

TUNZA ANSWERS YOUR QUESTIONS

Green Cities



What is the purpose of World Environment Day? Who is the target audience for its message, and who can participate? *Karen Jazmin Estrada Rivera, Peru*



World Environment Day is the day on which the United Nations seeks to stimulate awareness about the state of the environment and enhance political attention and action worldwide. It reminds all nations and peoples that a safer and more prosperous future relies on informed, empowered people who are active agents in protecting the environment – so that we can all cherish and enjoy living on this planet.



What are the most pressing environmental issues facing cities today? Do these differ significantly between the developed and the developing worlds? *Faid Souhaili, Mayotte, France*



Environmental issues in different cities and countries are affected by the level and scale of human activities and the resulting pressure on the environment. Pollution, energy and waste generation top the list in our congested urban areas affected by the expansion of transport and industry. Transport, for example, is the fastest growing source of carbon dioxide emissions from burning fossil fuels – the main cause of global warming.



Many cities draw natural resources from surrounding areas to support large populations. Is this desirable – or sustainable? *Tim Riley, United Kingdom*



We cannot avoid using natural resources. They provide us with goods and services to meet our needs, regulate life-support functions and enrich our social well-being. But we are not using this natural capital wisely, and our needs and demands are ever increasing. Sadly, we are also using nature as a dumping ground for wastes and emissions. The major challenge is to move towards using renewable forms of products and services to better the lives of every individual.



Given that cities have such a high demand for electricity, why don't more of them switch to renewable forms of energy? Wouldn't this make economic and environmental sense? *Alison Staat-Niederehe, United States*



Yes, it makes a lot of sense. However, citizens – both as consumers and producers – are not fully aware of the carrying capacity of the planet and of the impact of the intensive use of non-renewable natural resources on current and future generations. Public and private sector organizations need to invest in renewable forms of energy, infrastructure and facilities.



How can young people living in cities affect urban issues, which generally fall to politicians, architects and engineers to resolve? *Rongling You, China*



Politicians and engineers are there to make the best choices and create opportunities for healthier and more secure lives for their citizens. Young people can live by example by choosing environmentally friendly transport like walking, cycling, using public transport and sharing lifts, and by getting organized and making their voices heard about including environmental considerations in city planning. This will force the policy and decision makers to meet their demands.



Fifty years ago, less than one person in three lived in a town or city. Soon most of the world's people will do so. How will the natural environment cope as we become an increasingly urban species? *Joanna Freitas, Portugal*



If the current trend of increasing urbanization continues, it will have serious environmental and health implications including irreversible damage to ecosystems. This can be avoided if we adopt innovative ideas and actions. People mainly move to cities in search of better opportunities; if these were available for semi-urban and rural dwellers, the trend and its environmental implications could be reduced. This remains a major challenge.

Do you have questions on environment and development issues that you would like the experts at UNEP to answer? Please send them to cpinfo@unep.org, and we will try to answer them in future issues.

USEFUL WASTE

By Pablo Fernandez



photo: Pablo Fernandez

City dwellers create massive amounts of garbage every day, which are collected for disposal – if they're lucky. In many countries, rubbish is dumped in landfills or uncontrolled sites and covered with earth. This creates conditions under which fungi and bacteria produce methane gas as the waste breaks down, accelerating global warming.

I work with the NovaGerar project in Rio de Janeiro – where we capture the methane gas before it escapes from the ground, and burn it to power a generator. Begun in 2003, the project combats climate change – but that's not all. Burning the gas produces heat and electricity for the city. The generator is close to the urban centre, reducing losses suffered during long-distance transmissions of electricity, and increasing the city's amount of self-supplied energy. Last, but not least, we are creating electricity from resources that would otherwise be considered waste and discarded.

NovaGerar is one of the world's first ventures promoting sustainable development in developing countries under the Kyoto Protocol – the international agreement to mitigate climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions – that entered into force on 16 February 2005. It established the Clean Development Mechanism, a flexible economic mechanism that permits and encourages industrialized countries to invest

Green Cities: Plan for the Planet!



photo: Tiyawatchalapong/UNEP/Topham

in projects to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the developing world, and claim the net savings achieved as 'carbon credits'. It lets them meet their emissions reduction targets without carrying out costly overhauls to their infrastructures, by helping developing countries to introduce green technologies.

Our project, which generates credits for the Dutch government, is expected to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 12 million tonnes of carbon dioxide over 21 years – which is like taking 150,000 cars (travelling 15,000 kilometres each) off the road for a year. And, starting in 2006, it will also

generate up to 12 megawatts of electricity, enough to meet the daily power needs of 100,000 city dwellers.

Pablo Fernandez is a 2004 Bayer Young Environmental Envoy.



photos: NovaGerar Database

