

Landmark new report says emerging green economy could create tens of millions of new “Green Jobs”

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A new, landmark study on the impact of an emerging global “green economy” on the world of work says efforts to tackle climate change could result in the creation of millions of new “green jobs” in the coming decades.

The new report 1/ entitled Green Jobs: Towards Decent work in a Sustainable, Low-Carbon World, says changing patterns of employment and investment resulting from efforts to reduce climate change and its effects are already generating new jobs in many sectors and economies, and could create millions more in both developed and developing countries.

However, the report also finds that the process of climate change, already underway, will continue to have negative effects on workers and their families, especially those whose livelihoods depend on agriculture and tourism. Action to tackle climate change as well as to cope with its effects is therefore urgent and should be designed to generate decent jobs.

Though the report is generally optimistic about the creation of new jobs to address climate change, it also warns that many of these new jobs can be “dirty, dangerous and difficult”. Sectors of concern, especially but not exclusively in developing economies, include agriculture and recycling where all too often low pay, insecure employment contracts and exposure to health hazardous materials needs to change fast.

What’s more, it says too few green jobs are being created for the most vulnerable: the 1.3 billion working poor (43 per cent of the global workforce) in the world with earnings too low to lift them and their dependants above the poverty threshold of US\$2 per person, per day, or for the estimated 500 million youth who will be seeking work over the next 10 years.

Green jobs reduce the environmental impact of enterprises and economic sectors, ultimately to levels that are sustainable. The report focuses on “green jobs” in agriculture, industry, services and administration that contribute to preserving or restoring the quality of the environment. It also calls for measures to ensure that they constitute “decent work” that helps reduce poverty while protecting the environment.

The report says that climate change itself, adaptation to it and efforts to arrest it by reducing emissions have far-reaching implications for economic and social development, for production and consumption patterns and thus for employment, incomes and poverty reduction. These implications harbour both

major risks and opportunities for working people in all countries, but particularly for the most vulnerable in the least developed countries and in small island States.

The report calls for “just transitions” for those affected by transformation to a green economy and for those who must also adapt to climate change with access to alternative economic and employment opportunities for enterprises and workers. According to the report, meaningful social dialogue between government, workers and employers will be essential not only to ease tensions and support better informed and more coherent environmental, economic and social policies, but for all social partners to be involved in the development of such policies.

Among other key findings in the report:

- The global market for environmental products and services is projected to double from US\$1,370 billion per year at present to US\$2,740 billion by 2020, according to a study cited in the report.
- Half of this market is in energy efficiency and the balance in sustainable transport, water supply, sanitation and waste management. In Germany for example, environmental technology is to grow fourfold to 16 per cent of industrial output by 2030, with employment in this sector surpassing that in the country’s big machine tool and automotive industries.
- Sectors that will be particularly important in terms of their environmental, economic and employment impact are energy supply, in particular renewable energy, buildings and construction, transportation, basic industries, agriculture and forestry.
- Clean technologies are already the third largest sector for venture capital after information and biotechnology in the United States, while green venture capital in China more than doubled to 19 per cent of total investment in recent years.
- 2.3 million people have in recent years found new jobs in the renewable energy sector alone, and the potential for job growth in the sector is huge. Employment in alternative energies may rise to 2.1 million in wind and 6.3 million in solar power by 2030.
- Renewable energy generates more jobs than employment in fossil fuels. Projected investments of US\$630 billion by 2030 would translate into at least 20 million additional jobs in the renewable energy sector.
- In agriculture, 12 million could be employed in biomass for energy and related industries. In a country like Venezuela, an ethanol blend of 10 per cent in fuels might provide one million jobs in the sugar cane sector by 2012.
- A worldwide transition to energy-efficient buildings would create millions of jobs, as well as “greening” existing employment for many of the estimated 111 million people already working in the construction sector.
- Investments in improved energy efficiency in buildings could generate an additional 2-3.5 million green jobs in Europe and the United States alone, with the potential much higher in developing countries.

- Recycling and waste management employs an estimated 10 million in China and 500,000 in Brazil today. This sector is expected to grow rapidly in many countries in the face of escalating commodity prices.

The report provides examples of massive green jobs creation, throughout the world, such as: 600,000 people in China who are already employed in solar thermal making and installing products such as solar water heaters; in Nigeria, a bio fuels industry based on cassava and sugar cane crops might sustain an industry employing 200,000 people; India could generate 900,000 jobs by 2025 in biomass gasification of which 300,000 would be in the manufacturing of stoves and 600,000 in areas such as processing into briquettes and pellets and the fuel supply chain; and in South Africa, 25,000 previously unemployed people are now employed in conservation as part of the 'Working for Water' initiative.

Pathways to green jobs and decent work

"A sustainable economy can no longer externalize environmental and social costs. The price society pays for the consequences of pollution or ill health for example, must be reflected in the prices paid in the marketplace. Green jobs therefore need to be decent work", the report says.

The report recommends a number of pathways to a more sustainable future directing investment to low-cost measures that should be taken immediately including: assessing the potential for green jobs and monitoring progress to provide a framework for policy and investment; addressing the current skills bottleneck by meeting skill requirements because available technology and resources for investments can only be deployed effectively with qualified entrepreneurs and skilled workers; and ensuring individual enterprises' and economic sectors' contribution to reducing emissions of greenhouse gases with labour-management initiatives to green workplaces.

The report finds that green markets have thrived and transformation has advanced most where there has been strong and consistent political support at the highest level, including targets, penalties and incentives such as feed-in laws and efficiency standards for buildings and appliances as well as proactive research and development.

The report says that delivery of a deep and decisive new climate agreement when countries meet for the crucial UN climate convention meeting in Copenhagen in late 2009 will be vital for accelerating green job growth.

The report was funded and commissioned by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) under a joint Green Jobs Initiative with the International Labour Office (ILO), and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the International Organization of Employers (IOE), which together represent millions of workers and employers worldwide 2/. It was produced by the Worldwatch Institute, with technical assistance from the Cornell University Global Labour Institute.

1/ Green Jobs: Towards Decent Work in a Sustainable, Low-Carbon World,

ILO, Policy Coherence Group, United Nations Environment Programme

2/ The Green Jobs Initiative is a partnership established in 2007 between UNEP, the ILO and the ITUC, joined by the IOE in 2008. The Initiative was launched in order to promote opportunity, equity and just transitions, to mobilize governments, employers and workers to engage in dialogue on coherent policies and effective programs leading to a green economy with green jobs and decent work for all. The ILO is a tripartite UN agency that brings together governments, employers and workers of its member states in common action to promote decent work throughout the world. IOE is recognized as the only organization at the international level that represents the interests of business in the labor and social policy fields. Today, it consists of 146 national employer organizations from 138 countries from all over the world. ITUC is the International Trade Union Confederation. Its primary mission is the promotion and defense of workers' rights and interests, through international cooperation between trade unions, global campaigning and advocacy within the major global institutions. The ITUC represents 168 million workers in 155 countries and territories and has 311 national affiliates. UNEP is the voice for the environment in the United Nations system. It is an advocate, educator, catalyst and facilitator, promoting the wise use of the planet's natural assets for sustainable development.

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