

# PEOPLE

**M**onique Barbut, the Director of UNEP's Division of Technology, Industry and Economics, was unanimously elected Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of the Global Environment Facility for a three-year term by its Council in June. Her appointment appeared to have boosted deliberations among governments on what in August became agreement on a record \$3.13 billion funding package.



Before joining UNEP in 2003, **Ms Barbut** had a distinguished career in France's economic development bank, la Caisse Centrale de Cooperation Economique, and at the Agence Française de Developpement (AFD), the country's principal executing agency for foreign aid, becoming its Executive Director for all Caribbean, Pacific and Indian Ocean activities. She was also a key player – as a member of the French delegation – in the financing negotiations at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and played an active role in the creation of the GEF.

UNEP's Deputy Executive Director, **Shafqat Kakakhel**, said she would be "greatly missed" and **Paul Wolfowitz**, President of the World Bank Group added: "Her appointment brings valuable skills and experience to GEF, which are vital for strengthening the Facility's effectiveness". Ms Barbut said: "In partnership with GEF member countries, I look forward to building on GEF's core strengths and increasing its impact with respect to the implementation of international environmental agreements.

**R**odrigo Hernan Vivas Rosas, from Colombia, has won one of the first redesigned UNEP Sasakawa Prizes, presented in New York on 30 October. The other was awarded to the **Tenadi Cooperative Group** of Mauritania.



After two decades of recognizing important environmental initiatives, the \$200,000 Prize has been shifted towards being an incentive for environmental ideas and initiatives that are innovative, replicable, and – most importantly – sustainable in the long term.

Each laureate's scope of activities is associated with a theme selected for the year. In 2006, the theme for which candidates were eligible was 'Deserts and Desertification'.

**Mr Vivas Rosas**, 36, has successfully established several environmental and community development initiatives that have won international acclaim and recognition.

He is the leader of CIPALSA, an alliance between 16 organizations and nearly 65,000 people, including government and non-governmental organizations, a foundation established by ex-guerrillas and an association of indigenous people. Its work includes the 500 Mil Cisternas (500,000 tanks) project – a water supply alternative in arid and semi-arid rural areas of Colombia, which uses easily and quickly constructed tanks to capture and store rainwater for use in family agriculture, homes, schools, and colleges.

Trained in law and sustainable development, he also leads the way for REDLAYC, a food security and sustainable development regional entity, and is regional counselor for ECOFONDO, a consortium of regional environmental organizations. His activities span the Andean region, and his achievements have dented the poverty that helps perpetuate local guerrilla activity, the production of illicit crops, and the flow of migrants to Colombian cities. His integrated models and approaches are seen as a kind of laboratory for developing tools and applications in hillside environments plagued with lack of resources and threatened by desertification.

**T**he **Tenadi Cooperative Group** was founded in May 1975 by more than 200 families living in the desert. Persistent drought in the Sahel – and Mauritania, in particular – since 1973 has killed 90 per cent of the livestock, annihilating the hopes of people who have followed a nomadic lifestyle there for centuries.



As a result, many nomads decided to come together and settle on their land. Confronting a hostile nature, the group have used innovative techniques to lay down a solid foundation not just for basic survival, but for sustainable development.

Their activities include sinking two boreholes with immersed pumps to provide water; getting agriculture up and running; introducing new crops and regenerating flora which were becoming extinct; and spreading techniques to prevent sand encroachment among other nomadic encampments that want to become settled.

To combat desertification, the cooperative has improved and reforested 80 hectares around the boreholes to stop movement of the dunes, backed by a nursery of Prosopis trees for planting windbreaks – and created a date palm oasis, where market gardening produce and other crops can be grown productively under the trees. Achim Steiner, UNEP's Executive Director, said: "This is an award for the literally hundreds of thousands of grassroots initiatives trying to conserve the health and fertility of the land in some of the harshest environments on the globe." ■