Equator Initiative

Winners announced!

Equator Prize 2012

Click here to view the full list of winners.

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Winners announced!
The call for nominations for the Equator Prize 2012 was launched on 22nd August 2011 and closed on 31st October 2011. Eligibility was expanded from 106 to 146 countries, while nominations were invited from initiatives working in eight thematic areas (see graph below). Nominations were also accepted in fifteen languages, compared to four in previous prize cycles.

Assisted by its partners and UNDP Country Offices, the Equator Initiative conducted extensive outreach efforts in newly-eligible and previously under-represented countries. These efforts proved successful, with a total of 812 nominations received from 113 countries. This total was three times the number of nominations received for the 2010 prize, which may be attributed to the expanded prize eligibility criteria.

The higher volume of nominations and diversity of thematic areas and languages required a similarly expanded and diversified pool of reviewers. The Equator Prize Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) comprised 156 members, representing a range of backgrounds and areas of technical expertise. Each nomination was reviewed and scored by three TAC members through an online review system; these scores were then averaged, and the results ranked.

A provisional list of winners was chosen in early 2012 during a meeting of the Technical Advisory Committee. After a thorough process of due diligence, the 25 Equator Prize 2012 winners were announced on Thursday 22 March 2012 (click here to view the full list!). Representatives of winning communities will participate in the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), which will be held in Brazil in June 2012.
Following the success of the Equator Prize Award Ceremony in New York in September 2010, Equator Prize winners were also recognized at the national level in ceremonies organized by UNDP Country Offices. Policymakers, UNDP staff, and representatives from civil society and the media attended these high-profile events, bringing national attention to these organizations’ outstanding achievements.

**Philippines**

The national award ceremony for the two Equator Prize winners from the Philippines was held on 1st February 2011, during the first day of the International Conference on Biodiversity and Climate Change held at the Philippine International Convention Centre. UNDP Country Director Renaud Meyer was present to give an introduction to the Equator Prize and to congratulate the winning communities: the **Farmers’ Association for Rural Upliftment, Inc. (FARU)** of Tinglayan, Kalinga, and the **Trowel Development Foundation of Catarman**, Samar. FARU was represented by Mr. Gaspar Angayon, while the Trowel Development Foundation was represented by Mr. Leonardo Rosario.

As well as Mr. Meyer of UNDP, the other dignitaries who attended the ceremony included Senator Loren Legarda, the Chairperson of the Senate Committee on Climate Change; Dr. Patricia Licuanan, Chairperson of the Commission on Higher Education; Dr. Angel Alcala, Chairperson of the ICBCC; and Mr. Naderev “Yeb” Saño, Commissioner, Climate Change Commission.

Past winners of the Equator Prize in the Philippines were also invited to attend. They were represented by Mr. Ely Alcala of the **Camalandaan Agroforest Farmers’ Association**; Mr. Apolinario Carino of **Pederasyon sa Nagkahiusang mga Mag-uuma nga Nanalipud ug Nagpasig-uli sa Kinaiyahan**; Mr. Donato Bumacas, on behalf of the **Kalinga Mission for Indigenous Children and Youth Development, Inc. (KAMICYDI)**; and Ms. Marita Rodriguez, who represented the **Center for Empowerment and Resource Development (CERD)**.

**Kenya**

The national award ceremony for Kenya’s two Equator Prize 2010 winners took place on 15th February 2011 in Bomet County, Rift Valley Province. The ceremony was hosted by Chemaner Secondary School, a beneficiary of the biodiversity conservation initiatives initiated by the **Mara River Water Users’ Association**; the celebrations also honoured **Muliru Farmers Conservation Group**.

The national celebrations were linked to the International Year of Forests as declared by the United Nations General Assembly in 2011; the ceremony highlighted the value of forests in poverty reduction and promoting sustainable livelihoods in Kenya. UNDP Kenya collaborated with the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife Services to mark this auspicious occasion.

The daylong celebration was attended by approximately 800 guests from across Kenya, including officials from the Government of Kenya, UNDP Kenya, and representatives from non-governmental organizations. The event was also graced by representatives
from five previous Equator Prize recipients: Kwetu Training Centre for Sustainable Development, Kijabe Environment Volunteers (KENVO), Shompole Community Trust, Kipsaina Crane and Wetland Conservation Group, and Il Ngwesi Group Ranch. These previous Equator Prize winners profiled their progress achieved to date through a public exhibition held at the school, giving the ceremony an interactive format that enabled locals, guests and schoolchildren to mingle and discuss the work on display.

The Guest of Honour for the occasion was Dr. Noah Wekesa, the Minister of Forestry and Wildlife. Other dignitaries included Mr. Aeneas Chuma, UNDP Kenya Resident Representative and UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator; Hon. Beatrice Kones, local Member of Parliament; and Mr. A.M. Wa-Mwachai, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife. The event helped to forge links between the local organisations involved and representatives from government, media, and UNDP Kenya; in his remarks, Mr. Chuma acknowledged the vital role played by local organisations in achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, while Dr. Wekesa emphasized the importance of Kenya’s national afforestation efforts.

**Madagascar**

The Equator Prize national award ceremony for Madagascar was held in Antananarivo on 25th March in honour of the Association Adidy Maitso and the community of Didy Ambatondrazaka. A representative of the initiative received the award from Fatma Samoura, Resident Coordinator of the UN System and UNDP Resident Representative for Madagascar. The ceremony also marked the launch of the UN International Year of Forests in Madagascar. Forest conservation, as practiced by Adidy Maitso, is a critical issue for Madagascar, as noted by Ms. Samoura, who also remarked that the ceremony offered an opportunity to celebrate the work of local initiatives in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

**Cameroon**

Riba Agroforestry Resource Centre is the third Cameroonian initiative to win the Equator Prize. The group was recognised at a National Award Ceremony held on 12th April 2011 at the Hilton Hotel in Yaoundé. Representatives of Riba received their award from the Minister of the Environment and Protection of Nature, Pierre Hélé. The ceremony was also attended by a number of high profile government and UN representatives, including Ms. Fati Charlotte Ndiaye, the Resident Coordinator of the UN system in Cameroon. Other attendees included a delegate from the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Development (MINEPAT), the UNDP Resident Representative to Cameroon, and the Regional Coordinator of the World Agroforestry Centre. ITOH Community Graziers Group, a 2004 winner of the Equator Prize, also received recognition at the ceremony.
India

On 13th May, a ceremony was held in Bhubhaneshwar, Orissa, to recognise the achievements of **Samudram Women’s Federation**, a local Equator Prize 2010 winner. Samudram brings together over 160 women’s groups, composing 1,500 members and spanning 50 villages across the east coast of India. At the event, the Honourable Chief Minister of Orissa, Shri Naveen Patnaik, presented the award to Ms. Chittiama Buguru, president of Samudram Women’s Federation. The Honourable Chief Minister commended the work of the group, commenting that conservation of Olive Ridley sea turtles is critical to the livelihood security of Orissa’s coastal communities. He added that “the success of such groups reveals the significant potential of women’s groups to take the lead in environmental conservation efforts.”

The award ceremony was also attended by Shri Debi Prasad Mishra, Forest Minister of Orissa; Aurobindo Beheria, Forest Secretary of Orissa; Ms. Caitlin Wiesen, Country Director of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Mr. Srinivasan Iyer, Assistant Country Director, Energy and Environment, UNDP. Ms. Wiesen noted that initiatives such as Samudram that empower women and communities and are reliant on natural wealth “must lie at the cornerstone of our poverty reduction efforts.”

Venezuela

The Equator Prize national award ceremony for Venezuela was held on 5th June, on the occasion of World Environment Day, to celebrate the work of **Fundación para la Agricultura Tropical Alternativa y el Desarrollo Integral** (FUNDATADI). Held at the offices of UNDP Venezuela in Caracas, the ceremony also displayed the products of the ‘Aromas de Caldera’ cooperative, supported by FUNDATADI. Omaira Ibarra represented the cooperative, while Alexis Bermudez was present to receive the award on behalf of FUNDATADI.

The UNDP Resident Representative, Alfredo Missair, commended the work of FUNDATADI and Aromas de Caldera, describing their approach “a new way of understanding the relationship between humans and the environment.” The event was also attended by the Executive Director of the Directorate of Environment and Energy, Ramiro Ramirez Missair, and the national coordinator of the Small Grants Programme in Venezuela, Ricardo Petit, who used the occasion to announce a new call for grant applications for 2011.

Senegal

On 23rd July a ceremony was held on the island of Niodior in honour of the **Fédération Locale des GIE de Niodior** (FELOGIE), the third Senegalese community to be awarded the Equator Prize. Guests were welcomed on arrival to the island by performances of singing and dancing, before they were invited to an exhibition of various products sold by the women of FELOGIE, including fresh and processed fruit and seafood, and handicrafts. This was filmed by a television crew, who also captured footage of the award ceremony.

Amy Ndour (President of FELOGIE) and Fatou Ndong spoke on behalf of the initiative, highlighting their achievements in conserving biodiversity in the Saloum Delta Biosphere Reserve. Also present were several local and regional government representatives, including the Governor of Fatick Region, the Prefect of the Department of Foundiougue, the Deputy Prefect, and the President of the Rural Council, as well as many local traditional elders and religious leaders.
Erin Atwell, visiting on behalf of the Equator Initiative, thanked the women of Niodior for their work and gave an overview of the Equator Prize selection process. A representative of UNDP Senegal, Mme Maramé Leye Lo, highlighted the excellent partnership between the Global Environment Facility, UNDP, and the Small Grants Programme in Senegal that has enabled extensive work in biodiversity conservation and development at the local level. Finally, Oumar Wane, SGP National Coordinator focused on the importance of the contribution of the initiative to the development of the Saloum Islands in general, and in particular for the conservation of biodiversity in the Saloum Delta Biosphere Reserve.

Benin

On 11th August 2011, the Réseau de Développement de Réserves Naturelles Communautaires (REDERC) was honoured in a ceremony held at UNDP-Benin headquarters, in the capital city of Cotonou. Saidou Gnanado, Executive Director of REDERC, received the award from Nardos Bekele-Thomas, UNDP Resident Representative to Benin, and Blaise Ahanhanzo-Glélé, Minister for the Environment, Habitat and Urbanism. As the first initiative from Benin to receive the Equator Prize, REDERC was praised for its innovative work in safeguarding biodiversity through a network of community conservation areas in the north of the country. The event was also attended by the Second Vice-President of the National Assembly, as well as many representatives from the media and civil society. The event received excellent national coverage within Benin, appearing in the La Nation, Le Quotidien Nokoué, L’Autre Quotidien, and Le Municipal.

SIDE EVENTS AND BROWN BAG LUNCHES

The Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing: The Way Forward

On Wednesday, 21 September 2011, the Equator Initiative hosted a “brown bag” lunch on the Nagoya Protocol on “access to genetic resources and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from their utilization,” which was adopted at the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) COP-10 in Nagoya last year. Valérie Normand, Head of the Nagoya Protocol Unit at the CBD, spoke about the future of the Protocol and how UNDP can assist in its implementation.

The Protocol is the result of almost ten years of work, since the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg when governments first called for an international regime on access and benefit sharing. After a working group on the issue was established at the COP-7 in 2004, Nagoya represented a significant step in achieving this goal. On 20 September, during a ceremony held at the margins of the UN General Assembly, a further twelve countries signed the Protocol, bringing the total number of signatories to 54. The CBD has identified its COP-11 in October 2012 as a target for the Protocol’s early entry into force.

Ms. Normand gave an overview of the Nagoya Protocol’s key provisions, focusing on the opportunities for development contained within its benefit-sharing obligations and the shared interest of countries in advancing research into genetic resources for commercial and non-commercial uses. The Protocol recognizes the sovereign rights of countries over their natural
resources, as specified in Article 15 of the CBD, and has the objective of contributing to the conservation of biological diversity. Agreements between provider and user countries are based on prior informed consent (PIC) and mutually agreed terms, which allow benefits to flow to provider countries in return for the use of their genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge. Ms. Normand emphasized that these benefits are not only monetary – such as access fees or royalties – but can also take the form of technology transfers or participation in research. In return, however, the Protocol also outlines access obligations, including the need for legal certainty, clear rules and procedures, and adequate monitoring of genetic resources by research institutions, regulating authorities, and other ‘checkpoints.’

The Nagoya Protocol also goes beyond the CBD in specifying that prior informed consent must be obtained from indigenous and local communities in return for using their genetic resources and traditional knowledge. Traditional knowledge often provides the lead to genetic resources such as medicinal plants with specific properties that are then exploited for commercial ends; this is an issue that certain Equator Prize winners have faced. The implementation of access and benefit-sharing (ABS) mechanisms at the grassroots level, however, is less clear. The Protocol encourages each signatory to design its own benefit-sharing mechanisms at the national level and provides for capacity building and awareness-raising at the national and local levels and engages local and indigenous representatives in National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plan review processes. Ms. Normand provided a clear-sighted and optimistic appraisal of the road ahead for the Nagoya Protocol, emphasizing the need for reciprocal efforts by provider and user countries to establish clear procedures for access and benefit-sharing.

The Yawanawá Community: From the Amazon to Global Markets

On Tuesday, 4 October 2011, the Equator Initiative hosted Tashka Yawanawá of the Yawanawá people of the Brazilian Amazon, to talk about his community’s successes in advocating for change, conserving their indigenous territory, and developing new sources of sustainable energy. The Yawanawá community won the Equator Prize in 2008 in recognition of their sustainable management of over 180,000 hectares of Amazon rainforest in the Brazilian state of Acre. This tribe has managed to conserve their natural heritage and preserve their cultural identity in the face of multiple threats to their way of life. Tashka played a leading role in advocating for the revision of the boundaries of the Yawanawá traditional land, which was eventually achieved in 2005. Tashka spoke about the challenges this had entailed, including threats to the forest from proposed commercial logging and cultivation projects. Other threats to community wellbeing were identified, such as the cost of travelling from the community to the nearest town: the three-day journey by truck and canoe can cost as much as US$110 in diesel fuel. The community is also challenged by a lack of sustainable livelihood options, difficulty in accessing clean drinking water, and virtually no health services.

In response, the Yawanawá are developing the processing of oil from locally-grown jatropha trees into a renewable and cheap source of fuel for motor boats – 4,000 trees have been planted so far. The community has benefitted greatly from a partnership with AVEDA through the sale of sustainably harvested urukum seeds that are processed into a red dye used in beauty products sold across the world. AVEDA has helped to preserve and celebrate the Yawanawá culture, raising the profile of this tribe in Brazil and internationally. Tashka also spoke about the transformative social changes that have taken place within the tribe in recent years as power has devolved to smaller village-level authorities, including two women village chiefs. Diversification of agriculture and revenue from the sale of urukum has allowed more young members of the tribe to remain in the village instead of migrating to urban centres. The community has taken control of digging and maintaining wells that supply clean water to the villages. Support from various partners has benefitted local schools and improved the tribe’s communications infrastructure, with
a high-speed internet connection now installed in the village headquarters. Tashka emphasised the importance of being able to easily contact the outside world for raising awareness of challenges to the tribe’s sovereignty.

David Hircock, Executive Director for Sustainability and Innovation with the Estée Lauder Companies, has a long-term relationship with the Yawanawá, and spoke in detail about the changes the community has experienced in recent years. The discussion that followed Tashka’s presentation included the position of indigenous tribes in Brazil today, and the role of the federal and local government in enabling the survival of indigenous culture. The Equator Initiative, Tribal Link Foundation, and other partners have greatly helped to raise the profile of the Yawanawá; many challenges still remain, however, if communities like this one are to preserve their natural and cultural heritage in a rapidly changing world.

Sustainable Energy for All: Challenges and Adaptation in Bangladesh

On Thursday 20 October 2011, the Equator Initiative hosted a presentation by Mr. Mohammed Rezwan on the work of Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha. This organisation won the Equator Prize in 2006 in recognition of its work in providing sustainable energy and services to remote rural communities in flood-prone districts of north-western Bangladesh. Rezwan, founder and CEO of Shidhulai, gave a comprehensive overview of the successes of this outstanding initiative in meeting the challenges of climate change and energy poverty.

The presentation was introduced by Dr. Charles McNeill, Senior Policy Advisor, UNDP Environment and Energy Group, who welcomed those attending from a variety of backgrounds, including the Small Grants Programme, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and UN-REDD, and those working on community-based adaptation to climate change and sustainable energy. Stephen Gitonga, Policy Advisor on sustainable energy (UNDP) then spoke briefly about the Sustainable Energy for All Initiative. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has designated 2012 the International Year of Sustainable Energy for All, raising awareness of the need to meet targets of achieving universal access to modern energy services, doubling the rate of improvement in energy efficiency, and doubling the share of renewables in the energy mix by 2030.

Shidhulai Swanirvar Sangstha (roughly translated, “small village self-reliance organisation”) demonstrates that local innovation has a key role to play in meeting these targets. The initiative was the brainchild of architect Mohammed Rezwan, who set out to address the challenges of heavy annual flooding in the low-lying and densely populated Chalan Beel region of Bangladesh. Among other effects of this flooding, damage caused to schools meant that children could lose up to three months of education every year. In 2007, 330 schools were destroyed and more than 4,000 were damaged by severe flooding. The extreme marginalisation of riverbank communities trapped by floodwaters also meant decreased access to other services, including healthcare and agricultural training, while these communities’ food security was under threat from crops being washed away.

Beginning a decade ago with a grant of US$500, Rezwan designed a boat that would act as “half school bus, half school house”. Travelling from village to village, a school boat picks up students from riverbank villages. Classes are then taught on board the boat, with up to thirty children at a time in Grades I to IV. Boat classrooms are equipped with laptop computers and other equipment powered by solar panels. The idea was highly successful, leading to further grants from a number of foundations that allowed the idea to be rapidly scaled up. Today, Shidhulai has a fleet of 54 boats, including twenty school boats, ten floating libraries, five mobile health clinics, and five agricultural training boats. The organisation has served over 90,000 agrarian families, bringing a multitude of services to communities on the frontline of climate change.

Shidhulai’s work to confront the challenges of climate change and energy poverty has been recognised by multiple international awards apart from the Equator Prize, including the UNEP Sasakawa Prize and an Ashden Award for Sustainable Energy, while the organisation’s solar lantern enterprise won the SEED Award in 2009.
ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Equator Initiative moved offices in August 2011, relocating from the Chrysler Building (42nd Street) to the FF-Building (45th Street). We now share a building with our colleagues in the UNDP Environment and Energy Team; we are housed on the sixth floor, along with the Capacity Development Group and Knowledge Management Group.

STAFF ANNOUNCEMENTS

We would like to thank the following programme assistants for their hard work and contributions to the Equator Initiative during 2011:

Erin Atwell
Fordham University, United States

Inès Burrus
Technische Universität München, Germany

Juliana Quaresma
Federal Rural University of Pernambuco. Recife, Brazil

Since the last newsletter, Equator Initiative has welcomed five new programme assistants who will be working with us through the spring:

Mohamed Arguine
Brandeis University, United States

Jonathan Clay
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Matthew Konsa
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ABOUT THE EQUATOR INITIATIVE

The Equator Initiative is a partnership that brings together the United Nations, governments, civil society, businesses and grassroots organizations to build the capacity and raise the profile of local efforts to improve community wellbeing and livelihoods through sustainable natural resource management.

EQUATOR INITIATIVE PARTNERS

Current partners to the Equator Initiative include: Conservation International; Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD); Ecoagriculture Partners; Fordham University; German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development; International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN); The Nature Conservancy (TNC); Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Rare; Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); United Nations Development Programme; and United Nations Foundation (UNF).

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