

Restoring the Health and Wealth of Africa's Degraded Lands Key Focus of New International Initiative

Global Environment Facility-Backed Project Set to Get Green Light in Burkina Faso

Ouagadougou/Nairobi, 24 April 2007- An international initiative to counter land degradation in sub-Saharan Africa is scheduled to be born in the Burkina Faso capital this week.

The new project, which has been two years in the planning, could eventually raise around \$1 billion to restore and rehabilitate damaged and degraded lands.

Up to as third of the Continent is deemed threatened by land degradation as a result of escalating soil erosion, declining fertility, salinisation, soil compaction, pollution by agrochemicals and desertification.



Land degradation is not only an economic and human tragedy but, if unchecked, will undermine attempts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

The Strategic Investment Program for Sustainable Land Management in Sub-Saharan Africa (SIP) will bring fresh approaches and a wealth of experience to overcome the problem. It will reflect the fact that one of the best ways to defeat land degradation is to get funding, expertise and know-how directly to the grassroots including farmers and local communities.

The initiative, which has been two years in consultation, is being coordinated under the auspices of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment and the Global Environment Facility (GEF)—the multibillion dollar fund established to assist developing countries meet environment and development goals.

Monique Barbut, the GEF's Chief Executive Officer, said today at the opening of the two day conference: "The Ouagadougou Conference is a major event that will introduce the new GEF approach in addressing one of the most pressing environmental problems in Africa. The new program emphasizes country partnerships that will channel resources to the ground level where they can make a far reaching impact on the lives and the livelihoods of millions of people on the Continent".

"There have been many success stories in the battle against land degradation what is needed now is a strategic approach that unifies and unites all efforts, leverages the necessary funding and builds upon the knowledge that has been gathered over several years. In doing so we can multiply the

success stories and deliver a comprehensive victory against one of the great environmental, social and economic scourges of the 21st century,” she added.

The focus of the two day conference is to conclude the consultations and secure support and endorsements of the SIP at the highest political level in Africa as well as from donors both bilateral and multilateral.

It is anticipated that, subject to GEF Council approval, the implementation phase of the new program will commence in June this year. The GEF is expected to invest about USD 130-150 million and hopes to leverage a further USD 500-750 million in co-funding.

Notes to Editors and Background Information

In the Action Plan for the Environment Initiative of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), experts say an estimated 500 million hectares of land have been affected by soil degradation since about 1950, including as much as 65 per cent of agricultural land.

With two-thirds of arable land expected to be lost in Africa by 2025, land degradation currently leads to the loss of an average of more than 3 percent annually of agriculture GDP in the Sub-Saharan Africa region.

If the degradation of cultivated lands were to continue at the present rate, it is predicated that crop yields could be cut by half within 40 years thus having serious negative impact on the food security of the continent and aggravating the poverty and the number of malnourished persons. Projections indicate that the region will be able to feed only 40% of its population by 2025. Yet, the agricultural potential of the continent remains untapped.

This economically and environmentally crippling issue affects in particular the poorest, most vulnerable communities in Sub-Saharan Africa who lack the resources and knowledge to invest in land improvements.

Sustainable land management it is no longer just an environmental issue, but also an agricultural, social, economic, and livelihood one. Although a net food exporter before 1960, Africa has become more dependent on food imports and food aid over the past three decades.

And yet, a common set of key barriers, faced by nearly all sub-Saharan countries prevents the scale up of sustainable land management. These include difficult socio-economic conditions, insufficient institutional and legal frameworks, incomplete infrastructure, and weak scientific, technical, and educational capacities.

The Strategic Investment Program for Sustainable Land Management in Sub-Saharan Africa is the response from the GEF to support sub-Saharan countries in pursuing the multi-sector, long-term programmatic approaches needed to upscale sustainable land management.

The SIP is a GEF program and a joint priority under the TerrAfrica partnership.

The 2 days extraordinary conference is being held at the Ouaga 2000 International Conference Center, in the Burkina Capital City and will consist of presentations on the critical nature of the

problem of land degradation to the future development of Africa, the main features of the SIP, and new approaches and proposed solutions to be initiated through the GEF SIP Programme.

The conference will conclude with a statement of support and commitment from African governments and partners and a declaration by the AMCEN ministers. A joint statement of political commitment of African governments will be signed and a declaration of collaboration in implementation of SIP by all partners will also be adopted.

The Strategic Investment Program (SIP) is a Global Environment Facility (GEF) Program to address problems and issues related to sustainable land management in an integrated and comprehensive manner through appropriate partnerships of all stakeholders.

The SIP for Africa has been prepared with the support of all GEF Implementing and Executing Agencies and those agencies involved in sustainable land management in Africa under the convening leadership of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and in close consultation with the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the Regional Economic Communities.

TerrAfrica has actively supported SIP preparation and will ramp up support during implementation of the SIP portfolio. TerrAfrica was launched by NEPAD simultaneously at the UNCCD COP7 and at the Partnership Forum of the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Program to provide an operational framework for partners to upscale SLM.

TerrAfrica provides a platform for partners to support African leadership and better target and align policy, institutional and investment dialogue at multiple levels, while the SIP efficiently mobilizes GEF financing to address global dimensions. See www.terrafrica.org

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