

## 2019: Recap of the sixth Global Environment Outlook

2019 was a flagship year for UNEP's flagship environmental assessment, the [sixth Global Environment Outlook \(GEO-6\)](#). After nearly 2 ½ years of working with more than 150 authors, 25 governments and 25 expert scientists, GEO-6 and its accompanying Summary for Policymakers were launched in March 2019 at the fourth UN Environment Assembly. Member States received the two reports with appreciation and they also expressed their appreciation to the authors and experts who contributed to the report. The report was well-reported on in the media, with almost 3000 articles written in 30 languages across 102 countries. Up to October 2019, the GEO-6 and its Summary for Policymakers had been downloaded more than 150,000 times, keeping pace with UNEP's most downloaded publication, the Emissions Gap Report.



From March to October 2019 Science Division undertook an extensive outreach effort, presenting the [GEO-6 findings](#) to the Council of Europe, the European Parliament, the OECD's Environmental Policy Committee, the International Energy Agency, Environment and Climate Change Canada, the U.S. State Department, the German Ministry of Environment, The Environment Ministry of the Czech Republic, the Government of Poland, the Government of Norway, the Geneva Environmental Network, US Environmental Protection Agency, the Earth Systems Governance Network, and also collaborated with UN's Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) in a workshop to discuss the environmental messages of the Global Sustainable Development Report. The [GEO-6 findings](#) were also presented at the African Ministerial Conference for the Environment (AMCEN), in collaboration with the launch of the [GEO for Youth Africa](#).

During 2019, important [regional GEO products](#) were launched, including the [GEO for Youth Asia-Pacific](#) and the [GEO for Industry Asia-Pacific](#). Regional GEO outreach also continues through the seminars to teach the GEO methodology to 23 countries in Africa and 4 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.



The [GEO-6 Summary for Policymakers](#) was not only translated into the 6 UN languages, but through collaboration with countries, it is now translated into German, Japanese, Czech and Italian. Important relationships are developing with these governments, who see the GEO-6 as an important science-policy tool in their efforts to improve their environment. The translation of the larger main GEO-6 report is also progressing in Chinese and French.

Finally, through [Resolution 23](#) the process for improving the GEO process in future years has started, with 37 countries participating on a [Steering Committee](#) and helping to develop options for the [future of GEO](#). The [inception meeting of this Steering Committee](#) happened in November 2019 and the work will continue through 2020 to deliver a set of recommendations to the fifth Environment Assembly in 2021.



## A GEO-6 Outreach at the Expert Group on Population and Food

The head of the Global Environment Outlook was invited to discuss various aspects found in the [GEO-6](#) that touch on both population and food. Several observations were made and identified, one of the most important having to do with our global food system which currently leaves about 800 million people undernourished, leading to impacts such as stunting, cognitive difficulties and health problems. The rise in the number of people being overweight or obese leading to chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and other non-communicable diseases is alarming. Our agriculture is also facing threats due to monoculture crop production and intensification which are leading to certain crops (e.g. cereals, fruits and vegetables) lacking the proper level of micronutrients (e.g. iron, zinc). The increase in micronutrient deficiencies leading to health problems such as anemia, especially in mothers and children from developing countries has become a cause of concern.



[GEO-6](#) discusses numerous messages on environmental and health impacts of our food systems which align well with the messages on nutrition and food security. Diets lighter in meat consumption and those that contain more fruits, nuts and vegetables allow us to meet global and regional nutritional objectives as well as mitigate the environmental and health impacts of food systems. The science-policy seminar format developed for the [GEO-6](#) presents the findings of the 744-page report in a compact but comprehensive fashion, stimulating good discussions on key policy issues that countries are facing.

There were other several meetings held including an Expert Group meeting on the theme of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Session of the UN Population Commission. This meeting was launched with some introductory opening remarks by the Director of Population Division at UN DESA, Mr. John Wilmoth who noted how unique the theme of the upcoming 53<sup>rd</sup> Session will be. The Population Commission has never sought to discuss such a broad theme, but there is clear alignment of this theme with the broader [Sustainable Development Goals](#). The outcome of the meeting was not a resolution, but the possibility of an agreed statement that would eventually end as a resolution in another forum, including the General Assembly.

Pointers that started off the meeting included a review of concepts, definitions, and data sources to support the theme of 'Population, Food Security, Nutrition and Sustainable Development'. The definitions and concepts on hunger, food security and nutrition were discussed and reviewed by Nancy Aburto (FAO) as well as some of the data that FAO are gathering in these areas. Ruben Grajeda from World Health Organization reviewed the different nutrition indicators that WHO is tracking, to support their work on non-communicable diseases. Finally, Frank Swiaczny from the Population Division reviewed the data sources supporting UN DESA's work to track population and demographic trends. Most of these messages aligned well with the population and demographic trends data in the [Drivers chapter of GEO-6](#).

There were discussions on the link between food security and population where Lorenzo Bellu of FAO reviewed the growth and consumption trends for food production/consumption and agriculture. These messages aligned well with the analysis provided in the [Land](#) and [Cross-cutting chapters](#) of GEO-6. A presentation carried out by Hugo Valin from the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) discussed different pathways to achieve sustainable land use and sustainable food systems. Discussions on food systems were then concluded by Marco Springmann who reviewed the work on the trends related to health and nutritional aspects of our current food systems and looked at various diet strategies that could help mitigate the environmental impacts of food systems.

UNEP presented the main findings of the [sixth Global Environment Outlook](#) related to food systems.

The presentation was complemented by the findings from the IPCC's Climate Change and Land report as well as the World Resources Report on food systems. There was regional perspective brought to the discussion with Namukolo Covic (IFPRI) reviewing the trends on food security and nutrition in Africa. Sahar fawzy Gas Elsonbaty from the Health Ministry in Egypt also reviewed trends in her country, where there is a similar problem in nutrient deficiencies, due to poor diets and access to nutrient poor foods. The trends for obesity and overweight in Egypt are growing strongly and are leading to a crisis that the government is addressing with policies in sugar consumption and restrictions on unhealthy food.



## Science-policy seminar at Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECC)

A session was organized by The International Affairs section of ECC where the findings of GEO-6 were presented to a group of staff from across the Government of Canada. Here, the main findings of GEO-6 were presented to the group and a discussion ensued on how Canada could best turn these findings into forward-looking policies. UNEP noted that transitional fuels such as natural gas will be needed in parts of the world where coal-fired power generation is very prevalent. Presently, 500 coal-fired power plants are under construction around the world with 350 of them being built in China, India and Indonesia.



Canada's agricultural policies need to balance food security with climate protection. Some questions were asked about the GEO methodology on outlooks and UNEP responded that the pathways looked at were the Shared Socioeconomic Pathways of the IPCC and they were applied to a target seeking scenario where all SDGs and other Internationally Agreed Environmental Goals would be achieved. The broad outcome of this is that transformational changes are needed in our energy, food and water systems to ensure the climate is stabilized and enough food and water are available for the global population.

## Science-policy seminar at U.S. State Department

The Environment Section of U.S. State Department hosted a science-policy seminar in Washington, D.C. to review

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