

Subcommittee Meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives  
8 November 2018, 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.  
United Nations Office at Nairobi Gigiri  
Conference Room 1

**Background Document for Agenda Item 3:  
Update on the development of the 6<sup>th</sup> Global Environment Outlook**

This note serves as a background document for discussions under Agenda Item 3: Update on the development of the 6th Global Environment Outlook.

## Briefing Note on the development of the 6<sup>th</sup> Global Environment Outlook

Science Division Ref: SD/GEO/SPM/1

29.10.2018

The Global Environment Outlook (GEO) is the UN Environment flagship integrated assessment on the state of the global environment. It presents the environmental trends for air, climate, water, land and biodiversity. The GEO draws on all the major global assessments from international science panels and UN bodies. The assessment looks at the interactions and feedback loops between social, economic and environmental drivers to assess the effectiveness of different policy responses in moving the world onto a more sustainable pathway. The sixth edition of the Global Environment Outlook is designed to inform important policy decisions by member states, underpinning decision-making processes and plans of the UN Environment Assembly, supporting the environmental dimension of Agenda 200 in the entire UN System and feeding directly into the discussions at the UN General Assembly through the High-Level Political Forum.

UN Environment is nearing the end of the preparation of the main Global Environment Outlook report and its accompanying Summary for Policy Makers, as requested in UN Environment Assembly resolution 1/4. An embargoed e-copy of the report is set to be sent to Member States the week of Dec. 5, 2018, as requested in UN Environment Assembly decision 3/1.

Our next step in the preparation of the Summary for Policy Makers is the line-by-line negotiation of the text of this key document by Member States. This meeting is planned on 21-24 January 2019 (TBC) in Nairobi and letters of invitation have recently been sent to all Member States.

Other recent major milestones from the GEO-6 process included:

- A successful meeting of the High Level Intergovernmental and Stakeholder Advisory Group, co-chairs of the Scientific Advisory Panel and coordinating lead authors, that resulted in an agreed draft for negotiation of the GEO-6 Summary for Policy Makers (SPM) [Sept 2018].
- A successful meeting of the Scientific Advisory Panel, where they have issued a clean bill of health for the GEO with regard to scientific credibility. The Panel is working now to refine the text of the letter to the UN Environment Chief Scientist, issuing their opinion [Oct 2018].
- A successful meeting was convened by the UN Environment Chief Scientist and the GEO Secretariat, of the major UN Environment-sponsored global assessments. The Ad-hoc Global Assessment Dialogue will work to find synergies across the different assessments and collaborate in areas where this will improve the quality and policy relevance of the assessments [Oct 2018].
- We are also conducting two studies to inform the future evolution of GEO and hope to present and discuss these with Member States in preparation for UNEA-4 [TBD Nov-Dec 2018].

A more detailed background note on the GEO-6 process is provided in **Annex 1**.

In preparation for the Member State negotiation of the Summary for Policy, Makers Member States have been invited to provide feedback to the Secretariat on two main items:

- Regional Groupings should nominate potential co-chairs and vice-chairs of the January meeting. As per UN Environment Assembly rules, the two co-chairs and two vice-chairs will be elected at the opening session of the meeting.
- Member States are requested to nominate their negotiators for the meeting through the portal <https://reg.unog.ch/event/27111/> and inform the UN Environment Secretariat directly at [pierre.boileau@un.org](mailto:pierre.boileau@un.org) with copy to [unenvironment-science-geohead@un.org](mailto:unenvironment-science-geohead@un.org) , together with copies of their credentials by 4 December 2018.

The January negotiating session will follow the usual UN Environment Assembly rules of procedure. Breakout rooms will be provided for early-morning planning sessions of each regional grouping and these breakout rooms will be used to also allow smaller groups of negotiators to resolve difficult issues. Finally, a group of 40 authors from the main assessment will be present to assist negotiators with ensuring that the text of the Summary for Policy Makers maintains 'line of sight' with the main Global Environment Outlook report.

This negotiating session is a critical component of the Global Environment Outlook process. It will prepare a politically legitimate and scientifically credible Summary for Policy Makers that will be submitted to the fourth UN Environment Assembly for endorsement. As in the fifth Global Environment Outlook, the dedicated work of Member State negotiators will ensure a positive outcome while also working to raise the profile of the findings of the sixth Global Environment Outlook.

Other key features of the negotiating session will be:

- Governance Affairs Division will ensure UN Environment Assembly procedures are followed during the session and will provide guidance on key issues that may be raised in this respect by Member States;
- Simultaneous translation will be provided in six UN languages during the main plenary negotiating sessions;
- Member States will receive an advance English version of the draft text of the Summary for Policy Makers at least two months in advance of the January session. Other language versions of the draft Summary for Policy Makers will follow within four weeks of the advance version;
- Written comments will be requested from Member States in advance of the negotiation session to help the co-chairs and the Secretariat prepare. This should also help speed up the negotiations during the 4-day session;
- The Global Environment Outlook co-chairs will be present to support the negotiation process and answer questions related to the process for the development of the draft Summary for Policy Makers;
- Geographic and gender balance will be maintained in the selection of possible candidates for the co-chairs and vice-chairs of the negotiating session.

All efforts are being made by the Secretariat to ensure an effective and efficient negotiation process in Nairobi and we welcome the suggestions from Member States in this respect.

## ANNEX 1 - The Global Environmental Outlook

This information note is prepared by the Science Division for the presentation on GEO-6 to be held with Committee of Permanent Representatives on the 8 November 2018, in Nairobi.

**Background:** The Global Environment Outlook is UN Environment's flagship integrated environmental assessment, published every 4-5 years. The overall theme for the sixth edition is: 'Healthy Planet, Healthy People'. The full report, including a Summary for Policy Makers, will be presented for endorsement at the fourth UN Environment Assembly in March 2019. The report will also inform the discussion and outcomes of the UN High Level Political Forum in September 2019.

This edition of the Outlook will be the only UN report offering an overarching analysis of all major global environmental issues<sup>1</sup>. It will provide a coherent picture of progress to-date, remaining policy challenges and forward-looking scenarios, with policy options for achieving the environmental dimension of Agenda 2030 with multiple co-benefits across all the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Outlook's sixth edition features major innovations, including:

- More emphasis on emerging issues and target-seeking scenarios. This goes beyond extensive literature reviews and the use of latest modeling tools. It also uses new approaches including crowdsourcing of 'game changing' ideas and targeted regional stakeholder consultations.
- A stronger focus on enhancing policy effectiveness and impact. This was done through the analysis of case studies that represent concrete policy action by decision makers.
- Two thirds of the report focus on the 'Policy Effectiveness' and 'Outlooks' assessment. The traditional focus on 'state and trends' of the environment only covers the first one-third of the report, building upon several other global assessments and on the regional GEO assessments produced in 2016.

The Global Environment Outlook-6 process began in early 2015 with six Regional Environmental Information Network conferences that identified environmental priorities in each region. From these priorities, six regional environmental assessments were produced. These have formed the foundation of the global assessment.

**Progress and Timeline:** all planned meetings of authors and advisory bodies for the global process were successfully completed over a period of 18 months (February, May and October 2017, and February, June, September and October 2018)<sup>2</sup>. The main report was extensively peer reviewed through five successive cycles of comments. The integrity of the review process was overseen by a dedicated team of Review Editors. This is an additional quality-assurance step that is practiced by other major assessments (i.e. IPCC or IPBES) and that is now considered best

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<sup>1</sup> Other assessments consulted in this analysis include: the Global Biodiversity Outlook; the global Chemicals Outlook; the Global Resources Outlook; the Global Land Outlook; the Global Waste Management Outlook; regional and global assessments by the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES); reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC); the UN Global Sustainable Development Report; the UN Environment Emission Gap Report; the UN Environment Frontiers series looking at emerging issues; the Global Gender and Environment Outlook; etc.

<sup>2</sup> all UN Environment climate emissions from operations (including travel for staff and meeting participants) are offset through Certified Emission Reductions (CERs) certificates procured through UNFCCC.

practice. The full GEO-6 was supported by a team of Science Editors and is now also being copy edited as it goes to lay-out and publishing (supported with Norway PCA earmarked funds).

The 'draft for negotiation' of the Summary for Policy Makers was finalized at a dedicated meeting of the High-level Intergovernmental and Stakeholder Advisory Group (HLG) and lead authors, held in September 2018 in Mexico. This draft it will be negotiated by all Member States through a major intergovernmental meeting to be held from Jan. 21-24, 2019, in preparation for possible endorsement at the fourth UN Environment Assembly in March 2019.

The Scientific Advisory Panel has also reviewed and endorsed the scientific credibility of the entire GEO-6 process, at a joint meeting with the Review Editors held in Cairo from the 7-11 October 2018. To this effect, a formal letter from the SAP to the UN Environment Chief Scientist is currently being drafted.

In addition to the above, a 'global assessments coherence' meeting was also organized by the GEO-6 team and the Chief Scientist on October 19<sup>th</sup> 2018, to discuss avenues for enhancing synergies among all major global assessments. Participants included the heads of the assessment Secretariats and the co-chairs of: GEO-6, the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES); the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC); the UN Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) and the International Resource Panel (IRP).

Finally, an external independent evaluation of the GEO-6 process was completed in July 2018, and an in-depth scoping study on the future of the GEO process is now being prepared as a resource for Member States who may wish to consider a resolution on this subject at the fourth UN Environment Assembly.

#### **The Global GEO-6 process in numbers:**

- **Members of Advisory Bodies: 78** [High Level Group – 33; Scientific Advisory Panel – 23; Assessment Methodology Group – 12]
- **Authors: 146** [Authors – 120; young Fellows- 26]
- **Quality Assurance: 41** [Review Editors- 36; Science and Copy Editors- 5]
- **UN Team: 301** [UN Environment chapter coordinators- 15; GEO-6 core team- 7; Wider team of UN expert reviewers- 279]
- **Peer Reviewers: >1,370** [Technical reviewers- 1,006; Intergovernmental reviewers and government review focal points- 364 (noting that each government focal point coordinates inputs from several experts)]
- In total the GEO-6 assessment has been **reviewed five times** at different stages of its development and the process has yielded a **total of 14,388 comments** that were addressed by the authors.
- The **gender and geographical balance** in all advisory bodies and in the community of authors was ensured through close collaboration between the UN Environment team and the Scientific Advisory Panel
- The GEO-6 Global process was completed over a period of **18 months**, with a total of **7 face-to face meetings** and **hundreds of virtual conference calls** to coordinate and support advisory bodies and the community of authors

**Status Update 30 October 2018:** Preparations for the sixth edition of the Global Environment Outlook report are now coming to a successful conclusion, with a very positive momentum. Members of the High-level Intergovernmental and Stakeholder Advisory Group (HLG), which oversees the policy relevance of the process, have recently expressed satisfaction with the progress achieved. The HLG has also agreed to the text of a draft GEO-6 Summary for Policy Makers, as a basis for the inter-governmental negotiation planned for January 2019 in Nairobi.

The endorsement of the scientific credibility of the GEO-6 process by the Scientific Advisory Panel has also underscored the successful completion of the underlying report.

Concerns on limited human resources allocated to this Flagship process were raised, and were also flagged in the recently completed mid-term evaluation report. These concerns remain valid, as the core Secretariat team dedicated full-time to this task remains at a historical minimum. However, the team (a) has successfully managed to keep the process on track and to a high standard, and (b) is taking all possible measures to ensure a successful completion of the process even with limited resources.

Financial resources are now secured to complete the GEO-6 report, and to support the final SPM negotiation process in January 2019. This is thanks to (a) a significantly stepped-up contribution of core funds from within UN Environment in mid-2018, and (b) the recently approved ad-hoc contribution by the European Union to GEO-6. Thanks to the earlier contributions from the Norway PCA and several other donors and partners in 2017-2018 (e.g. Italy, Denmark, China, Thailand, Singapore, Mexico and Egypt) the process is expected to reach a successful conclusion. Additional financial resources for communications and outreach, and for the translation and publication of the report in the six UN Languages have not yet been fully mobilized. In 2019 fresh core resources will be sought and external partners are also expected to support these tasks.

**Contact Persons for Feedback and Follow-up**

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