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**United Nations Environment Assembly of the
United Nations Environment Programme
Fifth session**

Nairobi (online), 22–26 February 2021*
Item 5 of the provisional agenda**

**International environmental policy and
governance issues**

**Providing options for the future of the *Global Environment
Outlook***

**Interim report of the Steering Committee on the future of the *Global
Environment Outlook***

Introduction

1. In paragraph 6 of its resolution 4/23, the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) requested the Executive Director of UNEP to prioritize in the programme of work and budget the preparation of an options document on the future of the *Global Environment Outlook*, in broad consultation with Member States, stakeholders and the custodians of other global environmental assessment processes, focusing on the scope and objectives of the *Global Environment Outlook*. The preparation of the options document was to be overseen and managed by a steering committee, to be established under the auspices of the Environment Assembly and pursuant to the terms of reference and the nomination process set out in the annex to the resolution.

2. UNEP implemented those requests, received from the Environment Assembly at its fourth session, by first requesting nominations from Member States for experts to sit on the Steering Committee on the future of the *Global Environment Outlook (GEO)*. Once established, the Steering Committee developed the terms of reference for an expert consultant to help develop the draft of the options paper and to support the broad consultation process. The consultant developed a background paper to support the work of the Steering Committee, which, in turn, produced an additional discussion document that supported the online consultations and questionnaire developed for the consultation process. The Steering Committee then held a final workshop to begin developing the options document. The interim report at hand presents the work completed so far by the Steering Committee to fulfil its mandate, for the information of participants in the online segment of the fifth session of the Environment Assembly, to be held in February 2021. It complements the forthcoming final report of the Steering Committee, which will support the more substantive discussions on the

* In accordance with the decisions taken at the meeting of the Bureau of the United Nations Environment Assembly held on 8 October 2020 and at the joint meeting of the Bureaux of the United Nations Environment Assembly and the Committee of Permanent Representatives held on 1 December 2020, the fifth session of the Assembly is expected to adjourn on 23 February 2021 and resume as an in-person meeting in February 2022.

** UNEP/EA.5/Rev.1.

future of *GEO* expected to be held at the resumed fifth session of the Environment Assembly, in February 2022. The interim report has been fully considered and approved by the Steering Committee.

I. Mandate and process

3. The United Nations Environment Assembly initiated, in its resolution 4/23, an intergovernmental consultative process to propose options for the future of *GEO*. The Environment Assembly welcomed with appreciation the flagship sixth *GEO* report and its summary for policymakers, which was reviewed and approved by Member States. The Assembly requested the Executive Director to prioritize the preparation of an options document on the future of the *GEO* process, in broad consultation with Member States, stakeholders and the custodians of other global environmental assessment processes. To this end, the Assembly requested the establishment, under its auspices, of a Steering Committee of experts from Member States to oversee and manage the consultations for and preparation by the secretariat of an options document focusing on the scope and objectives of the process. The options document, which would include an assessment of the impact of the various options and provide recommendations, was to be submitted to the Environment Assembly for consideration at its fifth session to inform a decision on the future form and function of *GEO*.

4. The options and recommendations presented here are the outcome of an extensive process that began in November 2019. The process included deliberations among members of the Steering Committee; analytical work carried out by UNEP and a team of consultants from the International Institute for Sustainable Development; consultations through a series of webinars; and a web-based survey of Member States, stakeholders and assessment experts concerning the design elements and the criteria for identifying the options for the future of the *GEO* process. More than 450 individual and consolidated responses to the survey were received, from all regions and categories of respondent, including from 112 Member States, more than 200 assessment experts and some 100 stakeholders. In the present document, the Steering Committee considers key points of convergence from the rich body of inputs received. It assesses the administrative and financial consequences of a limited set of options and makes recommendations as a basis for actions that the Environment Assembly may wish to take at its fifth session.

II. United Nations Environment Programme mandate and the place of the *Global Environment Outlook* in the science-policy interface

5. The science-policy mandate of UNEP is anchored in the core function assigned to the Governing Council of UNEP in 1972 of keeping under review the world environmental situation. It also reflects the function of promoting the contribution of the relevant international scientific and other professional communities to the acquisition, assessment and exchange of environmental knowledge and information and the functions related to providing policy guidance and recommendations.¹ The growing body of knowledge, information, data and expertise concerning today's many unprecedented environmental challenges is key to achieving the transformation to a sustainable society set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals.

6. Six comprehensive reports in the *GEO* series have been prepared to date: *Global Environment Outlook 1: For Life on Earth* (1997); *Global Environment Outlook 2000* (1999); *Global Environment Outlook 3: Past, Present and Future Perspectives* (2002); *Global Environment Outlook 4: Environment for Development* (2007); *Global Environment Outlook 5: Environment for the Future We Want* (2012); and *Global Environment Outlook 6: Healthy Planet, Healthy People* (2019). The process has also yielded derivatives of the comprehensive *GEO* reports for target audiences, thematic *GEO* reports, and regional and national reports, as well as the *GEO* yearbooks (from 2003 to 2007), precursors to the *UNEP Yearbook* (from 2008 to 2014).

¹ The function is set out in General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII).

Global Environment Outlook series to date



7. Assessment processes represent a key function in the science-policy interface, and *GEO* has been the only assessment that covers all types of environmental issues and challenges comprehensively. Initiated in 1995 by the Governing Council of UNEP, *GEO* was, in its first three iterations, an expert and partnership-based integrated assessment. The process has, since *Global Environment Outlook 4*, taken on the features of intergovernmental scientific assessments, but with less stringent and formalized procedures than the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. The six comprehensive *GEO* assessments have been designed to review, analyse and synthesize the state of knowledge, with a view to supporting policy milestones in the international environment and sustainable development agenda (see the figure above). The *GEO* process has included and/or inspired a broad range of thematic, geographically focused assessments and derivative products, in support of key targeted environmental concerns. UNEP has strived to align the *GEO* process with other functions such as capacity-building, policy support, knowledge generation, and the collection and dissemination of data. A key consideration for the future *GEO* is its effectiveness in terms of contributing to an evolving science-policy interface with an increasingly comprehensive assessment landscape, both global² and regional, with new science being made available in relatively short time frames. It is also to be noted that Member States, in Environment Assembly resolution 4/23, requested the Executive Director to continue to promote greater coherence and coordination of global assessments undertaken within the United Nations system and in cooperation with relevant international bodies and the secretariats of the multilateral environmental agreements.³

² Other prominent intergovernmental assessment bodies hosted or administered by UNEP are the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. Other global environmental assessment bodies with intergovernmental features include the International Resource Panel and the Group of Experts of the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, under the General Assembly.

³ The coherence and synergies work under this resolution is being conducted by the UNEP *GEO* team, under the auspices of the Office of the Chief Scientist. The discussions of this group of secretariats and assessment co-chairs is called the Ad hoc Global Assessments Dialogue; see www.unenvironment.org/global-environment-outlook/adhoc-global-assessments-dialogue.

III. Criteria for analysing the design of a future *Global Environment Outlook*

8. The identification of options and recommendations for the design of the future *GEO* assessment processes and products has been informed by the following criteria, which remain relevant for future *GEO* processes:

- (a) Mandate consistency and comparability across editions of *GEO*;
- (b) The relevance (or salience) of *GEO* in terms of responding flexibly to the needs of Member States and stakeholders, for example on improving the effectiveness of environmental policy;
- (c) The legitimacy of *GEO* as an assessment accepted by Member States and stakeholders as authoritative, through unbiased, representative and defensible procedures that are balanced with regard to geography and gender;
- (d) The credibility of *GEO* as a robust and rigorous assessment based on scientifically accepted methods and analysis from multiple sources;
- (e) The accessibility of *GEO*, meaning that its outputs and the underlying knowledge base and environmental data are accessible by Member States and stakeholders to support policymaking, decision-making and strengthening of the science-policy interface;
- (f) The added value of *GEO*, in terms of ensuring that it responds to the UNEP mandate, and that it avoids duplication with other global assessment processes, while addressing interlinkages and cross-cutting issues and identifying gaps;
- (g) The overall feasibility of *GEO*, including continuity of operations for the periodic production of the report, in terms of the implications for administrative, financial and collaborative structures and other initiatives in the UNEP science-policy interface.

IV. Options and approaches for the design of a future *Global Environment Outlook*

9. The options and approaches for a future *GEO* address three key areas of assessment design. First, objectives and functions are proposed. Second, options regarding scope, utility and timing are presented (options and approaches 1 to 4). While these options and approaches differ, they are not mutually exclusive and give the flexibility to combine design elements from different options and approaches in any future scoping process. Third, options and approaches regarding process, governance and implementation are presented, which enable their delivery. The process, governance and implementation options and approaches presented below contain some common design elements essential to ensure the credibility, legitimacy and relevance of a future *GEO*. All options and approaches allow for the delivery of an assessment report and other products to the Environment Assembly to inform its decisions on the environment.

A. Objective and functions

10. The objective of the future *GEO* is to keep the world environmental situation and outlook under review in order to periodically inform the world's Governments and other stakeholders and strengthen the science-policy interface. This objective is in line with the input received during the consultations (see the annex to the present report) and is consistent with the founding mandate of UNEP⁴ and with Environment Assembly resolution 4/23.⁵

11. *GEO* aims to thoroughly review, analyse and synthesize existing knowledge obtained by regularly undertaking credible, legitimate and relevant assessments of science and information, with the intention of promoting informed and effective action for the environment by Governments and other stakeholders. The results of the consultation process identified support for a robust status and trends analysis, cooperation with scenario- and model-development communities, strengthening of policy analysis, policy support, consolidated data-sharing,⁶ capacity-building in the science-policy

⁴ See General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII).

⁵ In its resolution 4/23, the Environment Assembly requested that the options document address the role of the *GEO* process in the regular preparation of independent analyses of the state of and trends in the global environmental situation and that the Executive Director strengthen the policy relevance of the *GEO* process.

⁶ In its resolution 4/23, the Environment Assembly requested that UNEP develop a global environmental data strategy. UNEP has, in response, linked the World Environment Situation Room to the *GEO* process. See

interface⁷ and outreach to communicate assessment findings (see the annex). A core consideration is how the combination of different functions should be prioritized, organized and costed in order for *GEO* to best serve the needs of users, taking into account the criteria set out in section 3 (see option 3).

B. Overall scope, utility and timing

12. The overall scope of *GEO* includes a range of environmental issues, geographic scales and levels of governance. It involves analysis of environmental state, trends and outlooks, of progress towards policy targets, and of the effectiveness of policy in tackling the current unprecedented global environmental challenges, in order to support informed decision-making. *GEO* would add value and avoid duplication by synthesizing available knowledge, including findings from other relevant assessments, by filling assessment gaps and by analysing the drivers of and systemic links between environmental challenges to enable evidence-based decision-making. It would, together with other assessments and functions in the science-policy interface, contribute to a comprehensive review of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

13. The findings from the consultations (presented in the annex) indicate that there is support for determining the exact scope, utility and timing of *GEO* assessments and other functions through a process devised by the Environment Assembly to ensure that *GEO* responds to the needs of its users. The findings also indicate that *GEO* should assist Member States as well as the wider international governance system in setting out policy directions and strategies or identifying emerging issues; assist Member States in their national policymaking and in efforts to conduct national assessments; and help society at large gain an enhanced awareness of the state of knowledge, including by linking to the Global Environmental Data Strategy and the World Environment Situation Room (see Environment Assembly resolution 4/23). The findings indicate that the *GEO* process should be aligned with the UNEP medium-term strategy, with future Environment Assembly sessions and with the production of the Secretary-General's *Global Sustainable Development Report*.

Options and approaches

14. **Option 1: The Global Environment Outlook would provide a comprehensive global assessment approximately every four years.** The analysis by the Steering Committee, and the consultations, found that issues to be considered in the scope would include: analysis of environmental status and trends, including projected environmental changes; progress towards internationally agreed environmental goals and targets; current and projected risks to human well-being from environmental change; impact of environmental change on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals; interlinkages across scales and geographic regions; policy gaps in meeting internationally agreed environmental goals; the effectiveness of policy responses in differing developmental contexts; potentially successful policy approaches, with examples of how scarce resources can be mobilized; and actions and policy options needed in the transformation to a sustainable future (see the annex). The assessment would serve as input to the Environment Assembly, the high-level political forum on sustainable development and the *Global Sustainable Development Report*, as well as for multilateral environmental agreements, relevant regional bodies, individual Member States and society at large. The scoping would determine the timing, the geographic and thematic coverage, the outline, user needs and associated functions. It would also determine the size of a lean and globally knowledgeable team of experts to author the text and to analyse and integrate the existing science, data and knowledge, and findings from relevant assessments, including information from indigenous and local knowledge systems, needed to address the environmental issues of concern. Furthermore, the scoping would identify priority areas and emerging issues to be targeted in each edition of *GEO* to address changing environmental conditions and policy priorities, taking account of other assessment activities and allowing for comparison of the state of knowledge across assessments over time. The synthesis would factor in areas of expertise covered by other assessments, in order to avoid duplication of effort. Moreover, the scoping would determine the administrative and financial implications of the assessment, based on the number of experts involved, the number of meetings to be convened, the use of digital technologies, and the secretariat and technical support needed.

15. **Option 2: The Global Environment Outlook would provide focused, thematically based assessments and other products not covered by existing global assessments identified by Member States,** covering, for example, chemicals and pollution or emerging issues meriting consideration. The process could also generate derivative or other special products, such as workshop reports, targeted at

http://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/29769/DigitalTransformation_GlobalDataStrategy_Report_CPR_10Dec2019.pdf?sequence=13&isAllowed=y

certain user groups. The process for thematic assessments, derivative assessments and other special products would be detailed in the procedures for *GEO*. Such assessments and products could emerge in the context of a long-term rolling programme of work built on requests from Member States and stakeholders.

16. **Option 3: The Global Environment Outlook would initiate the development of a service-oriented approach for supporting and building capacity for monitoring and data collection, knowledge generation, assessment, outreach and decision-making.** The analysis by the Steering Committee, and the consultations, found that *GEO* should intentionally focus on these areas in order to keep the world environment under review (see the annex). The service-oriented approach would support the other options and build on experience from past *GEO* processes and other initiatives. It would add value to – and not duplicate – the other initiatives and would be closely coordinated with them.

17. **Option 4: The Global Environment Outlook process would continually synthesize the findings of relevant global assessments, drawing out the key conclusions, analysing the systemic links between different thematic areas and supporting evidence-based decision-making.** Gaps in assessments could be addressed if this option were coupled with option and/or approach 2. The synthesis would serve as input to the work of the Environment Assembly, the high-level political forum on sustainable development and the *Global Sustainable Development Report*, as well as for relevant multilateral environmental agreements, relevant regional bodies, individual Member States and society at large. *GEO* would provide a forward look at international decision-making processes and planned assessment activities in order to identify synergies, conflicts, duplications and gaps and to report to the Environment Assembly at each session on the evolving assessment landscape. The *GEO* process should also support – and collaborate with – other global environmental assessments in developing shared tools and data platforms, including conceptual frameworks, scenarios and integrated models, to promote coherence and synergies between assessments and to support capacity-building.

C. Process, governance and implementation

18. The United Nations Environment Assembly is responsible for overall oversight and governance of the *GEO* process and can establish the procedures and subsidiary governance and implementation structures that it deems necessary. The Environment Assembly and its predecessor, the Governing Council of UNEP, made a number of requests to the Executive Director with regard to the *GEO* process. Consequently, governance and implementation structures subsidiary to the governing body of UNEP, with dedicated roles and responsibilities for functions and process elements for *GEO*, have been established in the past. Similar structures exist for other global environmental assessments.

19. As part of the *GEO* process, a set of flexible procedures would be established, agreed upon by Member States, on the basis of experience from past *GEO* processes and other relevant processes. The development of such procedures was generally favoured in the consultations (see the annex). The objectives of the procedures would be to ensure relevance, legitimacy and credibility in the *GEO* process and to balance its different mutually supportive functions, taking full advantage of the opportunities of digital meetings, work platforms and technologies. The procedures would cover all options and approaches set out above. The elements to be considered in the procedures would include processes for (a) receiving and prioritizing global environmental issues of concern identified by Member States for strategic consideration and inclusion in the *GEO* assessment arena;⁸ (b) the initiation, development and approval of detailed scoping of the *GEO* assessments, their derivatives and other products; (c) the nomination and selection of a geographic, disciplinary and gender balanced teams of authors and experts; (d) the collective and iterative review, synthesis, analysis and judgment of the policy relevance of and level of confidence in the available knowledge, with traceability; (e) peer review and government and stakeholder review; (f) conflicts of interest and treatment of errors; (g) approval of the summary for policymakers and acceptance of assessment reports and other products; and (h) service-oriented approaches for supporting and building capacities in monitoring and data collection, knowledge generation, assessment, outreach and decision-making (option 3). The exact role and responsibilities of the governance and implementation structure would be set out in the procedures.

⁸ An example of such a process is the one established under Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (see https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/downloads/Procedure%20for%20receiving%20and%20prioritizing%20requests%20put%20to%20the%20Platform_2013.pdf).

20. The procedures above necessitate a clear and lean governance and implementation of the options for *GEO* under the Environment Assembly. During the consultation period, several Member States stressed the need for transparency, and the full involvement of all Governments.

21. The Environment Assembly may wish to request the Executive Director of UNEP to continue to convene open-ended intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder consultative meetings and establish advisory bodies for the *GEO* process, similar to those established for the sixth *Global Environment Outlook*. Open-ended intergovernmental consultative meetings with stakeholder observers, for approval of scoping and procedures and endorsement of summaries for policymakers, would be convened by the Executive Director of UNEP, akin to the meetings convened for the fourth, fifth and sixth instalments of the *Global Environment Outlook*. The Executive Director would also establish a high-level intergovernmental and stakeholder advisory group⁹ as the *GEO* oversight and steering group, and a science advisory panel,¹⁰ akin to those set up for the sixth instalment.

22. Alternatively, the Environment Assembly may wish to establish an ad hoc open-ended subsidiary body of Member States and accredited observers that would be responsible for overseeing the role of *GEO* in the UNEP science-policy interface. The body would be responsible for considering *GEO* procedures, approving the scoping of assessments and the summary for policymakers and other activities. The body would subsume the functions performed by the open-ended intergovernmental consultative meetings with stakeholder observers convened by the Executive Director of UNEP for the fourth, fifth and sixth editions of the *Global Environment Outlook*, particularly with regard to approval of scoping, of processes and of the summary for policymakers. The body would elect its officers from each region and would establish a multidisciplinary expert panel that could consist of a limited number of experts and stakeholders from each region. The body's officers and the panel would work together to provide oversight over the implementation of the *GEO* process, in accordance with established procedures, including by assuming responsibility for a balanced selection of experts and technical support units for a limited set of time-bound and task-specific author groups and task forces. The officers of the body and the panel would subsume the roles of the high-level intergovernmental and stakeholder advisory group and the science advisory panel of the sixth *Global Environment Outlook*.

D. Financial and administrative consequences

23. The financial and administrative consequences of the recommended options and approaches are under consideration. Any related activities associated with *GEO* could take place in accordance with an approved costed rolling plan and costed scoping documents to facilitate predictability in funding.

V. Recommendations and suggested actions

24. The Environment Assembly may wish to take note of the present report during the online segment of its fifth session and to note that a final report containing recommendations will be submitted for its consideration at its resumed fifth session, in February 2022. The recommendations will be informed by further consideration of the options and approaches identified in section IV for the future of the *GEO*, and their financial and administrative consequences, as well as possible approaches for process, governance and implementation, based on the criteria presented in section III.

⁹ Composed of 25 to 30 high-level government representatives from all six UNEP regions, as well as 8 to 10 key stakeholders.

¹⁰ Composed of 25 distinguished scientists.

Annex

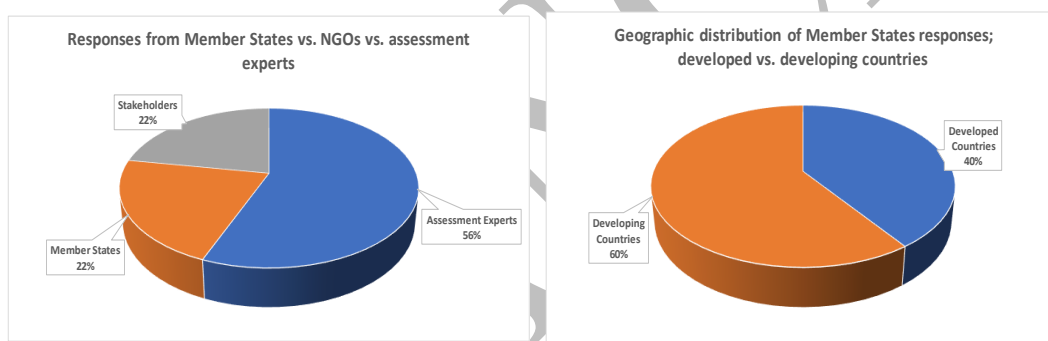
Analysis of consultation process results

Following is a summary of the key results of the month-long consultation on the future of the *GEO* process. The analysis was prepared to inform the deliberations of the Steering Committee on the future of *GEO* at its November 2020 workshop.

A. Diversity of responses

The consultation ran from 9 September through 9 October 2020. It was supported by a background document prepared by an independent consultant and a co-chairs’ discussion document prepared by the co-chairs of the Steering Committee and commented on by its members. Because of the coronavirus disease pandemic, the entire consultation occurred online. Seven orientation webinars were held to help participants better understand the context and purpose of the consultation and the tools used (mainly the questionnaire).

More than 150 people participated in the webinars, more than 400 questionnaires were completed, and more than 50 consolidated responses and 350 independent responses were provided. The secretariat encouraged responses from a wide range of countries and experts, sending four reminders during the consultation.

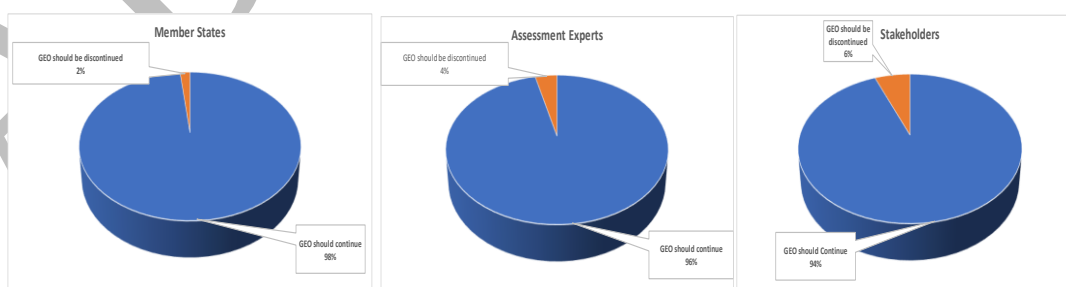


It should also be noted that many of the responses from Member States and stakeholders were consolidated responses, thus representing the views of many more respondents.

B. Clear signals

Certain results from the consultation show a very strong preference for one direction over another.

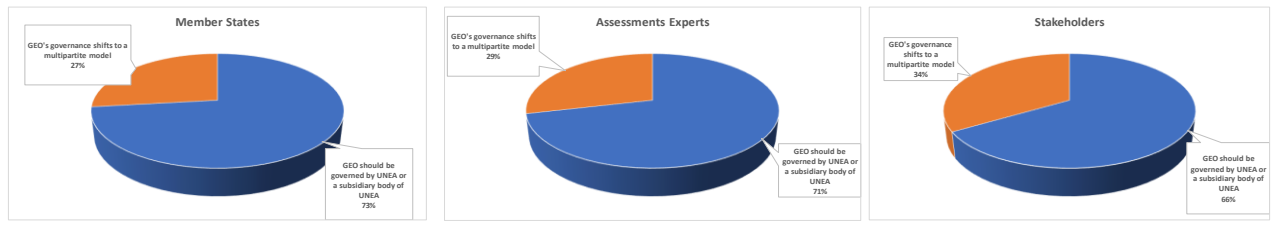
Those consulted largely thought that the *GEO* process should continue.



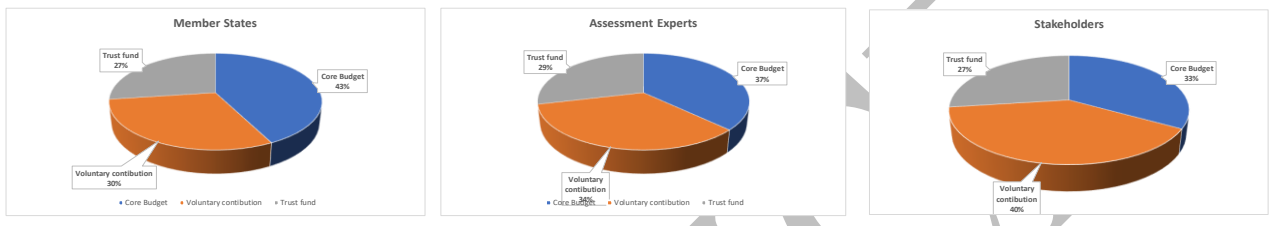
Those consulted largely thought that the *GEO* report should be produced on a four-year cycle.



Those consulted largely thought that the *GEO* process should be governed by the Environment Assembly or a subsidiary body of the Assembly.



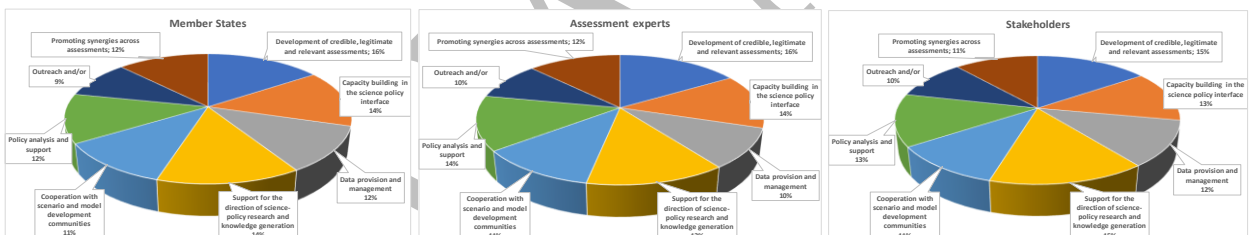
Those consulted largely thought that *GEO* should be financed by core funds and voluntary contributions.



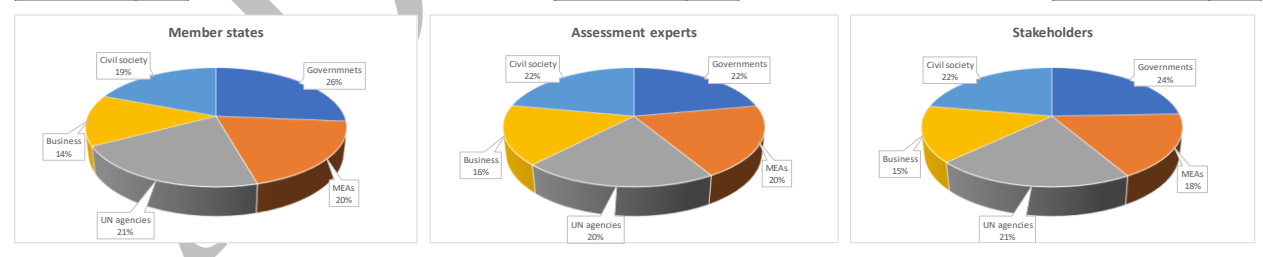
C. Strong signals

Other results from the consultation show a preference for a particular direction or collection of directions.

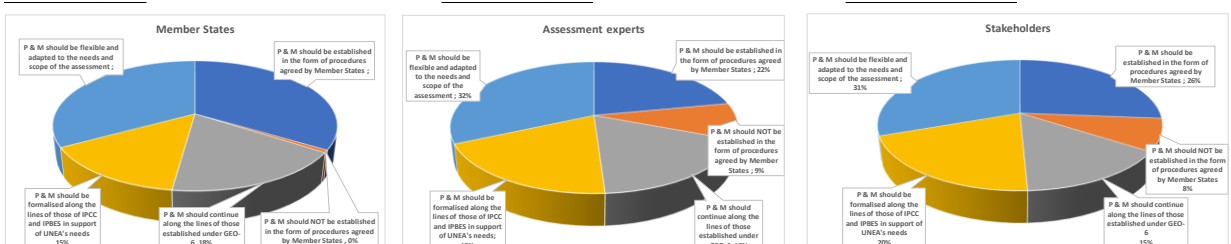
Those consulted thought that the *GEO* process should continue to produce assessments but should expand its work more into capacity-building and policy support.



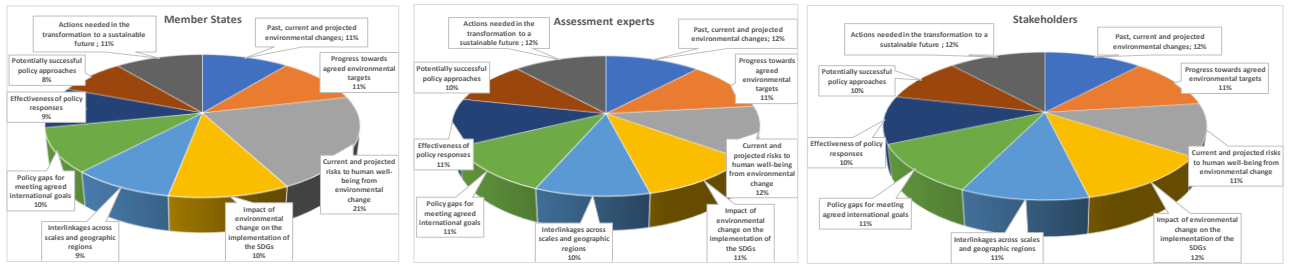
Those consulted thought that *GEO* should continue to include a broad range of Member States and experts in the production of its assessments.



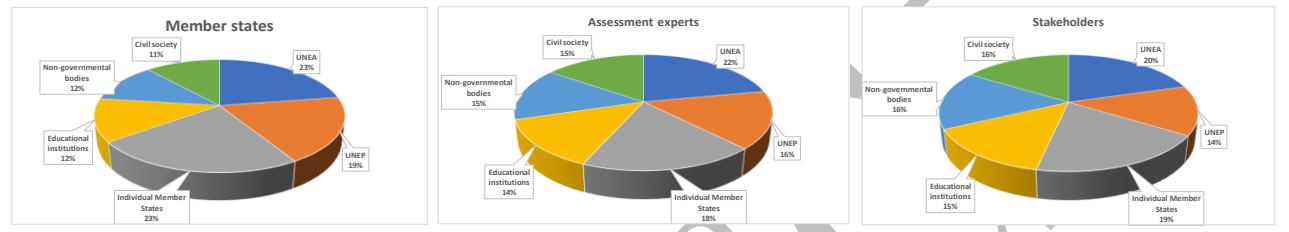
Those consulted largely said that *GEO* procedures and methods should be agreed on by Member States.



Those consulted largely said that *GEO* should mainly assess environmental changes, progress towards environmental targets and effectiveness of policy responses.



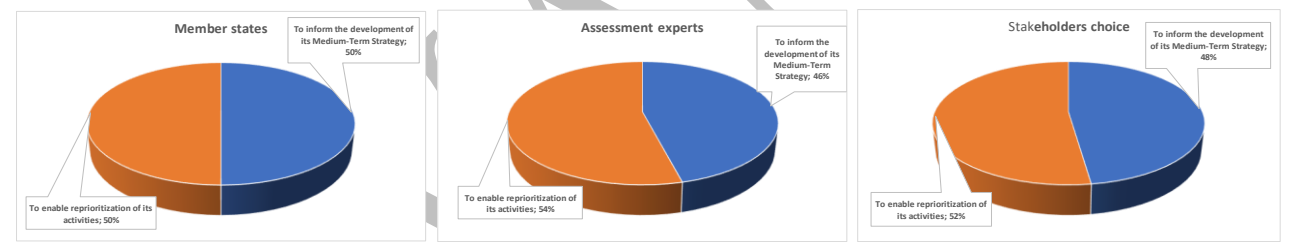
Those consulted said that *GEO* outputs should be used mainly by the Environment Assembly, UNEP and Member States.



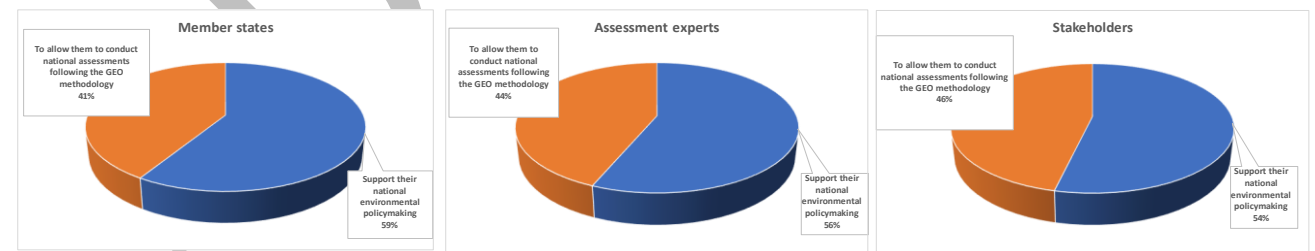
D. Mixed signals

Some responses from those consulted did not give clear direction.

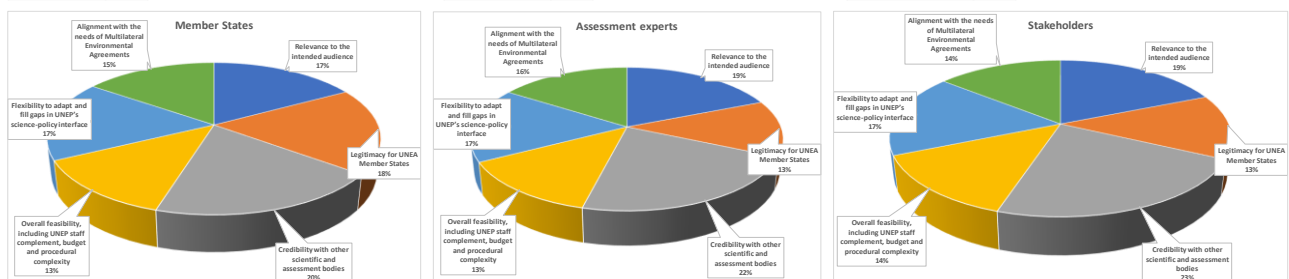
Those consulted did not provide clear guidance on how UNEP should use *GEO* outputs.



Those consulted indicated that Member States could use *GEO* outputs for a variety of purposes.



Those consulted largely said that the decision-making criteria proposed by the Steering Committee were appropriate.



E. Other suggestions

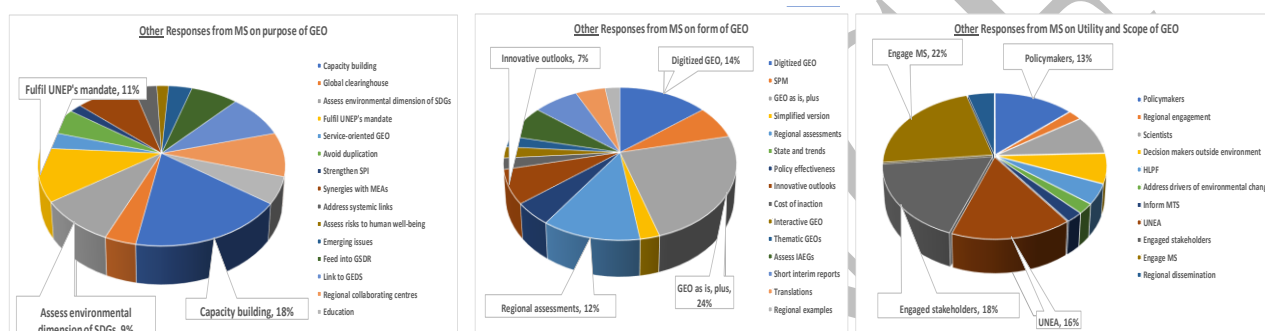
As part of the consultation process, participants were invited to offer additional ideas and suggestions in writing. These written responses were analysed and condensed into “short-form” categories for presentation here. The analysis was conducted for the three groups of respondents: Member States, stakeholders and assessment experts.

Member States

Member States proposed that the purpose of *GEO* could be expanded into capacity-building but should continue to fulfil the mandate of UNEP and assess the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Member States were of the view that the format of *GEO* should be retained, with the addition of elements such as more digitization and regional assessments and more innovative outlooks.

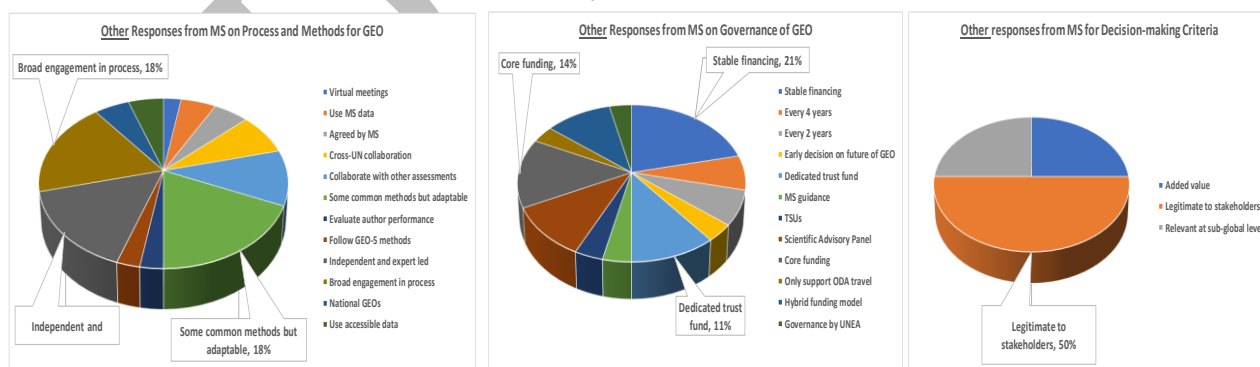
Member States said that the main users of *GEO* should be the Environment Assembly, Member States, policymakers in general and stakeholders.



Member States also expressed the view that *GEO* processes and methods should be common with other assessment processes but also be adaptable to the objectives of a particular edition of *GEO*. There was widespread agreement that *GEO* should remain independent and expert-led, with broad engagement by many groups.

Member States also said that financing for *GEO* should be stable and come mainly from core funding and a dedicated trust fund (a hybrid funding model).

Finally, Member States said that some additional criteria should be used by the Steering Committee for decision-making, including legitimacy for stakeholders, added value and the relevance of *GEO* assessment findings at a sub-global level.

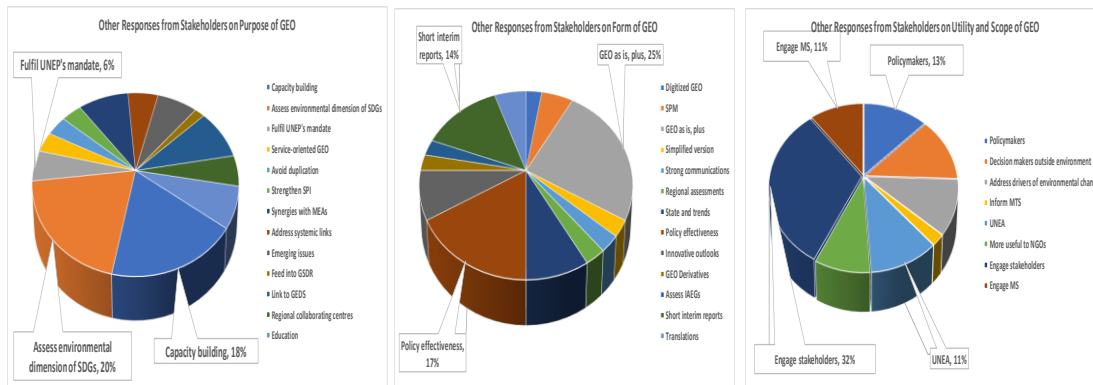


Stakeholders

Like Member States, stakeholders said that the purpose of *GEO* should be expanded to capacity-building and should continue to include assessment of the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals.

They said that *GEO* should retain its current format, supplemented by shorter interim reports and a greater focus on policy effectiveness.

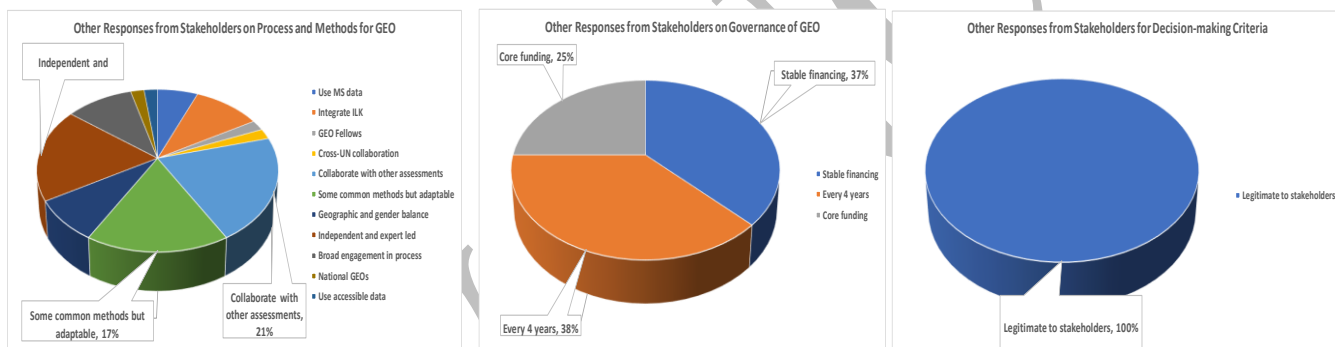
Stakeholders also said that *GEO* should be designed to engage, and be relevant for, stakeholders as well as Member States, policymakers and the Environment Assembly.



Stakeholders expressed the view that *GEO* process and methods could be improved by greater collaboration with other assessments. Methods should be common but adaptable, and the process should continue to be independent and expert-led.

They said that editions of *GEO* should be produced on a standardized four-year cycle, supported by stable financing, mainly from core funding.

Finally, stakeholders said that the decision-making criteria of the Steering Committee should be expanded to include the legitimacy of *GEO* for stakeholders.

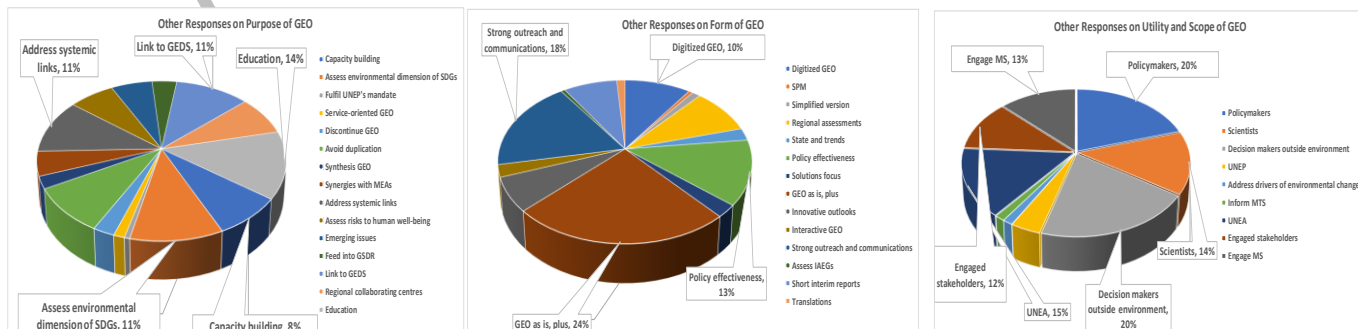


Assessment experts

Assessment experts said that the main purpose of *GEO* should be to assess the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals, addressing systemic links and education. They supported links with the Global Environmental Data Strategy and capacity-building as other purposes of *GEO*.

Regarding the format of *GEO*, assessment experts supported the “*Global Environment Outlook as is, plus...*” model, with the addition of a focus on policy effectiveness and digitized delivery supported by a strong outreach and communications strategy.

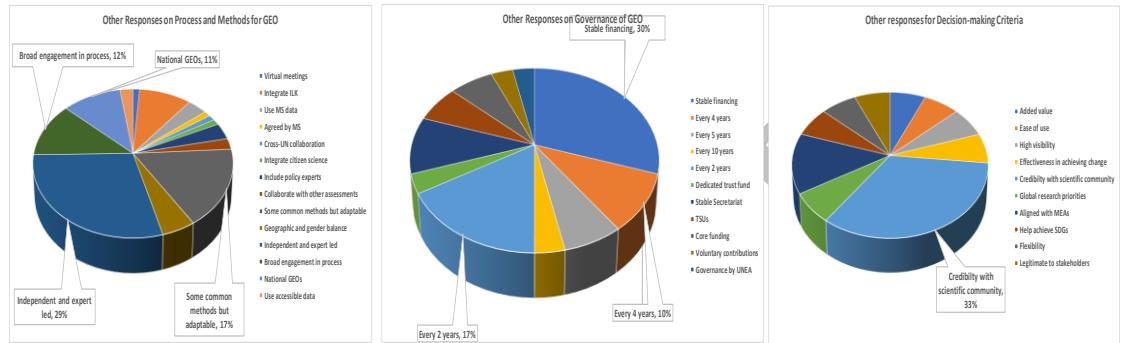
Assessment experts said that *GEO* should be used mainly by policymakers and Member States, and also by decision-makers outside the environmental field, by the Environment Assembly for decision-making, and by engaged stakeholders.



Assessment experts also said that the *GEO* process and methods should be independent and expert-led and that, while having some methods in common with other assessment processes was useful, these should be adaptable to the *GEO* process. They said that *GEO* should continue to have a broad engagement process and focus on helping countries produce national environment outlooks.

Regarding the governance of the *GEO* process, assessment experts said that producing a new edition every two years was feasible provided stable financing was available.

Finally, assessment experts said that the Steering Committee on the future of *GEO* should include “credibility with the scientific community” as one of its decision-making criteria when determining the future of the process.



ADVANCE