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December 16, 2020

**'Future of GEO' Steering Committee Workshop Report,
November 02-16, 2020**

The Steering Committee on the Future of GEO met at its second virtual workshop on November 2, 4, 6 and 9, 2020 then had an extra workshop session on November 16, 2020. Agenda items included:

1. Update on organisation of UNEA-5 and expected deliveries by the Steering Committee
2. Update on the analysis of the consultative process
3. Approval of the UNEA working document "Options and recommendations for the future Global Environment Outlook (GEO)"
4. Presentation and preparation of possible supplementary material and possible work in 2021
5. Consideration of possible draft UNEA-5 resolution
6. Any other business

On these agenda items:

- The Steering Committee received guidance from the Secretariat on the split format of UNEA-5 (virtual and in person) and decided that it would not be useful to deliver a final report to the virtual session of UNEA-5, since it would likely sit in abeyance until the in-person session of UNEA.
- The Steering Committee was fully updated on the outcome of the consultation process. The details of the consultation outcome were summarized by the Secretariat and presented to the Committee. The committee considered the outcome of the consultation process in their discussions and decisions during the workshop sessions.
- The Steering Committee agreed to include the analysis of results from the consultation period as an addendum to their UNEA interim report.
- The Steering Committee reviewed the whole text of the draft UNEA working document on the Future of GEO. In doing so, the Committee collectively agreed on the whole draft.
- Members of the Steering Committee and the Bureau agreed to produce an Interim Report for the virtual session of UNEA-5 and to continue their work in the intersessional period on three priority areas, namely:
 - i. Better defining the governance model for future GEOs
 - ii. How to ensure stable and predictable finance for future GEOs
 - iii. Ensuring the processes and methods for future GEOs are clearly defined and implementable
- Members of the Steering Committee and the Bureau agreed to meet once more before UNEA-5 to consider:
 - i. What type of decision might be necessary from UNEA-5 for the work of the Steering Committee to continue during the intersessional period.
 - ii. A draft work plan for the Steering Committee's work on the three priority areas to be conducted during the intersessional period.

Rapporteur	Signature
Mr. Rafael Monge Vargas	

Summary of the workshop

The workshop was chaired by the bureau of the Steering Committee. Bureau members took turns to chair different sessions of the workshop on different sessions of the workshop days. Workshop sessions were organized with an interval on one day break. A three-hour session was held on each of the meeting day with the two sessions distinguished by a twenty minutes break.

Day one

The meeting started with opening remarks from the chair of the Steering Committee. The bureau member chairing the opening session thanked the Steering Committee members for attending the workshop and their diligence in the work on the Future of GEO. The chair on behalf of the Steering Committee expressed its satisfaction with the feedback received during the broad consultation process on the Future of GEO and reiterated that these inputs would be valuable in the Committee's deliberations and decisions during this workshop. Members of the Consultancy team that had produced the background analysis of the options paper were also reorganized and welcomed to all sessions of the workshop as a resource to the Steering Committee. After adopting the agenda of the workshop, the floor was headed to the Secretariat for its opening remarks. Mr. Jian Liu, Director of the science division at the United Nations Environment programme (UNEP) welcomed Steering Committee members to their final workshop. In his remarks, he thanked the Steering Committee for advancing with the work on the development of the Options Paper regardless of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. He assured the Steering Committee of the support from the Secretariat and wished them a productive workshop highlighting that this was a very important milestone in the development of a future GEO. He further thanked the co-chairs and the bureau and all the members of the Steering Committee for the hard work accomplished since the inception meeting of the committee in Prague late October 2019. Reflecting on the Committee's objectives of this final workshop, Mr. Jian Liu reminded the Committee that they are strategically placed now with the work done in the past year and the feedback from the successful consultations just concluded to deliver the most effective GEO options for the fifth United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-5) consideration. Finally, he highlighted the dynamics of the UNEA-5 process emerging from the challenges of having an effective face to face assembly session in the present global health pandemic. He assured the Committee of the Secretariat's full support and stated that regardless of the dynamics of organizing UNEA-5 session, he hopes that the committee will continue its work until the appropriated session to present its work for UNEA consideration as mandated in the resolution.

Update on organisation of UNEA-5 and expected deliveries by the Steering Committee

On this agenda item Mr. Ulf Bjornholm from the Secretariat's governance affairs office updated the Steering Committee on the organization of UNEA-5. It was stated that a two phase UNEA has been proposed and being strongly considered by the UNEA presidency. This will entail a virtual session of UNEA-5 in February 2021 and a resumed face to face session of UNEA 5 in February 2022. However, the details around it are still to be considered and agreed. The general understanding is however, that since the first session will not be an in-person meeting, it will be very difficult to have representative and inclusive and transparent negotiations for this first part of the meeting. For this

reason, there is an understanding amongst member states that it can only address the decisions that are of a procedural or administrative nature and the decision that is likely to be considered in that context at the first part of UNEA is the midterm strategy and the program of work of the organization.

This will be important to ensure that UNEP continues to function throughout the upcoming years. There is a readiness for member states to consider this as a procedural and administrative decision. There is also discussion whether or not this first meeting may consider and agree, potentially on a political message of sorts, which is still to be defined. The President of UNEA is keen to try this approach. All of these matters will be discussed and considered at the next meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives scheduled for 19th of November 2020. It is very likely that much, if not all of the substantive discussions for UNEA-5 will be deferred to the second part of UNEA-5, when at least the hope is that member states can meet and stakeholders in person. However, as a requirement for all UNEA's working documents on respective resolutions are expected to be delivered six weeks in advance. To this regard, the Steering Committee is expected to deliver a maximum of 3500 words working document at UNEA-5 with options and recommendations for the future of GEO.

The committee enquired on whether the UNEP executive directors report (which contains updated on progress of different resolutions) will be presented this year or in 2021. On this the Secretariat highlighted that regardless of the date when UNEA-5 ends, the Secretariat is expected to present and provide documents; the executive director's reports and UNEA working documents as mandated by various UNEA resolutions six weeks in advance of UNEA-5. This is what the Secretariat is working on. A range of reports (around 2325 reports) will be present to Member States and they will be made available in all UN languages. The executive director report will be quite short and will be heavily depending on other reports like the options paper for the future of GEO in the case of resolution 23.

On this issue it was concluded that UNEA-5 will most likely be conducted in two sessions, with high possibility that the first session planned for February 2020 being virtual and less technical. This may mean that the document from this Steering Committee process may not be considered for this virtual session. It was agreed that the Secretariat will seek legal opinion on the implication of this arrangement to the work and mandate of the Steering Committee and update the committee during the Wednesday session.

Update on the analysis of the consultative process

On this agenda item the Secretariat presented on the outcome of the consultation process in detail. The consultations had involved Member States, UNEP accredited stakeholders and selected assessment experts. The analysis of the consultation responses was done in three categories;

Clear signals; This is a category that showed clearer preference of a choice. They included choices that GEO should continue, be produced in a four-year cycle and it should be governed by UNEA or a subsidiary body of UNEA. There was also a clear preference that GEO should be financed from UNEP's core budget, and a voluntary contribution or a blend of the two.

Strong signals; These were not necessarily agreed throughout, but they were highlighted strongly. They include responses that GEO should continue to assess but it should expand its capacity building and policy support. Another strong signal was on GEO's continuity to engage with the with broader range of member states and experts. A lot of participants in the consultation process felt that GEO should continue its broad engagement with member states and with independent experts in the production of the assessment. It was also strongly preferred that processes and methods of GEO should not established by Member States.

Mixed signals; This is a category that responses couldn't be used to obtain conclusions. An example was on responses to how UNEP and Member States should use GEO and on the presented evaluation criteria by the Steering Committee. In these categories, consultees presented varied responses to clearly conclude their preferred choices.

The Secretariat also presented on the analysis of the written responses that had been received through the 'other' options in the questionnaire. on the purpose of GEO from the other responses, capacity building was significantly presented followed by GEO's alignment with the UNEP's mandate. On the forms of GEO, digitized GEO was presented together with an enhanced GEO often referred to as a GEO plus. It was also highlighted that GEO should be led by experts and experts should be independent in a broad engagement process. For the financing of GEO a dedicated Trust Fund was presented as the other financing model for GEO. For the criteria to be used by the Steering Committee, legitimacy and legitimate to stakeholders was highlighted. Added value and relevance at global level was also presented as other criteria for the Steering Committee consideration.

Approval of the UNEA working document "Options and recommendations for the future Global Environment Outlook (GEO)"

The Steering Committee then embarked on the discussion, editing and development of the options paper of the future of GEO. In the following sessions, the Committee discussed in detail and approve the working document on "Options and recommendations for the future Global Environment Outlook (GEO)" as requested by UNEA-4 and prepared by the Bureau. Criteria for decision making was the first to be discussed in detailed and the Committee edited to agreement all criteria except one on the Credibility of GEO, that was bracketed for further discussion by the Steering Committee in subsequent sessions. At the end of the session it was agreed that the revised working document draft will be send to the Steering Committee immediately after the session for review and preparation for the Wednesday session. The meeting was adjourned at 17h12.

Day two

Continuation: Approval of the UNEA working document "Options and recommendations for the future Global Environment Outlook (GEO)"

The meeting started with an update from the Secretariat that a legal counsel on all matters related to UNEA had been invited to the session to update the Steering Committee on their work post UNEA and implications to their work. The legal counsel was to be given the floor upon arrival. However, in the meantime the floor was handed back to the bureau of the Steering Committee to proceed with the day's agenda. The chair of the session reminded the Committee that it was lagging behind a little bit. The discussions on the draft options paper started at section 4.1.

At the end of the day's sessions, it was decided that the Secretariat's legal office will provide legal advice on the implication of the new UNEA-5 arrangement to the work and mandate of the Steering Committee by Friday. The Steering committee continued the discussion on the objectives and functions of GEO and the overall scope, utility and timing of GEO in the UNEA working document draft. The Committee considered how best to present the outcome of the consultation's outcome on these issues. Uncleared aspects of the draft in these sections were also square bracketed for further discussions in subsequent discussions. It was agreed that the third session of the workshop planned for Friday 6th November would continue the discussions from Option A3 on the draft working document. During the meeting it was also agreed that Cathy Maguire representing the European Union in the Committee would provide a first draft of a chapeau text to be considered by the Committee introducing the options for the design of the future GEO. This session was adjourned at 1706hr.

Day three

Continuation: Approval of the UNEA working document "Options and recommendations for the future Global Environment Outlook (GEO)"

The third day of the workshop continued the discussion and approval of the UNEA working document on the future of GEO. The Steering Committee continued the discussion on the working document draft to its completion. In the end of the day's session, it was decided that the Committee will tackle the unclear aspects of the draft that were square bracketed, for further discussions in all the three previous sessions in the final session of the workshop scheduled for Monday 9th November 2020. It was further decided that the Secretariat will move the recommendations section to the end of the draft. Additionally, the Secretariat will provide a costing comparison for each option presented in the draft. A schematic analysis will also be drafted for consideration by the Steering Committee in its final day of the workshop. This day's session was adjourned at 1712hr.

Day Four

Continuation: Approval of the UNEA working document "Options and recommendations for the future Global Environment Outlook (GEO)"

On the fourth and final day of the Steering Committee workshop, the Steering Committee completed the discussions on the draft UNEA working document and tackled the unclear aspects that were square bracketed for further discussions in all the three previous sessions. However, discussions on section five and six of the draft were not concluded because of time constraints. To finalize discussions on section five and six of the draft, it was decided that an extra session will be organized on either Monday 16th November or Tuesday 17th November 2020. A doodle poll would be sent out

by the Secretariat for the Steering Committee to indicate the preferred date for the call. The call will also discuss and conclude on the remaining parts of the Agenda for this workshop that were pending.

To comply with UNEA requirements for working document, the draft that had been discussed and edited by the Steering Committee during the four sessions of the Steering Committee workshop would be submitted for copyediting. This is in line with the UNEA timeline that require the document to be edited and translated for Member States considerations. However, since two sections of the draft were yet to be finalized by the Committee, the draft would be submitted without the two sections. It was agreed that these sections would be submitted for copy editing and translations after the final discussion and agreement of the Committee in the planned extraordinary session.

Extra Session of the Steering Committee workshop.

This extraordinary session was scheduled to conclude the work of the Steering Committee from its original agenda. The meeting started with a presentation from Mr. Stadler Trengove UNEP's legal advisor on the status of the Future of GEO Steering Committee in view of the current UNEA-5 dynamics. He started by reiterating that UNEA-5 will most likely happen in two sessions one year apart with the first session being a virtual session and only focusing on the UNEP medium term strategy and programme of work. The resumed session will happen in February 2022 and that may allow for discussion of more technical aspects through negotiation of resolutions. Since the Future of GEO Steering Committee was initiated by UNEA and is expected to deliver at UNEA-5, its mandate technically continues through the year up to when the fifth UNEA session will be officially adjourned. In view of this, a few options are available for the Committee's consideration;

Firstly, it's important to recall that this would be the Steering Committee's document because the request that was contained in UNEA-4 resolution 23 was to the Steering Committee. Therefore, it is the Steering Committee's document to be submitted by the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee could therefore submit the options document ready for review by UNEA-5. It would then be up to UNEA to decide when to consider this matter and whether the Steering Committee could do further work during the period between the virtual UNEA and the resumed UNEA.

The second option would be for the Steering Committee to submit an interim report on the options documentary in UNEA-5 opening session assuming that the Committee would continue its activities until the resumed UNEA in February 2022. UNEA-5 could thus take note of the Steering Committee's report and indicate that it expects its final report in February 2022. In this case the reporting for the Steering Committee would be in two parts with an interim report submitted for February 2021 and a final report submitted in February 2022.

On this issue the Committee sort clarity on whether an amendment on their mandate was needed from UNEA should they decide to continue with the second option in presenting an interim report and continuing with other aspects of the options paper to submit the full report in the resumed UNEA planed for February 2022. In response, the legal advisor noted that there was no need for an amendment of the Committee's mandate since the end of UNEA-5 had not been reached. It was further noted that should the Committee decide to deliver the options paper in the opening session of UNEA-5, the report would lie in abeyance until February 2022.

On this issue the Steering Committee decided that it was valuable to present the current working document as an interim report for the opening session of UNEA-5 and continue with other key aspects of the options paper in the year to be finalized and presented in the resumed session of

UNEA-5. Three key aspects were identified by the Committee to be the financing of the options, the governance of GEO and the process and methods of GEO.

The committee then advanced with discussions on the remaining part of the working document to agree and approve the document. In its discussion the Committee agreed that the schematics would be better suited for the final report other than the interim report. This would be deferred for future discussions. It was however decided that a summary of the outcome of the consultation process would be added to the interim report as an addendum.

On this session the Steering Committee agreed on the final draft of the UNEA working document on the Future of GEO. The Committee decided that this working document be used as an interim report and presented at the opening session of UNEA-5 as an interim report with the consultation outcome summary as an addendum.

The Steering Committee will continue its work in the new year with a focus on the three identified areas to finalize the options paper for the resumed UNEA-5 in February 2022. The Steering Committee decided that another call will be needed before the start of UNEA-5 to discuss the kind of decision needed from UNEA-5 to continue their work and discuss a potential workplan for the UNEA-5 intersession period.

Conclusions

The workshops main objectives were fully achieved:

- The Steering Committee discussed in detail all aspects of the draft UNEA working document on the Future of GEO, edited it and approved it as an interim report on the Future of GEO options.
- The Committee discussed and sought legal advice on the implication of their work role and process in view of the UNEA-5 dynamics. In the end the Committee decided to present the option paper in two phases with the first interim report in the opening session of UNEA-5, a continuation of the Committee's work in the intersession and presentation of the final options paper in the resumed UNEA-5 planned for February 2022.

The meeting ended with thanks from the Co-chairs and the Secretariat. Having no other business, the final workshop of the Steering Committee was adjourned at 1717hrs

Participants List

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
Teshia	Jn Baptiste	Ministry of Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development	Saint Lucia
Marcos	Serrano	Ministry of Environment Chile	Chile
Mona	Westergaard	Ministry of Environment and Food	Denmark
Andrew	Stott	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs-UK	United Kingdom and Northern Ireland
Keisuke (alternate)	Takahashi	Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)	Japan
Suzan	Alajjawi	Supreme Council for Environment, Bahrain	Bahrain
Toral	Patel-Weynand	US Forest Service	USA
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
Huang	Yi	Peking University	China
Ivana	Stojanovic	Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism	Montenegro
Anna	Mampye	Ministry of Environment	South Africa
Chatchai	Intatha	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Thailand	Thailand
Anshu	Singh	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate change, Government of India	India
Narges	Saffar	International Affairs & Conventions Center, Department of Environment	Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Shri Ajay	Raghav, Sc D	Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change	India
Marcel	Kok	Environment Assessment Agency (PBL)	The Netherlands
Kazuhiko	Takeuchi	Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)	Japan
Isaac	Dladla	Eswatini Environment Authority	Swaziland
Jerome	Sebadduka Lugumira	National Environment Management Authority (NEMA)	Uganda
Mira	Zovko	Ministry of Environment and Energy	Croatia

Absent

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
Najib	Saab	Arab Forum for Environment & Development (AFED)	Lebanon
Mery	Harutyunyan	Ministry of Environment	Armenia
Garry	Kass	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs-UK	United Kingdom and Northern Ireland
Ambinintsoa Lucie	Noasilalaonomenjanahary	Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development	Madagascar
Shanna (alternate)	Emmanuel	Ministry of Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development	Saint Lucia
Charles	Lange	National Environment Management Authority (NEMA)	Kenya
Ryan	Assiu	Environmental Management Authority	Trinidad and Tobago
Claudia	Kabel	German Environment Agency	Germany
Keri (alternate)	Holland	US Department of State	USA
Apsara	Mendis	Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment	Sri Lanka

Annex I: Draft interim report on the Options Paper

Interim report on options and recommendations for the future of the Global Environment Outlook (GEO)

Prepared by the Steering Committee on the Future of GEO

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Mandate and process

The United Nations Environment Assembly initiated in resolution UNEP/EA.4/RES.23, an intergovernmental consultative process to propose options for the future of the Global Environment Outlook (GEO). The Assembly welcomed with appreciation the flagship sixth Global Environment Outlook (GEO-6) report and its summary for policymakers, which was reviewed and approved by Member States. The Assembly also requested the Executive Director "to prioritize ... the preparation of an options document on the future of the Global Environment Outlook 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 Global Environment Outlook process". The Steering Committee was requested "to submit the options document, which will include an assessment of the impact of the various options and provide recommendations to the Assembly for consideration at its fifth session", "to inform a decision on the future form and function of the Global Environment Outlook". This document fulfills the mandate set out above and has been considered and approved by the Steering Committee.

The options and recommendations presented here are the outcome of an extensive process which began in November 2019. The process, **Error! No se encuentra el origen de la referencia.** 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 (IISD); consultations through a series of webinars; and, a web-based survey with Member States, stakeholders and assessment experts on the design elements and the criteria for identifying the options for the future of GEO. More than 450 individual and consolidated responses to the survey were received across all regions and categories of respondents, including from 112 Member States, more than 200 assessment experts and some 100 stakeholders. This document 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 UNEA may wish to consider taking at its fifth session.

UNEP's mandate and GEO's place in the science-policy interface

UNEP's science-policy mandate is anchored in the core function assigned to the UNEP Governing Council 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 its functions related to providing policy guidance and recommendations¹. The growing body of knowledge, information, data and expertise on 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 (SDG).

¹ The function is set out in UN General Assembly resolution No 2997 XXVII.



Figure 1: Six comprehensive global GEOs have been prepared to date: GEO-6: Healthy Planet, Healthy People (2019); GEO-5: Environment for the future we want (2012); GEO-4: Environment for development (2007); GEO-3: Past, present and future perspectives (2002); GEO-2: GEO-2000 (1999); GEO-1: For life on Earth (1997). The GEO process has also included: i) derivatives of the comprehensive global GEOs for target audiences; ii) some special thematic GEOs; iii) regional GEOs, national GEOs; and a period of GEO yearbooks (2003 – 2007) which morphed into the UNEP Yearbook (2008 - 2014).

Assessment processes represent a key function in the science-policy interface, and the GEO has been the only assessment which covers all types of environmental issues and challenges comprehensively. Initiated in 1995 by UNEP’s Governing Council, the GEO was in its first three iterations an expert and partnership-based integrated assessment. The process has, since GEO-4, taken on the features of intergovernmental scientific assessments, but with less stringent and formalised procedures than the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). The six comprehensive GEOs have been designed to review, analyse and synthesise the state of knowledge with the view to support policy milestones in the international environment and sustainable development agenda (see figure 1). 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. The GEO processes has strived to align 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 timeframes. Also noting that Member States in EA.4/RES.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 assessments also hosted or administered by UNEP, are the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). Other global environmental assessment with intergovernmental features include UNEPs Resource Panel and the Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment under the UN General Assembly.

³ The coherence and synergies work under this resolution is being conducted by the GEO programme under the auspices of UNEP’s Office of the Chief Scientist. The discussions of this group of Secretariats and assessment co-chairs is called the Adhoc Global Assessment Dialogue. (<https://www.unenvironment.org/global-environment-outlook/adhoc-global-assessments-dialogue>)

Criteria for analysing the design of the future GEO

The identification of options and recommendations for the design of the future GEO assessment processes and products have been informed by the following criteria which remain relevant for future GEO processes:

- *mandate consistency, and comparability across GEO*
- *the relevance* (or saliency) of GEO, responding flexibly to the needs of Member States and stakeholders such as on improving the effectiveness of environmental policy ;
- *the legitimacy* of GEO, in terms of an assessment being accepted by Member States and stakeholders as authoritative through unbiased, representative and defensible procedures which are geographically and gender balanced;
- *the credibility* of GEO, as a robust and rigorous assessment based on scientifically accepted methods and analysis from multiple sources;
- *the accessibility* of GEO, in terms of ensuring that GEO outputs and the underlying knowledge base and environmental data are accessible by Member States and stakeholders to support policy and decision making and strengthening of the science-policy interface;
- *the added-value* of GEO, in terms of ensuring that GEO responds to UNEPs mandate and avoids duplication with other global assessment processes while addressing interlinkages, crosscutting issues and identifying gaps, and;
- *the overall feasibility*, including *continuity of operations for the periodic production of GEO*, in terms of implications for current administrative, financial and collaborative structures and other initiatives in UNEPs science-policy interface, and

Options and approaches for the design of the future GEO

The options and approaches for a future GEO address three key areas of assessment design. Firstly, objectives and functions are proposed. Secondly, options regarding scope, utility and timing are presented (options and approaches 1-4). 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. Thirdly, options and approaches regarding process, governance and implementation are presented which enable their delivery. 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 UNEA to inform its decisions on the environment.

Objective and functions

The objective of the future GEO is to keep the world environment situation and outlook under review to inform the world's governments and stakeholders on a periodic basis and strengthen the science-policy interface. This objective is in line with the inputs received during the consultations (see Addendum 1) and is consistent with UNEP's founding mandate (see UNGA 2997), and resolution EA.4/RES.23⁴.

The overall function of GEO is the thorough review, analysis and synthesis of existing knowledge, through the continued regular undertaking of credible, legitimate and relevant assessments of science and information, intended to promote informed and effective action for the environment by governments and other stakeholders. Results from the consultation process identified support for a robust status and trends analysis, cooperation with scenario and model development communities, strengthening policy

⁴ EA.4/RES.23 specifically requests that the GEO process regularly prepare an independent analyses of the state of and trends of the global environmental situation and strengthens the policy relevance of the GEO process

analysis, policy support, consolidated data-sharing⁵, capacity building in the science-policy interface⁶ and outreach to communicate assessment findings (see Addendum 1). A core consideration is how the combination of different functions should be prioritised, organised and costed in order for GEO to best serve the needs of users, taking account of the criteria set out in Section 3 (see option 3).

Overall scope, utility and timing

The overall scope of GEO includes a range of environmental issues, geographic scales and levels of governance. It involves the analysis of environmental state, trends and outlooks, progress towards policy targets and effectiveness of policy for tackling the current unprecedented global environmental challenges in order to support informed decision-making. GEO will add value and avoid duplication by synthesizing available knowledge, including findings from other relevant assessments, filling assessment gaps and analysing the drivers behind and systemic links between environmental challenges for evidence-based decision making. GEO 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.

The findings of the consultations indicate that there is support for the exact scope, utility and timing of GEO assessments and other functions to be determined through a process devised by UNEA to ensure that GEO responds to the needs of its users (see Addendum 1). The consultation also showed GEO should assist Member States of UNEA and the wider international governance system in setting out policy direction, strategies or identifying emerging issues; Member States in their national policymaking and in efforts to conduct national assessments; society at large with enhanced awareness of the state of knowledge, including linking to the Global Environmental Data Strategy and the World Environment Situation Room (EA.4/RES.23). The consultation also identified that GEO should align with UNEP's Medium-term Strategy (MTS), future UNEAs and the production of the Secretary General's Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR).

Options and approaches

1: GEO would undertake a comprehensive global assessment approximately every four years. The analysis by the Steering Committee and consultation 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 SDGs; interlinkages across scales and geographic regions; policy gaps for meeting internationally agreed environmental goals; 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 Addendum 1). The assessment would provide input to UNEA, the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, and the Global Sustainable Development report, 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, analyse and integrate 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. The scoping would furthermore identify areas of priority and emerging issues to be targeted under each GEO to address changing environmental

⁵ UNEA in resolution UNEP/EA.4/RES. 23 requested that UNEP develop a Global Environmental Data Strategy. UNEP has in response linked the World Environment Situation Room to GEO. See http://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/29769/DigitalTransformation_GlobalDataStrategy_ReportCPR_10Dec2019.pdf?sequence=13&isAllowed=y

⁶ UNEP 2017, Strengthening the Science-policy Interface: A Gap Analysis, ISBN No: 978-92-807-3678-6

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 to avoid duplication of effort. Finally, the scoping would determine the administrative and financial implications of the assessment based on number of experts involved, the number of meetings to be convened, the use of digital technologies and the Secretariat and technical support needed.

2: GEO would undertake focussed thematically based assessments and other products not covered by existing global assessments identified by Member States, for example covering chemicals and pollution or new emerging issues which may need consideration. GEO could also include derivative or other special products, such as workshop reports, targeted at certain user groups. The process for thematic assessments, derivative assessments and other special products would be detailed in the GEO procedures. Such assessments and products could potentially happen in the context of a long-term rolling programme of work built on requests from Member States and stakeholders.

3: GEO would initiate the development of a service-oriented approach for supporting and building capacities in the field of monitoring and data collection, knowledge generation, assessment, outreach and decision making. The analysis of the Steering Committee and the consultations identified that GEO intentionally focus on these areas in order to keep the world environment under review (see Addendum 1). The approach would support the other options and build on the experience from past GEO processes and other initiatives. The approach will add value to and not duplicate these other initiatives and will be closely coordinated with them.

4: GEO would maintain a regular/on-going synthesis of 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 coupled with option and/or approach 2. The assessment would provide input to UNEA, the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, and the Global Sustainable Development report, relevant Multilateral Environmental Agreements, relevant regional bodies, individual Member States and society at large. GEO would provide a forward look of international decision-making processes and planned assessment activities to identify synergies, conflicts, duplication and gaps and report to UNEA at each session on the evolving assessment landscape. GEO should also support, and collaborate with, other global environmental assessments in the development of shared tools and data platforms, including conceptual frameworks, scenarios and integrated models, to promote coherence and synergy between assessments and support capacity-building.

[Process, governance and implementation](#)

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

GEO would establish a set of flexible procedures agreed by Member States based on experience from past GEOs and other relevant processes. The development of such procedures was generally favoured in the consultation (see Addendum 1). The objectives of the procedure 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. Elements to be considered in the procedures would include processes for: i) receiving and prioritising global environmental issues of concern identified by Member States for strategic consideration and inclusion in the

GEO assessment arena⁷; ii) the initiation, development and approval of detailed scoping of the GEO assessments, their derivatives and other products; iii) nomination, selection of a geographic, disciplinary and gender balanced teams of authors and experts; iv) the collective and iterative review, synthesis, analysis and judgement of policy relevance and confidence levels of available knowledge with traceability; v) peer review and government and stakeholder review; vi) conflict of interest and treatment of errors; vii) approval of Summary for Policy Makers (SPMs) & acceptance of assessment reports and other products; and viii) service-oriented approaches for supporting and building capacities in monitoring and data collection, knowledge generation, assessment, outreach and decision making (option A3). The exact role and responsibilities of the governance and implementation structure would be set out in the procedures.

The procedures above necessitate a clear and lean governance and implementation of the options for GEO under UNEA. During the consultation period Several Member States stressed the need for transparency, and the full involvement of all governments.

UNEA may wish either 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 the ones of GEO-6.

Open ended intergovernmental consultation meetings with stakeholder observers for approval of scoping and procedures and endorsement of SPMs will be convened by the Executive Director of UNEP akin to meetings convened for GEO 4, 5, and 6. The Executive Director would also establish a High-Level Intergovernmental and Stakeholder Advisory Group of the GEO-6⁸ as the oversight and steering group of the GEO and a Science Advisory Panel⁹ akin to the ones of GEO-6.

Or, UNEA may wish to establish an ad-hoc open-ended subsidiary body of member states and accredited observers responsible for the oversight of the GEO's role in UNEPs science policy interface. The ad-hoc body would be responsible for considering the GEO procedures and approving the scoping of assessments and the Summary for Policy Makers (SPM) and other activities. The ad-hoc body would subsume the functions undertaken by the open-ended intergovernmental consultation meetings with stakeholder observers convened by the Executive Director of UNEP for GEO 4, 5, and 6, in particular regarding the approval of scoping, of process and of SPM. This ad-hoc subsidiary body of UNEA would elect its officers from each region and establish a multidisciplinary expert panel which could consist of a limited number of experts and stakeholders from each region. The subsidiary-body officers and the panel would work together in providing oversight over the implementation of the GEO process in accordance with the procedures, including by assuming the responsibility for a balanced selection of experts and technical support units to a limited set of time-bound and task specific author groups and task forces. The elected officers of the subsidiary-body and the multidisciplinary expert panel would subsume the roles of the High-Level Intergovernmental and Stakeholder Advisory Group of the GEO-6 and the Science Advisory Panel of the GEO-6.

Financial and administrative consequences

The financial and administrative consequences of the recommended options and approaches are and their combinations are under further consideration. Any GEO related activities could happen in accordance with an approved costed rolling plan and costed scoping documents to facilitate predictability in funding.

⁷ An example of such a process is the one established under IPBES (see https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/downloads/Procedure%20for%20receiving%20and%20prioritizing%20requests%20put%20to%20the%20Platform_2013.pdf)

⁸ Composed of 25–30 high-level government representatives from all six UN Environment regions as well as 8-10 key stakeholders

⁹ Composed of 25 distinguished scientists.

Recommendations

UNEA-5 may wish to note the interim report of the Steering Committee and that a final report containing recommendations will be submitted to the resumed session in February 2022. The recommendations will be informed by the further consideration of the options and approaches identified in Section 4, their financial and administrative consequences as well as elements of possible governance and procedures for the Future of GEO, based on the criteria presented in Section 3.

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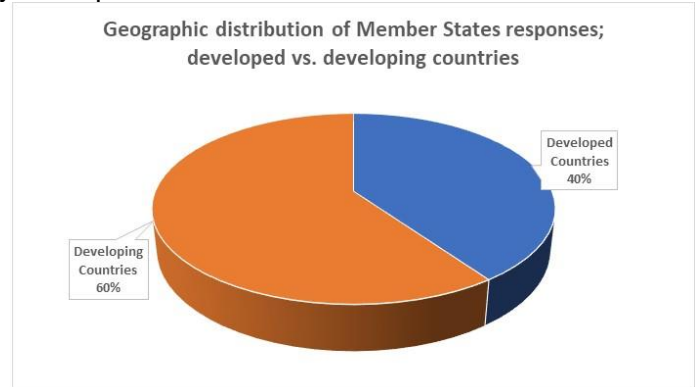
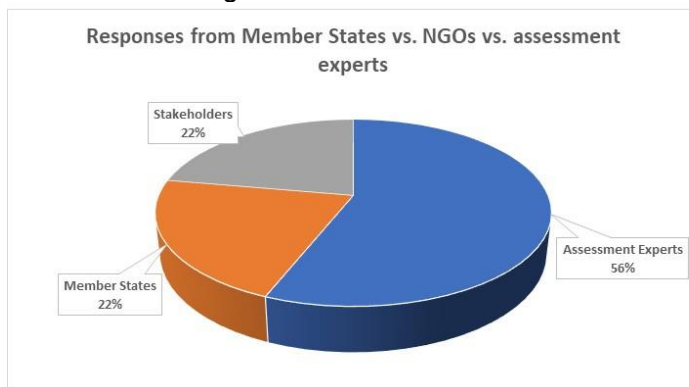
Analysis of Future of GEO consultation results

This document provides a brief synopsis of the key results of the month-long Future of GEO consultation process. The analysis is meant to inform the deliberations of the Future of GEO Steering Committee at its November workshop.

Diversity of responses

The Future of GEO consultation period began on Sept. 9 2020 and ended Oct. 9 2020. It was supported by a background document prepared by an independent consultant and a co-chair's discussion document prepared by Steering Committee co-chairs and commented on by the members of the Steering Committee. The entire consultation occurred online due to the global pandemic. 7 orientation webinars were organized to assist participants in the consultation to better understand the context and purpose of the consultation and also to understand the consultation tools (mainly the questionnaire) that were being used.

Some brief highlights of the consultation include: # participants in the webinars, # questionnaires completed, # consolidated responses vs. individual responses, # of independent written responses, etc.. In addition to these highlights, efforts were made by the Secretariat to encourage responses from a wide range of countries and experts. In all, 4 reminders were sent by the Secretariat during the consultation to ensure a diversity of responses were received.

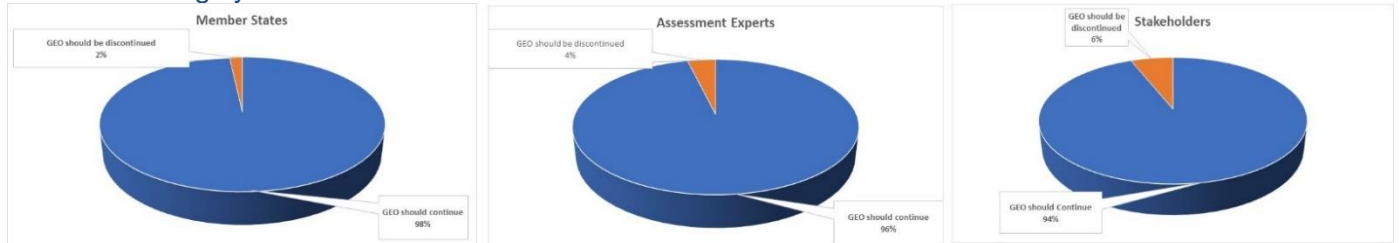


However, many of the responses from Member States and Stakeholders were consolidated responses, so these represented the views of many more responses.

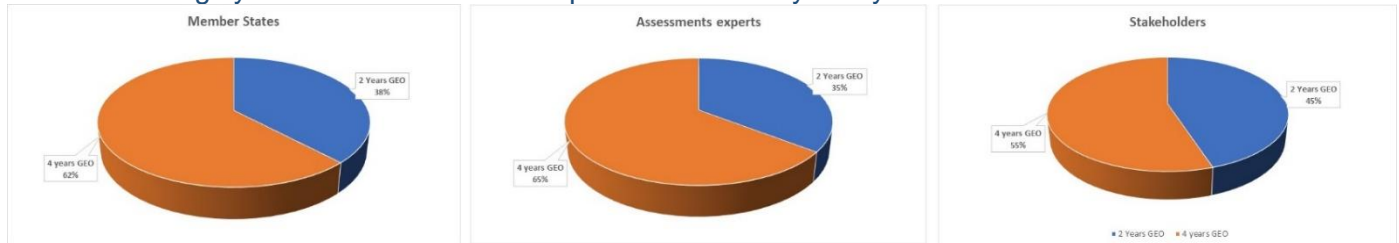
Clear signals

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

Consultees largely felt that the Global Environment Outlook should continue



Consultees largely felt that GEO should be produced on a 4-year cycle



Consultees largely felt the GEO should be governed by UNEA or a subsidiary body of UNEA.



Consultees largely felt that GEO should be financed by core funds and voluntary contributions



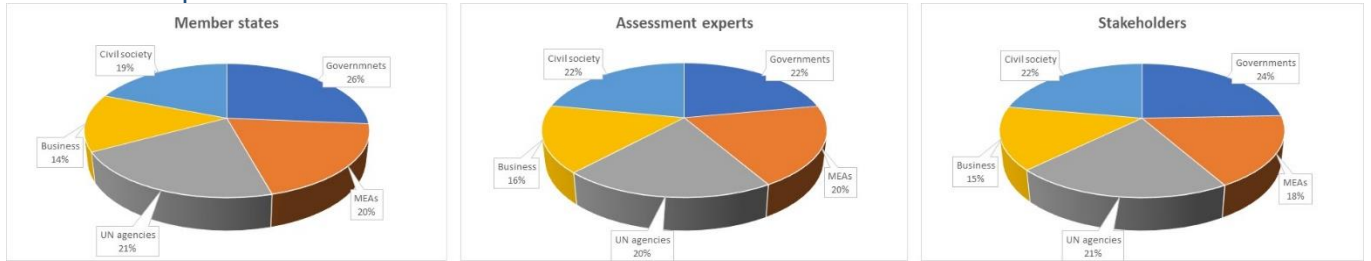
Strong signals

Other results from the consultation show a particular preference or collection of preferences over others.

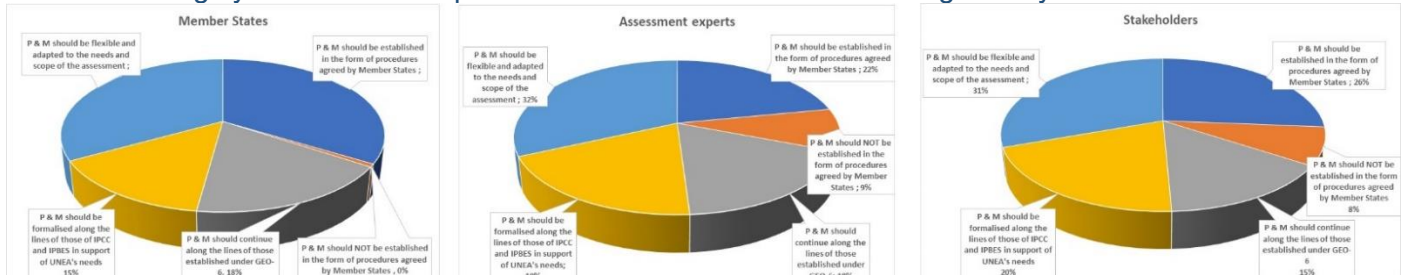
Consultees felt that GEO should continue to produce assessments but should expand its work more into capacity building and policy support



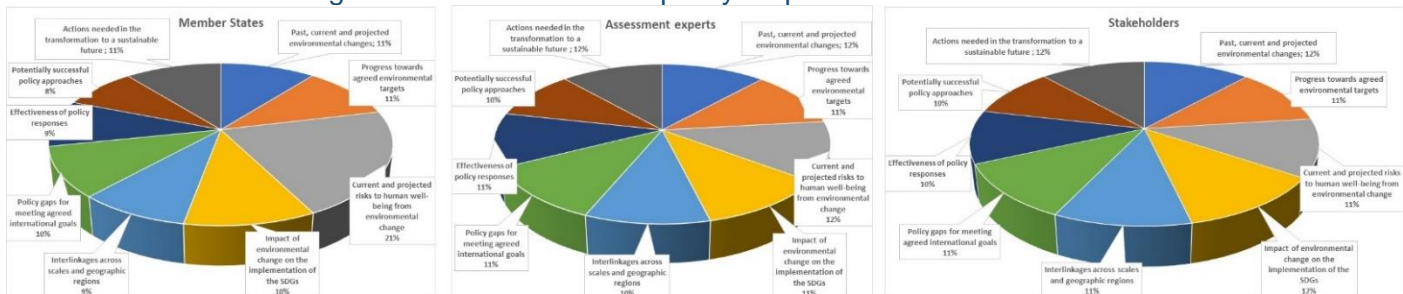
Consultees felt that GEO should continue to include a broad range of Member States and experts in the production of its assessments



Consultees largely felt that GEO's procedures and methods should be agreed by Member States



Consultees largely felt that GEO should mainly assess environmental changes, progress towards environmental targets and effectiveness of policy responses



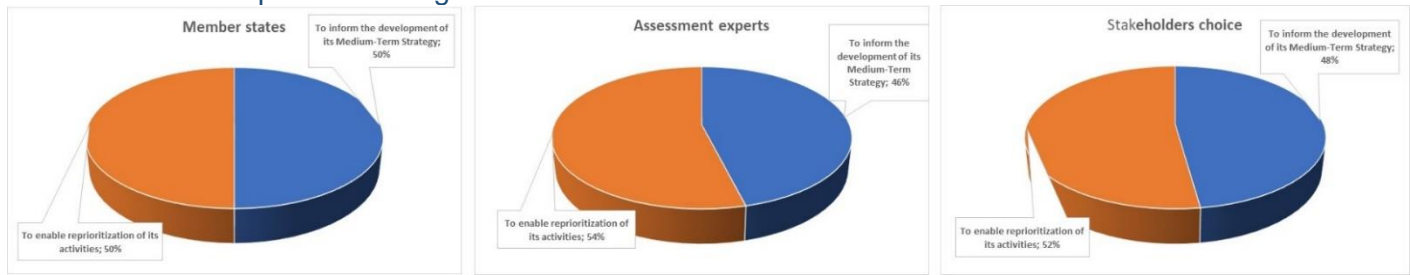
Consultees felt that the GEO should mainly be used by UNEA, UNEP and Member States.



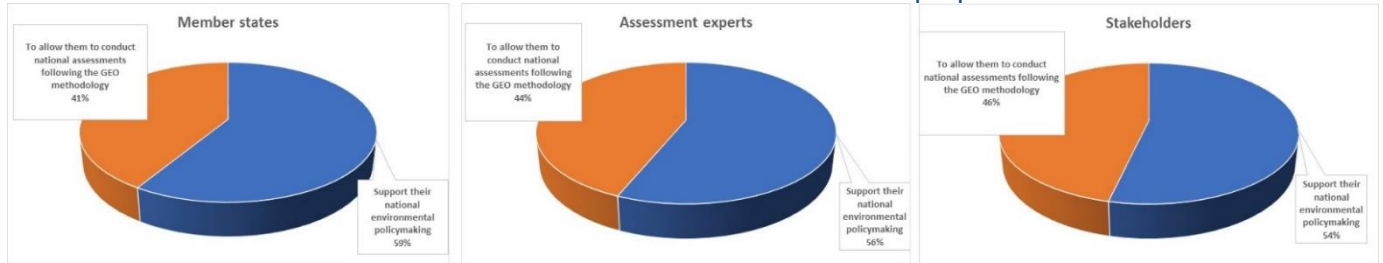
Mixed signals

Some responses from consultees did not give a clear direction.

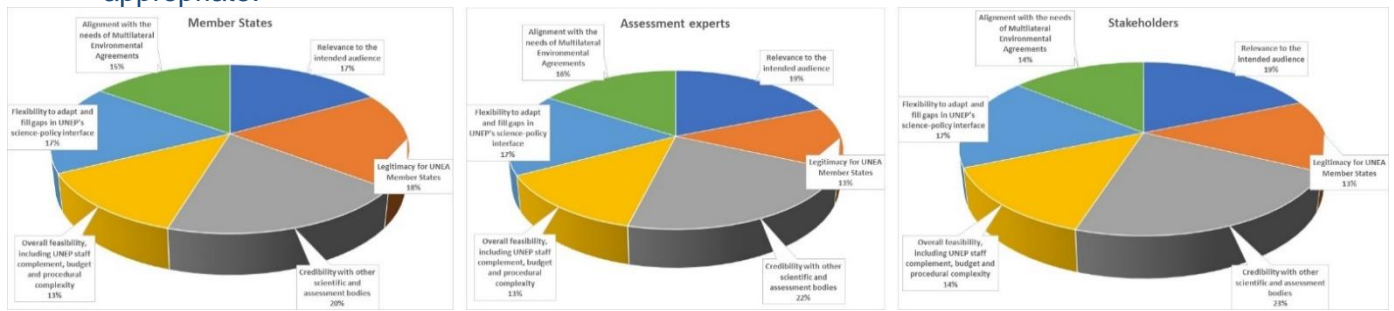
Consultees did not provide clear guidance on how UNEP should use GEO



Consultees indicated that Member States could use GEO for different purposes



Consultees largely felt that the decision-making criteria proposed by the Steering Committee were appropriate.



Consultees also made a number of Other suggestions

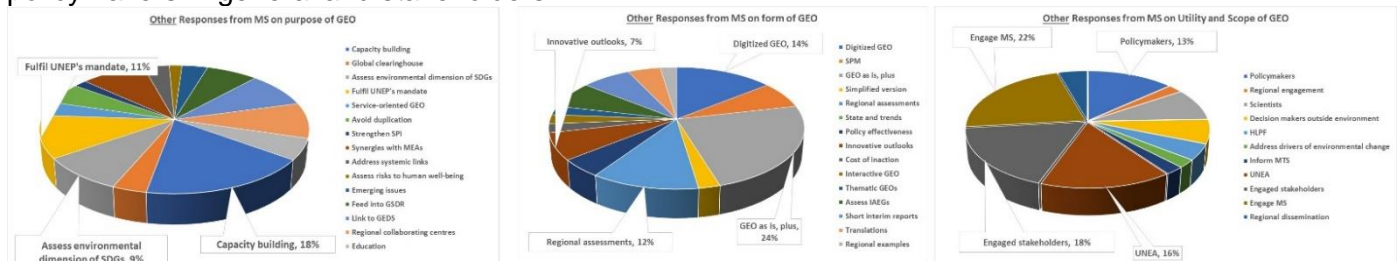
Member States

As part of the consultation process, participants could offer additional ideas and suggestions in writing. These written responses were analyzed and summarized into 'short form' categories that are presented here. The analysis was conducted for the three groups of responders, namely, Member States, stakeholders and finally assessment experts.

Member States proposed that GEO's purpose could be expanded into capacity building but should continue to fulfil UNEP's mandate and assess the environmental dimension of the SDGs.

Member States felt that the form of GEO should continue as is but add some elements such as more digitization and regional assessments as well as more innovative outlooks.

Finally, Member States felt that the main users of GEO should be UNEA, Member States, policymakers in general and stakeholders.

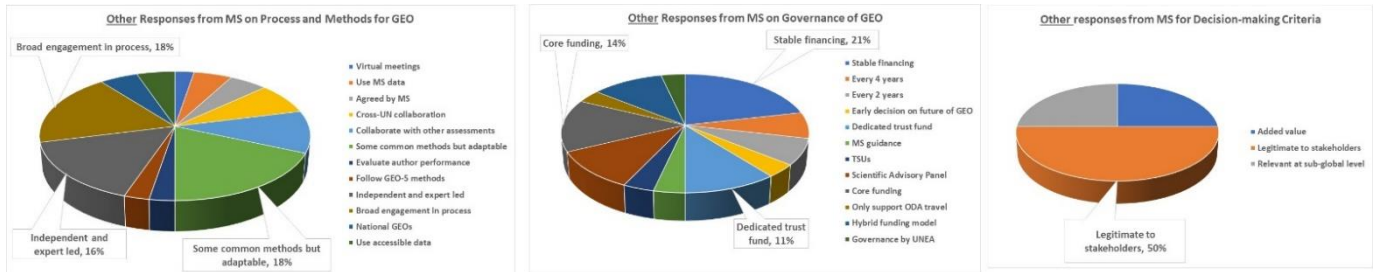


Member States also felt that GEOs processes and methods should be common with other assessment processes but also be adaptable to the objectives of particular GEOs. Member States also felt that GEOs should continue to be independent and expert led and have broad engagement in the process from many groups.

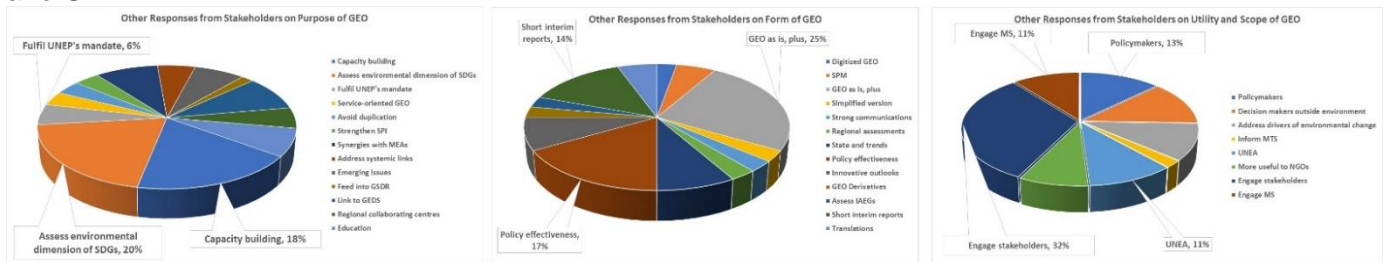
Member States also felt that financing of GEO should be stable and come mainly from core funding and a dedicated trust fund (a hybrid funding model).

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

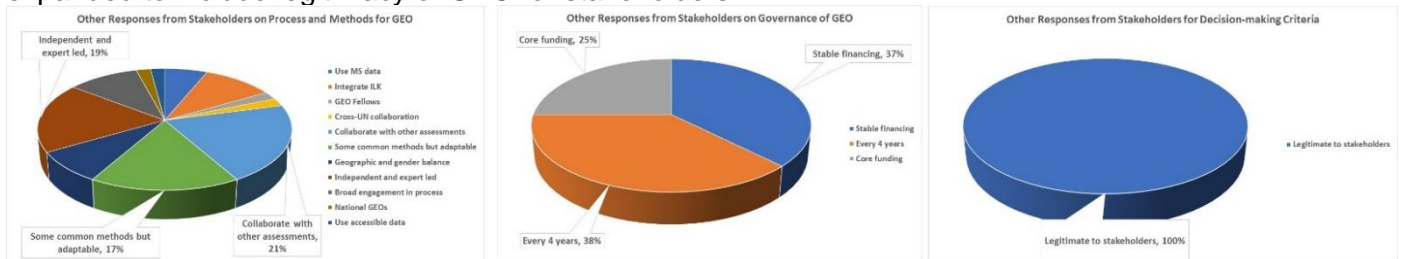
Stakeholders



Stakeholders also had a number of suggestions for improvements to the GEO process. They suggested that the purpose of GEO should also be expanded to building capacity and should continue to assess the environmental dimension of the SDGs. Stakeholders also felt that the form of GEO should continue as is but be expanded to produce shorter interim reports as well as focus more on policy effectiveness. Stakeholders felt that GEO should be designed to engage and be relevant for stakeholders (themselves). They also felt that GEO should also be relevant to Member States, policymakers and UNEA.



Stakeholders also felt that GEOs process and methods could be improved by greater collaboration with other assessments, those methods should be common but adaptable and that GEO should continue to be independent and expert led. Stakeholders felt that GEO's production cycle should be standardized on a 4 year cycle, supported by stable financing mainly coming from core funds. Finally, stakeholders felt that the decision making criteria of the Steering Committee should be expanded to include legitimacy of GEO for stakeholders.

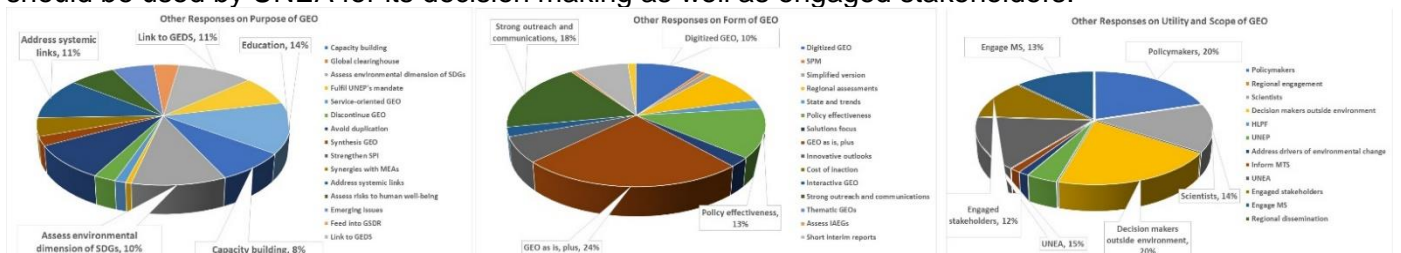


Assessment experts

Assessment experts also felt that the purpose of GEO should mainly focus on assessing the environmental dimension of the SDGs, addressing systemic links and education. They also supported linking to the Global Environmental Data Strategy (GEDS) and capacity building as other purposes for GEO.

On the form of GEO assessment experts supported the 'GEO as is, plus...' model as well as a GEO focused on policy effectiveness and a digitized GEO that was supported by a strong outreach and communications strategy.

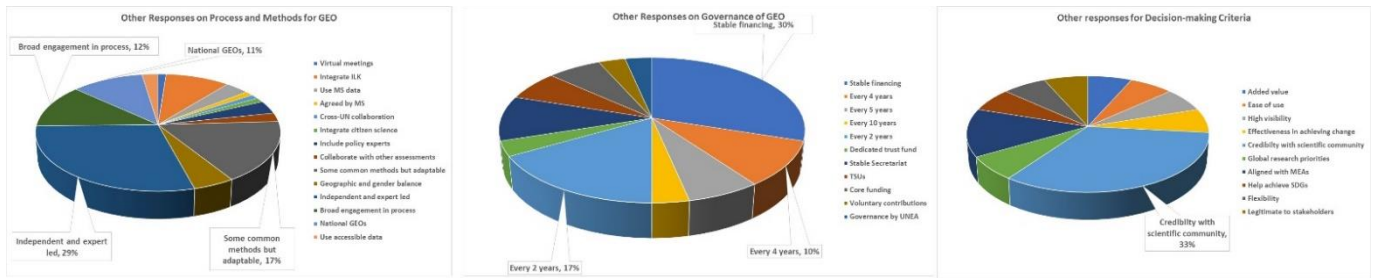
Finally assessment experts felt that GEO should be mainly used by policymakers, Member States and also decision makers outside the environmental field. Assessment experts also felt GEO should be used by UNEA for its decision making as well as engaged stakeholders.



Assessment experts also felt that the GEO process and methods should be independent and expert led and that some common methods with other assessment processes were useful but that

these should be adaptable to the GEO process. They also felt that The GEO should continue to have a broad engagement process and focus on helping countries produce national GEOs. On the governance of GEO, assessment experts felt that GEOs every 2 years was feasible if stable financing was available.

Finally, assessment experts felt that the Future of GEO Steering Committee should include 'credibility with the scientific community' as one of its decision-making criteria when determining the future of GEO.





Facilitated Workshop of the Future of GEO Steering Committee
[2 – 9 November 2020 - 14h00 – 17h00 each day \(Nairobi time\)](#)

see meeting links in the invitations

Provisional Annotated Agenda

Item 1: Opening - The co-chairs and secretariat will give their opening remarks

Item 2: Adoption of agenda and organisation of work

Supporting document: Provisional annotated agenda and proposed organization of work

Discussion/decision: Adoption of agenda and organisation of work

Item 3: Update on organisation of UNEA-5 and expected deliveries by the Steering Committee

Supporting document: No document. Briefing by the secretariat and co-chairs

Discussion/decision: The Steering Committee is expected to deliver a maximum 3500 words working document to UNEA-5 with options and recommendations for the future Global Environment Outlook (GEO). The Committee could also consider whether the background document and/or other supplementary material should be presented to UNEA-5. The current plan is for the working document to UNEA-5 to be concluded by the end of the year, but the discussions on the modalities of UNEA-5 may imply that the document will only be considered in a possible thematic stage of the Assembly in late 2021 or early 2022, in which case there may be room for additional work on the working document and/or on supplementary material, including possibly on the scoping of GEO-7 and the development of GEO procedures. The Committee may want to seek further guidance from the UNEA bureau and the UNEP secretariat on how to proceed once a formal decision on the modalities of UNEA-5 is taken.

Item 4: Update on the analysis of the consultative process

Supporting document: Note from the secretariat

Discussion/decision: Clarifications and discussion of the need for further work

Item 5: Approval of the UNEA working document "Options and recommendations for the future Global Environment Outlook (GEO)"

Supporting document: Revised draft UNEA-5 working document "Options and recommendations for the future Global Environment Outlook (GEO)" following review by the Committee

Discussion/decision: The Committee is invited to consider the draft line by line and approve it.

Item 6: Presentation and preparation of possible supplementary material and possible work in 2021

Supporting document: Revised background document, proposed work plan for 2021

Discussion/decision: The Committee is invited to consider the draft background, the need for possible further work and how the document should be presented. The Committee is also invited to consider the development of additional material arising out of discussions under agenda item 3, 4 and 5 above.

Item 7: Consideration of possible draft UNEA-5 resolution

Supporting document: None

Discussion/decision: The Committee is invited to consider the development of a possible draft UNEA-5 resolution.

Item 8: Any other business



United Nations Environment Programme

UNEP/GEO-SC/WS-extra

Distr.: General
13 Nov. 2020
Original: English

Extra session of Workshop on the Future of GEO Steering Committee
16 November 2020 - 15h00 – 18h00 (Nairobi time), 13h00 to 16h00 CET.

<https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/233004861>

Provisional Annotated Agenda

Item 1: Opening - The co-chairs and secretariat will give their opening remarks

Item 2: Adoption of agenda for extra session

Supporting document: Provisional annotated agenda for the extra session

Discussion/decision: Adoption of agenda

Item 3: Overview of UNEA-5 considerations

Supporting document: verbal briefing from Stadler Trengrove

Discussion/decision: Which type of document to deliver to UNEA 5.1?

Item 4: Approval of final sections of the UNEA working document "Options and recommendations for the future Global Environment Outlook (GEO)"

Supporting document: Sections 5 and 6 of the working document, Draft addendum on descriptions and assumptions, spreadsheet on costing

Discussion/decision: Approval of text on financing and implementation and recommendations.

Item 5: Inclusion of additional graphic elements in Working Document

Supporting document: Schematic document from Cathy McGuire

Discussion/decision: Should these schematics be included in Section 4?

Item 6: Other documents that might be prepared for UNEA-5

Supporting document: Proposed addenda on outcomes of broad consultations, more detailed description of options.

Discussion/decision: Should these documents be further fleshed out and translated?

Item 7: Any other business



United Nations Environment Programme

UNEP/GEO-SC/WS-2

Distr.: General
04 November 2020

Original: English

Facilitated Workshop of the Future of GEO Steering Committee2 – 9 November 2020 - 14h00 – 17h00 on Nov. 2, 4, 6 and 9th (Nairobi time)**Proposed Organisation of Work**

Timing	Session 1 Monday 2 November	Session 2 Wednesday 4 November	Session 3 Friday 6 November	Session 4 Monday 9 November
06h00 – 07h20 EDT	<p>Item 1 Opening (SA)</p> <p>Item 2. Adoption of agenda and organisation of work</p> <p>Item 3. Update on organisation of UNEA-5 and expected deliveries by the Steering Committee</p> <p>Item 4. Update on the analysis of the consultative process</p>	<p>Item 5. (continued) Approval of the UNEA working document "Options and recommendations for the future Global Environment Outlook (GEO)" (TPW)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overall scope, utility and timing - Process, governance and implementation 	<p>Item 5. (continued) Approval of the UNEA working document "Options and recommendations for the future Global Environment Outlook (GEO)" (SA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Financial and administrative consequences continued - Background - UNEP's mandate and GEO's place in the science policy interface 	<p>Item 5. (continued) Approval of the UNEA working document "Options and recommendations for the future Global Environment Outlook (GEO)" (TPW)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Any remaining issues - Approval of document
07h40 – 09h00 EDT	<p>Item 5. Approval of the UNEA working document "Options and recommendations for the future Global Environment Outlook (GEO)" (IB)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Criteria - Objective and functions 	<p>Item 5. (continued) Approval of the UNEA working document "Options and recommendations for the future Global Environment Outlook (GEO)" (SA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Process, governance and implementation (continued) - Recommendations - Financial and administrative consequences 	<p>Item 5. (continued) Approval of the UNEA working document "Options and recommendations for the future Global Environment Outlook (GEO)" (IB)</p>	<p>Item 6 Any other business (SA)</p> <p>Item 7 Closure (IB/SA)</p>

