

Our Ref: UNEA/GEOSC/pb/17

April 21, 2021

**‘Future of GEO’ Steering Committee Meeting Summary,
April 15, 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 seventeenth virtual call to discuss progress and plan next steps for the advancement of the process. Agenda items included:

1. Review and approval of the 2021 workplan of the Future of GEO Steering Committee
2. Discuss the proposed approach for conducting feasibility study for financing and implementation of Future GEOs
3. Presentation and discussion on other science-policy interface work currently undertaken by the UNEP Secretariat
4. Any Other Business

On these agenda items the Steering Committee decided:

- The Secretariat to provide an updated version the draft workplan and request for Steering Committee to approve the workplan on a no-objection basis. Written comments on the workplan be sent to the Secretariat by close of business Wednesday 21 April 2021. The Secretariat will then provide an updated version of the workplan the following day and request the approval of the Steering Committee on a no-objection basis. If the Secretariat receives no objections it the shared draft of the workplan will be considered approved. Further, the Secretariat should prepare a more precise table on what and when the Steering Committee will have to decide on what. These dates had been left out in earlier versions of the workplan because the Steering Committee needed to agree on the items in the workplan first.
- The consultant’s background document and existing material from the previous consultations should be utilized other than starting from scratch on the feasibility study. Additionally, the proposed feasibility study should consider the scientific and technical elements of the four options for full assessment.
- Further input is needed from Steering Committee to expand the description of the four options. To enable this the Secretariat should draft the timeline to ensure that the feasibility study is short and upfront in the process to allow for detailed deliberation in the Committee to produce the required output based on the study. The discussion in the Steering Committee should therefore be the main focus of the timeline. The documents to be used in the consultations should also short and simple to consider more policy makers through the design of the consultation as they are key stakeholders of GEO.

- The Secretariat to send the Steering Committee the draft proposed approach for conducting feasibility study for financing and implementation of Future GEOs and allow the Committee members to indicate their preference for either proceeding with an external consultant or the iterative process that will involve the Secretariat and the Committee itself in the feasibility study.
- The Steering Committee could benefit from another opportunity to hear more about the Synthesis report on whether the process prompted any reflections on changes that could be made across multiple assessment processes that would support synthesis and integration. As GEO has a more integrated nature it would also be of interest whether the exercise identified anything that the Steering Committee should be taking into account in the further development of the options. More deliberation on this could be done in subsequent meetings of the Steering Committee.

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 introduction of the UNEP new Chief Scientist. Andrea Hinwood the new Chief Scientist was introduced to the Future of GEO Steering Committee. She is coming from the side of academia and experience in several other assessment processes. Her role will focus in ensuring that the strategic coordination of the science and analytics that the organization does is targeted in a strategic manner and the science process is rigorous, robust and of best quality possible. The Chief Scientist's role will be based in the Executive office in UNEP. The Steering Committee welcomed the chief scientist.

Review and approval of the 2021 workplan

The Secretariat presented the draft proposed outline of the Steering Committee workplan. It was noted that this is the same document that had been presented in the February call, however, with an additional sentence after discussions with the bureau of the Future of GEO Steering Committee. The document had been marked up with the comments received from Committee members. The workplan is being developed because of the dynamics of UNEA-5 which was split into two to allow for a virtual session (conducted in February 2021) and then a resumed possibly face-to-face UNEA-5 session in February 2022. This workplan will therefore help the Steering Committee work strategically in the UNEA intercession period to deliver the options paper on the Future of GEO in the resumed UNEA for Member States consideration.

The workplan has three main items: the feasibility study on the financial and administrative implications of the proposed options of GEO, a broad consultation on the financial and administration consequences and a final workshop of the Future of GEO Steering Committee to draft the final options paper to be presented for the resumed UNEA-5. It was noted that based on the Steering Committee's feedback on the last call, the proposed expert group meeting had been dropped off the workplan. The Secretariat then detailed on the questions that the feasibility study will seek to answer as presented in the draft workplan. The background document, co-chairs discussion paper and the Steering Committee's interim report will be used as resources for the feasibility study. In conduct the feasibility study, the criteria developed and agreed by the Steering Committee will be maintained and followed. The last criteria will be of particular use for the feasibility study because it seeks to assess 'the overall feasibility of GEO including continuity of operations for the periodic production of the report in terms of the implications for administrative, financial, procedural and collaborative structures and other initiatives in the UNEP science-policy-interface.' Further, the proposed consultation process will be supported by a set of webinars and questionnaires developed in all UN languages similar to earlier consultation process in the Future of GEO process work. The timeline for conducting this work will have to be updated once the workplan is approved to reflect the current situation with more realistic dates. In the conclusion section of the draft workplan document, the Secretariat highlighted that additional information had been added to the fact that a budget between USD 60,000 to 80,000 would be anticipated should the feasibility study be conducted by an external

consultant or could be incorporated into Secretariat's costs should the Secretariat do the study. In either choice, it was highlighted that a significant time and resources will be needed from the UNEP Secretariat to support the analysis.

The Steering Committee observed that references to governance and collaborative structures are not consistent in statement of work or the work plan – the second bullet under key elements was highlighted as a good basis “The collaborative structures which would be used to deliver future GEOs, including governance and procedural elements”. It was noted that this should be harmonised across the document. Additionally, scientific and technical elements should be added to the list to ensure that the different options of the future GEO can be fully assessed. On this the Secretariat welcomed the idea and requested for specificity when sending in written comments.

On this agenda item the Steering Committee decided that a few days be given to allow for expert written comments to come in then the Secretariat would provide an updated version and request for Steering Committee to approve the workplan on a no-objection basis. It was therefore decided that the Secretariat will send out an email immediately requesting any written comments on the workplan by close of business Wednesday 21 April 2021. The Secretariat will then provide an updated version of the workplan the following day and request the approval of the Steering Committee on a no objection basis. If the Secretariat receives no objections it will consider the workplan approved. Further, the Secretariat should prepare a more precise table on what and when the Steering Committee will have to decide on what. On this the Secretariat noted that it had left the dates as they were because one of the decisions that the Steering Committee needed to take in the meeting was to agree on is whether those were the things that it needed to do. This will then allow the Secretariat to firm up the dates and present a more detailed and realistic table of events to the Steering Committee.

Discussion of proposed approach for conducting feasibility study for financing and implementing future GEOs

A draft statement setting out work on the Future of GEO feasibility study was presented. The Secretariat noted that the draft statement was prepared as a result of discussion with the Steering Committee bureau and its emerging from the workplan presented in the first item of the meeting. Further, the presented statement of work could be used as either a term of reference for the consultant consulted for the feasibility study or as a guide to the alterative process that the Steering Committee and the Secretariat could take on. It was highlighted that the key outcome intended from the feasibility study are financial and costing implications of the four options presented in the Steering Committee interim report, the collaborative structures that would be utilized in delivering future GEOs including their governance and procedural elements and administrative structures that would be used to deliver future GEOs. The Secretariat then went through the steps in studying the three targets presented in detail. The expected outcome of the feasibility study will be combined with the findings of the broad consultations to support deliberations of the Steering Committee at its final workshop to produce a working document and addenda that would inform UNEA-5 in February 2022 to choose a preferred option for the form and function of future GEOs.

The Chief scientist then briefed the Steering Committee on the discussions with the UNEP Corporate Services Division and the Executive Office on the future of GEO and the work of the future of GEO Steering Committee. The Chief Scientist conveyed apologies for UNEP's Executive Director who was planning to attend this call, but it wasn't possible. There has been a couple of meetings between Corporate Services Division and the Executive office since the last meeting of the Steering Committee. The Chief Scientist thanked the Steering Committee for giving them time to discuss what

the plans of the Committee are. The Chief Scientist then delivered a statement noting that it was great to know that Member States are giving such high consideration to the future of GEO process. The Steering Committee was further acknowledged for putting so much effort in the production of the future of GEO interim report that was delivered at UNEA 5.1. The Chief Scientist highlighted that the hope is that they will have opportunities to engage with the Committee at key points along the process and might have a discussion on how that might happen. The Executive division and the Corporate division in addition to the Chief Scientist have reviewed the four options presented in the interim report and have a clear preference for the first option implemented with involvement of digital and data driven platforms for periodic reporting on state and trends of the environment. It was further noted that option one allows for analysis of environmental trends as well as a review of the global policy response and prospects for the future. Such an analysis would be useful every four years which aligns well with the need to provide UNEP's medium-term strategy as well as inputs into the Secretary General's Global Sustainable Development report. Further internal discussions have agreed that the production of GEO should continue to be an all UNEP effort with participation of best external experts available. To support the all UNEP effort, a base level funding of approximately USD 1 Million per year will be guaranteed to ensure continuity in staffing levels as well as activities related to outreach education and capacity building. However, it was noted that the peak periods when the GEO report is being produced will required enhanced level of funding which has been found to be approximately USD 2.5 Million per year in the past. This additional funding will have to be met through voluntary contribution of Member States over and above their current environment fund contributions. Further, it was noted that other assessment processes are supported by technical support units that are typically funded by respective Member States and provide in-kind support to these assessments processes. The Steering Committee was requested to consider such an arrangement for the GEO process in its deliberations. The Chief Scientist thanked the Steering Committee again and assured the Committee of continued support by provision of the necessary funding, administrative information and analyses needed to ensure the Steering Committee makes its decision on the future of GEO.

The Chair of the Steering Committee then informed the Committee on the discussion currently happening in the bureau to develop a procedures document. Such an exercise would look at the four options presented in the interim report already and answer the question on what procedures and structures will be needed to deliver such an option effectively. This analysis will help the Steering Committee determine the costs needed for the respective options as well as the benefits for each option. Further this analysis will establish the connections between the four options more clearly. The bureau is therefore looking at the existing structures and mirroring that on the proposed options. A first draft is already available for discussions just within the bureau and the Secretariat and one of the things already emerging is that a future GEO may deviate somewhat from the procedures of IPCC and IPBES for example because of the nature of GEO. However, there is still a possibility to build on the same procedural philosophy to achieve consistency across the major assessments landscape. The procedures document is therefore looking at the question of *how to* in different options of the options document. A draft will be shared with the Steering Committee for information and then discussion with the main intent to help the Committee design the feasibility study correctly then possibly make such a document available in the Future of GEO through a more formal process that the Committee can discuss.

In response to the Chief Scientist statement, the Steering Committee reinforced the view that GEO is the UNEP flagship report. The Chief Scientist noted that other reports in the organization will be framed to sync to the GEO and ensure synergies. The financial support and position presented by the Chief scientist was also welcomed and appreciated by the Steering Committee. The Committee

requested for a written statement from the Chief Scientist on the presentation to which the Chief scientist will provide. The Steering Committee reinforced the need to consider the outcome of the consultant's background document and existing material from the previous consultations is made use and utilized other than starting from scratch on the feasibility study. The Committee further remarked that the current options are not mutually exclusive and contains elements that can be rearranged to a more effective option. There is therefore room for modification of option one and combining other elements into that option. This was in response to the Chief Scientist statement indicating the Executive office preference for the first option presented in the interim report of the Steering Committee. The Committee further highlighted that it would be valuable if the feasibility study would consider the scientific and technical elements of the four options. Further it was proposed that the outputs presented in the draft statement of work should include an assessment of the options (with their administrative structures) against the criteria agreed by the Steering Committee. Finally, it was noted that further input will be needed from Steering Committee to expand the description of the four options. The reference to 'proponents' was highlighted as inappropriate. The recommendations of the committee were made collectively, and all views should be considered. The Steering Committee further appreciated that UNEP is making a clear signal in supporting the process. The Committee was cautioned against focusing on a large, detailed report in the feasibility study while forgetting on the core mandate of the Steering Committee to produce an options paper for Future GEO that will help Member States make a decision at UNEA5.2. The Secretariat was therefore requested to look into the timeline to ensure that the feasibility study is short and upfront in the process to allow for detailed deliberation in the Committee to produce the required output based on the study. The discussion in the Steering Committee should therefore be the main focus of the timeline. The documents to be used in the consultations should also consider more policy makers through the design of the consultation as they are key stakeholders of GEO.

In responding to this the Secretariat highlighted its preference for an alternative process between itself and the Steering Committee in producing the financial and costing work as compared to use of an external consultant because a lot of information and work will be done by the Secretariat anyway. Preparing the material and interpreting the financial information for the consultant will also be done by the Secretariat. It was therefore stated that this was a Steering Committee decision to make on the call or in the days following the meeting for the Committee to decide on its preference.

On this item it was decided that the Secretariat will send out to the Committee the details of the feasibility study and request for preferences of either proceeding with an external consultant or the iterative process that will involve the Secretariat and the Committee itself in the feasibility study.

Presentation and discussion on other science-policy interface work currently undertaken by the Secretariat

The Secretariat presented an overview on the science-policy work being undertaken by the Secretariat as requested by Member States. It was highlighted that the Synthesis report that would be presented to the Steering Committee in the meeting is an assessment of various reports produced in different parts inside UNEP and outside through its collaborative centers. Further the Secretariat highlighted the difference between its thematic focused publication and the intergovernmental assessments like the GEO. The lead of the advisory group and the lead author of the UNEP Synthesis report named *Making peace with nature* presented to the findings of the report to the Steering Committee in detail.

The Committee thanked the Synthesis paper team for the presentation and emphasised on the need to have such information to Member States. It was further noted that due to lack of sufficient time for discussion on this item, it would be good if the Steering Committee gets an opportunity to hear more from those involved whether the Synthesis exercise prompted any reflections on changes that could be made across multiple assessment processes that would support synthesis and integration. As GEO has a more integrated nature it would also be of interest whether the exercise identified anything that the Steering Committee should be taking into account in the further development of the options.

In response, it was noted that this report was effective in demonstrating that these assessments are consistent with each other. The problems are interlinked and a key role that GEO could play in future is exactly this role. More deliberation on this could be done in subsequent meetings of the Steering Committee.

Any other business

- One of the chairs of the Steering committee is stepping down in her role due to early retirement from her official government work in the end of May 2021. The Secretariat will initiate a new nomination process with the respective government to have the replacement in the Committee. Further, the Secretariat will be seeking interest to replace the Co-chair particularly from developing countries to retain geographical balance in the bureau of the Steering Committee. The Secretariat stated its gratitude in working with the cochair and thanked her contribution in the Committee. Fellow member of the Steering Committee also wished her well in her retirement

Having no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 16h52 (EAT).

Action items

- The Secretariat will prepare a written summary of the meeting.
- The Secretariat will revise the draft workplan taking in consideration inputs from this call and circulated the new edition for inputs from the Steering Committee and eventual approval on a no-objection basis.
- The Secretariat will revise the draft proposed approach for conducting feasibility study taking in consideration inputs from this call and circulated the new edition for inputs from the Steering Committee and eventual approval on a no-objection basis.
- The Secretariat will share the statement made by the Chief Scientist in written.

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	Gokhelashvili	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
Najib	Saab	Arab Forum for Environment & Development (AFED)	Lebanon
Marcel	Kok	Environment Assessment Agency (PBL)	The Netherlands
Anna	Mampye	Ministry of Environment	South Africa
Teshia	Jn Baptiste	Ministry of Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development	Saint Lucia
Anshu	Singh	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate change, Government of India	India
Mira	Zovko	Ministry of Environment and Energy	Croatia
Isaac	Dladla	Eswatini Environment Authority	Swaziland
Robert	Watson	Synthesis Paper team	UK
Andrea	Hinwood	Chief Scientist	UNEP

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
Jerome	Sebadduka Lugumira	National Environment Management Authority (NEMA)	Uganda
Shanna (alternate)	Emmanuel	Ministry of Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development	Saint Lucia
Kazuhiko	Takeuchi	Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)	Japan
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)
Huang	Yi	Peking University	China
Claudia	Kabel	German Environment Agency	Germany
Toral	Patel-Weynand	US Forest Service	USA
Andrew	Stott	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs-UK	United Kingdom and Northern Ireland