

Future of Global Environment Outlook (GEO) Steering Committee Meeting

The 'Future of GEO' process, launched at the fourth United Nations Environment Assembly through [UNEP/EA.4/RES.23](#) was initiated to develop various options for the future of the Global Environment Outlook. This process will deliver these options, and likely a recommendation, to the fifth UN Environment Assembly in February 2021. In developing these options, the [Steering Committee](#) was formed to oversee and manage the [Future of GEO process](#).

The [Steering Committee](#) on the future of GEO and the Secretariat met in the Ministry of the Environment offices, Prague, Czech Republic from 31 October – 1 November 2019 to achieve the following objectives:

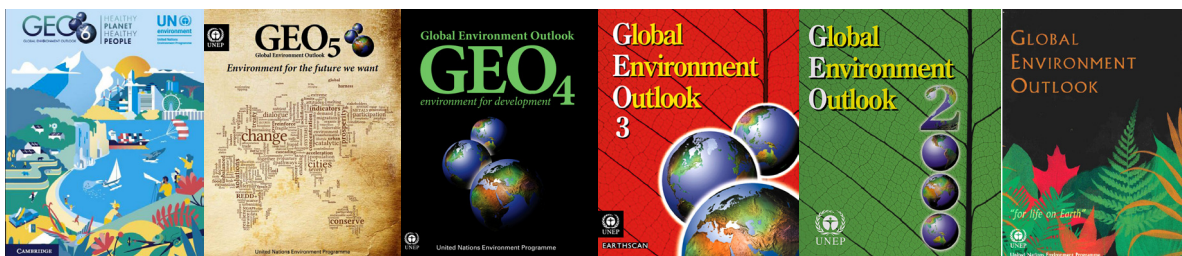
1. Update Steering Committee members on the rationale and details of resolution [UNEP/EA.4/RES.23](#) and lessons learned from the GEO process, in particular as it pertains to the preparation of GEO-4, GEO-5 and GEO-6.
2. Consider and approve the main issues to be reviewed in the options document;
3. Consider and approve the work plan and timeline for the preparation of the options document and for conducting the broad consultations on the future of GEO
4. Consider and approve the Terms of Reference for the work on the options document and the broad consultations



Group photo of the Steering Committee with the Secretariat

The meeting opened with remarks from the Deputy Minister of Environment for the Czech Republic (Mr. Vladislav Smrž) and Jian Liu (Director, Science Division, UNEP), with both highlighting the importance of the meeting and wishing the meeting participants success in their work. A video message from the new Executive Director of UNEP, Inger Andersen, was also broadcast and well appreciated by the participants. The co-chairs of the Steering Committee, Suzan Alajjawi from the Supreme Council for Environment, Bahrain and Ivar Baste, Norwegian Environment Agency, welcomed and thanked everyone for attending the [first face to face meeting](#) and also thanked the deputy minister for the great hospitality in hosting this first meeting of the Committee.

Mr. Laszlo Pinter from the Central European University presented lessons learned from early GEO processes (GEO's 1, 2 and 3) as well as some learnings from the [GEO-4](#) process. Laszlo shared the evolution of GEO from its first versions to the sixth in the series. In doing this Laszlo compared the management of the different processes, the scope and structure of the different GEOs and the product successes (based on the number of downloads, national and city-level GEOs produced, citations and use by policymakers). He shared the pros and cons for different approaches used in the GEO processes and compared these with other on-going global assessment processes. The main take away was that GEO is both a process and a product. Matthew Billot and Pierre Boileau presented the lessons learned from [GEO 5](#) and [6](#) respectively (having been the Heads of these GEOs). Their presentations briefed the Steering Committee on the details, form and function of their respective GEOs. Funding, staffing and outreach were discussed in detail, with Ivar mentioning some comparisons with [GEO 4](#).



The Secretariat provided lessons learned from the [GEO-6 process](#), focusing on the findings of the mid-term evaluation conducted by the independent evaluation office. In the mid-term evaluation most elements of the project were found to be either moderately satisfactory or highly satisfactory. The only unsatisfactory element was financial management, and this was due to the difficult budget situation which required that UN Environment staff conduct resource mobilization activities at the same time as the main GEO report was being drafted.

In the later part of the day, the issues paper that is meant to guide the consultant that will work on coming up with various options on the 'Future of GEO' was discussed. During the discussion most of the issues identified by the Committee were captured by the Secretariat to provide more detail on the specific elements that the Committee wished the consultant to investigate. A revised draft of the issues paper was produced overnight and considered on the second day of the meeting.

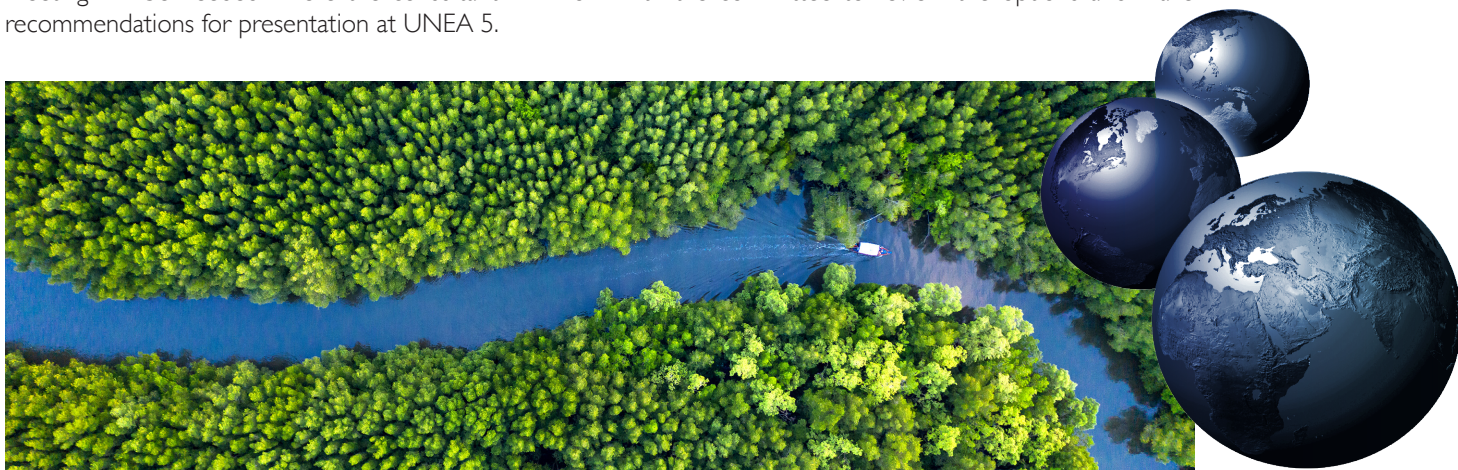
On the second day of the meeting the committee amended the work plan to specify that the Committee preferred a consultant to be hired through a traditional procurement process to draft the options document.

The Committee also recommended modifications to the timeline and budget for the Future of GEO initiative. Changes included: conducting virtual consultations with stakeholders and other assessment processes while ensuring Member States were consulted face-to-face. The Committee requested that the Secretariat evaluate whether the face-to-face consultations could be conducted as a part of the regional UNEA preparatory meetings, to allow for potential savings on the budget.

The committee discussed in detail the organisation of the expected work for developing the options document with a direct focus on the requirements of [resolution 23](#). They identified that the resolution clearly outlined three key aspects as outputs of the work, which are;

- The preparation of the options paper should be shared and discussed through an extensive consultation
- The consultation process should be organised to involve member states, stakeholders and other assessment processes
- The final options document from the process above should be delivered to UNEA-5 to decide on the future form and function of GEO.

On the approach for preparing the options paper, the committee discussed in detail the three options presented by the Secretariat and agreed that the best option was to have a consultant, or a group of consultants develop the options paper and conduct the consultations. This is based on a cost estimate that the three options would not have any substantial difference while the consultant option offers benefits in terms of independence of the views prepared by the consultant. The Steering Committee also agreed that it will be important for the consultant to tap into the expertise of the Committee members in developing the options document, therefore a proposal for two additional face to face meetings of the Committee was agreed upon. The March 2020 facilitated workshop will ensure that the expertise of the Committee members will be available to the consultant. One final facilitated meeting will be needed where the consultant will work with the committee to review the options and make recommendations for presentation at UNEA 5.





The Steering Committee agreed that the peer review of the options document will be performed virtually to reduce costs and allow a wider circulation of the draft for feedback. This peer review will be organized by the Secretariat, allowing for a wide range of stakeholders, experts from other assessment processes and Member States to input into the preparation of the options document.

The timeline of the whole process was then discussed, and edits made. The budget table was adjusted to reflect the option of using a consultancy with two face to face facilitated meetings, regional consultation meetings followed by production and layout of the final document. The Committee also recommended that the draft options paper be presented to the Annual Sub-Committee of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to the UN Environment Programme at its late 2020 session (19-23 October 2020). This presentation would prepare Member States for the eventual presentation of a resolution on the Future of GEO to be decided upon at UNEA-5.



For a more detailed summary of the meeting, please see the [Outcome Document](#) from the meeting.