



EMBARGOED UNTIL SATURDAY, JANUARY 23, 2016

CONTACT: Alisa Zomer, Yale University, alisa.zomer@yale.edu, +1 203-436-9566

**Press Release: Dire State of Fisheries and Worsening Air Pollution Revealed
in New EPI Report Card**

2016 EPI Reveals Decline and Progress in the Global Environment

DAVOS, Switzerland – The 2016 Environmental Performance Index (EPI), a Yale-based initiative that evaluates how 180 countries protect ecosystems and human health, finds cause for both optimism and serious concern. The world’s nations have expanded access to water and sanitation while creating more protected areas than ever before, yet countries have failed to reverse degradation of air quality and decline in fisheries, the report finds. The EPI, which measures national and global protection of ecosystems and human health from environmental harm, draws out trends and highlights data gaps in priority areas including air quality, water management, and climate change.

Increased access to water and sanitation stands out as a major success story: concerted efforts to develop clean drinking water and sewage infrastructure have significantly reduced deaths from waterborne diseases. The number of people who lack access to clean water has been cut nearly in half since 2000, though at 550 million, or around 8 percent of the world’s population, there is still much room for improvement. The world’s nations also show strong commitments to habitat protection, and countries are now within striking distance of international targets for terrestrial and marine habitat protection.

Yet in other areas, environmental progress has stalled, and some issues have shown troubling declines. Twenty-three percent of countries lack any kind of wastewater treatment. The world’s fisheries are in a dire state, with most fish stocks at risk of collapse. Air pollution has worsened and today accounts for 10 percent of all deaths, compared with 2 percent claimed by foul water. More than 3.5 billion people - half of the world’s population - live in nations with unsafe levels of air pollution.

Now in its 10th iteration, the EPI provides a diagnostic tool for policymakers to evaluate and improve performance toward environmental goals. The EPI is produced biennially by researchers at Yale and Columbia universities, in collaboration with the World Economic Forum and with support from the Samuel Family Foundation and the McCall MacBain Foundation.

“While many environmental problems are the result of industrialization, our findings show that both poor and wealthy nations suffer from serious air pollution,” said Angel Hsu, Assistant Professor at Yale-NUS College and the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies (F&ES) and lead author of the report. “The EPI shows that focused, coordinated global efforts are essential to make progress on global goals and to save lives.”



“The EPI sends a clear signal to policymakers on the state of their environment and equips them with the data to develop fine-tuned solutions to the pressing challenges we face,” said EPI co-creator Kim Samuel, Director, Samuel Group of Companies and Professor of Practice at McGill University's Institute for the Study of International Development. “With the very survival of the planet at stake, we hope leaders will be inspired to act--especially in urban areas where an increasing majority of the world's population lives.”

Seventeen new Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Climate treaty, both recently adopted by the UN, create a framework for strengthening global initiatives to tackle environmental challenges. Realizing these agreements' goals will require better monitoring frameworks. Data gaps create hurdles and impasses for tracking progress towards meeting targets, including benchmarks for protecting fisheries, ensuring freshwater quality, agricultural sustainability, preventing species loss, fostering climate adaptation, and managing waste.

“Even when data exists, policymakers often struggle to apply this information appropriately,” notes Marc Levy, Deputy Director of the Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN) at Columbia University. “The EPI works to identify and address these blind spots within existing policy goals.” For instance, a new biodiversity indicator weeds out protected areas that do not intersect with species' habitats, showing where national parks may be ineffective at protecting species.

Technological advances offer solutions to some stubborn monitoring challenges, yet these improvements are not a silver bullet. Satellite imagery and remote sensing fill gaps in the EPI's air quality and forestry information, but this data has its own blind spots. Scaling data collection and assessment down to the individual level has great potential to complete fragmentary pictures and make datasets whole. Appraising environmental quality at the city or regional level can sharpen environmental management strategies, honing in on environmental outcomes that national assessments can miss.

Angel Hsu and Kim Samuel will hold a press conference at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2016 in Davos, Switzerland, on January 23 at 10:30 AM (CET), Media Village, Press Conference Room. Full details are available at: <http://epi.yale.edu>