

GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS HAVE NO NATIONAL SOLUTIONS

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Conservation, Sustainable Development, and EIA

Last week, the United Nations released a landmark report, The Global Environment Outlook (GEO), which made two important points that all national governments need to take seriously: One, environment damage (deadly emissions, chemicals polluting drinking water, and the accelerating destruction of ecosystems) is responsible for a quarter of premature deaths and diseases across the world. Second, there is a growing chasm between rich and poor countries as rampant overconsumption, pollution and food waste in the developed world is leading to hunger, poverty and disease elsewhere.

While the report, which was six years in the making, and has been compiled by 250 scientists from 70 countries, does not paint a positive picture of the world, the heartening news is that scientists feel that, despite the challenges, the situation can be rectified. This is true. Food waste, for instance, which accounts for 9% of global greenhouse gas emissions, can be reduced. The world currently throws away a third of all food produced. In richer nations, 56% goes to waste. Then the report says 1.4 million people die each year from preventable diseases such as diarrhoea and parasites linked to pathogen-riddled water and poor sanitation. This can also be tackled by providing clean water and also investing in processes that can lead to a behavioural change in people.

In the past one year, there have been several reports that have warned national governments about the perils of ignoring such mounting environmental challenges. While each of these reports have appraised the scope and nature of different challenges — from air pollution to biodiversity — the most important takeaway from all these reports is that many of these are global problems. Many of these environmental problems (climate change being the big one), as Israeli academic and author of the bestseller, *Sapiens*, Yuval Noah Harari, says, have no national solutions. Global cooperation is the first and necessary step to successfully face these challenges. With many world leaders such as US President Donald Trump showing a lack of interest in combating climate change, the road ahead will not be easy. Unfortunately, the brunt of such irresponsible behaviour will be borne by developing countries such as India.

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