

FOR A HEALTHY PLANET

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Degradation - GHGs, Ozone Depletion and Climate Change

Last week in Nairobi, governments welcomed the [Global Environment Outlook 6: Healthy Planet, Healthy People \(GEO-6\)](#) report. GEO-6 argues that in a business-as-usual scenario, the world will exhaust its energy-related carbon budget in less than 20 years to keep the global temperature rise to well below 2°C; it will take even less time to exhaust the budget to keep the global temperature rise to below 1.5°C.

India could save \$3.3-8.4 trillion in a 1.5°C world. It is in [India's interest to aim for 1.5-2°C](#). This would mean investing in not new fossil fuels but in renewables and better batteries. Investing in inappropriate infrastructure has costs in terms of climate change and stranded assets — decommissioning oil and gas infrastructure in the Netherlands, a small country, is €6.7-10 billion. If India's universities develop tomorrow's technologies, it could provide cutting-edge and frugal technologies. This could change energy geopolitics and remove the excuse of rich countries of postponing carbon neutrality. Developing countries can change — Costa Rica, for instance, has pledged carbon neutrality by 2021.

GEO-6 shows that the interlocking environmental crises kill millions prematurely and affect and displace billions. Substituting for nature by buying air purifiers, building coastal defence systems to compensate for degrading mangroves, or just cleaning beaches is expensive. Ironically, such costs increase the GDP as currently calculated. As GDP grows at the cost of the environment and does not reflect an increase in everyone's well-being, India should reconsider how it calculates its GDP.

A healthy planet is a public good and governments should take responsibility for it. When they hand responsibility to the private sector, clean air is only available to those who can pay for an air purifier. Poor people cannot afford air purifiers. Investing in water and sanitation will bring returns — a \$1 investment in water and sanitation could bring \$4 in returns; a green investment of 2% of global GDP could lead to similar growth rates by 2050. We must mobilise think tanks to work out context-specific solutions for India.

Investing in education for sustainable development, vertical and compact cities, public transport with cheap parking facilities, renewable energy, removing single-use plastics, and reducing food waste are the way to go to reduce global warming.

Many Indians are vegetarians. Why not promote that lifestyle? Much of India was a circular economy, so why not cherish the re-users and recyclers? India had a judiciary that thought of long-term justice; why not protect that? We must debate where we want to be in 2050 and strive towards that.

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