

The Sixth Global Environment Outlook: The Road to Singapore

As the Global Environment Outlook process advances, we are quickly approaching our fourth and final authors meeting in Singapore (19-23 February 2017). This meeting will be crucial for ensuring high-quality second-order drafts of all the chapters are prepared for the 16 April to 18 May 2018, expert review period. This review will be followed by a full intergovernmental and expert review period from 15 June to 17 August 2018. Once authors have addressed all of these comments, this is expected to result in a final Global Environment Outlook text in September or October of 2018. Following professional layout, this draft will then be shared with UN Environment Assembly Member States in December 2018 as an embargoed copy, in preparation for the official launch at the fourth UN Environment Assembly, (11-15 May 2019).

The Singapore meeting, therefore, is a critical step in the drafting process and authors will need to focus primarily on advancing their drafts and ensuring coherence across the whole document. However, the meeting will also focus on the theme of sustainable cities, with a high-level panel of invited experts discussing this topic on Monday, 19 February, 2018. A fourth visioning workshop will complement this high-level panel discussion for the Outlooks component of the report, also focused on sustainable cities. Our gracious local hosts will bring us on an exclusive guided tour of Singapore's physical transformation over the past 50 years at the Singapore City Gallery on Wednesday, 21 February 2018. We will wrap up the day with a relaxing evening reception at the iconic Green Roof at Marina Barrage that commands a panoramic view of Singapore's city skyline and the open sea. These events are expected to energize and encourage the author teams towards the objective of producing complete, high-quality drafts of their chapters.

Once again, we are inviting a large cohort of authors to ensure that all the areas of expertise are covered and, through lively discussions, solutions to the various drafting challenges will be found. Also, we are again encouraging authors to consider text that addresses the economic and equity dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals, to complement their in-depth analysis of the environmental aspect. At the same time, we are expecting that authors will begin extracting key messages from their chapters that can be considered by separate groups of authors working on the Technical Summary and the Summary for Policy Makers. A decision to produce a technical summary of the full report, as other assessments do, was taken in Guangzhou, China at the [third authors meeting](#).



The Green Roof at Marina Barrage

Photo Credit: Singapore's National Water Agency

The Summary for Policy Makers will be the key focus following the completion of the second-order drafts and the start of the review periods. The High-level Intergovernmental and Stakeholder Advisory Group is taking leadership in the development of this crucial document and has approved a procedure for its preparation. This procedure requests that a first-order draft of the Summary for Policy Makers be produced by the coordinating lead authors and the co-chairs of the Global Environment Outlook process. This summary will then be followed by a review by the [three main advisory bodies](#) of the Global Environment Outlook process and a drafting meeting in September, 2018. Finally, the Summary for Policy Makers will be reviewed and revised line-by-line by UN Environment Assembly Member States in either late November 2018 or late January 2019. The Summary for Policy Makers and the full Global Environment Outlook report will then be presented to the fourth UN Environment Assembly for consideration of endorsement in March 2019; thereby bringing to a close the official preparation of this critical assessment report.

However, the UN Environment Secretariat has also begun to identify drafting groups to prepare three derivative products of the Global Environment Outlook, which we expect to be released in stages throughout 2019. These products: GEO for Youth, GEO for Business and GEO for Cities, have been produced in the past and have informed vital audiences of the findings within the Global Environment Outlook which are relevant to them. The Secretariat expects that these will be products that will present the relevant information in a format and with content that will be adapted to that audience. These products are also expected to expand the impact of the Global Environment Outlook and allow different groups to better understand how to apply the findings of the report in their context.



Gardens by the Bay is a park or botanical garden in Singapore

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Equity dimensions inform Global Environment Outlook-6

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The drivers and pressures of environmental degradation are not evenly distributed across society. Nor are the benefits and risks of exposure to, and impacts of, environmental change equitably shared by present and future generations.

The Sustainable Development Goals hold out the promise to ensure that no one will be left behind as we strive to implement the 2030 Agenda. The inability to account for equity issues lead to policy failure on environmental issues which endanger the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Globally, approximately 702 million people live in extreme poverty on less than US\$1.90 per day.¹ Most poor people today live in middle-income countries, but in 10 years poverty will become more concentrated in the more fragile least developed countries facing conflict and climate stress. In Sub-Saharan Africa, 41% of the population – 389 million people – lived in extreme poverty in 2013,² leaving them vulnerable to economic downturns and other external shocks.



* The author wishes to thank Joyeeta Gupta and Joeri Scholtens for their insightful contributions to this article.

¹ Development Economics, World Bank Group, Ending Extreme Poverty and Sharing Prosperity: Progress and Policies, October 2015.

² In 2011 Purchasing Price Parity (PPP) prices. OurWorld in Data, University of Oxford, 2017.

It has long been understood that developing countries are likely to suffer most from the negative impacts of climate change, due to the economic importance of climate-sensitive sectors (e.g., agriculture and fisheries) for these countries, and to their limited human, institutional, and financial capacity to respond to the direct and indirect effects of climate change. The vulnerability is highest for least developed countries in the tropical and subtropical areas.³

While the distribution of poverty remains daunting, new drivers of deprivation have emerged in the present century. Environmental change and environmental degradation – desertification, deforestation, land degradation, climate change and water scarcity – are fundamentally redrawing the map of our world.⁴

The costs of inaction on climate and other environmental issues often fall especially hard upon those directly dependent on natural resources and nature’s contribution to humanity. Approximately 70 percent of the world’s poor depend on natural resources for all or part of their livelihoods.⁵ Ecosystem services and other non-market goods make up between 50 and 90 percent of the total source of livelihoods among poor rural and forest-dwelling households worldwide—the so-called “GDP of the poor.”⁶

Environmental degradation reinforces existing inequities, which in turn become further drivers of degradation, such as the loss of biodiversity, increasing levels of pollution or land degradation. Failing to account for the equity dimension can perpetrate a vicious inequality–environmental degradation circle.

The Global Environment Outlook (GEO) assessments and their consultative and collaborative processes have worked to bridge the gap between science and policy by turning the best available scientific knowledge into information relevant for decision makers. Equity dimensions now need to be incorporated in the GEO. Attention to equity in policy-making enhances the prospects for environmental effectiveness by ensuring that trade-offs are minimized, conflicts are pre-empted and prosperity is promoted.

The Equity dimensions team authors Leisa Perch, a policy specialist with the World Centre for Sustainable Development based in Barbados, and Sándor Fülöp, the Former Parliamentary Commissioner for future generations in Hungary, supported by Joeri Scholtens, a lecturer at the University of Amsterdam’s Department of Geography, are working to weave the equity dimension into the Global Environment Outlook.

GEO-6 will go beyond previous editions of the Outlook by incorporating an equity perspective, one that recognizes that planetary health and human health are intimately interwoven.

Know an Expert: Global Environment Outlook Author Profile



Dr. Atilio Savino from Argentina is a Lead Author on the Crosscutting chapter of the sixth edition of the Global Environment Outlook focusing on waste management. With more than thirty years of experience in solid waste management and climate change, he is the President of “Asociación para el Estudios de los Residuos Sólidos – ARS” (Association for Solid Waste Studies) and Chief Editor of the Regional Waste Management Outlook in Latin America. He is also a Board Member of the International Solid Waste Association – ISWA representing the Regional Developing Network of Latin America, and member of the International Advisory Board of ISWA’s official journal “Waste Management & Research.”

He likens his participation in the sixth edition of the Global Environment Outlook to that of the Regional as well as the Global Waste Management Outlook which was a fantastic experience combining personal views, experience and knowledge of different experts from different countries.

He says the process of the sixth edition of the Global Environment Outlook has a different magnitude that obliges each of the participants to have a broader perspective to interlock all the constituents more complexly, to analyze the situation and propose the necessary steps to drive towards a truly sustainable world.



³ Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), Poverty and Climate Change: Reducing the Vulnerability of the Poor through Adaptation, 2003.
⁴ Statement of UN Environment, Second informal thematic session on “Addressing drivers of migration, including the adverse effects of climate change, natural disasters and human-made crises, through protection and assistance, sustainable development and poverty eradication, conflict prevention and resolution”, 23 May 2017.
⁵ Green Economy Coalition, The Green Economy Pocketbook: The case for action, 2012.
⁶ TEEB (The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity, Mainstreaming the Economics of Nature), A synthesis of the Approach, Conclusions and Recommendations of TEEB, 2010.