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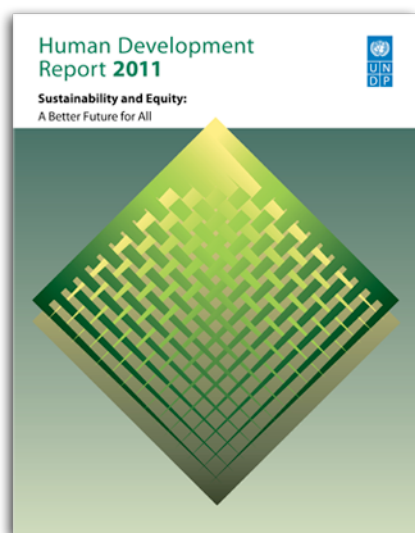
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Environmental risks threaten Latin American, Caribbean gains in cutting poverty and inequality, says Human Development Report

Copenhagen, 2 November 2011— Latin American and Caribbean nations are reducing wide income inequalities while taking steps to confront deforestation and other environmental threats that could slow human development gains in the region, says the 2011 Human Development Report released today by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).



Despite development progress in the region, the 2011 Report—titled *Sustainability and Equity: A Better Future for All*—warns that rapid deforestation and other environmental dangers could sideline regional achievements and hamper advancement. The Report calls for bold action within and across nations to address climate challenges such as rising sea levels that will have profound impacts on Caribbean islands and mainland coastal areas.

The world spotlight will turn on Latin America in June 2012 when the UN Conference on Sustainable Development is held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 20 years after the landmark UN Conference on Environment and Development was held in the same city.

The pace of deforestation in Latin America and the Caribbean has slowed and while forest reserves in some countries of the region are still depleting at an unsustainable pace, nearly a million square kilometres of forest loss from 1990 to 2010, the Report says, there is also some very good news.

The trend started to reverse in 2005, owing largely to a series of actions to combat deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon. The area's annual deforestation rate had fallen 70 percent by the end of 2009, contrasting with acute forest losses in much of Central America, linked to the high levels of reliance in those countries on firewood or charcoal for cooking.

“Deforestation and overexploitation of soil and waterways can threaten long-term livelihoods, fresh water availability and essential renewable resources, such as fisheries,” the Report's authors write, adding that such problems can amplify imbalances in opportunities and power.

Public awareness of the risks of climate change is relatively high in Latin America and the Caribbean: Opinion surveys show that 95 percent of those questioned in the region believed that global warming is a serious environmental threat, compared to 68 percent on a global average.

The 2011 Report looks at other possible ecological challenges for the region:

- Declines in fish stocks would have profound effects on the diets of island and coastal dwellers. The impact on recreational fishing and diving, important sources of work and income in the region's tourism industry, would also be affected.
- Climate change is forecast to bring higher sea levels, declining rainfall, rising temperatures, and possibly more destructive weather in a region prone to hurricanes. The Report projects that a half-metre rise in sea levels over the next 40 years could inundate coastal areas in 31 Latin American and Caribbean nations

Despite the environmental challenges, the Report notes that there is progress in natural resource conservation, and in some countries, including Brazil, communities are taking initiatives to reduce pollution, improve urban living and boost public transportation.

The Report notes that several countries have been successful in combatting poverty with community-level programmes that provide minimum wages and guarantee social services. Such initiatives can be both effective in outcome and cost, the Report argues, citing as examples Brazil's *Bolsa Familia* and Mexico's *Oportunidades* programmes that cover about one-fifth of those nations' populations at a cost of about 0.4 percent of GDP.

Latin America and the Caribbean is also endowed with untapped renewable energy potential, the Report notes, most notably solar and wind power. Alternative fuels already provide nearly one third of the primary energy supply in the region, with Brazil being a leading producer of the world's sugar-derived ethanol.

The 2011 Report shows that while Latin America remains the region with the world's highest levels of income inequality, national income distribution gaps have been closing in recent years, especially in Argentina, Brazil, Honduras, Mexico and Peru.

In contrast to its income equality performance, the region has made progress in equality of access to education and health services. Latin America and the Caribbean leads the developing world in public spending on education, 7.7 percent of GDP, and many countries are approaching full enrolment at primary and secondary school levels.

Nonetheless, deep inequalities persist: Haiti has the greatest share of poverty in the region, as measured by the report's Multidimensional Poverty Index and is the only nation of the Western hemisphere in the Human Development Index's (HDI) lowest quartile, at #158 of the 187 countries and territories covered.

Battered by decades of political instability and the 2010 earthquake that killed more than 200,000 people and left three times that number homeless, Haiti suffers from a "multidimensional" poverty rate that is more than twice that of Guatemala and nearly three times the levels of Nicaragua and Honduras, these being the three nations that are the region's next-lowest performers in the HDI.

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ABOUT THIS REPORT: The annual Human Development Report is an editorially independent publication of the United Nations Development Programme. For free downloads of the 2011 Human Development Report in ten languages, plus additional reference materials on its indices and specific regional implications, please visit: <http://hdr.undp.org>.

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