Keeping the World’s Environment under Review

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How do we take stock of the state and changing trends of the world’s environment, and distill lessons from policy experiences? Amongst the myriad detailed narratives about the condition of the planet, the periodic Global Environment Outlook (GEO)—published by the United Nations Environment Programme—stands out as the most ambitious. For nearly three decades, the GEO project has not only delivered iconic global assessment reports, but the many contributors have also inspired hundreds of similar processes, worldwide, from regional to local levels. This book provides an inside account of the evolution of the GEO project from its earliest days.

Building on meticulous research, including interviews with former heads of the United Nations Environment Programme, diplomats, leading contributing scientists, and senior leaders of collaborating organisations, the story is told from the perspective of five GEO veterans who all played a pivotal role in shaping the periodic assessments. GEO’s history provides striking insights and will save valuable time for those who will commission, design and conduct, as well as critique and improve the assessments of environmental development, in the next decade.

“This well-researched documentary shows how, for many years, GEO shaped the environmental agenda at national and global levels. It argues that, moving forward, a drastic overhaul of its approach, scope, content, and targeted audiences is needed, to respond to the rapid socio-economic changes world-wide, and the urgent need to move to greater sustainability.”

Veerle Vandeweerd, Initiator of GEO and Head of GEO team 1995–1999

“This book settles a historical debt on the history of integrated environmental assessments.”

Edgar Gutiérrez-Espeleta, Director of the Development Observatory, University of Costa Rica (GEO Collaborating Centre 1998–2002); Minister of Environment and Energy, Costa Rica 2014–2018; President of United Nations Environment Assembly 2016–2017; Member of High Level Inter-Governmental and Stakeholder Advisory Group for GEO-6

“This book presents a fascinating and intimate account of what it took to create and operate one of the most comprehensive and inclusive assessment processes for keeping the world’s environment under review.”


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