Global Environment Outlook Report - UNEP

Why in news?

The sixth edition of the Global Environment Outlook (GEO-6) from the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) on the theme "Healthy Planet, Healthy People" was released recently.

What is the report for?

- World leaders came up with the Paris climate deal in 2015, with promised actions to cut emissions, to limit global temperature rises to 1.5 °C.
- But the health impacts of pollution, deforestation and the mechanised food-chain are less well understood.
- There is also no international agreement for the environment, similar to what the Paris accord does for the climate.
- The GEO thus partly addresses this gap by bringing the attention of world nations to the impact of environmental problems on humans.

What are the report highlights?

- **Premature deaths** - A quarter of all premature deaths and diseases worldwide are due to manmade pollution and environmental damage.
- The report notes on deadly smog-including emissions, chemicals polluting drinking water, and the destruction of ecosystems crucial to the livelihoods of many.
- These are driving a worldwide epidemic that hampers the global economy.
- **Inequality** - The GEO depicts a widening gap between rich and poor countries.
- The top 10% of populations globally, in terms of wealth, are responsible for 45% of GHG emissions, and the bottom 50% for only 13%.
- Pollution impacts are, however, borne more by the poorer citizens.
- Rampant overconsumption, pollution and food waste in the developed world leads to hunger, poverty and diseases elsewhere.
- **Health** - Poor environmental conditions cause approximately 25% of global disease and mortality, with around 9 million deaths in 2015 alone.
- Nearly 1.4 million people die each year from preventable diseases with lack of access to clean drinking supplies.
- E.g. diarrhoea and parasites linked to pathogen-riddled water and poor

sanitation
- Air pollution alone causes 6-7 million early deaths annually.
- Chemicals pumped into the seas cause "potentially multi-generational" adverse health effects.
- Land degradation through mega-farming and deforestation occurs in areas of Earth which are home to 3.2 billion people.
- Unchecked use of antibiotics in food production will result in drug-resistant superbugs becoming the world's number one cause of premature death by mid-century.

What does it call for?

- **Economy** - Urgent action at an unprecedented scale is necessary to arrest and reverse the present environment situation.
- There is an urgent need for retooling of the global economy to more sustainable production lines.
- Without this, GDP growth may become meaningless against the cost of lost lives, work hours and associated treatment expenses.
- **Human behaviour** - The world is unsustainably extracting resources and producing unmanageable quantities of waste.
- The report thus called for a root-and-branch detoxifying of human behaviour.
- E.g. By 2050, the world will likely have to feed 10 billion people, but that does not mean that the production has to be doubled.
- The world currently throws away a third of all food produced; this is driven by 56% of food in richer nations going to waste.
- So food waste, which also accounts for 9% of global greenhouse gas emissions, could be slashed.
- The report also advises adopting less-meat intensive diets.
- The report also called for a rapid drawdown in greenhouse gas emissions and pesticide use to improve air and water quality.

What lies ahead?

- The GEO was unveiled at the UN Environment Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya.
- It is likely to add to the debate over who bears the greatest responsibility for the damage already borne by Earth.
- Some developed nations, led by the United States, had threatened not to "welcome" the GEO report.
- This is a procedural but nonetheless significant hurdle, for the nations to

agree on the necessary cuts in waste, overconsumption and pollution.

Source: Economic Times, The Hindu

