

## Outcomes Document

### The Coordination Group Meeting for the Seventh Edition of UNEP's Global Environment Outlook (GEO-7)


**March 16, 2023**

*On March 16, 2023 the GEO-7 Coordination Group met to consider the following agenda items:*

- Roundtable introductions
- The Co-chairs and vice-chairs of the Ad hoc Open-ended meetings, the four Co-Chairs of the assessment, the IMAG and MESAG Bureaus and the Secretariat to provide a brief update on the main outcomes of the Bangkok meetings and agree on next steps.
- Discussion on the development of the Coordination Group's Terms of Reference, workplan and mode of work.
- Any other business

#### **On these agenda items, the meeting decided:**

- The Coordination Group will interact informally relying on the existing Terms of Reference for the IMAG, MESAG, the assessment co-chairs and the co-chairs for the ad-hoc open-ended meetings, and it will meet as needed to discuss the overarching goals of GEO-7 and in case of any need for guidance among the group.
- The adopted documents from the September and October ad-hoc open-ended meetings, namely the GEO Procedures Document and the GEO-7 Scoping Document, must not be reopened or changed and need to be adhered to throughout the GEO-7 process.
- Selection of collaborating centres is not the role of the advisory bodies. It can be undertaken by the Secretariat based on advice from the advisory bodies

Rapporteur	Signature
Mr. Andres Guhl	

#### **Meeting Summary March 16, 2023**

##### **Roundtable introductions.**

Participants introduced themselves to the group.

##### **Co-chairs and vice-chairs of the Ad hoc Open-ended meetings, the four Co-Chairs of the assessment, the IMAG and MESAG Bureaus and the Secretariat to provide a brief update on the main outcomes of their Bangkok meeting and agreed next steps.**

The assessment co-chairs briefed the group on their progress, noting that by the end of the meeting annotated outlines for all chapters will be ready. Initial gaps in the authors teams have been identified, especially gaps in Indigenous and Local Knowledge (ILK) experts and tools to integrate ILK throughout the assessment. The assessment co-chairs requested that the

IMAG and MESAG identify any tools, if possible. There are also specific regional representation gaps including for the Eastern European group, African Group, Asia and Pacific Group and Latin America and the Caribbean Group. The assessment co-chairs are focused on making sure the chapters are coherent across the report as the authors develop the zero order drafts which will be ready by September for the first internal review to prepare the first order drafts for the second authors meeting in January.

The IMAG co-chairs briefed the group on the progress including key principles and policy guidance from IMAG. The main goal is to cluster and focus these recommendations. Besides providing guidance on the five sectors that need to be transformed according to the GEO 7 outline, additional key policy guidance will be provided on environment, health and security interlinkages. The IMAG co-chair requested the assessment co-chairs to help IMAG understand the needs for policy guidance and decided to finalise the IMAG guidance on policy questions after hearing specific needs from the assessment co-chairs.

The IMAG discussed collaborating centres and supporting services as well as the evidence base and the literature to be considered as a basis for GEO-7. The IMAG decided that guidance on the evidence base and literature is within the role of the MESAG for scientific guidance. However, the IMAG recommended to add a category of evidence base as 'policy documents' because those can also be useful in the GEO-7 solutions pathways.

The IMAG discussed the gap-filling process and advised the Secretariat to use the existing nomination database for gap-filling and then to later seek additional nominations if necessary to close the gap. The IMAG concluded that on regional and sub-regional groupings that data availability is also a key criterion for the classification and that the decision and logic for the classification should be clear and transparent.

The IMAG discussed supporting services and ways to support knowledge generation using a strategic program to build a GEO network that will benefit future GEOs to develop tools digitally that can be combined with the digitalization of GEO-7 to help Member States and major stakeholders to contribute to the process and use the GEO products, also contributing to co-creation of knowledge. The IMAG looks forward to further refining this idea and providing guidance to the Secretariat.

A question was raised on the policy documents and impact assessments from the Secretariat to understand where the materials are available. The Secretariat clarified that this information will be useful for the authors. The IMAG vice-chair responded that at some levels for the European Union for example, these sources can be made available. Then the IMAG co-chair raised that the UNEP portal is being fed with national data and experiences that the authors can use.

An assessment co-chair raised a question about the guidance on policy and related inquiries from authors. The IMAG vice-chair responded that policies can typically support modelling work, and most are policy analysis experts which have access to databases. The assessment co-chair then requested the IMAG to kindly share information on such databases and information with the co-chairs and authors, so that all experts may have access to such additional policy-related sources and evidence base. The IMAG vice-chair said that this access needs to be judicious because there are many documents and sometimes some are not publicly available.

An assessment co-chair recommended to use the World Bank databases as well as World

Bank regional and International Energy Agency, etc. to use rather than national documents because there are too many national-level policy documents. The IMAG vice-chair clarified that while the policy documents would not be the only evidence base used, that the guidance is to use policy documents as well as the other scientific evidence bases.

The Secretariat clarified that one of the findings from GEO-6 is a lack of impact assessment information from governments and published in peer-reviewed journals. The Secretariat shared experience of policy authors searching for evidence on policy effectiveness and that there were conclusions that there's a lack of governmental sources of impact assessment, so any support from the IMAG with providing the evidence base would be useful. The IMAG co-chair clarified that the guidance from IMAG is to use not only peer reviewed literature on the impacts or policies, but to review policy documents as well as impact assessments that are perhaps not published in peer-reviewed journals but are available. Additionally, the IMAG co-chair shared that the policy documents and impact assessments are added as a source of the evidence base, but not as the only literature. The IMAG vice-chair reflected on the Secretariat's comments that many ex-post analysis information is missing while there is a plethora of ex-ante analysis.

The MESAG co-chair shared that there should be the same level of scientific credibility applied to these sources as with the rest of the GEO-7 literature base.

The MESAG co-chair summarized that the MESAG meetings were lively and participatory with a strong balance of expertise and backgrounds which supports the work of MESAG. The meetings started with a review of the MESAG procedures that build on the adopted GEO Procedures. There were two main topics that MESAG will provide scientific guidance on including the gap-filling process for experts and the on-line peer-review platform. The MESAG discussed the technical peer-review platform as well as an overview of the review process as described in the adopted GEO Procedures Document. The MESAG raised the question about if the gaps in expertise are due to a lack of identifying the correct experts among those nominated, or whether the additional sources of experts are needed.

The MESAG raised the issue of lack of resources in their workplan because there is concern that attending the third authors meeting may be too late to provide scientific guidance to the process. Therefore, there was a quasi-budget-neutral suggestion that half of the MESAG attends one meeting and the other half attends the next. This will be discussed in later virtual MESAG meetings.

The MESAG did not yet discuss regional classification because they are waiting for a request for scientific guidance on this topic. There's a plan for monthly meetings, so the MESAG expects to receive any requests for scientific guidance from the assessment co-chairs or IMAG to address any concerns. The MESAG thanks the Secretariat for organizing interactions with the assessment co-chairs and the experts providing an update on the solutions pathways and modelling workshops as well as the IMAG.

The Secretariat raised the question about the collaborating centres to seek guidance from the advisory bodies on how to strategize working with collaborating centres and explaining the selection process. The IMAG co-chair responded that the collaborating centres topic was raised in the IMAG meeting and that IMAG provided some advice to the process. The IMAG advised that rather than sharing the call for collaborating centres once every four years, the Secretariat should instead have an ongoing process that seeks and selects the best suited collaborating centres for supporting GEO and ongoing UNEP work. The IMAG can provide

guidance to the Secretariat on how to proceed, but the selection is not the role of IMAG or MESAG. The MESAG Rapporteur recommended that there could be collaborating centres working with each other and training other centres in the GEO process to help avoid any selection frustration. The assessment co-chair advised that it would be difficult to engage all collaborating centres now at this stage of the process, but that they may be able to support the review and/or outreach and communication later in the process. The IMAG vice-chair recommended to start engaging first with collaborating centres that have provided experts to the GEO-7 process. The IMAG vice-chair recognized that this is already a sign of commitment to the GEO-7 process, so a good basis to work with those collaborating centres. The assessment co-chair however mentioned that the authors must be in the process in their individual capacity and not as part of an institution.

The Secretariat asked about the discussion held in the MESAG meeting with regards to some requested changes the adopted text of the GEO-7 Scoping Document and asked about any advice from the MESAG co-chair on how to address this issue. The MESAG co-chair clarified that the matter was clearly explained to the MESAG that the Terms of Reference (ToRs) are adopted language from the GEO Procedures that cannot be changed, and the MESAG procedures are under discussion and building on the adopted language in the GEO Procedures. The IMAG co-chair responded that hearing suggestions or comments is fine, but it would be extremely risky to reopen any text in the adopted GEO Procedures or in the GEO-7 Scoping Document because the agreement was time consuming and meticulously planned throughout the ad-hoc open-ended meeting and adopted with the silence procedure for agreement. The MESAG co-chair agreed and explained that there was no intent to reopen the text. The assessment co-chair stressed that it would be a disaster to reopen any text that was adopted in the ad-hoc open-ended meeting. The Secretariat advised that a key role of the Coordination group is to issue unequivocal guidance with regards to not reopening any text on adopted documents, and that this could be a clear guidance in the outcomes document of this meeting.

The IMAG vice-chair raised the question on the review process to ask what the MESAG discussed specifically and if there is a procedure recommended. The MESAG co-chair responded that the review process described was from the adopted GEO Procedures Document in section 9 and that the MESAG had some initial suggestions on scientific guidance for implementing the procedures and will provide detailed guidance at a later stage. However, the review process has not yet been discussed within the MESAG, it will be the topic of the upcoming online meetings and guidance will be provided after that. The assessment co-chair asked about the process if it was following the IPCC and IPBES processes. The MESAG co-chair explained that the process in the adopted GEO Procedures Document is very similar to those processes and building on the GEO-6 process. The Secretariat explained that scientific guidance on how the review editors interact with the authors to provide feedback on the quality of review following each review period would be useful. The MESAG co-chair took note and explained that the discussion was more focused on how to deal with any imbalance between chapters on comments and addressing the review comments. The assessment co-chair explained the roles of review editors and authors in the IPCC and IPBES processes and recommended to use these roles since they have been successful in previous IPCC and IPBES assessments. The MESAG co-chair agreed and responded that the MESAG is considering how to provide scientific guidance after discussing the process again in the May virtual meeting.

The assessment co-chair raised a question about the collaborating centres to ask about support in nominations of authors, throughout the review, or in other ways. The IMAG co-chair

responded that in order to provide guidance, the IMAG had asked about the current situation and key challenges. The IMAG co-chair mentioned that the key challenges are the human and financial resources to engage all 45 collaborating centres who expressed interest in engaging with the GEO-7. The IMAG discussed creative solutions including some recommendations on how many can be engaged, targeted and/or phased engagement on only some key areas with need for support and possibly low level of engagement that may require less staff and financial resources in the Secretariat.

The MESAG co-chair raised the question of how to proceed to discuss the ToRs of the Coordination Group, mode of work and workplan. The Secretariat clarified that the expectations are for the coordination group to be informal for information exchange and advice among GEO-7 leadership. The assessment co-chair agreed and raised the question of how frequently the meeting should take place, and suggested initially every two months, pending the identification of agenda items. If no agenda items are identified for any given meeting, then there's no need for a meeting at that time. The IMAG co-chair agreed that this type of engagement is preferred rather than formally defining ToRs, also due to the agreement with MESAG to meet with the IMAG and MESAG Bureaus as well as joint IMAG and MESAG calls, therefore the IMAG co-chair requested to ensure there are not too many meetings in any given month based on these suggestions, noting that in the event of any urgent matters there will be a meeting. The assessment co-chair agreed and raised that agreeing on goals and objectives of the GEO-7 assessment requires some procedures or ToRs to approach that agreement. The MESAG co-chair agreed that it would be useful to stay in contact with the leadership of the GEO-7 process in the coordination group. The IMAG co-chair asked that the formal language of agreeing on goals and objectives be interpreted in an informal manner because at the moment there are no foreseen issues among the Coordination Group, so less procedures would be nice. The Secretariat agreed that having some virtual contact by email or teams would be useful to have discussion virtually to avoid periodic meetings. Another question is the frequency of the meetings, the suggestion was made to have quarterly meetings with agenda items shared to the Secretariat for compilation and distribution among the Coordination Group. The MESAG co-chair agreed and opened the floor for questions.

The assessment co-chair explained that immediately the group needs advice on the expert gap-filling process regarding key issues. Therefore, there may be need for an impromptu teleconference and consistent information exchange through the Secretariat. The MESAG co-chair agreed.

The assessment co-chair raised a question for the group: what is meant by success of GEO-7? The assessment co-chair described previous IPCC and IPBES assessments that have impacted policy and negotiations for conventions, but a lack of evidence for a similar impact for GEOs. So, what's defined as success and what is expected for GEO-7 to produce? The MESAG co-chair responded that the issue has been discussed if the GEO is reaching out to the scientific community and that perhaps reason for stronger impact among IPCC and IPBES is due to scientific credibility and link to major UN conventions. The IMAG co-chair explained that there are clear landing zones for IPBES and IPCC, and that he does not agree with the comments on a lack of impact for GEO-6. The IMAG co-chair continued that it is important to consider the issues in the global environmental space that UNEP is dealing with, to understand what issue require global action to identify a landing zone for GEO-7. The IMAG co-chair added that it is a bit early to open this debate.

The assessment co-chair explained that the pickup needs to be more specific than UNEA considering by topics with ideas of FAO or IFAD for food, IEA for energy, the World Bank or

IMF for finance issues. Considering the key issues, is it possible to be in touch with key audiences to understand the needs and possible pick up to make GEO-7 more influential. What do we want GEO-7 to achieve? The assessment co-chair explained the difference between IPCC or IPBES considering the highest level of decision-making body on the environment, the UNEA because it is up to this body to elaborate resolutions based on the findings of GEO-7.

The MESAG vice-chair responded highlighting also the needs of the local communities and providing scientific evidence for decision-making.

The Secretariat explained the strengths of GEO-5 because there were clear indicators and messages, with a clear landing place (the Rio+20 Conference). The challenges of GEO-6 and GEO-7 were raised as releasing at UNEA because the audience receiving the report at an international meeting is challenging as the content cannot be used to negotiate, and it's a crowded space. The Secretariat stressed the need to present scientific evidence to support policy findings.

The IMAG co-chair explained that the objectives of GEO-7 are important to inform individual and collective actions. The Secretariat agreed with the challenges and shared that launching at the World Economic Forum would perhaps open access to a stronger audience. The assessment co-chair agreed that they are a key audience and recommended that UNEP's Executive Director works with the World Economic Forum to inform the forum of GEO-7 and requests that there's a space to present the key findings.

The IMAG co-chair explained that there is a need to launch well before key events so that the audience can understand and use the contents of GEO-7.

The assessment co-chair emphasized that without economic and finance transformations, then there's no chance to transform energy and food systems. The IMAG co-chair explained that while that is a key message, without clear guidance on how to start and how to make those transformations happen, then the impact won't be feasible. The Secretariat added that the messages need to be clear with strong priorities and clear timelines with memorable messages without distortion from panic. The IMAG co-chair agreed, but emphasized that the actions need to be instrumental, so the issues are raised along with the instruments to solve the issues.

The Secretariat raised the suggestion for the GEO-7 to also connect to and inform the SDGs plan for re-negotiations of the SDGs for post-2030 and highlighted that this is why it's important to have strong ties to the GSDR.

The assessment co-chair raised the importance to plan for outreach and that there should be a plan early in the process. The MESAG rapporteur raised concerns about boundaries between policy relevance and policy prescriptiveness. The IMAG vice-chair asked what the measurements about ex-post and ex-ante analysis are and supported the answer that because we are here for GEO-7, then that's a sign that the GEO-6 was successful. On the plan for outreach because there's a lot of noise, there's a challenge to achieve effective and impactful communications and outreach.

The assessment co-chair agreed with the IMAG co-chair that to recommend transformations in the economic and financial systems, GEO-7 must also be more specific on what needs to

be changed. The assessment co-chair continued that one key action would be changing subsidies and that in order to do this would require making the agendas of the World Bank, WEF, etc to raise this key issue.

The Secretariat raised that the best view is to raise the importance of communicating GEO-7 to the UNEP Executive Director to prepare for a concerted effort to push the GEO-7 outreach to the key economic institutions mentioned.

## Annex 1: Participants List

First Name	Last Name	Role in GEO-7	Region(s) of Representation	Participation
Lorenzo	Ciccarese	Co-chair of the ad-hoc open-ended meetings, MESAG member	Western European Group	In-person
Rosemarie	Casimiro	MESAG vice-chair	Asia and the Pacific Group	In-person
Maria del Mar	Viana Rodriguez	MESAG co-chair	Western European Group	In-person
Andres	Guhl	MESAG Rapporteur	Latin American and Caribbean Group	In-person
Edgar	Gutierrez-Espeleta	Assessment co-chair	Latin American and Caribbean Group	In-person
Nyovani	Madise	Assessment co-chair	African Group	In-person
Ying	Wang	Assessment co-chair	Asia and the Pacific Group	In-person
Arthur	Ejlis	IMAG co-chair	Western European Group	In-person
Miroslav	Havranek	IMAG vice-chair, vice-chair of the ad-hoc open-ended meetings	Eastern European Group	In-person
Anna	Maympe	IMAG co-chair, rapporteur of the ad-hoc open-ended meetings	African Group	In-person
Rafael	Monge	IMAG Rapporteur	Latin America and Caribbean Group	In-person
Caroline	Kaimuru	UNEP, IMAG Secretariat Support		In person
Pierre	Boileau	UNEP, Head of GEO Unit		In person
Jian	Liu	Director, UNEP Division of Early Warning and Assessment		In person
Edoardo	Zandri	Chief, UNEP Scientific Assessments Branch		In person
Matt	Billot	UNEP, MESAG Secretariat Support		In person
Rachel	Kosse	UNEP, MESAG Secretariat Support		In person

## Apologies

First Name	Last Name	Role in GEO-7	Region(s) of Representation
Nicholas	King	MESAG Co-chair	African Group
Ervin	Balázs	MESAG Vice-chair	Eastern European Group
Rolenas	Baereleo	IMAG vice-chair	Asia Pacific Group
Alberto	Capra	Vice-chair of the ad-hoc open-ended meetings	Latin American and Caribbean Group
Thuraya	Al Sariri	Co-chair of the ad-hoc open-ended meetings	Asia Pacific Group