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November 4, 2021

‘Future of GEO’ Steering Committee Meeting Summary, October 27, 2021

Important Note: In order to make our calls more efficient and effective, Steering Committee members are encouraged to keep their verbal interventions to a maximum of 3 minutes each. Members are encouraged to mute their telephone lines when they are not speaking, to minimize background noise.

The Steering Committee on the Future of GEO met at its twenty-second virtual call to review the outcomes of the consultation process and consider the impacts on the final report. Agenda items included:

1. Briefing from UNEP’s Chief Scientist on the restructuring of UNEP’s publication system and process
2. Presentation and discussion of the outcome of the future of GEO feasibility study consultation
3. Any Other Business

On these items the Steering Committee decided:

- The Secretariat should provide a user statistics summary of previous GEOs. This will be important for the Steering Committee’s consideration as it deliberates on the final report for UNEA 5.2. Such a summary, both for the main GEO assessment reports and their Summaries for Policy Makers (SPM), would be valuable for the Steering Committee’s work and knowledge.
- The Steering Committee is pleased by the Secretariat’s efforts in analyzing and summarizing the outcome of the consultation quickly to give the committee this timely update. Written analysis and reports should be made for the Steering Committee’s information and knowledge and to support its upcoming workshop.
- The analysis of the outcome of the consultation should be revised to consider Member States inputs as individual participants other than as groups, as in the case of the European Union submission. This will give a more accurate analysis of the results.
- There is a need to look closely into the financing aspect of GEO in line with the results of the consultations and the CPR inputs. A consideration of how GEO funds will be managed in relation to the different governance options presented in the feasibility study should be considered by the Steering Committee, especially in light of the creation of a possible trust fund.
- The Steering Committee should be informed if any Member State (s) is planning to table or co-sponsor a resolution on the future of GEO. Such information will help in coordination and planning for the final report. Members of the Steering Committee are encouraged to consider drafting a future of GEO resolution and be open for inputs from within the Committee itself.
- The Secretariat will be happy to help coordinate any work on a draft resolution should it be needed. The draft resolution text shared with the Steering Committee was an early draft emerging from the summary from the draft final report. Some committee members have already commented on the draft resolution and this could be used as a starting point for drafting the final draft text of a possible resolution.
- The Steering Committee should continue to comment on the draft final report that has been circulated. The Secretariat will consolidate all comments provided on the draft final report into a working version that will be the basis for discussions during the workshop.
- The final workshop of the Steering Committee is planned to run from November 8-11, 2021. It will be similar to last year’s workshop, running for 3 hours from 12h00 to 15h00 CET. The objective is to fully consider the text of the final report and ensure every committee member is comfortable with it.

Rapporteur	Signature
Mr. Rafael Monge Vargas	

Summary of the meeting

The meeting was chaired by the co-chairs of the Steering Committee.

Briefing and discussion on the restructuring of UNEP's publication system and process

A briefing was provided by UNEP's Chief Scientist on the new proposed publishing system and process for UNEP publications. UNEP had undertaken a study to ensure implementation of a robust and efficient publications system and process that will lead to high quality and enhanced impact of its publications. UNEP publications are recognized as key contributors to outcomes, however, they themselves are important steps in a process or theory of change. UNEP publications are meant to influence policy, encourage action, provide an evidence base and help position UNEP while underpinning its credibility and ability to speak and be listened to.

Through its study on the organization's publication system and process, UNEP's current publication system and process had been reviewed to assess the effectiveness of the established processes in making publishing decisions. The effectiveness of UNEP's quality control mechanisms and monitoring systems had also been reviewed to assess the use and relevance of the publications production process, and the impact in terms of reach, usefulness and use of its publications. The study used in-house surveys of all staff and authors of 12 of UNEP reports as well as critical analysis and evaluation. In its consideration of the path forward on the publishing system and process, the Chief Scientist's office reviewed feedback and comments on the reach of UNEP publications, summarized feedback from a survey of Member States observations, considered the process and quality of publications by reviewing 50 publications (as at 16 September 2021) and consulted with groups across UNEP on process workflows.

The result of the study on UNEP's publication system and process highlighted the need for accessibility of the products (publications, reports, data), clarification on the audiences for products, necessity for greater diversity in products or offerings, which may not need be necessarily a publication, and the urgency for a communications approach to ensure UNEP products are fit for purpose and disseminated to achieve the greatest reach. It was emphasised that it is necessary to boost capacity for communication about UNEP publications. It was also apparent that the different categories of UNEP publications need to be clarified and better defined to ensure consistency in UNEP products across the organization. Finally, there is a need for better processes to capture information about the reach and impact of UNEP products. To achieve these outcomes, UNEP will have to consider enhanced channels in its publication systems and processes including, bundled complementary assets, country engagement, events, influencers, media, partners, science outreach and other specific tools like social media, data visualisations, Apps, podcasts, etc.

The Chief Scientist further highlighted the trends in access and utilization of key UNEP publications. There is a need to consider reach, beyond downloads and media impact. Communication efforts should be better co-ordinate and bundled to get maximum impact. From the information and trends presented in the report, shorter tailored reports, policy synthesis, practical lessons and fact sheets were more likely to be used. The publishing process therefore recommends a new publication system and process that will, as part of the publication's approval process, identify the focus of a publication, the target audience, appropriate communications methods and advocacy strategies as

part of the publication plan. Such a plan would ensure maximum impact for GEO, UNEP's flagship report, in the future.

On this issue the Steering Committee thanked the Secretariat for the briefing and found it useful as it progresses with its final deliberations on the future of GEO. There has been a previous concern that UNEP reports are not well reflected in national media but the Steering Committee is now hopeful that the GEO will make an impact at a global scale. The Steering Committee sought clarity on GEO being a flagship report and where the Chief Scientist sees GEO in the UNEP publication landscape. The chief scientist responded that GEO's role to provide a review of the global environmental situation on an ongoing basis and it is core to UNEP's mandate, making it the organization's flagship report. However, UNEP will publish key spotlight reports on a yearly basis to drive key strategic agenda items. The new publication system therefore seeks to bring in coherence and collaboration across these different publications. This will ensure that GEO not only draws from other important publications, but also that its uptake and impact are significantly enhanced in future.

The Steering Committee also highlighted the importance of having use and uptake statistics of previous GEOs for their consideration. Such a summary both for the main assessment reports and their Summaries for Policy Makers (SPM) would be valuable for the Steering Committee's work and knowledge. On this issue the Chief Scientist highlighted this as one of the challenges UNEP faces when conducting impact monitoring of its publication. Currently only downloads and citations are tracked. These do not necessarily translate to impact. The Steering Committee also sought clarity on whether the Secretariat will be considering other players in the global science policy interface in its next steps in developing the publication system. On this the Secretariat has started the process of scouting data from other platforms that the industry affects. An automated system will help link the publication's repository and track the impacts of respective publications in terms of usage. The Secretariat is therefore working to employ other measures to track the impact of its publications. On this issue it was decided that the Secretariat will provide user statistics for previous GEOs for the Steering Committee's information.

Presentation and discussion of the Feasibility study consultation outcome

The Secretariat presented the outcome of the consultation on the GEO feasibility study. The consultation on the overall administrative, financial and collaborative consequences of future GEOs (feasibility study) began on October 4, 2021 and ended October 22, 2021. It was supported by the feasibility study report prepared by the Steering Committee on the future of GEO and an interim report that the Committee had submitted to the opening session of UNEA-5 in February 2021. The entire consultation process was online due to the global pandemic. Four orientation webinars were organized to assist participants to better understand the context and purpose of the consultation and to understand the consultation tools (mainly how to complete the online questionnaire which was made available in all 6 UN languages) that were being used. The Secretariat presented a detailed the analysis of both the quantitative and the qualitative responses to the questionnaire. All other responses received through other UN languages had been translated to English so that they could be included in the analysis.

The Steering Committee commended the Secretariat for analyzing and summarizing the outcome of the consultation quickly and for providing the committee with this timely update. Further, the Steering Committee requested access to the written analysis and presentations made during the call. Such an analysis should consider Member State inputs as individual participants other than as groups, as in the case of the European Union submission. This will give a more accurate analysis of the results. The Steering Committee highlighted the need to look keenly into the financing aspect of GEO, in line with the results of the consultation and the CPR inputs. It was emphasized that there is a need to consider fewer options and potential hybrids for the final options report to be presented to UNEA. The Steering Committee noted that the issue about budgets and how they will be managed,

especially with a proposed trust fund in the mix, should be carefully considered at the final workshop. It may be important to consider how GEO funds will be managed by the different governance options presented in the feasibility study before the final workshop of the Steering Committee. It was agreed that the Bureau will work with the Secretariat to map out this link more clearly.

Any other business

Drafting a resolution on the future of GEO

The Steering Committee would like to know if any Member State(s) that are sitting on the Committee is planning to table or co-sponsor a resolution on the future of GEO. Such information will help in the coordination and planning for the best approach to enabling a decision at UNEA 5.2. The Steering Committee encourages its members to consider drafting a resolution and open this draft for inputs within the Steering Committee itself. On this issue the Secretariat highlighted that there is an effort to have draft resolutions presented as soon as possible since some had been presented already at the Annual Subcommittee meeting of the CPR. The Secretariat will be happy to help coordinate any work on a draft resolution, should it be needed. The draft resolution shared with the Steering Committee was an early draft emerging from the summary from the draft final report. Some Steering Committee members have already commented on the draft resolution text and this could be used as a starting point for drafting a final resolution.

Steering Committee comments on the draft final report

The Steering Committee was encouraged to send in comments on the draft final report that had been circulated. These comments will help in effectively finalizing the report.

Future of GEO presentation and comments at the Annual CPR

The co-chair of the Steering Committee had presented at the Annual Subcommittee of the CPR on the current status of the future of GEO work. It was highlighted that some of the members of the CPR had reminded the meeting of their inputs provided in this consultation and that these inputs highlighted GEO's central role in UNEP's mandate and its role in the science-policy interface and the need for GEO to continue to be policy relevant and scientifically credible. Further, CPR members highlighted the need for an intergovernmental process that utilized gender and geographically balanced expertise. The sources of funding for the GEO has also been highlighted at the CPR, with emphasis on GEO being at the center of UNEP's mandate and the need for it to be resourced from core funds. Finally, the suggestion to narrow down the options to be presented at UNEA 5.2 was highlighted. The Steering Committee was requested to consider this in their final deliberations of the upcoming meeting. Other CPR members requested that some thematic reports in the organization should be subjected to an intergovernmental process similar to GEO. CPR members had also enquired if the synthesis GEO proposed in the feasibility study would be similar to the Making Peace with Nature report, that has been released earlier by UNEP. The Secretariat noted that the synthesis option would be an intergovernmental process and that would, by design, make the synthesis assessment output different from the Making Peace with Nature report.

Plans for the November 8-11 workshop of the Steering Committee

The final workshop of the Steering Committee is planned to run from November 8-11 2021. It will be similar to last year's workshop, running for 3 hours each afternoon from 12h00 to 15h00 CET. The objective is to fully consider the text of the final report and ensure every committee member is comfortable with it. The Secretariat will consolidate all comments provided on the draft final report into a working version that will be the basis for discussion in the workshop. The word limit for UNEA working documents is 8500 words, therefore summarizing the findings of the Steering Committee and ensuring that UNEA understands the decision points that the committee is recommending will be vital.

Having no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 16h32 (EAT).

Action items

- The Secretariat to prepare a written summary of the meeting.
- The Steering Committee to send the Secretariat written comments (if any) on the final report draft and the draft resolution text
- The Secretariat to share the presentation made by the Chief Scientist on the proposed new UNEP publication system and process
- The Secretariat to provide the Steering Committee with a breakdown of usage of previous GEO reports and products
- The Secretariat to send the detailed outcome of the feasibility study consultation to the Steering Committee

List of Participants

First name	Last name	Affiliation	Nominated by
Anna	Mampye	Ministry of Environment	South Africa
Keisuke (alternate)	Takahashi	Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)	Japan
Marek	Haliniak	Ministry of the Environment, Poland	Poland
Nino	Gokhelashvili	Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia	Georgia
Ivar Andreas	Baste	Norwegian Environment Agency	Norway
Huang	Yi	Peking University	China
Rafael	Monge Vargas	Ministry of Environment and Energy	Costa Rica
Charles	Lange	National Environment Management Authority (NEMA)	Kenya
Toral	Patel-Weynand	US Forest Service	USA
Sebastian	Jan Konig	Swiss Federal Office for the Environment,	Switzerland
Claudia	Kabel	German Environment Agency	Germany
Cathy (alternate)	Maguire	European Environment Agency (EEA)	European Union
Salla	Rantala	Finnish Environment Institute	Finland
Mona	Westergaard	Ministry of Environment and Food	Denmark
Anshu	Singh	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate change, Government of India	India
Marcos	Serrano	Ministry of Environment Chile	Chile
Mery	Harutyunyan	Ministry of Environment	Armenia
Najib	Saab	Arab Forum for Environment & Development (AFED)	Lebanon
Andrew	Stott	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs-UK	United Kingdom and Northern Ireland
Marcel	Kok	Environment Assessment Agency (PBL)	Netherlands
Niki (alternate)	Rust	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs-UK	United Kingdom and Northern Ireland

Apologies

First name	Last name	Affiliation	Nominated by
Ryan	Assiu	Environmental Management Authority	Trinidad and Tobago
Akzan	Shiranov	Ministry of Energy	Kazakhstan
Celso	Moretti	Agricultural Research Corporation	Brazil
Mira	Zovko	Ministry of Environment and Energy	Croatia
Ivana	Stojanovic	Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism	Montenegro
Chenouf	Nadia	Ministry of the Environment and Renewable Energy	Algeria
Christine Okae	Asare	Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	Ghana
			Bahrain
Noasilalaonomenjanahary	Ambinintsoa Lucie	Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development	Madagascar
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Isaac	Dladla	Eswatini Environment Authority	Swaziland/Eswatini
Deepa (alternate)	Liyanage	Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment	Sri Lanka
Teshia	Jn Baptiste	Ministry of Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development	Saint Lucia
Shanna (alternate)	Emmanuel	Ministry of Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development	Saint Lucia
Keri (alternate)	Holland	US Department of State	USA
Jock	Martin	European Environment Agency (EEA)	European Union

Paul (alternate)	Lucas	Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL)	Netherlands
Carlos (Alternate)	Cordero Vega	Ministry of Environment and Energy	Costa Rica
Jerome	Sebadduka Lugumira	National Environment Management Authority (NEMA)	Uganda
Narges	Saffar	International Affairs & Conventions Center, Department of Environment	Iran (Islamic Republic of)
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Kazuhiko	Takeuchi	Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)	Japan
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