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REPORT PUBLISHED ON BIOENERGY, AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN WEST AFRICA

COUNTRIES HAVE RESOURCES, LAND AND DEMAND TO DEVELOP BIOENERGY SUCCESSFULLY

Rome, Thursday 16 October 2008 – The eight member countries of the Economic and Monetary Union of West Africa (UEMOA) – Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo – have the natural resources, the land availability and the demand to develop bioenergy successfully, a new report has found. Furthermore, the study states, these countries have the political will and commitment at the national and regional levels to guide a paradigm shift to make the transition to local food and fuel production with attention to economic, social, and environmental benefits.

The conclusions of the report, entitled “**Sustainable Bioenergy Development in UEMOA Member-Countries**”, were presented at an event organised on the occasion of World Food Day today by the **Global Bioenergy Partnership (GBEP)**, in co-operation with the **United Nations Foundation** and the **Italian Ministry for the Environment Land and Sea**. The event was held at the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in Rome, and opened by **FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf**. The United Nations Foundation (UNF) joined with the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD) and the Energy and Security Group (ESG) in undertaking this regional analysis in partnership with the UEMOA Commission, the Rural Hub of Western and Central Africa, and the Italian Ministry of the Environment Land and Sea.

Jacques Diouf, Director-General, FAO, attended the presentation and said: “This report is an excellent example of concrete willingness to work together in partnership to further the global goal of sustainable energy development in Africa and should represent the beginning of a broad based process to meet Africa’s energy needs”.

Corrado Clini, Director General, Italian Ministry of the Environment Land and Sea, and Chair of the Global Bioenergy Partnership, said: “As the report highlights, it is vital to support policies aiming to improve the overall agricultural sector with investments in education, research and infrastructure and with improved access to market, because this effort will support production of both food and bioenergy.

“It’s key to promote sustainable use of agro-forest products and residues for electricity generation, for household cooking and heating, which will lead to the substitution of imported fossil fuels with locally grown sustainable bioenergy.”

Melinda Kimble, Senior Vice President, United Nations Foundation, said: “The UEMOA countries in West Africa are more reliant on traditional biomass than almost anywhere else in the world –

exceeding more than 70% of their total primary energy supply. But current consumption patterns are unsustainable, and much of the economic value of this resource is lost due to elementary combustion.

“Any bioenergy development plan must address these issues as a top priority. It is vital that policies and technologies are developed and implemented to better use agricultural and forest residues. If done correctly, these energy feedstocks hold great potential for efficient and affordable locally-produced fuels. But UEMOA nations must also improve overall agriculture productivity and boost community-led forest conservation, management and reforestation efforts.”

As part of the study, a blueprint for action in the field of bioenergy has been developed for the period 2009 to 2011. Key activities have been organised into five pillars: capacity building, policy, finance, market development, and technology transfer and research and development (R&D).

While bioenergy opportunities are significant, the report highlights that the energy–agriculture crisis has brought into focus the daunting challenges facing the region. Home to many of the world’s “bottom billion,” water is scarce, electricity is dear, crop yields are erratic, and the temptation to migrate is strong.

Still, the report concludes that bioenergy from agriculture and forestry-based products and by-products can provide significant opportunities for diversification, added value, and further development of the agricultural sector in West Africa. Facing up to the challenges, it adds, requires dedicated government commitment, increased data and knowledge to make sound decisions, enhanced policy and regulatory frameworks, financing facilitation, capacity building, institutional strengthening, technology transfer, and R&D. International collaboration with both industrialised and developing countries will be invaluable and inter-sectoral engagement will be imperative. The next step is bringing together major players in a consultative process to build a consensus and gain commitments to moving forward, the report states.

NOTE TO EDITORS: The full text/summary of the report “**Sustainable Bioenergy Development in UEMOA Member-Countries**” will be available soon on request.

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