



**CEPF Donor Council Statement:
CEPF and Poverty Reduction
November 2004**

CEPF strategically focuses on preserving the biologically richest yet most threatened places on Earth. Throughout these biodiversity hotspots, human activities are causing the world's terrestrial, freshwater, and marine biodiversity to vanish. Species are becoming extinct and pristine landscapes are disappearing at unprecedented rates. Fundamental ecosystem services that are the foundation for human welfare—clean air, fresh water, food and fiber, natural medicines, pollution control and waste disposal, protection from natural disasters, and regulation of disease—are being jeopardized.

Maintaining the range of environmental services that we depend upon means maintaining intact ecological and evolutionary processes at different scales. These services also help maintain energy and infrastructure activities that underpin large-scale economic development; for example, forest cover prevents soil erosion, which leads to siltation that in turn dramatically shortens the lifespan of dams and harbors. The value of these ecological services—at all scales—is tremendous and we are only now beginning to measure how significant and varied they are and what happens when they are diminished.

The convergence of critical areas for biodiversity conservation with millions of people who are impoverished and highly dependent on healthy ecosystems for their survival is more evident in the hotspots than anywhere else on Earth. The poor within the hotspots are the people most reliant on natural resources for food, shelter, medicine, income and employment. If the rural poor draw their livelihoods from a fragile and steadily degrading ecological base, there is no potential for them to lead sustainable lives and livelihoods. Yet the poor are often trapped in a vicious downwards spiral: poor people are forced to overuse environmental resources to survive from day to day, which further depletes or degrades the resources they depend upon. This diminishes the plants and animals they need for food and degrades vital water supplies, while increasing their vulnerability to illness and natural disasters.

Actions to conserve biodiversity contribute to poverty reduction by maintaining intact habitats, ecological processes, and core ecosystem services that are the foundation for sustainable and healthy human lives. Recognizing this, Goal 7 of the Millennium Development Goals broadly focuses on environmental sustainability, including targets for biodiversity conservation through protected areas, forested land, and access to clean water. Investments in protecting, maintaining and restoring the biological assets upon which the poor depend is essential for poverty reduction now and in the future.

CEPF addresses poverty reduction in many ways. It supports environmental stewardship of land and resources and sustainable livelihoods. By helping people to manage biological resources better, CEPF helps ensure that what people harvest will be sustainable. This helps break the vicious cycle. CEPF also helps reduce vulnerability to ecosystem depletion, degradation, and to disasters. It accomplishes this through its strategic assistance to nongovernmental organizations, community groups and other civil society partners to build the capacity of these groups to participate in civil society and decision-making and to promote transparency and accountability among institutions. These actions benefit biodiversity conservation but they are also the foundation for building the structure to help reduce poverty and to support sustainable lives and livelihoods.

** The CEPF donor partners agreed this common statement on CEPF and poverty reduction at the Seventh Meeting of the CEPF Donor Council, 1 November 2004.*