

UCSD News Bulletin July 2010

Monthly News Bulletin from the Secretariat of Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development (UCSD)

Rio and beyond.....

East African Governments ‘snub’ UN General Assembly to recognise access to water and sanitation as a human right

“....At current rates, **some parts of Africa are at least a century away from providing safe water and sanitation to all.** A “**water apartheid**” has descended across the world — dividing rich from poor, included from excluded. Efforts to redress this disparity are failing. **Dedicating \$15 billion a year to the water and sanitation millennium goals could bring \$38 billion a year in global economic benefits.** That's a pretty good rate of return in today's financial climate. It is within our grasp for the first time.”

- **Mikhail Gorbachev (Founding member of Green Cross International), July 16, 2010**

The United Nations General Assembly has declared for the first time that access to clean water and sanitation is a fundamental human right. [In a historic vote Wednesday July 28, 2010, 122 countries supported the resolution](#), and **over forty countries abstained / were absent from voting including Uganda Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda**, the United States, Canada, **Sweden** and several European /industrialized countries. **There were no votes against the resolution.**

This historic resolution for the consideration of the plenary of the General Assembly was on behalf of the co-sponsoring countries of: Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Benin, The Plurinational State of Bolivia, Burundi, Central African Republic, Congo, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Eritrea, Fiji, Georgia, Guinea, Haiti, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Paraguay, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Seychelles, The Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Tuvalu, Uruguay, Vanuatu, The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and Yemen.

Ambassador Pablo Solón of the Plurinational State of Bolivia (one of the key supporters of this resolution) before the General Assembly of the United Nations on 28 July, 2010 gave a thrilling intervention speech on “The Human Right to Water and Sanitation”. He reminded the Assembly that 75% of our brain is made up of water, and water is the principal vehicle for the electrochemical transmissions of our body, and that the loss of 20% of body water can cause death. He pointed out that it is possible to survive for various weeks without food, but it is not possible to survive more than a few days without water. Hence *Water is life*.

The human right to water has continued to fail and be fully recognized, despite clear references in various international legal instruments, such as: the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Noting that the lack of drinking water and sanitation causes more deaths than does war, Ambassador Pablo further underscored that the co-sponsors presented this resolution in order that the UN recognizes the human right to water and sanitation.

Despite the visible ‘water apartheid’, **Kenya and Tanzania abstained**, while **Uganda and Rwanda were absent from this historic vote**. This raises eyebrows **and among others, the following questions:**

- **Why did the East African Governments abstain / missed to leave only Burundi as a co-sponsor** from this region which has **24 million people living in slums where access to clean water, safe water and sanitation as well as other essential services is at best patchy, at worst non-existent** (Society for International Development, 2007)?
- **What message are we reading from our Governments to fundamentally eradicate poverty and deprivation** (considering the emerging discourse that having healthy human beings and living conditions is key to economic growth)?
- **If our Governments are not indecisive on this key driver of poverty and inequality** that is responsible for **one child death every 3.5 seconds, shouldn't the Kenyan and Tanzanian Governments be held to account for the ‘abstaining decision’ on one side; while Uganda and Rwandan ones clear the air for the absenteeism?**

Read the General Assembly Resolution GA/10967 recognising access to clean water, sanitation as a human right and the result of the voting: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2010/ga10967.doc.htm>

Biodiversity Conference in Nagoya: Three issues for Africa

The United Nations General Assembly declared that 2010 be the 'International Year for Biodiversity' (IYB). As a part of this year, countless initiatives are being organized throughout world. Their aim is to raise awareness of the importance of biodiversity, to highlight that it continues to shrink, to celebrate novel solutions being carried out for its conservation and sustainable use, and to encourage organisations, institutions, companies and individuals to take direct action to reduce the constant loss of biological diversity worldwide.

In the first six months, hundreds of IYB events have been organised around the world, from Shanghai to Nairobi, from Cartagena to New York, with the 65th United Nations General Assembly being held in September. The IYB will culminate with the 10th Conference of the Parties to Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP10), in Nagoya, Japan, from 18 to 29 October, 2010 (ICSTD, 2010). The CBD is an International environmental convention for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. It is an international legally binding treaty that was first opened for signature at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and entered into force in 1993.

The year 2010 will be a historic one for the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) as well. **It is the year that Parties to the CBD report on the (failed) target they agreed to in 2002: to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level. But what are the issues at stake for Africa in Nagoya COP10 in October 2010?**

At the backdrop of this Conference is the [Global Biodiversity Outlook \(GBO-3\) Report](#) of May 2010, which states that ecosystems may soon reach 'tipping points' where they rapidly become less useful to humanity. Such 'tipping points' could include rapid failure of the remaining wetlands to act as natural 'sieves' for dirty waters released from the fast growing towns and cities, [blue-algal take over of water courses like Lake Victoria](#) which is increasing the cost of water treatment in order to serve an escalating urban population, and the loss of catchment forests resulting in land degradation (especially fragile ecosystems), silting of streams and rivers which affect water quality and fishing.

The GBO-3 Report also concluded that in addition to the general 2010 biodiversity target, none of the 21 specific subsidiary targets - such as curbing the rate of habitat loss and degradation, protecting at least 10 percent of the Earth's ecological regions, controlling the spread of invasive species, and making sure that international trade does not take any species towards extinction - are being met either, at least not on a global basis.

According to ICTSD (2010), **biodiversity loss has not been conveyed as a critical issue to the public at large hence the current failure to persuade decision makers of its importance.** This explains the current status of the 2010 target. For example, according to the Africa Environment Outlook 2, mainstreaming environment into Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSPs) still faces challenges. One of them is that environmental priorities differ across countries with some countries devoting relatively more attention to issues like water supply, sanitation, vulnerability to natural hazards, land tenure and institutional capacity. **They devote relatively less attention to biodiversity, gender and environmental relationships, urban environment and the impacts of micro-economic policies on the environment.** Hence, there is a need to make the public, politicians and decision makers understand the rationale for biodiversity conservation and more so link it to economic growth.

Relatedly, there is a **difficulty of quantifying biodiversity.** According to ICTSD (2010), unlike climate change, where analysts measure carbon and carbon equivalents, there is **not yet a measureable unit of account for biodiversity.** Conservationists have long tried to address how to quantify biodiversity, but given that it can be seen as encompassing the entire and irreducible complexity of life, this is no easy task. Finding a solution to it, though, could help clarify the relationship between nature loss and economic harm, and transform biodiversity loss from the figurative into something tangible for policy makers, business leaders, and consumers alike.

There also a **biodiversity funding gap.** Although threats facing biodiversity are clearly escalating, the available budget specifically allocated biodiversity conservation is limited and not nearly sufficient to halt the loss of biodiversity (ICTSD, 2010). Given the current economic climate and national belt-tightening (aftermath of the financial meltdown, food and fuel crises), resource allocation for biodiversity conservation has suffered and hence Nagoya COP10 is expected to devise ways to engage and generate new and additional funding to deter the reported drivers affecting biodiversity in East Africa

and other countries: habitat loss and degradation, climate change, excessive nutrient load and other forms of pollution, over-exploitation and unsustainable use and invasive alien species (GBO-3, 2010).

Read more about the **10th Conference of the Parties to Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP10), to be held in Nagoya, Japan, from 18 to 29 October, 2010** from the link: <http://www.cbd.int/cop10/>

Resources

UNFCCC

The thirteenth session of the Ad-hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action (AWG-KP) and the eleventh session of the Ad-hoc Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex 1 Parties under the Kyoto Protocol (AWG-LCA) will take place from Monday, 2 August to Friday, 6 August 2010 at the Hotel Maritim in Bonn.

A new text to “facilitate negotiations among Parties” has been issued by the Chair of the UNFCCC's working group following up on the Bali Action Plan. The text dated 9 July 2010 will be discussed at the 11th session in Bonn on 2-6 August of the AWG-LCA. At the same time, the AWG-KP will also be meeting.

Follow the August 2 – 6, 2010 Climate Change Talks in Bonn by reading Third World Network's *TWN Bonn News Updates* from the link: <http://www.twinside.org.sg/climate.htm>

The Millennium Development Goals report

The world is still on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target of cutting the rate of extreme poverty in half by 2015 says a new report by the United Nations a few months before a major General Assembly meeting is to review progress so far.

Many countries are moving forward, but unmet commitments, inadequate resources, lack of focus and accountability, and insufficient dedication to sustainable development have created shortfalls in many areas.

Some of these shortfalls were aggravated by the global food and economic and financial crises. Read more: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/MDG%20Report%202010%20En%20r15%20-low%20res%2020100615%20-.pdf>

Join the 10/10/10 Global Work Party!

350.org is an international campaign that works with people around the world to help solve the climate crisis. It is named after a scientific target: 350 parts per million (ppm) CO₂. Scientists say that we must reduce the amount of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere from its current level of 390 ppm to no more than 350 ppm in order to avoid catastrophic climate change.

On October 24, 2009, 350.org organized an International Day of Climate Action with over 5,200 events in 180 countries to promote the 350 ppm goal. There were events all around the world and hundreds of them across East Asia, from Hokkaido, Japan to Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

On October 10, 2010, 350.org is organizing the **10/10/10 Global Work Party**, when thousands of communities across the globe will get to work on local climate solutions and celebrate a clean energy future. It's easy to join the day and you can be sure that your action will make a big difference.

Possible events you could organize include: organizing an "energy efficiency fair" to promote technologies (like efficient light bulbs, promotion of fuel wood saving stoves and awareness raising on energy saving tips) that can save energy and money, installing a solar hot water heater or a small wind turbine in your community or at your school, planting a community garden / forest, organising Clean-Up exercises for homesteads, towns and schools and much, much, more ...

Once you have your idea, **please register your event** at the 350.org website. You can find **useful resources and more ideas there**, as well. Even if you don't know exactly what you want to do on 10/10, make sure to **visit the 350.org website to sign up to receive email updates.**