

Foreword

by

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The global economic crisis has left many countries struggling with slow growth, stretched public finances and high levels of unemployment. In this economic context, it is not easy to keep environmental protection and the conservation of natural resources at the top of government policy priorities. Yet, we know that we simply cannot afford to relegate these challenges to a level of secondary importance. The planet's ability to support sustainable lives for a fast-growing population is decreasing, while our demands on the planet are increasing at a rapid pace. We are on a collision course with nature!

There has been significant development progress over the past 20 years. While the world's population has increased by a third, world GDP has tripled, helping millions of people to work their way out of poverty. On the environmental side, efforts in reducing air pollution, improving water quality, and strengthening international management of chemicals and the marine environment have also led to improvements in many local and regional environmental sectors. In many respects, however, we have failed to deliver on the targets we set in Rio 20 years ago. Severe climate change and natural resource deterioration are causing tremendous losses of economic assets and livelihoods. Widening social inequality thwarts the benefits of economic growth and limits opportunities for many social groups, in particular the most vulnerable. While relative decoupling of greenhouse gas emissions from economic growth were realised in OECD countries, on a global scale, emissions are continuing to grow at rates never seen before. Rapid economic growth has come at a price to the natural environment and livelihoods of many of the poorest in the world.

It is time for a radical change. If we fail to transform our policies and behaviour now, the picture is more than grim. Today, 1 billion people still live on less than two dollars a day; they are mostly all malnourished; 1.3 billion lack access to electricity; and almost 1 billion have no clean drinking water. Our current demographic and economic trends, if left unchecked, will have alarming effects in four key areas of global concern – namely climate change, biodiversity, water and health. The costs and consequences of inaction would be absolutely colossal, both in economic and human terms. As our OECD Environmental Outlook to 2050 shows, by 2050, without immediate action, we will see:

- a 50% increase in greenhouse gas emissions, with a disastrous impact on the quality of life of people worldwide;
- a doubling of premature deaths from exposure to particulate air pollution;
- a further 10% decline in global terrestrial biodiversity.

These huge environmental challenges will not be overcome in isolation. They must be managed in the context of other global challenges, such as food and energy security, poverty reduction and

greater equality. Well-designed policies to tackle one environmental problem could also help alleviate others and contribute to growth and development. Finding solutions to these interrelated economic and environmental challenges to long-term and sustainable growth requires a deep shift towards greener and more innovative sources of growth, and towards more sustainable consumption and production patterns. Moreover, because of rapid globalisation, we cannot afford to look only at our own national realities. It makes no sense to ignore the needs of other nations, other countries' citizens and focus solely on our own economic and social realities, no matter how urgent these may be. In our interconnected world this formula no longer works – if it ever did.

The potential economic and social impacts of environmental degradation are particularly important in developing countries. People there are the most vulnerable to climate change and extreme weather risks. They face serious threats from pollution, poor water quality and diseases associated with a changing climate and from energy, food and water insecurity. At the same time, they are more dependent than people in advanced economies on natural resources for their livelihoods. Continuous dependency on fossil fuel energy sources for economic growth, for example, will create a long-term lock-in to carbon intensive infrastructure which is expensive, inefficient and removes potential business opportunities from developing countries. All of this combines with severe economic and social challenges to seriously undermine development.

Advancing green growth is the only way forward for OECD and developing countries alike to achieve sustainable development. We must make progress in promoting green growth, and we must make green growth deliver. Our Environmental Outlook to 2050 reinforces the case for green growth policies across government, introducing bold policy options to help governments make pollution less costly, remove environmentally harmful subsidies, value and price natural systems and ecosystem services, and encourage green innovation.

We realise that individual developing countries will need to pursue green growth in different ways depending on national needs and circumstances and on their particular opportunities and comparative advantages. Carbon taxes, payment for ecosystem services schemes, renewable energy policies, sustainable mineral resource management, and green innovation and technology initiatives are just some of the options available to them.

This Development Co-operation Report 2012 offers many examples of the paths developing countries and their development co-operation partners are finding to green their growth while promoting development that is sustainable and inclusive. It offers valuable lessons and perspectives on what works, what does not and why. It examines the very positive role that OECD countries, multilateral organisations, civil society and the private sector can play in promoting development by and for developing countries. We hope that these lessons will be considered carefully and that the principles that underwrite these examples will be applied with enthusiasm, equity and an informed interest in the future we want – now. The OECD stands ready to put our new strategy for development at the service of the most vulnerable in the world, and to design, promote and implement better development policies for better lives!

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