

The Global Environment Outlook (GEO) and its future in bringing the world's environment under regular review



Photo credit: Nejc Soklic / Unsplash

The still unfolding effects of the COVID-19 global health pandemic has presented humankind with new challenges, emphasized fundamental truths and enhanced need for critical review of human interaction with nature. For almost three decades now, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has endeavored to assess, analyze and report on a periodic basis; the states and trends of key global environmental aspects, associated policy effectiveness and outlooks for the future. This is a very important mandate of the organization and it has never been more crucial now. Through its flagship report: Global Environment Outlook (GEO), the world environment has been kept under regular review. In the fourth United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-4), member states started a process of assessing how the future of this flagship report would look like. Through establishment of a thirty-seven member-states-led committee, the steering committee was tasked with considering key aspects of the previous GEOs and the current global environmental assessment's landscape in the context of UNEP's science-policy interface to propose options that future GEO's could take. This task could not be any timely. With a pandemic ravaging global economy, risking more degradation of the environment and hampering progress for the internationally agreed environmental goals and targets, now more than ever, there is urgent need to authoritatively inform policy through regular review of the global environment.

The member states led steering committee working on the future of GEO has made significant progress in fulfilling this UNEA-4 resolution. In the opening session of UNEA-5 conducted in February through virtual means, the committee presented an [interim report on the future options of GEO](#). This was arrived at through an in-depth analysis of the current global assessment's landscape and the broader UNEP's science policy interface. Further the committee conducted broad consultations with Member states, UNEP-accredited stakeholders and assessment experts on key building blocks of potential GEO. The outcome of this work was discussed at a virtual workshop of the Committee where key criteria was used to design potential GEO options. Since the opening session of UNEA-5 happened virtually, the committee was allowed more time to continue its work and present a full options paper on the future of GEO at the resumed in-person session of UNEA-5 scheduled for February 2022 to allow for negotiations of the resolution by member states. Therefore, ever since this outcome the Steering Committee has designed a feasibility study on future of GEO to allow for assessment of three key aspects, the administrative consequences of the proposed options, the financial implications of the options and the collaborative consequences of each of the options. This will enable member states to make informed decision on the future option of GEO at the resumed session of UNEA-5.

The cost of conducting assessments varies with the scope and functions of the assessment among other variables. Additionally, previous GEOs collaborated with different partners to achieve specific outcomes along the assessment process and after for outreach and training. The administrative governance structure of GEO has remained relatively

