Manuel's grandfather harvested rubber trees in the 1940s and 1950s until the latex exudation industry collapsed. Like his father and grandfather before him, 19-year-old Manuel earns his living from the forest. But how he does it vividly illustrates how times have changed. Whereas his forefathers exploited the forest, Manuel's livelihood depends on protecting its resources.

UNDP has launched a programme in the 1990s and 1980s to prevent deforestation and to substitute unwise forest exploitation. Today, by contrast, the emphasis is on ecosystem conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

Manuel has found a way to earn a living from the forest, without destroying it. By combining his knowledge of the forest with entrepreneurial skills, he has launched a business that is preserving the natural environment. This is the essence of ecotourism, which is now growing in popularity around the world.

Manuel's enterprise is based on a natural resource that is available wherever forests exist: wildlife. Sustainable tourism will only flourish if the natural environment is protected, because the long-term survival of wildlife depends on the maintenance of intact ecosystems. Manuel's enterprise is the perfect example of the kind of relationship that ecotourism aims to achieve.

Manuel is one of many entrepreneurs who are drawing on the rich natural resources of their communities to develop viable businesses. The Global Environmental Facility, part of UNDP's Drylands Development Centre in Nairobi, is launching a capacity development initiative that will help local governments develop ecotourism enterprises in some of the poorest areas of the world.