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July 26, 2021

**‘Future of GEO’ Steering Committee Meeting Summary, call #1 of the iterative process
May 27, 2021**

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 eighteenth virtual call to discuss progress and plan next steps for development of the feasibility study. Agenda items included:

1. Review and discussion of draft procedures document for the future of GEO
2. Review and discussion of draft expanded description of the four options for the future of GEO
3. Discussion of costing methodology for the four options
4. Any Other Business

On these agenda items the Steering Committee decided:

- The GEO procedures document, based on available best practice, provides useful information for the Steering Committee. Further, GEO procedures could be useful in future after the UNEA decision on the future of GEO. However, the procedures document should be seen as a resource rather than an output of the work, This will allow the Steering Committee to focus the its work on its mandate an Member State expectations during this UNEA intersessional period.
- Since the procedures document is to be used mainly as a resource in developing the GEO options, it will provide a compilation of best practice across other global assessments. The Steering Committee will take more time to review the draft and submit written comments in a week’s time.
- The Secretariat should conduct the proposed feasibility study and align the governance options in the draft GEO procedures document with each of the options in the interim report. Such governance options may be different for different options to provide a true picture of the cost and administration of the different GEO options.
- The four options of GEO presented in the interim report are not mutually exclusive therefore several combinations of the options are possible. This should be clearly presented then assessed using the criteria identified by the Steering Committee for the feasibility study.
- GEO options 2 to 4 as presented in the interim report require more details in the enhanced descriptions that have been provided. These details could include elements like how the GEO process could support national or local environmental assessments under options 2 and 3. Advantages and disadvantages of each option should also emerge clearly from the expanded descriptions.

- The Secretariat should proceed with expanding the remaining GEO options using a case study approach in describing the other three scenarios of GEO presented in the interim report for discussion at the next meeting of the Steering Committee.
- For the thematic assessment option, the Secretariat would use a scenario that it has been requested by the authorizing body to produce a report on the environmental impact of COVID-19. Meetings, administrative and collaboration costs would then be derived from that.
- For the service-oriented GEO option, the Secretariat would use a scenario of an enhanced science diplomacy programme
- For the synthesis GEO option, a scenario using the details of the recently concluded Making Peace with Nature will be used, but with an in-person meeting approach.
- Written comments on the Comprehensive GEO option presented will be welcomed to help the Secretariat expand on this option.
- Planning for the September consultations should start early to ensure enough time is allowed for the Steering Committee after the consultations to deliberate and draft their final report, informed by the outcome of the consultations.

Rapporteur	Signature
Mr. Rafael Monge Vargas	

Summary of the meeting

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

Review of draft procedures document for the future of GEO

The meeting started with a presentation on the draft GEO procedures document that had been prepared by the Co-chairs of the Steering Committee as an input into the discussions of the Committee on the future of GEO. A chair presented key rationale and approaches taken in the draft, then summarised the outline of the draft with a focus on key sections of the procedures. The proposed GEO procedures, as presented, were still in draft form and assume that GEO will be designed as an intergovernmental expert-led process, as presented in the interim report. The draft procedures were meant to help define the identified options and approaches for the future of GEO in more detail. The draft may also help illustrate areas of complementarity between the options. Further, the draft procedures may contribute to determining the financial and administrative implications of the GEO options and approaches. The paper therefore draws attention to some of the cost elements and societal benefits that are associated with different parts of the procedure. It reflects the objectives, functions, criteria, procedural elements and governance approaches identified in the interim report. The procedures are to a large extent derived from the IPBES procedures, which in turn build significantly on the IPCC procedures.

The draft GEO procedures presented deviate at times from the IPBES procedures, since those of IPBES deviate from IPCC. The deviations involve sometimes simplifications, and other times adaptation to the options and approaches set out in the interim report and to past GEO practices. The procedural philosophy, structure, and key elements in the draft GEO procedures are however largely consistent with that of IPCC and IPBES. Such a consistency may help facilitate future cooperation between GEO, IPCC and IPBES. It was further highlighted that the draft procedures consider the alternative governance approaches presented in the interim report as well as all four options presented in the interim report for their scope, utility and timing. Finally, the draft procedures can easily be adjusted to a decision at UNEA on how to implement the different options of GEO. The Steering Committee could therefore review the draft procedures and adapt these or consider subjecting the draft's next iteration to the consultations planned later in the year and/or consider including the draft procedures in their final submission of the GEO options to UNEA.

On this item, the Steering Committee observed that drafting a GEO procedures document based on available best practice provides useful information for the Committee. However, details of the procedures document should not be misused by the Steering Committee. Instead, the Secretariat should conduct the proposed feasibility study and align the governance options in the draft GEO procedures document with each of the options in the interim report. Such governance options will be different for different options, to provide a true picture on the cost and administration of the different GEO options.

On this the Secretariat agreed that it might be too early to discuss a GEO procedures document however clarified that the reason why it was desired to discuss it at this point was that, particularly the governance structure proposed in the procedures document would expand upon what GEO currently has in place, leading to cost and administrative implications. Further, the Secretariat noted that all procedures presented in the draft procedures document already exist in GEO, in one way or another, and it will be good to formalise them in the future. However, the Secretariat is mainly interested in the procedures of the authorising body and the executive body, which go beyond what

GEO currently does, and it would be valuable to get inputs from the Steering Committee on whether such a structure would be valuable. This will allow the Secretariat to incorporate those elements when costing the GEO options.

The Steering Committee asked if such a comprehensive procedure would be needed for the GEO options 2 to 4, as presented in the interim report, since the draft as it stood had a detailed focus on a Comprehensive GEO assessment. On this it was highlighted that such an observation could also feed into the final report of the Steering Committee to highlight that a lighter governance and procedures approach could be used for options 2 to 4.

Further the Steering Committee was concerned that there seemed to be a focus now on the first option presented in the interim report in the drafting of the GEO procedures. This could be seen as bias against the other three options. In response it was emphasised that the details of the draft procedures document were adapted from readily available material and information that could be replicated for other options if need be. A comprehensive GEO assessment option was used in the development of the draft because it offered a good example of where detailed governance procedures would be needed. It was suggested that the focus should be in further developing the options, then coming back to the procedures after that to see what the best governance structure would be. GEO procedures could be useful in future, after the UNEA decision on the future of GEO. It would therefore be valuable to have a few principals on the procedures associated with each option to help UNEA with its decision. The Steering Committee was reminded to remain true to what was allowed during the opening session of UNEA-5 and conclude its work rather than taking on new tasks.

On this issue therefore, it was decided that the presented GEO procedures could be used mainly as a resource in developing the options further because it offered a compilation of best practice across other global assessments. It was further agreed that the Steering Committee would have more time to review the draft and revert with written comments in a week's time.

Review of draft expanded description of the GEO options and Discussion of costing methodology for the four options

The Secretariat presented a detailed description of a comprehensive global assessment GEO option. This presentation was connected to the costing methodology presentation that identified and costed elements of each GEO option. In its presentation the Secretariat sought guidance from the Steering Committee on how to proceed with describing the other three options presented in the interim report because the three options are not traditional GEO-type products. Further the Secretariat informed the Steering Committee that in producing a detail description of a Comprehensive global assessment, GEO-6 had been used as an example/case study to show how different elements would be costed and the types of collaborative structures that could be utilized. GEO-6 (a comprehensive global assessment) had five large in-person meetings together with hundreds of virtual calls to help authors produce drafts, respond to peer reviews and guide the process. In-person meetings allow authors to get out of their offices and focus on drafting or the production of a specific deliverable at a given time. These meetings were costed for the expanded description of the Comprehensive GEO assessment. Further, the Secretariat presented the costing spreadsheet that had been prepared along with the expanded description of option one. The matrix contained costs associated with the drafting of GEO-6, costs for the collaborators and the staffing requirements.

On this issue, the Steering Committee highlighted that the four options of GEO presented in the interim report are not mutually exclusive therefore several combinations of the options are possible. This should be clearly indicated, then assessed using the criteria identified by the Steering Committee when drafting the feasibility study. Further, options 2 to 4 as presented in the interim report require more detailed descriptions. These could entail details like whether national or localized GEOs can be produced under option 2 and 3. Advantages and disadvantages of each option should emerge clearly from the expanded descriptions. Finally, because of the tight workplan of the Steering Committee, the consultation process should start to be planned as early as possible. This will ensure enough time is allowed for the Steering Committee to deliberate after the consultations and draft their final report, informed by the outcome of the consultations.

The Secretariat further sought guidance from the Steering Committee on how to expand the other three options and how a link between them could be established to help form different combinations.

The Steering Committee highlighted the need to ensure clear justification when using information from IPBES or IPCC on costing. On this, emphasis was made to stick to the criteria developed by the Steering Committee when assessing the different elements of the options.

On the meetings associated with the assessment process, the Steering Committee highlighted the need to learn from the current virtual working arrangement and how that could enhance production of GEO in a cost-effective way. Digitization of the GEO should also be assessed. A digital data platform has been incorporated into the description of option 1 and has been costed for the comprehensive GEO option.

On costing the expanded other options, the Secretariat proposed a case study approach to describe the other three scenarios of GEO presented in the interim report. For the thematic assessment option, the Secretariat would assume that it has been requested by the authorizing body to produce a report on the environmental impact of COVID-19. Meetings and collaboration costs would then be derived from that. A service-oriented GEO would be expanded using an example of a science diplomacy programme, which is an educational programme that has been requested to help university students to come up to speed with how to use science for decision making. Finally, on the Synthesized GEO option, the case of the recently completed Making Peace with Nature report would be considered as the main example, with in-person and virtual meetings. Due to the pandemic, the Making Peace with Nature report was produced entirely online. These three examples could be produced for the next Steering Committee call for their consideration. On this proposal the Steering Committee enquired on how a service model would be combined with each of the other models.

The Steering Committee welcomed the idea of using the case studies because it makes them tangible. On the comprehensive GEO option, the Steering Committee enquired on which previous GEO will be used as a case study because there has been some time in between those GEOs and they have been produced differently over time. Further the Steering Committee enquired on who will be writing the actual feasibility study report.

On these points, the Secretariat noted that GEO-6 has been used as a case study in the Comprehensive GEO option. GEO-5 was conducted using more and smaller meetings but in the end the cost was almost the same as GEO-6. On the feasibility study drafting, the Secretariat will produce an annotated outline to start the drafting process. The Secretariat hopes that by that time there will be some help from the bureau and the task team members of the Steering Committee that

volunteered for this work. The Secretariat will be responsible for drafting most parts of the feasibility study, but a frequent checking with the task team will be enabled to respect the iterative arrangement approved by the Steering Committee in its workplan. On maintaining the timeline, the Secretariat highlighted the risk that there may be lack of enough members of the Steering Committee to approve the feasibility study for the start of the consultations due to the period falling within the summer holidays in some parts of the world. The Secretariat will come back to the Steering Committee with options to manage that but is confident that it will stick to the timeline. The Secretariat had only received two expression of interest to volunteer for the Task Team. It will be reaching out to more individuals of the Steering Committee in other regions to constitute a regionally balanced task team.

On this issue, it was decided that written comments on option one will help the Secretariat proceed with expanding other options.

Any other business

This was last meeting in the future of GEO Steering Committee for Suzan Allahjawi who was stepping down in her role as chair of the Steering Committee. However, the Co-chair position has been filled by Prof. Yi Huang from China. Suzan thanked the Steering Committee and the Secretariat and wished them well.

Having no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 17h54 (EAT).

Action items

- The Secretariat will prepare a written summary of the meeting.
- Secretariat in interaction with the Steering Committee's task team to draft enhanced descriptions of the other three GEO options using case study approach
- The Secretariat to draft annotated outline of the feasibility study report for discussion in the next Steering Committee meeting
- Secretariat to send doodle poll for the next meetings of the Steering Committee

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
Marcos	Serrano	Ministry of Environment Chile	Chile
Mona	Westergaard	Ministry of Environment and Food	Denmark
Rhian	Rees-Owen	International Environment Negotiations Evidence-UK	United Kingdom and Northern Ireland
Keisuke (alternate)	Takahashi	Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)	Japan
Suzan	Alajjawi	Supreme Council for Environment, Bahrain	Bahrain
Salla	Rantala	Finnish Environment Institute	Finland
Nino	Gokheshvili	Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia	Georgia
Ivar Andreas	Baste	Norwegian Environment Agency	Norway
Rafael	Monge Vargas	Ministry of Environment and Energy	Costa Rica
Chatchai	Intatha	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Thailand	Thailand
Marcel	Kok	Environment Assessment Agency (PBL)	The Netherlands
Anshu	Singh	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate change, Government of India	India
Mira	Zovko	Ministry of Environment and Energy	Croatia
Jerome	Sebadduka Lugumira	National Environment Management Authority (NEMA)	Uganda
Kazuhiko	Takeuchi	Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)	Japan
Huang	Yi	Peking University	China
Claudia	Kabel	German Environment Agency	Germany
Toral	Patel-Weynand	US Forest Service	USA

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
Mery	Harutyunyan	Ministry of Environment	Armenia
Garry	Kass	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs-UK	United Kingdom and Northern Ireland
Shanna (alternate)	Emmanuel	Ministry of Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development	Saint Lucia
Ryan	Assiu	Environmental Management Authority	Trinidad and Tobago
Keri (alternate)	Holland	US Department of State	USA
Apsara	Mendis	Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment	Sri Lanka
Ivana	Stojanovic	Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism	Montenegro
Ambinintsoa Lucie	Noasilalaonomenjanahary	Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development	Madagascar
Charles	Lange	National Environment Management Authority (NEMA)	Kenya
Narges	Saffar	International Affairs & Conventions Center, Department of Environment	Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Andrew	Stott	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs-UK	United Kingdom and Northern Ireland
Najib	Saab	Arab Forum for Environment & Development (AFED)	Lebanon
Anna	Mampye	Ministry of Environment	South Africa
Teshia	Jn Baptiste	Ministry of Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development	Saint Lucia
Isaac	Dladla	Eswatini Environment Authority	Swaziland