

Water in the Green Economy in Practice: Towards Rio+20

Information brief

WHAT is a “green economy”?

- According to UNEP, a green economy is an economy that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities.
- It provides a response to the multiple crises that the world has been facing in recent years – the climate, food and economic crises – with an alternative paradigm that stimulates growth while protecting the earth’s ecosystems and contributing to poverty alleviation.
- It is compatible and consistent with the older concept of sustainable development, but it focuses primarily on the intersection between environment and economy.

WHY is it important NOW?

- The recent global financial crisis represents an opportunity to promote green economy initiatives as part of the stimulus packages being put in place to support the recovery. The transition to a green economy will entail moving away from the system that allowed, and at times generated, these crises towards a system that proactively addresses and prevents them.
- Therefore, the UN General Assembly decided to chose “a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication” as one of the major themes for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) in June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro.

WHY is WATER important in the green economy?

- Water contributes to the green economy. Water and sanitation interact with poverty, food security, health and many other sustainable development issues. Experts widely agree that investing in water services pays off, but the international community still lacks a sense of urgency.

WHAT CHANGE is required?

“Do more with less” through:

- **Technological innovation** to shift the technological frontier.
- **Adoption and diffusion** of technology to close the gap between least and most efficient users.
- **Reallocation** of water to those uses with greatest local social benefits.
- **Behavioral change.**

This requires:

- **Incentives** (e.g. prices and subsidies).
- **Regulations.**
- **Social norms.**



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WHICH TOOLS can we use to do this?

- **Economic incentives** in water management.
- **Governance and policy reforms** to create green jobs.
- Cost recovery and alternatives for **sustainable financing** of water services to leap forward and provide services to the poor, promote growth and reduce environmental impacts.
- **Investments and fiscal measures** for the protection and improvement of biodiversity to promote green growth.
- **Water technology** to contribute to job creation and the development of enterprises.
- **Water planning** to support the transition towards green growth.

WHERE can we make the change? What are the ISSUES?

- **AGRICULTURE** can play an essential role in achieving a green economy since it accounts for **70%** of global water withdrawals and provides employment for **40%** of the global population. Food security for an expanding population should be achieved, but by using less natural resources.
- **INDUSTRY** is critical for poverty alleviation, the delivery goods and services, job creation and improving standards of living. As the prime manufacturer of the goods and services that societies consume, industry has a critical role to play in creating more sustainable production and consumption patterns. It can promote the green economy by decoupling the consumption of materials and energy from production, so doing 'more with less'.
- **CITIES** have a central role to play in the green economy, since the majority of the world's economic activity and now over **50%** of its population is concentrated in urban areas. Developments in cities have far-reaching effects upon the world's economies, energy use and climate change. As centers of social interaction and economic activity, cities are the critical spatial platform for the formulation and implementation of policies across sectors.
- **WATERSHEDS.** Freshwater ecosystems provide services that are crucial for human survival. As well as providing clean water for household use, agriculture and industry, they support fisheries, recycle nutrients, remove waste, replenish groundwater, help prevent soil erosion, and protect against floods. This is particularly the case for the world's poor, as they often depend directly on water and other ecosystem services provided by rivers, lakes and wetlands for their livelihoods.

HOW can we make the green economy INCLUSIVE?

In the transition towards the green economy, developed and developing countries have common but differentiated responsibilities.

- **Developed countries** have to take the lead in changing their production and consumption patterns and commit to support the developing countries' sustainable development through finance, technology transfer and appropriate reforms to the global economic and financial structures.
- **Developing countries** must continue to raise living standards and maintain their development goals but do so while adopting sustainable practices. Poverty eradication remains a priority.

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This conference...

- Provides an opportunity to **showcase how water is a key factor in the green economy** as shown in specific practices in the different regions of the world. It focuses on actions and reflects on lessons learnt from practical implementation experiences.
- Aims to **support the process of moving towards action in preparation for Rio+20**.

WHAT will be the outcomes of the conference?

- Contribute to the preparation of a toolkit or best practice guide of actions on 'water in the green economy'.
- Compendium of between 60 and 70 best practices in the use of tools to promote water and the green economy.
- On-line database of best practices.
- UN-Water publication on about 14 success stories of tools to promote water and the green economy.
- Conference report highlighting lessons learnt.

Participants in the conference

More than 60 national and international representatives will be present, including:

- Representatives of UN-Water members and UN-Water chair;
- Key representatives of UNDESA and UNEP;
- Representatives of successful initiatives in water and green economy;
- Stakeholders;
- Journalists.

The conference will also be **broadcast live** over the Internet at www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/green_economy_2011

WHERE to look for further INFORMATION?

For further information, please consult:

- Website of the conference 'Water in the Green Economy in Practice: Towards Rio+20'.
www.un.org/spanish/waterforlifedecade/green_economy_2011
- Website of the United Nations Environment Programme 'Green Economy' section
www.unep.org/greeneconomy
- Website of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development 2012 (Rio+20)
www.uncsd2012.org/rio20

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