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Update on the sixth edition of the Global Environment

Outlook report

**Progress in the preparation of the sixth Global Environment
Outlook, pursuant to resolution 1/4 on the science-policy
interface**

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

In June 2014, the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme adopted resolution 1/4 on the science-policy interface. The present report provides an update on progress made in the implementation of the resolution, as requested in paragraph 8 thereof.

* UNEP/EA.3/1.

I. Introduction

1. At its first session, held in June 2014, the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme adopted resolution 1/4 on the science-policy interface, in which it requested the Executive Director, within the programme of work and budget, to undertake the preparation of the sixth Global Environment Outlook (GEO-6), supported by UNEP Live, with the scope, objectives and procedures of GEO-6 to be defined by a transparent global intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder consultation informed by document UNEP/EA.1/INF/14, resulting in a scientifically credible, peer-reviewed GEO-6 and its accompanying summary for policymakers, to be endorsed by the Environment Assembly no later than 2018. The present report provides an update on progress made in the implementation of that resolution, as requested in paragraph 8 thereof.
2. Progress made in the implementation of the resolution is aligned with expected accomplishment (a) (global, regional and national policymaking is facilitated by environmental information made available on open platforms) under subprogramme 7, Environment under review, of the programme of work for 2016–2017.
3. The present report and annex hereto have been prepared by the secretariat of the Global Environment Outlook and the high-level intergovernmental and stakeholder advisory group, a key advisory body for the Global Environment Outlook process. The purpose of the annex is to highlight some key findings of the process to date and to request guidance from ministers on three key questions. Responses from ministers will be used to adjust or adapt the process going forward.

II. Progress in the implementation of resolution 1/4

4. The Global Environment Outlook is the Environment Programme's flagship integrated assessment of the state of the global environment. It presents the environmental trends for air, climate, water, land and biota/biodiversity. It draws on all the major global assessments from international science panels and United Nations 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.
5. The analysis conducted to date in the sixth edition of the Global Environment Outlook shows that, while some progress is being made, the global environment is, in many areas, degraded and under threat and that urgent and sustained action is required to address these challenges. At the regional level, these threats are affecting the health of humans, ecosystems and economies. Some improvements are being made in certain areas, and Governments are making efforts to build on these success stories. At the global level, commitments by nations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and other environmental goals, such as the Paris Agreement, show that countries recognize the importance of environmental improvement and achieving true sustainability in a time frame that will allow ecosystems, human populations and economies to adapt to "the new normal".
6. Development of the environmental assessment began with an intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder consultation held in Berlin from 21 to 23 October 2014. Following the consultation, six regional assessments were prepared by a group of more than 400 expert authors. These regional assessments were published at the second Environment Assembly, held from 23 to 27 May 2016. In the margins of the Assembly, the high-level intergovernmental and stakeholder advisory group and select members of the scientific advisory panel developed an annotated outline and provided guidance for the preparation of the global analysis to be conducted in the sixth Global Environment Outlook.
7. Subsequently, a gathering of expert authors and co-chairs from the regional assessment process, as well as some members of the scientific advisory panel, took place in Bangkok from 28 June to 1 July 2016 to develop a list of prospective co-chairs, vice-chairs and authors for the global assessment. These experts were then invited to contribute to the Global Environment Outlook process in October and November 2016. The development of the global assessment was officially launched at the first global authors' meeting, held in Frascati, Italy, from 20 to 24 February 2017.
8. The authors then worked to develop their first drafts of the first nine chapters of the global assessment in March and April 2017, and these were prepared for the expert and intergovernmental review process at the second global authors' meeting, held in Bangkok, from 22 to 26 May. The review process for the first nine chapters, covering the drivers of environmental change, the state of the relevant data and knowledge and the state and trends of the global environment, was conducted from 3 July to 15 September 2017. Chapters on policy effectiveness and global outlooks were drafted and discussed at the third global authors' meeting, held in Guangzhou, China, from 9 to 13 October 2017. These chapters were submitted as a first-order draft for expert and advisory body review in late November 2017. Delivery of the sixth Global Environment Outlook and its accompanying summary

for policymakers is planned for the fourth session of the Environment Assembly, at which member States will be requested to endorse the summary. Delivery of these products for the fourth session will require an amendment to resolution 1/4, which we would request member States to approve during the third session of the Assembly.

9. Concurrently with these meetings and activities, the advisory bodies for the Global Environment Outlook have continued to meet virtually on a monthly basis to provide guidance on issues of scientific credibility and policy relevance. Two face-to-face meetings of the advisory bodies, in parallel with the first and third authors' meetings, have developed important additional guidance, such as the procedure for the preparation of the summary for policymakers of the sixth Global Environment Outlook. The authors' meetings have also provided an opportunity for important outreach and awareness-raising efforts, thereby creating anticipation for the release of the global assessment.¹

10. The advisory bodies have monitored the funding situation of the project, which continues to show a gap of almost \$1.4 million, despite generous contributions from the Governments of China, Italy, Norway and Singapore (see the table below).

Contributions to activity costs for the sixth Global Environment Outlook, 2017–2018

(United States dollars)

| Event Locations and details | Contributor | | | | | | Total |
|---|------------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------------------|----------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | China (local costs) | Italy | Norway | Singapore (local costs) | Other (unsecured) | Core funding | |
| Bangkok | | 37 800 | 408 000 | | | | 445 800 |
| Frascati, Italy | | 257 800 | 37 000 | | | | 294 800 |
| Guangzhou, China | 270 875 | | 350 000 | | | | 620 875 |
| Singapore | | | 350 000 | 270 875 | | | 620 875 |
| Other costs | | | 100 000 | | | | 100 000 |
| High-level intergovernmental and stakeholder advisory group | | | | | 150 000 | | 150 000 |
| Review editors | | | | | 120 000 | | 120 000 |
| Member State negotiation | | | | | 700 000 | | 700 000 |
| Outreach | | | | | 400 000 | | 400 000 |
| Environment Fund | | | | | | 576 000 | 576 000 |
| Regular budget | | | | | | 891 200 | 891 200 |
| Total | 295 600 | 1 245 000 | 270 875 | 270 875 | 1 370 000 | 1 467 200 | 4 919 550 |

Note: Extrabudgetary contributions for 2018 are not included in the totals.

III. Recommendations and suggested action

11. To further strengthen these findings, the high-level intergovernmental and stakeholder advisory group has highlighted matters for the consideration of ministers, as set out in the annex to the present report, outlining its views on the challenges faced and the possible pathways to achieving success. The annex also sets out some questions that Governments may wish to answer to help the Global Environment Outlook report to provide the best information and guidance for future deliberations and decisions. Through this collaborative effort, the high-level intergovernmental and stakeholder advisory group hopes to stimulate discussion and increase the policy relevance of the Environment Programme's flagship environmental assessment.

¹ Further information and videos are available from www.unep.org/geo.

Annex

Matters for the consideration of ministers, prepared by the high-level intergovernmental and stakeholder advisory group

1. The sixth Global Environment Outlook, which is currently being prepared, is the United Nations Environment Programme's flagship integrated assessment of planetary well-being and its implications for humanity. The Outlook provides important analyses and interpretations of the state and trends of the global environment, the effectiveness and impacts of relevant policies and programmes and prospects for the future, based on the most up-to-date data available and collated and drafted through a rigorous scientific process. Its aim is to inform and assist citizens, organizations and Governments at all levels about the most effective ways to manage and sustainably use natural resources and the environment while protecting the health of the environment so as to promote sustainable development for the continued benefit of current and future generations.
2. Regional environmental assessments for the sixth Global Environment Outlook were published in 2016. They all identified pollution as a major challenge. The growing extent of air and water pollution and their effects on human health and productivity were highlighted, as were emerging issues relating to new chemical-based pollutants. These assessments are assisting in a fast-emerging understanding of the systemic challenges presented in the efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to eradicate poverty by the intersections of climate change, biodiversity loss, overuse of chemicals, unsustainable patterns of consumption and production, the inefficient use of natural resources, the economic and social costs of their degradation and demographic trends, including urbanization, and the growing need for optimally functioning ecosystem services, such as clean water and air. The recent scientific work on ecosystems suggests that, individually and together, these challenges are increasing the risks that human societies will further transgress those ecologically sustainable limits where they have already done so, and may soon be overstepping others.
3. The broader Global Environment Outlook will be available in full to decision makers and the public in 2019. The sections on the state of the environment and the policy responses are close to finalization, while the section on outlooks is still under development. The sixth Global Environment Outlook will also include a summary for policymakers, negotiated with and by Governments, and potentially some other derived products targeted for specific audiences.
4. However, from the analyses to date it is clear that urgent and sustained action is needed to address pollution. The effects of pollution on people's health alone are having significant negative economic and social impacts. These losses are estimated as equivalent to several percentage points of gross domestic product, even using conservative estimates, but the often devastating impacts on the health, lives, livelihoods and well-being of the millions of people who experience them are not well expressed by such dry aggregate statistics. Moreover, pollution has a disproportionate impact on women, the economically disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, such as children and the elderly. Its impacts are also long-lasting, transcending generations through, for example, direct negative impacts on cognitive and physical development.
5. Analysis of policy and programmatic efforts in some countries and regions shows that progress on some of these issues has been achieved but that considerably more is possible through reinforced international cooperation and concerted, coherent and targeted action, despite the increasingly complex risks of pollution. Technological innovations are also necessary but not sufficient to meet the increasing demands of and pressures on the environment. Local-level social innovations show promise. Beyond all these, wider systems innovations, facilitated by enabling policy frameworks that transform food, energy, water management, built infrastructure and mobility systems, are necessary to reduce rather than exacerbate pollution.
6. The integration of environmental, economic and social information is necessary yet rare. In many countries, basic data on the environment, including the impacts of pollution, are not regularly collected, standardized, made available in usable forms or used for decision-making. However, there are many opportunities in the digital era for rapidly transforming data collection through, for example, satellite data, inexpensive sensors, citizen science and improved telecommunications, to contribute to informed action. Integrated approaches to promote sustainable development such as life-cycle analysis and natural capital accounting can clarify social-economy-environment relationships. Flexible and iterative approaches and support for niche innovations have a key role to play in achieving the various targets of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals in an integrated way.

7. The analysis so far in the Global Environment Outlook demonstrates that the environment and natural resources are fundamental to the achievement of all the objectives of the 2030 Agenda. A healthy and optimally functioning environment is key to social well-being and sustainable development and should be considered, together with social and economic concerns, when addressing each and every Sustainable Development Goal. For example, gender issues and education have important environmental dimensions; economic development, employment and efforts towards poverty eradication have an impact on the environment and are dependent upon natural capital; food and agriculture cannot function without the environment and a conducive climate, yet have a heavy impact on both; innovation in industrialization and infrastructure design is essential both for sustainable development and for maintaining the continued healthy underpinning support of the environment. Democracy, governance and the rule of law have become pertinent for environment and natural resources management, and, where they have failed, a lack of equitable access to resources, conflict and degradation are key challenges.

8. Against this backdrop, the overarching policy challenge is to maximize synergies in, and more effectively integrate for, sustainable development. The Global Environment Outlook seeks to assist all stakeholders in better understanding how to address these issues, through urgent sustained actions for environmental health improvement, alongside the importance of managing the environment sustainably and equitably for economic and social development (see the figure below).



9. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals offer a framework for more ambitious outcomes globally.

10. As the Global Environment Outlook is being finalized, ministers are asked to consider the questions below to provide guidance on ways that the Outlook, the summary for policymakers and any derived products, might increase their value for you and your constituents in informing relevant actions:

- (a) How can the outlook's analysis in the sixth Global Environment Outlook help you to address more effectively the environmental sustainability challenges at the global, regional and national levels?
- (b) What are the most important issues for you that should be addressed by the intergovernmentally negotiated summary for policymakers for the sixth Global Environment Outlook?
- (c) What kinds of targeted briefing papers or other derived outputs that could be extracted from the sixth Global Environment Outlook would you like to receive in order to facilitate your work as well as to enhance the usefulness of the report in your country or region?