

Environment for Development – Policy Lessons from Global Environmental Assessments Report for UNEP

Policy Studies

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Report for UNEP

M.T.J. Kok, J.A. Bakkes, A.H.M. Bresser,
A.J.G. Manders, B. Eickhout, M.M.P. van Oorschot,
D.P. van Vuuren, M. van Wees, H.J. Westhoek



Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency



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Corresponding author: Marcel Kok, marcel.kok@pbl.nl

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Office Bilthoven
PO Box 303
3720 AH Bilthoven
The Netherlands
Telephone: +31 (0) 30 274 274 5
Fax: +31 (0) 30 274 44 79

Office The Hague
PO Box 30314
2500 GH The Hague
The Netherlands
Telephone: +31 (0) 70 328 8700
Fax: +31 (0) 70 328 8799

E-mail: info@pbl.nl
Website: www.pbl.nl/en

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Summary

Never before have so many global assessments and outlooks been published in the field of environment and sustainable development as in the last two years (2007-2008). This report synthesises important and selected findings of the following publications:

- The fourth Global Environment Outlook: Environment for Development (GEO-4), published by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP 2007ab)
- Climate Change 2007. Fourth Assessment Report (IPCC AR4), published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC 2007abcd).
- The OECD Environmental Outlook to 2030 (OECD EO), published by the OECD (OECD 2008).
- The International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), which is, among others, supported by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Bank (IAASTD 2008).
- The Human Development Report 2007/2008. Fighting climate change: Human solidarity in a divided world (HDR) (UNDP 2007).
- The World Water Development Report 2 - Water, a Shared Responsibility and 3 - Water in a Changing World (WWDR), published by the World Water Assessment Programme (UNESCO 2006 and UNESCO (in prep.)).
- Climate Change and Water, Technical paper VI, published by IPCC (IPCC 2008).
- Water for Food: Water for Life. A Comprehensive Assessment of Water Management in Agriculture (CAWMA), published by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) (IWMI 2007).

These assessments are complementary to each other, as each has a different, specific focus or entry point and a different methodological approach. They all resulted from processes that were mandated by different international organisations, including the UNEP. Some would not, first and foremost, label themselves to be environment-oriented. But taken together, these assessments provide an extensive picture of the current state of knowledge on various aspects of the environment and sustainable development. They also outline which future developments can be expected, the advantages and disadvantages, as well as the potential of the various policy options for addressing these problems arising from these developments.

This report is written at the request of UNEP, in support of the preparations for its *25th Session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum*, in February 2009. The overall goal of this synthesis report is to provide policy-makers with highlighted key messages from recent global environmental assessments, including the GEO-4, which was presented at the UNEP's 10th Special Session of the Governing Council in 2008. The current report does not claim to provide a comprehensive and neutral overview of all assessments. Rather, it analyses whether messages from these assessments strengthen the findings of the GEO-4 and what insights they add to the central theme of GEO-4: environment for development. More specifically, the report looks across these assessments for key environmental challenges foreseen for the next decades and to possible policy interventions for dealing with these in a comprehensive manner.

The assessments converge in identifying the main global environmental challenges in sustainable development. The assessments are consistent in their identification of the key issues in the management of the global environment: climate change; biodiversity loss, both terrestrial and aquatic (fresh water and marine); land use and freshwater management and pollution. More than ever, competition for land emerges as a global issue. The assessments conclude, each in its own focal area, that many technical solutions are available and affordable for achieving the domestic and international targets. However, they display different perspectives on preferred policy options.

Apparently, assessment practice is beginning to move away from problem identification towards analysis of possible policy responses. In some assessments, this shift is more distinct than in others. If a new round of assessments will proceed more strongly in this direction, assessments will need to adapt their methodologies accordingly. Because assessments of policy responses will likely create more controversies and result in assessment processes becoming more political, this will require that particular attention is paid to the rules and the process design of new assessments to deal with such controversies.

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