on the state of transboundary natural resources and how they are linked with different aspects of life both within the border zone and within our respective countries. This report provides information on natural resources and their role in trade, agriculture, human mobility, energy, among others.

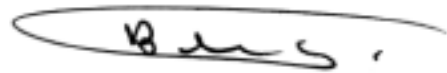
This document provides up-to-date information and confirms the close relationship that exists between the state of transboundary natural resources, poverty, and recurring social conflicts. In this respect, this report is an indispensable tool that will inform decision making in the coming years.

We congratulate all those who contributed to the preparation of this report, both from our Ministries, UNEP, and other institutions. We invite all actors that are providing assistance, or that are asked to intervene in the border zone, to consult this report and to take into consideration its recommendations when carrying out future action. We are firmly committed and dedicated to take the conclusions and recommendations of this report to the highest levels of our governments. It will inform the work of the Joint Dominican-Haitian Bilateral Commission as well as guide the political decisions and actions undertaken in the border zone.



DR. JEAN FRANCOIS THOMAS

Minister of Environment, Haiti



DR. BAUTISTA ROJAS GÓMEZ

Minister of Environment and Natural
Resources, Dominican Republic

Executive summary

This report presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations of an 18 month long assessment of the border between the two countries that share the Caribbean island of Hispaniola – Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and the Dominican Republic, a middle-income country. It is along this 380 km border that there is the most contact between the two populations, and the highest likelihood of tension and conflict between them. It is here too that there is the greatest opportunity to have a positive impact on the complex relationship between the two countries.

Paradoxically the challenges in the border zone are driven both by the interdependencies of the two countries and by the stark contrasts in the economic, social and environmental conditions. These differences manifest themselves in the chronic poverty and severe environmental degradation seen in many areas on the Haitian side of the border, as well as illegal transboundary exploitation of natural resources.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) accompanied the Governments of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, through their Ministries of Environment, in undertaking a detailed assessment of the border area. The assessment covered both countries, however, emphasis was put on the Haitian side where the information is scarce and the environmental problems are more pressing.

- Finally, it provides practical recommendations for the two governments and their international partners on how to mitigate the identified risks, capitalize on the opportunities, increase transboundary environmental cooperation, and build resilience to identified areas of vulnerability.

The assessment team found that the key issues of concern identified in the border zone can be connected to four interlinked driving forces:

- Haitian poverty, food insecurity and under-development affect virtually all parts of the border zone.
- Environmental degradation manifests itself mainly in soil erosion, deforestation, and a degraded marine environment.
- Weak governance, especially on the Haitian side of the border, affects all facets of the economy and society.
- Finally, the economic and resource inequalities between the two countries are the cause of many of the transboundary problems identified in the border zone.

Examples of some of the key issues in the border zone include the illegal extraction and trade of natural resources (mainly charcoal, but also firewood and marine resources), agriculture, and large numbers of people crossing illegally from rural areas in Haiti into the Dominican Republic in search of livelihoods due to the degradation of land and a surplus of labour on the Haitian side.

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