

GEO-6 Highlights: Monday, 21 January 2019

The Intergovernmental Meeting on the Sixth Global Environmental Outlook (GEO-6) opened on Monday, 21 January 2019, at the UNEP headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. In the morning, delegates listened to opening statements, elected officers for the meeting, and adopted the meeting agenda. For the rest of the day, countries shared their general views on the draft Summary for Policymakers (SPM). Starting Tuesday, delegates will begin a line-by-line review of the draft SPM and make specific suggestions for changes.

Opening Session

Jorge Laguna-Celis, Secretary, Secretariat of Governing Bodies and Stakeholders, UN Environment (UNEP), opened the meeting. He noted that GEO-6 will be presented to the fourth meeting of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-4) for possible endorsement in March 2019.

Co-Chair of the High-level Intergovernmental and Stakeholder Advisory Group (HLG) Paolo Soprano (Italy) outlined the context in which GEO-6 is being produced, explaining:

- the origins of the GEO reports; GEO's role as a UNEP "flagship report";
- the UNEA mandates for GEO-6;
- the GEO-6 governance system, working structure, processes for peer review and responding to comments; and
- the SPM work programme.

Joyce Msuya, Acting Executive Director, UNEP, characterized the GEO as one of the most important UNEP products, representing "the very best of science and partnership for the environment." She noted that unlike previous reports, GEO-6 considers policies that may help make a difference in future outcomes.

Keriako Tobiko, Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Forestry, Kenya, said that the outcome of the meeting will form a critical basis for discussions at UNEA-4. Highlighting the disconnect between science and policy, and between policy, science and action, Tobiko: urged decision makers to incorporate science into policymaking procedures; and called for translating policy into tangible, concrete, measurable actions on the ground. He lauded GEO-6 authors for incorporating traditional knowledge, thus strengthening the link between science and tradition knowledge.

Organizational Matters: Election of Officers

Delegates elected the bureau by acclamation:

- Co-Chair Paolo Soprano, Italy, for the Western Europe and Others group (WEOG);
- Co-Chair Edgar Guittierez, Costa Rica, for the Group of Latin America and Caribbean (GRULAC) countries;
- Marek Garzdecki, Poland, for Central and Eastern Europe (CEE); and
- Aziza Geleta Dessalegn, Ethiopia, for the African Group, also serving as Rapporteur.

The Asia-Pacific Group has called upon to provide its Bureau nominee later in the meeting.



Group photo at the opening of the conference



Joyce Msuya, Acting Executive Director, UNEP, and **Keriako Tobiko**, Minister of Environment, Kenya

Co-Chair Edgar Gutiérrez (Costa Rica) outlined the Bureau's proposed work plan for the week. Delegates adopted the provisional agenda (UNEP/GEO-6/SPM/1.1) without amendment.

Presentation by GEO-6 Co-Chairs

Joyeeta Gupta, GEO-6 Assessment Co-Chair, said the report's key underlying messages are:

- a healthy planet supports healthy people;
- an unhealthy planet leads to unhealthy people;
- drivers and pressures need to be addressed;
- current science justifies action now;
- environmental policy is necessary but not sufficient; and
- a healthy planet, healthy people and healthy economy are mutually supportive.

GEO-6 Assessment Co-Chair Paul Ekins said the report considers 11 crosscutting issues, noting that addressing social, gender equity and climate change remain key for achieving the SDGs, as does education and achieving significant changes in food production, consumption, water management resource use. He outlined messages in SPM section 3 on effectiveness of environmental policy, including:

- multi-level governance is very important;
- there is a need to go beyond the basic emissions control agenda;
- the need for sustained and conclusive actions;
- the world is not on-track for meeting the SDGs;



Jian Liu, Chief Scientist, UNEP, with **Stadler Trengove**, UN Legal Officer

- transformative change and an integrated approach is required; and
- data gaps need to be filled but they should not delay urgent action.

General Statements on the SPM

In general statements, the EU, supported by many others, including LAO PDR, expressed their gratitude to the experts for the work done to produce GEO-6. The EU, with NORWAY, noted that the SPM will be instrumental for furthering discussions at UNEA-4, the High-level Political Forum (HLPF), and the development of the Global Sustainable Development Report.

South Africa, for the AFRICAN GROUP, noted that GEO-6 will help provide best available responses to achieve environmental goals including the SDGs; highlighted the importance of comprehensive environmental monitoring; and called for adequate means of implementation.

ARGENTINA called for strengthening the links between science and policy, and between the three pillars of sustainable development.

The US called for a stronger focus on data and science informing policy, pointing to the need for clarity in the section on air pollution. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION noted the importance of the endorsement of GEO-6 by UNEA-4.

PALESTINE called for taking note of the environmental- and resource-related challenges of people in occupied territories.



From L-R: **Jian Liu**, Chief Scientist, UN Environment (UNEP); **Keriako Tobiko**, Minister of Environment, Kenya; and **Joyce Msuya**, Acting Executive Director, UNEP



Guri Sandborg, Norway

NORWAY called for further discussions to unpack the “science-policy interface” and how best to “act now,” stressing that the SPM needs country buy-in and ownership.

CHINA appreciated the involvement of experts from the country in the assessment, and supported the work towards ensuring GEO-6 endorsement at UNEA-4. COSTA RICA lauded the scientific legitimacy of the GEO-6 report, particularly in support for achieving the SDGs. JAPAN said the scientific narrative is well presented and drew attention to text on the problem of marine litter in oceans, noting scarcity of knowledge in this area.

Argentina, for GRULAC, urged for consistency with internationally agreed language and definitions, and requested a disclaimer on maps that consider disputes of boundaries among countries. INDONESIA requested for consistency in adding reference to local communities when referring to indigenous communities. SINGAPORE asked for clarification on the process for incorporating country comments in the report noting concern on text changes it proposed. Pierre Boileau, GEO-6 Secretariat, noted that the report has undergone five peer-review processes, of which two are intergovernmental reviews.

The UK suggested changes to avoid “drifting into policy prescriptions,” defining certain confidence qualifiers, and correcting an imbalance in the oceans section that focuses too much on plastics.



Laksmi Dhevanthi, Indonesia

The DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO suggested clarifying a statement on the contribution of peatlands to storing carbon, to note that most peatlands in the Congo Basin remain pristine.

The NETHERLANDS raised questions about some of the graphics used in the draft SPM, noting for example that the timeline used in one graphic did not match the timeline used in related text.

CANADA noted that some messages require qualifiers, suggested more references to women as agents of change, and noted that some of the statements involving chemicals are too general.

SWITZERLAND suggested taking out prescriptive language in the air, water and oceans sections and placing it later in the report. She also suggested the meeting discuss sharing with ministers the two-page summary of the SPM key messages as it may serve as an important communication tool.

CHILE suggested greater emphasis in the SPM on the relationship between gender and the environment, the importance of biodiversity, and the need for more effective environmental policies, especially regarding resource use.

Noting that the document required more depth, COLOMBIA called for the inclusion in the SPM of issues such as mercury, and adaptation to climate change; and called for expanding on issues related to the ozone layer and chemicals management.



Vanessa Lim, Singapore



Maribe Mujinga Nsomo, Democratic Republic of the Congo

SENEGAL stressed the need to include means of implementation to action policies that will be created to support GEO-6 implementation. He called for more data, and also for capacity building for environmental assessments in developing countries.

NORWAY reported that their written submission contains more concrete policy advice, aligned with and referencing the main GEO-6 report.

Pointing to the importance of speaking to national and local level actors, INDONESIA suggested that language related to multi-level governance also include references to local and national actors; and that the two-page summary of the SPM key messages use the agreed terminology related to environmental governance.

MADAGASCAR called for a better French translation of the theme "Healthy People, Healthy Planet."

Stressing the importance of the GEO for future generations, EGYPT cautioned against prejudging discussions in other fora such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

ECUADOR called for additional references to gender equality in text regarding, *inter alia*, oceans, migratory species, and chemicals management; and urged referencing the private sector in dealing with plastics. He called for:

- more data collection and exchange of information;
- sustainable consumption and productions patterns towards a circular economy;
- the reduction of fossil fuel use; and
- promoting equitable growth in developed and developing countries.

KENYA said the SPM should call for investment into biodiversity awareness-raising campaigns.

SAMOA stressed that:

- the key messages should be "policymaker friendly" to ensure the GEO is implemented;
- GEO-6 is linked strongly to the SDGs and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda; and
- the GEO is applicable at local, national, and regional levels.

THE PHILIPPINES noted that they would provide written comments on, *inter alia*, low-carbon development; technological innovation; climate change; air pollution; and sustainable energy.



Elizabeth Taylor, Colombia

GABON called for incorporating action points from the Libreville Declaration on Health and Environment. The WOMEN MAJOR GROUP noted that the GEO needs to translate language on education into policy language; called for synergies related to data, innovation, science and traditional knowledge to ensure equitable benefits; and highlighted the need to include information related to the second Global Chemicals Outlook (GCO II).

The US reminded delegates that the SPM was not meant to be exhaustive, but is rather a summary of the lengthy GEO-6 report. Co-Chair Soprano emphasized that issues outside the GEO-6 would not be included in the SPM.

SRI LANKA noted that land degradation is an important driver for many developing countries, and urged for emphasis on ways to convert policy messages in the SPM into concrete actions on the ground.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION drew attention to the recently completed GCO II and urged for reflection of its messages in the GEO-6 SPM.

Pierre Boileau, GEO-6 Secretariat, responded to comments saying: the SPM has been geared towards alignment to the achievement of the SDGs, drawing attention to the State of the Environment, Policy and Outlook sections, where achievement of the SDGs have been assessed under the business as usual scenario. He said that implementation would be difficult to detail in the SPM, but noted that a third of the main report is dedicated to policy implementation. He also highlighted that the efficiency of policy types and frameworks have been analyzed in detail. With respect to the GCO II, Boileau emphasized that since it has not yet been officially published, it cannot be referenced in the GEO-6. He noted, however, that chemicals and waste are dealt with as cross-cutting issues, and that two authors from the GCO assessments were involved in the GEO-6.

SOUTH AFRICA suggested hyperlinking the electronic version of the SPM to the main GEO-6 report to assist countries to link their messages to the detailed text.

GEO-6 Assessment Co-Chair Paul Ekins urged delegates to submit specific text suggestions to facilitate the inclusion of their comments into the draft SPM.