“Sustainable bioenergy: sowing the seeds of sustainable development”
A holistic approach to assessing intersection aspects of bioenergy and sustainability, including greenhouse gas emissions, biological diversity, the price and supply of a national food basket, access to energy, economic development, and energy security.
Rome, 10-12 November 2011

CONCEPT NOTE

The rapid expansion of worldwide bioenergy calls for effective ways to approach sustainability aspects of bioenergy production and use. National and regional blending targets for biofuels for transport, together with thresholds for minimum emission reductions and sustainability criteria to be fulfilled in order for biofuels to qualify for government support and count towards targets are continuously increasing all over the world. On the one hand, many developing countries may benefit from a number of natural advantages in terms of climatic conditions and costs, and as such could take advantage of the current bioenergy revolution to unlock their potentials.

Ambitious national and regional goals include those set in the EU and US, aiming to achieve, respectively, an EU target of 20% renewable energy, national targets of 10% renewable energy in transport and up to a 10% decrease in GHG lifecycle emissions in the transport sector by 2020 (EU -Renewable Energy and Fuel Quality Directives), and a targeted renewable fuel production of 36 Bgal in 2022, of which 16 Bgal from cellulosic feedstock with minimum GHG emission thresholds to be met (US - Energy Independence and Security Act). Both legislations include sustainability criteria and minimum GHG reductions to be fulfilled by bioenergy employed in order to count towards the mandate.

On the other hand Latin America (and in particular Brazil, Argentina and Colombia) has a large potential for bioenergy production. According to FAO previsions the reference scenario for 2030 shows that Latin America will need just 2.4% of its arable land to satisfy its requirements for biofuels production, highlighting in this way its potential for bioenergy production. This is complemented by their willingness to act as a net biofuel exporter.

Asian countries¹, according to IEA estimates, are expected to raise their biofuel consumption by 2030 by 14%. This increase might be caused by decisions and mandates established by governments in the last few years that could potentially change the patterns of the global bioenergy production and consumption.

¹ Without considering Eurasia and Middle East
Although African and other equatorial countries have the highest potential for bioenergy production due to their climatic conditions, unleashing this potential needs focused efforts in capacity building and technology transfer. Production and use of bioenergy may revitalize agricultural sector, create jobs, increase income and access to energy.

The Global Bioenergy Partnership (GBEP), an international initiative established by G8 Leaders in 2005 and supported by following G8 and G20 Summits, works with its Partners and Observers facilitating the achievement of their objectives on the basis of international consensus. GBEP has recently agreed (May 2011) a set of 24 relevant, practical, science-based, voluntary sustainability indicators for bioenergy. This agreement involves 45 Countries and 22 International Organizations. The indicators, set out under the three pillars of sustainable development (environmental, social and economic) are intended to guide any analysis undertaken of bioenergy at the domestic level with a view to informing decision making and facilitating the sustainable development of bioenergy.

Likewise, bioenergy has become a key issue on the international agenda. Several international organizations and fora address bioenergy in their declarations and commit themselves on the relation between bioenergy and sustainable development. International commitments include those taken in the G8, G20, CSD and MEF context, as well as in the UNFCCC context.

This seminar will facilitate capacity development through the exchange of information, experience and good practices. It is also the opportunity to contribute to the international context to achieve consensus and shared goals for the sustainable development of bioenergy.

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2 GBEP Partners now comprise the following 23 countries and 13 international organizations: all G8 nations plus Argentina, Brazil, China, Colombia, Fiji Islands, Ghana, Mauritania, Mexico, Netherlands, Paraguay, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland and Tanzania, as well as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), European Commission, FAO, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), IEA, UNCTAD, UN DESA, UNDP, UNEP, UNIDO, United Nations Foundation, World Council for Renewable Energy and European Biomass Industry Association. A further 22 countries are participating as observers (Angola, Australia, Austria, Chile, China, Egypt, El Salvador, Gambia, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Lao P.D.R., Madagascar, Malaysia, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Norway, Peru, Rwanda, South Africa, Thailand, Tunisia and Viet Nam), along with the following 10 international organizations: African Development Bank, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, European Environment Agency, Global Environment Facility (GEF), IFAD, IRENA, West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), World Bank, and the World Business Council on Sustainable Development.

3 Since 2005 the G8 renewed every year mandates to GBEP and its related activities to facilitate bioenergy sustainable development.

4 The G20 Agriculture Ministers in June 2011 stated: “We will continue to address the challenges and opportunities posed by biofuels, in view of the world’s food security, energy and sustainable development needs. We recognize the need to further analyse all factors that influence the relationship between biofuels production and (i) food availability, (ii) response of agriculture to price increase and volatility, (iii) sustainability of agriculture production, and further analyse potential policy responses, while recognizing the role biofuels can play in reduction of greenhouse gases, energy security and rural development.”

5 The Final Text of CSD-17 (2009) committed to “promote continued research and development with a view to continuously enhance the sustainability of biofuels and other bioenergy sources, including through South-South, North-South and triangular cooperation, and through the exchange of information and technical cooperation...”.

6 In July 2009 the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate (MEF) declared: “(...) we will dramatically increase and coordinate public sector investments in research, development, and demonstration of these technologies, with a view to doubling such investments by 2015, while recognizing the importance of private investment, public-private partnerships...”

7 See in particular commitments under the Kyoto Protocol, Bali Action Plan, Copenhagen Accord and Cancun Agreements.