

The Intergovernmental Meeting on the Sixth Global Environment Outlook Summary for Policymakers

21-24 January 2019

The Intergovernmental Meeting on the Sixth Global Environment Outlook (GEO-6) opens today at the UNEP headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. The GEO-6 report was mandated by the first session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA). Delegates attending GEO-6 will negotiate and adopt the GEO-6 Summary for Policy Makers (SPM).

Expectations for this Meeting

The GEO-6 theme, “Healthy Planet, Healthy People,” aims to help policymakers and society at large to achieve the environmental dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and multilateral environmental agreements.

GEO-6 differs from GEO-5 in that the development of this report involves Vice-Chairs in addition to Co-Chairs. This structure was recommended by the Scientific Advisory Panel to help further ensure the scientific credibility of the GEO-6 process, and to encourage learning from best practices from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).

The SPM and GEO-6 assessment report adopted at this meeting will be presented for endorsement to the fourth session of UNEA (UNEA-4), which will be held on 11-15 March 2019 in Nairobi, Kenya. This endorsement is expected to raise the profile of GEO assessments due to the high level and universal membership of UNEA.

Origins of the Process

UNEP’s GEO was launched in 1995 in response to a request by the UNEP Governing Council for a comprehensive report on the state of the world environment. The GEO is a process of conducting a global integrated environmental assessment to deliver the best available scientific findings to policy makers and provide them with sufficient information to respond

effectively to environmental challenges. The output of the GEO process is an assessment report of the state and trends of the global environment.

Key Turning Points

GEO-1, published in 1997, provided a comprehensive overview of the state of the world’s environment and showed that although significant progress had been made in confronting environmental challenges in both developing and industrialized regions, there was still a need to vigorously pursue environmental and associated socioeconomic policies.

GEO-2, published in 1999, concluded that if current trends in population, economic growth, and consumption continued, the natural environment would be increasingly stressed.

GEO-3, published in 2002, provided an overview of the main environmental developments over the previous three decades, demonstrating how social, economic, and other factors contributed to the changes that had occurred. It highlighted increasing poverty and concluded that four major divides categorize the world and threaten sustainable development: the environmental, policy, and lifestyle divides; and the vulnerability gap.

GEO-4, published in 2007, assessed the state of the global atmosphere, land, water, and biodiversity, as well as the human dimensions of environmental change, and presented scenarios and policy options for action in the context of environment for development. It issued an urgent call for action in dealing with persistent and urgent environmental problems, such as climate change, that undermine human wellbeing and development.

GEO-5 was requested by the 25th session of the UNEP Governing Council, held in February 2009, in Nairobi, Kenya. GEO-5 differed from previous GEO reports by shifting from assessing priority “problems” to include assessments of priority solutions. The GEO-5 report consisted of three major parts: an assessment of the state and trends of the global environment; regional policy analyses; and potential opportunities for action at the global level.

GEO-5 assessed 90 environmental goals and objectives, reporting little or no progress on 24 environmental goals and objectives including: climate change; combating desertification and mitigating the effects of drought; maintaining and developing the multiple benefits of ecosystem services; and addressing drivers of habitat loss. These findings were released on the eve of the “Rio+20” UN Conference on Sustainable Development.

Intersessional Highlights

Global Intergovernmental and Multi-Stakeholder

Consultation: The Global Intergovernmental and Multi-stakeholder Consultation on GEO-6 was held on 21-23 October 2014, in Berlin, Germany. This meeting, attended by 133 delegates, endorsed the guiding framework for the report, the methodologies by which it would be conducted, and the process for transparent engagement of authors and contributors to make the GEO-6 scientifically robust and credible.

Delegates supported that GEO-6 would be an integrated environmental assessment, using the Drivers – Pressures – State – Impacts – Response (DPSIR) approach in the GEO conceptual framework. The meeting gave importance to capacity building in all aspects of the assessment process, and to incorporating local and indigenous knowledge, in addition to using state-of-the-art technical analyses. They also voiced support for the establishment of two advisory bodies, the High-level Intergovernmental and Stakeholder Advisory Group (HLG) and the Scientific Advisory Panel (SAP), and the formation of an Assessment Methodologies, Data, and Information Working Group.

Meetings of the GEO-6 Advisory Groups: The GEO-6 HLG, SAP, and the Assessment Methodologies, Data, and Information Working Group formed the GEO-6 advisory groups.

The SAP met on 25-26 March 2015 in order to discuss ways of supporting the content development for global and regional assessments, and how to ensure scientific quality assurance.

In a joint meeting on 11-13 January 2016 in Geneva, Switzerland, HLG and SAP met to:

- discuss and advise on the GEO-6 regional assessments;
- review the links between the regional and global assessment;
- amend the GEO-6 workplan; and
- further develop the global GEO-6 outline.

Immediately prior to UNEA-2, the HLG met on 21- 22 May 2016, to launch the global assessment process, and requested the UNEP GEO-6 Secretariat to design a process whereby

information from the regional assessments and other recently published assessments would be used as the foundation for the global assessment.

At a meeting held in Frascati, Italy, on 21-23 February 2017, the HLG discussed inputs to UNEA-3, an outreach strategy for GEO-6, and a strategy for GEO-6 to support the SDGs.

The HLG discussed structure and length of the SPM and procedures for the SPM preparation in Guangzhou, China, on 10-12 October 2017. Discussions on the structure and length were finalized through subsequent virtual meetings and face-to-face in Singapore on 19-23 February 2018.

Assessment Methodologies, Data, and Information

Working Group: The Working Group met in Geneva, Switzerland, on 30-31 March 2015, where they discussed:

- assessment methodologies, data, and information;
- guidance, standards, and specific processes to ensure credibility and overall quality of all GEO-6 content and the associated data and information published in UNEP Live; and
- the structure, content, and process for developing a UNEP Integrated Assessment Methodologies, Data and Information Guidelines and Standards Manual.

Regional Assessments

The GEO-6 Regional Assessments, examined the state of the planet’s health in six regions: the Pan-European region, North America, Asia and the Pacific, West Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), and Africa.

Six Regional Environmental Information Network (REIN) Conferences were held between April and May 2015 in the UN regions to identify priority issues, environmental trends, and emerging issues. These conferences attended by over 400 experts and representatives from 85 countries. The drafting of the assessments, based on scientific data and peer reviewed literature, involved 1,203 scientists, hundreds of scientific institutions, and more than 160 governments.

The completion and release of the assessments coincided with UNEA-2, which is convening in Nairobi, Kenya, from 23-27 May 2016. The Pan-European assessment was launched at the eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in Batumi, Georgia, on 8 June 2016.

Together, the assessments conveyed the common message that environmental deterioration is occurring much faster than previously thought and action is needed now to reverse the worst trends. These messages informed the GEO-6 report on the state, trends, and outlook of the global environment.

North America Regional Assessment: North America REIN conference was held in Ottawa, Canada, on 27-29 May 2015 to identify priorities for the assessment. The assessment recognizes improved environmental conditions in the region, emerging challenges, and approaches to manage these challenges.

Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Assessment: The LAC REIN conference was held in Panama City, Panama, on 4-5 May 2015 and identified regional priorities including: impacts from climate change and natural hazards; biodiversity and ecosystem services; natural resources and tourism; economic development and sustainable consumption and production; health and environment; land use, land degradation and land planning; environmental governance; environmental information; and communication and public awareness.

Asia and the Pacific Regional Assessment: This REIN conference, held in Bangkok, Thailand, on 27-28 April 2015, agreed on priority environmental actions focusing on the link between peace, security, and the environment.

Africa Regional Assessment: The Africa Regional REIN conference was held on 20-24 April 2015 in Johannesburg, South Africa, and agreed to base the assessment on the aims of the region's Agenda 2063, which aims to establish a prosperous region characterized by sustainable inclusive growth, peace, and good governance. Key priorities identified include: land degradation; freshwater, marine and coastal resources; air quality; and illegal trade in wildlife.

Pan-European Regional Assessment: The Pan-European REIN met in Istanbul, Turkey, on 13-17 April 2015 and agreed to use the five regional priorities from GEO-5, namely climate change, air pollution, chemicals and waste, biodiversity and freshwater.

West Asia Regional Assessment: The West Asia Assessment was guided by seven regional priorities: water, land, marine resources, biodiversity, air, climate change, and waste management identified at the REIN conference held in Amman, Jordan, on 10-14 May 2015.

GEO-6 Authors Meetings

The production of the GEO-6 report involved four global authors meetings where authors convened to develop drafts and address comments from the review processes. These meetings also addressed issues on the structure and coherence across different chapters. A drafting meeting was also convened to finalize the SPM draft.

First Global Authors Meeting: The GEO-6 inception meeting, which was also the First Global Authors Meeting, took place in Frascati, Italy from 20-24 February 2017, where the "first order" draft of the assessment was realized. The process provided authors with guidance on *inter alia*:

- the GEO-6 matrix drafting approach;
- writing for assessments;
- the use of visuals such as graphs, charts, maps and infographics in assessments;
- citation and referencing styles; and
- Environment Live data and services for the assessment.

Second Global Authors Meeting: This meeting took place in Bangkok, Thailand, from 22-26 May 2017. The meeting featured a stakeholder workshop for the chapters *of the assessment, titled* Innovative Scenarios and Policy Pathways Stakeholder Visioning Workshop. This workshop explored innovative ideas that may lead to positive futures and help realise the achievement of the SDGs. The workshop participants also looked into ways of linking these innovative scenarios with the policy section of the GEO in a way that is most useful for decision makers.

Third Global Authors Meeting: This meeting was held in Guangzhou, China, from 9 -14 October 2017. Authors at the meeting addressed comments received from the second order draft review of the State of the Environment chapters. They also advanced drafting of the report ensuring consistency in economic and equity dimensions, and developed a draft structure for the SPM.

Fourth Global Authors Meeting: This meeting held in Singapore from 19-23 February 2018 convened authors to advance finalization of several elements of the GEO-6 outputs, including:

- drafting the SPM and Technical Summary;
- addressing questions regarding coherence across the document; and
- advancing the second order drafts of the Policy Effectiveness and Outlook chapters

SPM Drafting: The GEO-6 SPM drafting meeting produced the second order draft that forms the negotiating document that will be considered for approval by the Intergovernmental Meeting on GEO-6 this week. This meeting held on 24-27 September 2018 in Cancun, Mexico, also included convened a meeting of the HLG. The meeting focused on:

- reducing lengths of all sections of the SPM;
- ensuring coherence between the main report and the SPM;
- producing a clear storyline;
- ensuring that the policy section is robust enough to be useful for policy makers; and
- ensuring key messages are clear, and figures appropriate and easily understandable.