

Our Ref: UNEA/GEOSC/pb/13

September 26, 2020

**‘Future of GEO’ Steering Committee Meeting Summary,
September 17, 2020**

Important Note: In order to make our calls more efficient and effective, Steering Committee members are encouraged to keep their verbal interventions to a maximum of 3 minutes each. Members are encouraged to mute their telephone lines when they are not speaking, to minimize background noise.

The Steering Committee on the Future of GEO met at its thirteenth virtual call to discuss progress and plan next steps for the advancement of the process. Agenda items included:

1. Discussion and decision on format of the final facilitated workshop
2. Discussion and decision on the content of final facilitated workshop
3. Any Other Business

On these agenda items the Steering Committee decided:

- The final workshop of the Steering Committee be moved by two weeks to start on November 2nd, 2020 instead of October 19th, 2020. This will allow for the conclusion of the consultation period. The format of the workshop will remain the same with a four-day arrangement. A draft information document should be provided for the Steering Committee in the middle of October after consideration of the consultation output. A separate call should be conducted to present the outcome of the consultation.
- The timeline will be redrafted to reflect the change of date for the start of the workshop. The date for the delivery of the draft information document from the Bureau should also be included in the new timeline. The information document not exceed 3500 words and should summarize the decision-making process of the Steering Committee and the administrative and financial implications of the recommended options. It should include a short list of recommended options for the future of GEO and a preferred option that is identified by the Steering Committee. Some more programmatic details of the options may be left for decision at a future scoping meeting of GEO. This should be highlighted in the information document.
- The Steering Committee should consider putting forward a draft Resolution to UNEA-5 to allow Member States to make clear decisions on the future of GEO.
- In the call to discuss the consultation outcome to be conducted after October 9th, 2020, a proposal will also be submitted for the decision-making process on the options. This proposal will include some multi-criteria decision making together with a more deliberative process.
- The next call of the Steering Committee scheduled for October 8th, 2020 will focus on the committee’s inputs into the co-chairs CPR presentation.

Rapporteur	Signature
Mr. Rafael Monge Vargas	

Summary of the meeting

The meeting was chaired by the co-chairs of the Steering Committee.

The meeting started with an update from the Secretariat on the progress of the ongoing consultation process on the future of GEO. The consultation process started officially on 9th September 2020. The secretariat had sent out the invitation note early in advance to help participants start to prepare and register for the consultation webinars. At the moment, the responses to the questionnaire are not as much as the Secretariat would like. The Steering Committee was requested to stimulate participation through their networks. The questionnaire has now been translated to all UN languages. The Secretariat wants to have as much inputs as possible in the questionnaire to help the Steering Committee have the best representative information and statistic for its consideration in its last workshop. To this effect, reminders have been sent to member states, stakeholders and assessment experts to stimulate their involvement into the process. Two more webinars will be conducted in the coming week and hopefully they will be well attended. The webinars are proving useful because the Secretariat is noting increased traffic to the questionnaire during the webinars or shortly after the sessions. Participants are also very engaged during the calls and their enquiry to the subject matter confirms their interest.

On this issue it was decided that the Steering Committee will continue to share information on the webinars and the questionnaire in their networks throughout the consultation period and help achieve broad consultation process that was requested for in the requesting resolution.

Discussion and decision on format of the final facilitated workshop

Cochairs of the Steering Committee presented the proposed format of the second facilitated workshop. The proposal is that the co-chairs will be facilitating much of the workshop. Although the consultant has facilitated previous workshop and the consultation webinars, the bureau feels that at this stage the workshop will be better managed by the Steering Committee itself. The consultancy team will be available as a resource in the workshop.

Following the results of the broad consultation, the Steering Committee plans to have a final workshop where it expects to agree on a document which summarizes options for the Future of GEO with a recommended way forward, which will then be communicated to the fifth UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-5) for decision. Given the current global pandemic, the final workshop of the Future of GEO process will be a virtual event. Co-chairs noted that the Steering Committee has expressed an interest in having shorter sessions of work, with days in between when revised drafts of documents can be prepared for further consideration. That would imply an approach which allows for a sequenced, detailed consideration of the draft paper that allows for the document to be updated between sessions.

The Steering Committee had earlier proposed that two to three-hour blocks of discussions, separated by a day each, would be the preferred format. They have indicated their availability during the week of Oct. 19th, 2020, and the consultancy team has confirmed availability to provide support on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. A possible fourth day of discussions could also happen on Monday Oct. 26th. Between these days, the key documents could be posted on a collaborative website allowing for Steering Committee members to suggest wording changes, and for the Secretariat to post revised versions of the agreed text. Information documents such as this one, produced for UNEA, are limited to 3500 words.

In this format, a draft document for UNEA will be circulated for comments to the Steering Group by the co-chairs, supported by the Secretariat, prior to the workshop. A revised version would be tabled for consideration one week prior to the first session. Further written comments could be submitted during the latest two days before the consultations. They will be addressed in a track changes version to be explained by the co-chairs at the session. The sessions would be chaired by the co-chairs or members of the Future of GEO bureau. Each session would consider the draft document paragraph by paragraph. Issues that may turn out to be difficult would be temporarily "parked" and revisited later, possibly as packages. Comments and suggestions for changes would be duly noted. In between each session, the Secretariat and co-chairs would work to incorporate comments into a revised draft, which would be reviewed and approved at the later sessions. Difficult issues may be discussed with the view to agree on wording during the sessions. The text from the final session would be updated over the weekend and a final session would be used to finalize and approve the full text and decide on next steps heading towards UNEA.

On this item the Steering Committee observed that the timing of the workshop would overlap with the ongoing consultation process. If the consultation is open until the 9th of October 2020, then the workshop would overlap with the consultation period. The Committee advised that in order to have all inputs for the Steering Committee, the workshop should be moved back for the end of the consultation. The Secretariat responded that the intent of providing the draft on 29th of September was to allow enough time for the Steering Committee commenting. By this time there will be some feedback already on the consultation. Alternatively, the period aimed for commenting by the Steering Committee could be shortened to 10th or 12th October but that will give about only one week for the Steering Committee to comment before the 19th of October start of the workshop.

The Steering Committee further noted that the original plan was to have the consultation period designed for each region but that has been changed because of the ongoing pandemic. It is now important to have the participation of the consultation broadened as per the mandate and ensure that as much as possible most member states, stakeholders and assessment experts are able to input into the process. The Steering Committee has some time to ensure that they are transparent in the consultation process and ensure that the final workshop takes into account all inputs to develop the final options paper. Additionally, it would be valuable if a presentation would be scheduled at the end of the consultation to review the results of the consultations before the start of the final workshop.

An enquiry was also made on how a date adjustment as proposed by the Committee for the start of the workshop would fit with the expected CPR presentation on the future of GEO. The Secretariat highlighted that the intent of the CPR presentation is to provide a progress report only. Results of the final workshop are not therefore needed in that presentation. A progress report on the process and some basic information on the results of the consultation will be sufficient. That meeting will

happen on October 15th 2020 or October 16th, 2020. The Steering Committee call on October 8th, 2020 will focus on the Committee's inputs into the co-chairs presentation to the CPR.

On this agenda item, the Steering Committee decided that its final workshop will be moved by two weeks to the week of November 2nd. This will allow for the conclusion of the consultation process. A meeting will be organised before the start of the workshop and just after the conclusion of the consultations to present the findings of the workshop. The timeline for the process should be edited to include a date on when the report from the consultation will be available and the format of the workshop be circulated to the Steering Committee for approval.

Discussion and decision on the content of final facilitated workshop

Cochairs of the Steering Committee presented and briefed the Committee on the discussion that the bureau had with the governance office of UNEP. Given the potential limits to long, involved negotiations at UNEA-5 because of its likely virtual format, it is advised that the Steering Committee agree on a short document to UNEA of about 3500 words. The document would summarize the rationale for a limited set of options for the Future of GEO. In so doing, the Committee may want to limit the characteristics of the options to a streamlined set of key design elements/building blocks (e.g. overall scope, process and governance and function, financing). The Committee may want to select a preferred option with more details on its administrative and financial implications. It may also want to recommend a way forward with a clear statement on the importance of continuing GEOs for Member States and other decision-making bodies. Such a way forward could include leaving more specific design elements of the option selected by UNEA to be developed during the scoping process for future GEO's (e.g. key questions, utility, outline, data and capacity building needs). The Steering Committee may also want to consider recommending that the more detailed aspect of the option selected by UNEA could build on the previous GEO processes and be further refined and institutionalized (e.g. on requests for, nomination and selection of experts, assessment process, review, conflict of interest, treatment of errors, complementary functions, approval of summaries and acceptance of reports). Additionally, the Secretariat highlighted that it is important for the Steering Committee to reflect on the timing of the next GEO should it decide that GEO should continue.

On this item, the Steering Committee emphasised that one of the key design elements of GEO should be its function. The finance element will also be needed for UNEA consideration. To avoid speculation during UNEA discussions, it is important to have the administrative and financial implications of the options by the Steering Committee presented upfront. The Steering Committee further enquired on the rationale for leaving some design elements for UNEA to decide on. Would that mean a new Committee would be formed at UNEA-5 for this work? In responding the co-chairs of the Committee highlighted that it is difficult to prejudge the timing since some of the options from the consultation may be very radical and lead to more time needed for designing them.

The Steering Committee further enquired on the contents of the options paper for UNEA. The enquiry sort clarity on whether the paper will contain what will be agreeable by all members or only that which can be agreed on. The criteria to arriving at an agreement during the formulation of the paper was also enquired.

In response, it was noted that the bureau has had a meeting with the governance office of UNEP and noted that a resolution of the future of GEO will be prepared by member states. Some governments will take the lead in preparing the resolution. It was further highlighted that the Steering

Committee members states will be better placed to take the lead in drafting this resolution. One means to agree on the options is to agree that the Steering Committee has some valid options that can be implemented. The Steering Committee governments can also agree on what GEO's way forward is.

The Secretariat noted that the two options for UNEA-5 are a partially virtual assembly or an entirely virtual assembly. It is quite difficult to get an agreement from member states virtually. The governance affairs office of UNEP has noted that something closer to an administrative decision may be needed for the future of GEO resolution rather than a resolution that may need to be negotiated. In a partly virtual UNEA it may be possible to negotiate a resolution, however, in an entirely virtual setting it may be difficult to arrive at a decision at UNEA. Therefore, although the original resolution requested for options and recommendations, members of this committee are in a much better position to assess these options and ensure that the recommendation to UNEA does not need detailed discussions and negotiations.

On the mechanism for the Steering Committee to decide and agree on the options, a report from the consultation process would help to inform what the collective wisdom of the Steering Committee would be. The Secretariat had guided the consultancy team to develop such a criterion but they had found some difficulties. It is however important to have such quantitative type of criteria before a more deliberative consideration. In concluding this agenda item, the Secretariat requested the Steering Committee to start thinking about whether it wants to continue in the governance structure of GEO and future GEOs after the conclusion of its mandate working in formulation future GEO options.

On this item it was decided that the secretariat would schedule a call a week after the October 8th call to discuss the outcome of the consultations and discuss a semi qualitative-quantitative decision-making process to be used by the Steering Committee.

Any other business

- The Steering Committee was encouraged to invite more people to submit comments in the online questionnaire. A successful consultation for this process would be both representative and broad. There is therefore need to ensure many responses are received from all the three categories identified in the resolution throughout the regions.
- The Secretariat- in an effort to streamline communications to the Steering Committee through a single channel- has developed a generic UNEP-science mailing address. This will be the only means to send mails to the Steering Committee by the Secretariat. Steering Committee members are therefore requested to check if they received the test mail from this account (unep-science-geohead@un.org) and reply to confirm.
- In an effort to ensure timely reminders on the Steering Committee deliberations after calls, the Committee requested the Secretariat to send an email with key dates, decisions and action items from the call in addition to the meeting summary which is developed by the Secretariat and edited before approval by the rapporteur of the Steering Committee for the records. It was agreed that this will be done moving forward.

Having no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 16h32.

Action items

- The Secretariat will send an email to the Steering Committee with key dates, decisions and action items from this call.
- The Secretariat will prepare a written summary of the meeting and share the link to the recording of the call.
- The Secretariat will revise the final facilitation timeline to include the new adjustment of the workshop starting on 2nd November 2020 from October 19th 2020. The Secretariat should maintain the 4 day format of the workshop but also include the date for a new call to present the findings of the broad consultation process.
- The Secretariat will schedule a meeting after the October 8th call to discuss the outcome of the consultation.
- The Secretariat and the bureau of the Steering Committee to draft a semi quantitative-qualitative decision-making criterion to be used by the Committee in the final workshop. The Steering Committee will be consulted on this.
- The Steering Committee should consider putting forward a draft Resolution to UNEA-5 to allow Member States to make clear decisions on the future of GEO.
- The Steering Committee should continue reaching out to their networks for the participation of the consultation webinars and input into the questionnaire.

List of Participants

First name	Last name	Affiliation	Nominated by
Sebastian	Jan Konig	Swiss Federal Office for the Environment,	Switzerland
Marek	Haliniak	Ministry of the Environment, Poland	Poland
Cathy (alternate)	Maguire	European Environment Agency (EEA)	European Union
Teshia	Jn Baptiste	Ministry of Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development	Saint Lucia
Marcos	Serrano	Ministry of Environment Chile	Chile
Mona	Westergaard	Ministry of Environment and Food	Denmark
Andrew	Stott	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs-UK	United Kingdom and Northern Ireland
Keisuke (alternate)	Takahashi	Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)	Japan
Suzan	Alajjawi	Supreme Council for Environment, Bahrain	Bahrain
Toral	Patel-Weynand	US Forest Service	USA
Salla	Rantala	Finnish Environment Institute	Finland
Nino	Gokhelasvili	Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia	Georgia
Claudia	Kabel	German Environment Agency	Germany
Ivar Andreas	Baste	Norwegian Environment Agency	Norway
Rafael	Monge Vargas	Ministry of Environment and Energy	Costa Rica
Huang	Yi	Peking University	China
Ivana	Stojanovic	Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism	Montenegro
Anna	Mampye	Ministry of Environment	South Africa
Chatchai	Intatha	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Thailand	Thailand
Keri (alternate)	Holland	US Department of State	USA
Apsara	Mendis	Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment	Sri Lanka
James	Mathew	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate change, Government of India	India
Anshu	Singh	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate change, Government of India	India
Narges	Saffar	International Affairs & Conventions Center, Department of Environment	Iran (Islamic Republic of)

Apologies

First name	Last name	Affiliation	Nominated by
Ouedraogo	Desire	Ministry of Environment, green economy and climate change	Burkina Faso
Nadia	Chenouf	Ministry of the Environment and Renewable Energy	Algeria
Christine Okae	Asare	Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	Ghana
Aliya	Shalabekova	Ministry of Energy	Kazakhstan
Jock	Martin	European Environment Agency (EEA)	European Union
Paul (alternate)	Lucas	Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL)	The Netherlands
Celso	Moretti	Agricultural Research Corporation	Brazil
Carlos (Alternate)	Cordero Vega	Ministry of Environment and Energy	Costa Rica
Isaac	Dladla	Eswatini Environment Authority	Swaziland
Najib	Saab	Arab Forum for Environment & Development (AFED)	Lebanon
Mery	Harutyunyan	Ministry of Environment	Armenia
Garry	Kass	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs-UK	United Kingdom and Northern Ireland
Jerome	Sebaduka Lugumira	National Environment Management Authority (NEMA)	Uganda
Ambinintsoa Lucie	Noasilalaonomenjanahary	Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development	Madagascar
Mira	Zovko	Ministry of Environment and Energy	Croatia
Shanna (alternate)	Emmanuel	Ministry of Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development	Saint Lucia
Kazuhiko	Takeuchi	Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)	Japan
Charles	Lange	National Environment Management Authority (NEMA)	Kenya
Marcel	Kok	Environment Assessment Agency (PBL)	The Netherlands
Ryan	Assiu	Environmental Management Authority	Trinidad and Tobago