

silver lining

by Juan Somavia

The global picture for jobs is grim. Preliminary International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates for 2009 forecast tens of millions of new unemployed people and working poor due to the global financial crisis — with a particularly worrying rise in youth joblessness. The financial crisis has rapidly evolved into an economic crisis and now a jobs one.

Many elements of a global rescue package are being discussed, ranging from short-term bailouts to medium- and longer-term proposals for boosting public expenditure on programmes with strong employment content, increased lending to help to finance growth-supporting expenditures in developing countries, and greater training and promotion of new skills development. An increasing number of economic stimulus packages include the greening of economies and the creation of 'green jobs'.

UNEP's Executive Director, Achim Steiner, has called 'green jobs' the "silver lining of climate change." In the newly deteriorating economic climate, will they prove to be one of the most important elements of the responses to the economic crisis? There is reason to believe that they can and should be a vital and crucial element of any recovery plan.

Our recently published report, *Green Jobs: Towards Decent Work in a Sustainable, Low-Carbon World*, examined green jobs in a global context for the first time. Funded and commissioned by UNEP under a joint Green Jobs Initiative with ILO, the International Trade Union Confederation and the International Organization of Employers, it represents the best available knowledge and forward-looking thinking on how to bolster green job creation in the global economy.

Millions of green jobs already exist. Millions more are in the making. They contribute to preserving or restoring the quality of the environment; help cut consumption of energy, raw materials and water; de-carbonize the economy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions; minimize waste and water pollution; and protect and restore ecosystems and biodiversity.

Energy supply — in particular renewable energy — buildings and construction, transportation, agriculture and forestry will all be particularly important in terms of their environmental, economic and employment impact. Clean technologies are already attracting increasing amounts of venture capital: in some countries this has more than doubled in recent years.

Millions of new jobs have been created in the renewable energy sector worldwide, and the potential for growth is huge in alternative energies, wind, solar and biomass. Already, renewables generate more jobs than oil production and refining, and projected investment could create at least another 20 million more by 2030. And 12 million new agricultural jobs could be created in producing biomass for energy and related industries.

A worldwide transition to energy-efficient buildings would create millions more jobs still, and 'green' existing employment for further millions of workers in construction. Investing in improved energy efficiency in buildings could generate an additional 2 to 3.5 million green jobs in Europe and the United States alone, with the potential for much higher jobs growth in developing countries. Recycling and waste management employ millions worldwide and are expected to grow rapidly in countries facing escalating commodity prices.

Of course, many jobs that are green in principle may not be green in practice. Some because they may cause environmental damage by inappropriate practices, and some because they are inherently dangerous, dirty and difficult. Sectors of concern — especially, but not exclusively, in developing

countries — include agriculture and recycling where work involves low pay, insecure employment contracts and exposure to hazardous materials. These jobs would not constitute what the ILO calls "decent work". And though millions of green jobs already exist, too few are being created for the world's most vulnerable workers living on less than \$2 per day, and especially for the women and millions of unemployed youth who need them the most.

Moving towards a more sustainable development path will involve major changes in all countries' production and consumption patterns. It's a global challenge that will affect enterprises and work places all over the world. The transition has already started. Half of today's 2.3 million jobs in renewables are in the developing world. Moving towards a sustainable low carbon economy can work for the poorest of the poor. The solar panels being installed in rural villages are just one example of this, and there are many more.

But we need to make sure that green jobs are decent jobs, and acknowledge that good green jobs do not come naturally. Millions of workers throughout the world, for example, are involved in recycling discarded computers and mobile phones. Though their jobs may seem green, they are often bad quality ones where the first things to go in the recycle bin are health and safety rules.

New jobs will be created, others adapted, and some will fade out. Mitigating and adapting to climate change will entail a transition to new patterns of production, consumption and employment. Policies have to focus in the beginning on those at the receiving end of this transition so as to keep political will and public support. That means helping to diversify economies, assisting enterprises and workers to adapt, ensuring social protection is in place, and that there are training programmes to fill skills gaps. The best way to make a just transition is by ensuring that those who are most directly involved — employers and workers — have a say in it. We need effective social dialogue to help us grow into a greener economy.

So, are green jobs a viable hope for the world's environmental and economic future in times of sharply lower growth and recession? The answer is decidedly: Yes. Huge opportunities exist to create them through energy and industrialization policies that reduce environmental footprints. They can provide decent work and incomes that will contribute to sustainable economic growth and help lift people out of poverty. They are central to the positive link that needs to be established between climate change and development. Indeed, the major investments to adapt to climate change could provide many new and better jobs for the most vulnerable people.

Green jobs not only have long-term potential for sustainable economic growth, but can help jump-start stalled economies and put people back to work quickly in both developing and developed countries. This is particularly true in retrofitting buildings to make them more energy efficient, in accelerating the extension of public transport, in constructing the infrastructure needed to adapt vulnerable countries to climate change, in shifting to renewable energy and in works undertaken to rehabilitate ecosystems and reforestation.

Some nations have already adopted economic packages that promote green job growth as a short-term way of rebuilding, rewiring and renewing existing infrastructure and facilities to make them more energy-efficient, and as a long-term solution to unemployment and environmental issues. If invested wisely, the resources to overcome the economic crisis could leave a legacy of energy-efficient infrastructure, rehabilitated ecosystems, renewable energy sources, and countries more resilient to climate change. And they could lay the foundation for a greener economic future which is environmentally sound, economically productive and socially sustainable. If ever there was a time for the Green Jobs Initiative to take hold, this is it. 