

EVALUATION REPORT

Mid-Term Evaluation of the UN Environment Project: Global and Regional Integrated Environmental Assessments (“GEO-6”)



June 2018



Evaluation Office of UN Environment

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Mid-Term Evaluation of the UN Environment Project: Global and Regional Integrated Environmental Assessments ("GEO-6")

PIMs ID

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ABOUT THE EVALUATION

Joint Evaluation: No

Report Language(s): English

Evaluation Type: Mid-Term Project Evaluation

- i. **Brief Description: This is an independent Mid-Term Evaluation of the Global Environmental Outlook project. The evaluation purposes were: (i) to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, and (ii) to promote operational improvement, learning and knowledge sharing through results and lessons learned among UN Environment, the GEO High Level Group, the GEO Scientific Advisory Panel, the GEO Assessment Methodologies, Data and Information Group, as well as the UN Environment Assembly and the project partners. The GEO -6 process is broad in scope and engages with a multiplicity of participants. The evaluation addresses some key strategic questions that focus on the credibility, legitimacy and salience of the GEO-processes and products. It examines communications and dissemination efforts and highlights issues to be addressed in the remaining implementation period. The evaluation also identifies lessons of operational relevance for future project formulation and implementation.**

Key words: Environmental Assessments, GEO-6, Mid-Term Evaluation, GEF]¹

¹ This data is used to aid the internet search of this report on the Evaluation Office of UN Environment Website –

Project Identification Table

Table 1. Project summary

UN Environment PIMS ID:	01751		
Sub-programme:	Environment Under Review	Expected Accomplishment(s):	EA(a) Global, regional and national policy making facilitated by environmental information made available on open platforms.
UN Environment approval date:	May 2013	Programme of Work Output(s):	712.1 Global integrated environment and outlook assessments
Expected start date:		Actual start date:	28 Oct. 2014
Planned completion date:	31 Dec. 2017	Actual completion date:	n/a
Planned project budget at approval:	10,154,840 (Cash: 3,433,049; in-kind: 6,837,780)	Actual total expenditures reported as of [date]:	
Planned Environment Fund allocation:	n/a	Actual Environment Fund expenditures reported as of [date]:	n/a
Planned Regular Budget allocation	USD 687,794	Actual Regular Budget allocation	
Planned Extra-Budgetary Financing:	4,668,186	Secured Extra-Budgetary Financing:	2,197,903
		Actual Extra-Budgetary Financing expenditures reported as of [date]:	
First disbursement:		Date of financial closure:	n/a
No. of revisions:		Date of last revision:	
No. of Steering Committee meetings:		Date of last/next Steering Committee meeting:	Last: Next:
Mid-term Review/ Evaluation (planned date):		Mid-term Review/ Evaluation (actual date):	June 2017
Terminal Evaluation (planned date):		Terminal Evaluation (actual date):	Not applicable
Coverage - Country(ies):	Global	Coverage - Region(s):	
Dates of previous project phases:		Status of future project phases:	

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

EU	European Union
GEO	Global Environment Outlook
GGEO	Global Gender Environment Outlook
GSDR	Global Sustainable Development Report
HLG	High Level Intergovernmental and Stakeholder Group
IEA	Integrated Environmental Assessment
IPBES	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IRP	International Resource Panel
MEA	Multi-lateral Environmental Agreement
MOOC	Massive Online Open Courses
MTE	Mid-term Evaluation
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NWMLE	Network of Women Ministers and Leaders for Environment
SAP	Scientific Advisory Panel
SPM	Summary for Policy Makers
TE	Terminal Evaluation
ToC	Theory of Change
USGS	United States Geological Survey

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- ii. **This Mid-term Evaluation (MTE) assesses the performance of the GEO-6 project to date (in terms of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency). The evaluation has two primary purposes: (i) to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, and (ii) to promote operational improvement, learning and knowledge sharing through results and lessons learned among UN Environment, the GEO High Level Group, the GEO Scientific Advisory Panel, the GEO Assessment Methodologies, Data and Information Group, as well as the UN Environment Assembly and the project partners. The evaluation identifies lessons of operational relevance for future project formulation and implementation.**
- iii. **The following nine “strategic questions” were asked:**
 - **To what extent do decision-makers and key stakeholders regard the assessment process and products as credible, legitimate and salient?**
 - **Have the regional assessments been produced in a timely manner so that they are available for decision-making?**
 - **To what extent does sufficient capacity exist to use and apply the assessment knowledge?**
 - **To what extent are assessment findings adequately communicated and disseminated?**
 - **Were the above issues adequately addressed in the project design?**
 - **How could the GEO-6 process be optimised for the remaining project period and budget to support optimal delivery?**
 - **To what extent have the regional assessments been used? How could their use be further promoted within the remaining project period?**
 - **Is the logic of the GEO-6 clearly presented and to what extent is it used to monitor progress?**
 - **What are the key lessons learned from the GEO-6 process that could be incorporated to improve the design of the next GEO phase?**
- iv. **The evaluation has pointed to both strengths and weaknesses in the process of design and development of GEO-6. Responses to a detailed survey instrument, along with semi-structured interviews and document review have indicated that the process has illuminated significant strengths. The depth and breadth of author expertise, combined with increased author and stakeholder participation, has resulted in a learning exercise that should result in a high-quality product. GEO-6’s new focus on policy effectiveness and early involvement of policy-makers should result in better facilitation of policy/science interaction. There is also evidence of strong support for the UN Environment GEO-6 team’s management, under difficult resourcing circumstances.**
- v. **While it will not be possible to evaluate the final impact of the project, as presented in the Theory of Change, until after the report has been completed and disseminated, it seems clear that the process and early products are credible, legitimate and salient as far as the process participants are concerned.**
- vi. **Not surprisingly, given the extent of the task and the multiplicity of participants, there are numerous criticisms of both the process and the content of the product as it currently stands. These issues are dealt with in detail in Section 5. In summary, and using the Terms of Reference key strategic questions as an organizing structure, the main concerns were as follows.**
- vii. **The incorporation of regional assessments into the GEO process is a new approach adopted by GEO-6, since in the past, the regional assessments used to be prepared by UN Environment for some regions but on irregular cycles. While the assessments appear to have been produced in a timely manner, survey respondents indicated that their usefulness is uncertain, and their contribution to the global assessment has been minimal. There was general agreement that the regional assessments are very different, and that there is no consistency across the**

- six. Concern was expressed that the scientific content of the regional assessment reports was not as well reviewed as has been the case for the global exercise.
- viii. It appears to be undeniable that significant capacity building is required in many developing countries to ensure the take-up of the findings that will be a fundamental part of the final GEO-6 products. Many countries struggle with basic issues such as information management and having credible statistics on the state of their environment. The current GEO-6 process does not have budget allocated for this capacity building effort.
- ix. The survey and interviews uncovered significant concern about the lack of a communication plan, and uncertainty about whether the key messages from GEO-6 would be properly disseminated. While the GEO-6 team has been clear that a communication plan is being produced, several participants were critical about the timing of this activity, with comparisons being made to other global assessments, the perception being that these appeared to have more effective dissemination plans.
- x. Most of the critiques of GEO-6 project design and management are relevant for the structuring of a potential GEO-7, and these inform the recommendations presented in Section 6.4. GEO-6 has kept many of the good practices from previous GEOs, and has implemented improvements of its own, including increased author and stakeholder participation; different approaches and methodologies; and, a much stronger emphasis on policy and outlooks. On the other hand, implementation and management has been consistently challenged by insufficient human resources and uncertainty over financial resources. Funding levels for projects such as GEO have fallen by up to 50% since 2016, and the current staffing levels are clearly militating against the efficient and effective conclusion of the project.

Recommendations for Optimising GEO-6

The remaining work programme for GEO-6 indicates that a full final draft is due by mid-September (2018). It only makes sense, therefore, for recommendations to be tailored to this time frame. Anything more ambitious should be left as considerations for a potential GEO-7.

Strategic Relevance

In the time remaining, the GEO-6 Secretariat should maintain regular contact with other global assessment processes such as the IPBES, IPCC, Global Sustainable Development Report and the International Resource Panel, to ensure that information is openly shared, and that duplication is avoided.

Scientific Credibility

Journal database access should be provided to Lead Authors who do not have free access to University journal databases. In addition, a high-level editor should be contracted during October/November to ensure consistency and accuracy of the final draft.

Planning and Management by UN Environment

The final stages of the GEO process will require a major spike in the Secretariat's support to the process. The work of the community of volunteer experts and authors will be largely completed by October 2018. The main tasks of supporting the GEO High Level Group and Member states in the crafting and negotiation of the Summary for Policy Makers will fall mainly to the GEO-6 Secretariat. It is recommended that UN Environment contract eight additional staff: two UN Volunteers; one Junior Professional Officer; and, five expert consultants. In addition, the co-chairs and vice-chairs should have a local technical support unit to provide administrative and substantive support.

Funding

UN Environment should move rapidly to ensure that \$2,688,000 is secured to cover the current projected budget shortfall.

Ownership and capacity:

Summary documents should be produced for different user groups.

The proposed communication and dissemination plan needs to be produced as soon as possible.

The communication and dissemination plan should include a strategy for capacity building in targeted developing countries, to ensure country take-up of GEO-6 findings.

Recommendations for a Potential GEO-7

Responses to the questionnaire survey, along with follow-up interviews, provided a wealth of suggestions for what follows after GEO-6. Some commentators went as far as to suggest that the structure of the process should be changed so fundamentally, that referring to it as GEO-7 would give the wrong impression. These recommendations should be seen as preliminary, pending the finalization of GEO-6 and an assessment of its impact.

The key question posed in the ToR, that this section addresses is: “what are the key lessons learned from the GEO-6 process that could be incorporated to improve the design of the next GEO phase”?

Design of the Global Environmental Assessment System

There is concern about what some consider to be the “proliferation” of global assessments, with the result being possible duplication. At the same time, sectoral assessments are necessary, notably to underpin integrated global assessments. Inputs from past and present Chairs and Executive Secretaries of the main global assessments on how to improve synergies between assessments would be a positive step

The UN Environment’s Science Policy Forum should convene a high-level meeting of global assessment secretariats to discuss reforms of the global assessment system.

Project Design

Even if the overall global assessment system does not fundamentally change, and a new GEO process is launched, there is still a need to examine the structure of the GEO process. There is general agreement that the GEO-6 process has been unnecessarily cumbersome, and under-resourced. One option for radical reform is to continue with the regional assessment process as introduced in GEO-6, but to significantly enhance scientific review. The global GEO should then consist of a genuine synthesis of these enhanced outputs but produced only by a small expert team led by UN Environment. If this model is adhered to, there would not be a need to recreate an entire administrative and technical structure for the global process. At the very least, options for complete redesign of the overall structure for a potential GEO-7 should be considered

If embarking on a new GEO process, UN Environment should undertake a thorough “scoping” of ideas as to how the overall process should be structured. This scoping exercise should be fully open to stakeholders and should take place over the course of 12 months. A model for this approach is the recent World Bank review of its Environmental and Social Safeguard policies.

Scientific Credibility

While the overall scientific credibility of GEO-6 has not been challenged by this mid-term evaluation, suggestions have been made as to how the scientific content of potential future endeavours could be further strengthened. It seems clear, for example, that the scientific credibility of the GEOs would be enhanced if strong relationships with data collectors are restored. This would mean reintroducing the collaborating institutions model used in previous GEO processes.

Whatever structure is chosen for potential future GEOs, consideration should be given to significantly strengthening relationships with important international data providers.

Communication

How the outputs of GEOs are communicated is clearly a fundamental aspect for project impact. There is a concern that the production of large, text-based reports may no longer be an effective model for information dissemination. If one of the main purposes of the GEO remains reporting on the state of the global environment, then an alternative would be to produce a much shorter product, based around key indicators.

As part of the scoping proposal put forward in Section 6.4.2, different options for communicating GEO outputs should be examined.

Capacity Building

If there is an intention to increase the use of the global GEO in developing countries, then a more serious effort needs to be placed on building country-level capacity to use the products. This will also involve the production of summary documents for different end user groups.

The scoping process put forward in Section 6.4.2 should examine the options for country-level and end user group capacity building into the design of future GEO processes.

Financing/resourcing

Clearly, one of the most significant issues facing potential future GEO processes is the provision of secure resourcing. There should not be a need for the administrators of GEO exercises to spend time attempting to find funding during GEO preparation. Adequate staffing and funding should be secured before the project starts.

UN Environment should ensure, through internal resource allocation, that a potential future GEO process is adequately funded and staffed.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

1. In 1995 the Governing Council of UN Environment requested a regular, comprehensive report on the state of the world environment. Since then, the key mechanism of UN Environment to fulfil this unique mandate has been the Global Environment Outlook (GEO). Since 1997, five GEOs have been produced, first at two-year intervals, and later every five years.
2. The GEOs are expected to bring the best available scientific knowledge to policy makers, bridging the science and policy spheres to enable better informed decision making. They are both a process of conducting a global integrated environmental assessment (IEA) and a product using the IEA methodology in the production of a series of reports and side products, mapping the state and trends of the environment at global and regional scales.
3. Despite many global, regional and thematic environmental assessments having been produced, the environment is still degrading at an unprecedented rate, with significant adverse effects on human well-being. It is therefore increasingly important that UN Environment continues to provide timely integrated scientific information and knowledge on the state of the environment.
4. Each GEO builds on the assessment findings of its predecessor by translating the lessons learned and insights gained from the previous processes into recommendations for future GEO cycles. With the GEO process and products, UN Environment is aiming to continue providing up-to-date information and knowledge of the global environmental situation and thus continue to be one of the central mechanisms in delivering on the organization's mandate. Since environmental assessments are designed to be underpinned by credible science, institutional networks, partnerships and multi-stakeholder collaborative mechanisms, the GEO process is aiming to bridge science and policy.
5. According to the GEO-6 project document, policy and decision-makers globally require timely and credible environmental, social and economic data at global and regional scales as a basis for sound decision-making in the context of environmental sustainability and sustainable development. The assessments, combined with the entire GEO process, are delivered with the aim of supporting various levels of decision-making, from global to local, and set priorities for technology support and capacity-building interventions. The GEO-6 Project Document outlines that the new UN Environment Live platform will be used to establish a continuous assessment process to inform decision-making.
6. The sixth GEO consists of a global assessment, as well as a set of 6 regional assessments, produced with partners and using the integrated environmental assessment (IEA) methodology to produce scientifically credible and policy relevant information on the current state and trends of the environment. The incorporation of regional assessments into the GEO process is a new approach adopted by the GEO-6 process, since in the past, the regional assessments used to be prepared by UN Environment for some regions but on irregular cycles.
7. The sixth GEO has also delivered the first Global Gender and Environment Outlook assessment (GGEO). According to the GEO-6 project document, the studies carried out during the GGEO preparation phase showed that although knowledge on gender-environment linkages was available, it was scattered and represented diverse sectors and periods of time. Thus, the GGEO aimed to provide evidence-based knowledge on gender and environment, as well as policy options to address the challenges and provide good practices.

1.2 Purpose of the Mid-Term Evaluation

8. In line with the UN Environment Evaluation Policy² and the UN Environment Programme Manual³, the Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) of the project Global and Regional Integrated Environmental Assessments (GEO-6) was supposed to be undertaken approximately half way through project implementation to analyze whether the project is on-track, what problems or challenges the project is encountering, and what corrective actions are required.

9. In practice, the MTE has been undertaken towards the end of the GEO-6 process, which began in late 2014, and is due for completion by the time of the UN Environment Assembly 4 (UNEA 4) in March 2019. It is important to note, therefore, that whatever recommendations emanate from this MTE can only have a marginal impact on the design of the remaining GEO-6 and its products, given that there is approximately 10 months remaining in the project.

10. The Mid-term Evaluation assesses project performance to date (in terms of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency). The evaluation has two primary purposes: (i) to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, and (ii) to promote operational improvement, learning and knowledge sharing through results and lessons learned among UN Environment, the GEO High Level Group, the GEO Scientific Advisory Panel, the GEO Assessment Methodologies, Data and Information Group, as well as the UN Environment Assembly and the project partners. Therefore, the evaluation will identify lessons of operational relevance for future project formulation and implementation.

11. The regional assessments, prepared as part of the GEO-6 process, were completed in mid-2016. The MTE of GEO-6 will assess the completed regional assessments both in terms of process and the produced products. In terms of the global assessment, the focus of the MTE will be on the process and progress thus far. Since the regional assessments are meant to contribute to the global assessment, the MTE will also assess the linkages between these two processes. The MTE will assess the usefulness and transferability of information of the regional assessments for the global assessments. Outreach conducted will be evaluated in terms of the entire GEO-6 process.

12. Since GEO-6 is part of a continuing process of keeping the environment under review, the MTE will look back to previous GEO periods and respective evaluations, particularly the Terminal Evaluation of the GEO-5, which was completed in 2014. The MTE of the GEO-6 will assess to what extent the lessons of the TE of GEO-5 were incorporated into the design of the GEO-6 and the extent to which evaluation recommendations were implemented. The MTE of the GEO-6 will also look forward and contribute to the design of the future GEO processes, particularly a potential GEO-7.

13. The structure of this report follows the layout prescribed by the UN Environment Evaluation Office document, "Guidance on the Structure of the Main Evaluation Report". The structure has been modified slightly, given that this was not a Terminal Evaluation.

14. The evaluation was conducted by an independent consultant and an assistant, under the overall responsibility and management of the UN Environment Evaluation Office, in consultation with the Head of the GEO-6 Team.

15. The target audience for the findings of the MTE is the United Nations Environment Assembly; Government representatives of sectors that influence the work of the environment ministries; UN programmes, agencies and funds; the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development; the Network of Women Ministers and Leaders for Environment (NWMLE); MEAs;

² <http://www.unep.org/eou/StandardsPolicyandPractices/UNEPevaluationPolicy/tabid/3050/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

³ http://www.unep.org/QAS/Documents/UNEP_Programme_Manual_May_2013.pdf . *This manual is under revision.*

Regional Policy Fora; and UN Environment's Major Groups and Stakeholders and UN Environment Collaborating Centres.

2. EVALUATION METHODS

2.1 Introduction

16. This section outlines the approach taken to the evaluation. It presents: the evaluation schedule; the key strategic questions posed by the Terms of Reference; the main information sources for the evaluation; the evaluation criteria and related questions; and, data associated with responses to a questionnaire survey.

2.2 Evaluation Schedule

17. Table 1 presents the timing schedule for the mid-term evaluation. The process began in November 2017, with the drafting and acceptance of the Inception Report. Probable conclusion of the MTE will be late April 2018, upon submission and acceptance of the final report.

Table 1: Evaluation Schedule

	Novem-ber	Decem-ber	January	February	March	April
Inception report completion	—					
Development of interview and survey protocols	—					
Refinement of interview and survey questions	—					
Telephone interviews with GEO-6 team members	—	—	—			
Delivery of survey questionnaires	—	—	—			
Survey follow-up			—	—		
Initial drafting of report				—	—	
Development of presentation for the 4 th Authors' meeting				—		
Presentation and participation at the 4 th Author's meeting				—		
Submission of first draft report					—	
Submission of final report						—

2.3 Key Strategic Questions

18. The Terms of Reference for this evaluation lists nine 'key strategic questions' that need to be asked. They are:

- To what extent do decision makers and key stakeholders regard the assessment process and products as credible, legitimate and salient?
- Have the regional assessments been produced in a timely manner so that they are available for decision making?
- To what extent does sufficient capacity exist to use and apply the assessment knowledge?
- To what extent are assessment findings adequately communicated and disseminated?
- Were the above issues adequately addressed in the project design?
- How could the GEO-6 process be optimised for the remaining project period and budget to support optimal delivery?
- To what extent have the regional assessments been used? How could their use be further promoted within the remaining project period?

- Is the logic of the GEO-6 clearly presented and to what extent is it used to monitor progress?
- What are the key lessons learned from the GEO-6 process that could be incorporated to improve the design of the next GEO phase?

19. To meet the requirements of the Evaluation Ratings Table⁴, these strategic questions have been nested within nine groups of evaluation criteria: strategic relevance; quality of project design; nature of external context; effectiveness; financial management; efficiency; monitoring and reporting; sustainability; and, factors affecting performance.

2.4 Main Information Sources

20. A variety of methods were used to collect information. They included:

- Interviews (telephone and Skype);
- Web documents;
- GEO documents; and,
- Bibliographic and similar searches.

21. Five types of interview and survey respondents were identified to provide input to the evaluation through surveys and interviews:

- GEO-6 design and implementation: GEO-6 Team, UN Environment regional offices and any country-level participants, UN Environment managers from other divisions, Assessment methodologies group;
- GEO-6 contributors: Collaborating lead authors, authors, reviewers;
- GEO-6 quality controllers: High-level group, Scientific Advisory Panel, Communities of Practice;
- GEO-6 users of Regional Assessments and Global Gender and Environment Outlook;
- GEO experts: those knowledgeable about GEAs in general and other GEAs, other UN Environment and UN assessments; and,
- Selected members of other end users.

2.5 Evaluation Criteria and Related Questions

22. Table 2 presents a list of evaluation questions, along with the GEO-6 participant groups to which the questions were targeted.

⁴ Completing the Evaluation Ratings Table is a formal requirement of the evaluation. It requires that summary assessments be entered against nine groups of criteria. The Ratings Table is included as part of the Conclusions and Recommendations section of this report.

Table 2: Evaluation Questions

Legend

Candidate for primary sources	Possible, supporting source
--------------------------------------	------------------------------------

EVALUATION CRITERIA	GEO Secretariat	High Level Group	SAP	Ass. Methodologies	Coordinating lead authors	Chapter authors	UN Env't regional offices	Regional assessment authors	GGEO authors	Civil society orgs
Strategic Relevance Questions										
Has the project maintained an alignment with the MTS and PoW?										
Has the project maintained an alignment with the Bali Strategic Plan and South-South Cooperation?										
Is the project responding to the needs of countries, sub-regions, or regions?										
Has the project made an effort to be complementary to other relevant interventions?										
Quality of Project Design										
Has the logic of GEO-6 from planned outputs to desired impact been clearly presented?										
What are the particular strengths and weaknesses in the design of the project?										
Did the main stakeholders participate in the design stages of the project, and did their involvement influence the project design?										
Nature of External Context										
Are there any social or political factors that may influence the progress towards impact?										
Effectiveness										
To what extent do decision makers and key stakeholders regard the assessment process and products as credible, legitimate and salient?										
How do key decision makers on GEO-6 define 'legitimacy', and how has it been pursued?										
What has been the standard that GEO-6 has applied to scientific credibility (how would one recognize and distinguish between credible or not credible) and how does this compare to other assessments?										

EVALUATION CRITERIA	GEO Secretariat	High Level Group	SAP	Ass. Methodologies	Coordinating lead authors	Chapter authors	UN Env't regional offices	Regional assessment authors	GCEO authors	Civil society orgs
products, and are the products appropriate?										
Has there been a process for identifying capacity gaps in the GEO 'team'. If yes ... how have these been addressed?										
Factors and Processes Affecting Project Performance										
Has the project made use of existing communication channels and networks used by key stakeholders?										
How well have communication/dissemination strategies worked to date?										
Have the regional assessments been produced in a timely manner so that they are available for decision making?										
Have the outcomes of GCEO been effectively incorporated into GEO-6?										
Are there some stakeholder groups/interests that are more important than others?										
Have important interests been properly taken account of in the GEO-6 process?										
Has GEO-6 provided 'boundary spanning' functions across science and policy?										
How well has collaboration functioned between UN Environment branches/offices?										

2.6 The Questionnaire Survey and Data Collection

23. Fifty-one responses were received from the emailed questionnaire survey. The survey instrument was customized for each participant group, around the questions listed in Table 2.

24. In ten cases, respondents asked for a follow-up interview, and this was undertaken either using Skype or telephone. All the survey responses were anonymously coded and organised to fit within the relevant Table 2 question category.

25. A preliminary analysis of responses informed the preparation of a Powerpoint presentation that was delivered at the 4th Authors' Meeting in Singapore on February 20th to the Plenary, and separately to 60-minute sessions with the HLG and the SAP. Both advisory groups raised issues that were noted and have been included in this evaluation.

26. Separate face-to-face interviews were held with the following Singapore participants:

- Both Co-chairs;
- 5 members of the HLG;

- **2 members of the review team;**
- **1 member of the AMG; and,**
- **3 Lead authors**

3. THE PROJECT

3.1 Context

27. The initial GEO produced in 1997 provided a snapshot of the world environment incorporating regional views. The second GEO ("GEO 2000" published in 1999), introduced Collaborating Centres at the core of the GEO process. GEO 2000 expanded regional inputs to the process thereby providing a balance between top-down scientific assessment and bottom-up regional inputs. GEO-3 published in 2002 provided a longer overview of environmental change reaching back 30 years - since the GA resolution in 1972 - and included analysis of how social, economic and other factors contributed to these changes. It observed that despite much attention to environmental issues since 1972, the environment was still peripheral to social-economic development. GEO-3 also looked thirty years into the future, using four scenarios incorporating changes in a range of areas including population, economics, technology and development, with attention to linkages between the environment and human well-being.

28. GEO-4 was published in 2007 and built on GEO-3 by linking environment and development using the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission), and other international environmental declarations and agreements. GEO-4 provided a comprehensive overview of the state and trends of the environment based on priority issues identified by regions.

29. GEO-5 was produced as an input to the UN Conference on Sustainable Development ("Rio+20"). The policy relevance of GEO-5 was strengthened by including an analysis of appropriate policy options and their indicative costs and benefits. Intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder consultation was increased in the design of the process and the development of a Summary for Policy Makers, and capacity-building for developing countries was given priority as a component of the assessment processes.

3.2 Objectives and Components

30. The project background is provided in detail in the Terms of Reference for the MTE. This section provides a summary of the main elements.

31. The specific objectives of GEO-6 and the regional assessments, as identified in the Project Document are:

- To keep the state of environment under review (based on enhanced access to country data provided through UN Environment Live), highlighting emerging issues as appropriate.
- To measure progress towards internationally agreed goals and targets and to contribute to the process for developing the Global Sustainable Development Report.
- To undertake an integrated assessment through the lens of the following key drivers (i) demographic dynamics; (ii) environmental processes and change; (iii) macro-economic policies; (iv) governance / institutions; (v) technology and innovation, including where the main impacts arise in product systems' life cycles; and provide knowledge on human well-being, shared prosperity, environmental change, and policy responses.
- To provide a global outlook based on regional outlooks/scenarios.
- To build capacity by developing best practice assessment procedures and guidelines and disseminating them widely, as well as through developing Massive Online Open Courses (MOOC) on IEA, data sharing and inclusive knowledge generation.

32. The planned results and activities for GEO-6 are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: GEO-6 Planned Results and Activities

Expected Accomplishment: Global, regional and national policy-making is facilitated by environmental information made available on open platforms	
Outcome 1. UN, MEA bodies, and targeted political fora and environment related institutions are increasingly using information from integrated environmental assessments in their policy making processes	<p>Output A) Regional assessment synthesis reports produced and disseminated.</p> <p>Output B) GEO-6 report and negotiated summary for policy makers (SPM) produced and disseminated.</p> <p>Output C) An authoritative and evidence based GGEO for governments and other stakeholders produced and disseminated.</p> <p>Output D) An informative package for each type of assessment produced, comprising a variety of information tools tailored to different 'end users'.</p> <p>Output E) Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) running on open platforms and supported by integrated assessments using UN Environment Live.</p>
<p>Activities:</p> <p>Strengthen IEA methodologies, procedures and guidelines</p> <p>Convene global inter-governmental and multi-stakeholder consultations;</p> <p>Transparent nominations of advisory panels</p> <p>Establish communities of practice;</p> <p>Organise Regional Environmental Information Network Conferences;</p> <p>Assessments drafted;</p> <p>Organise peer review;</p> <p>Assessment production and translations;</p> <p>Communication and outreach processes;</p> <p>Produce summaries for policy makers.</p>	

3.3 Stakeholders

33. Understanding the different roles that stakeholders play in UN Environment projects is always extremely important. In some respects, analysis of stakeholder positions and roles in GEO-6 is more complicated than in most other projects. This is because the very definition of 'stakeholder' is problematic. In GEO-6, stakeholders are both those involved in the production of the assessments, and the so-called 'end users'.

34. With respect to the former, the main stakeholders are as follows:

- **UN Environment Project Manager (PM) and the project management team/Secretariat;**
- **UN Environment Chief Scientist and Director of the Science Division;**
- **UN Environment Fund Management Officer (FMO);**
- **Environment Under Review Sub-Programme Coordinator;**
- **Members of the GEO High Level Group;**
- **Members of the GEO Scientific Advisory Panel;**
- **Members of the GEO Assessment Methodologies, Data and Information Group (AMDG);**
- **GEO Co-Chairs and Vice-Chairs;**
- **UN Environment regional offices;**
- **GEO-6 Coordinating lead authors;**

- GEO-6 Lead authors and authors; authors;
- Chapter reviewers;
- Regional assessment authors; and,
- GGEO authors.

35. Within this cohort of process stakeholders, there are different sub-groups, with quite different interests. Table 4 disaggregates the main sub-groups and their interests.

Table 4: GEO-6 Main Stakeholder Sub-Groups and Interests

Stakeholder Sub-Group	Interest/role
UN Environment Project Team	Overall responsibility for managing the entire process. Strong focus on scheduling of production, and keeping to budget
High-level Group	Policy relevance. Ensuring that the outcomes of GEO-6 are accessible and relevant for decision makers
Scientific Advisory Group	Ensuring scientific credibility. Less interested in policy relevance
Coordinating Lead authors	Management and quality control of the writing process.
GEO-6 Lead authors and authors	Production of subject-focused chapters.
GEO Fellows	Supporting the writing team
UN Environment regional offices	Quality control of the regional assessments
Assessment Methodologies, Data and Information Group	Ensuring that IEA approach is clear and understood. Ensuring that data and methodologies are properly analysed and considered
GGEO chapter authors	Production of subject chapters, with a strong gender and human rights focus.
Communities of Practice	Combined interest in scientific credibility and policy relevance.

36. These very different interests and orientations colour participants' views of the GEO process, and required that the evaluators recognize these different orientations, and tailor interview questions and approaches to match.

37. Engaging with process stakeholders was relatively straightforward, as their roles in the GEO-6 preparation are clearly defined, and so questions can be easily customized. The situation regarding end users is more problematic. This is because, with one exception, the "product" (i.e. GEO-6) has not been completed, and so there is nothing to yet "use". However, it is important that potential end users be considered during this MTE, if only to comment on strategies employed during the GEO-6 development process to engage them, the purpose then being to increase the eventual likelihood of learning and uptake.

38. The strategy used to elicit potential end user views was to use comments on GEO-6 chapter drafts by 159 reviewers from around the world as a "proxy" for end users, as many of these reviewers will presumably end up using the document.

3.4 Changes in Design during Implementation

39. The original design of the project was extensively critiqued by a Project Review Committee (PRC) in August 2014. It has been revised once, in early 2016⁵. The revision resulted in changes to several milestones. The most significant were:

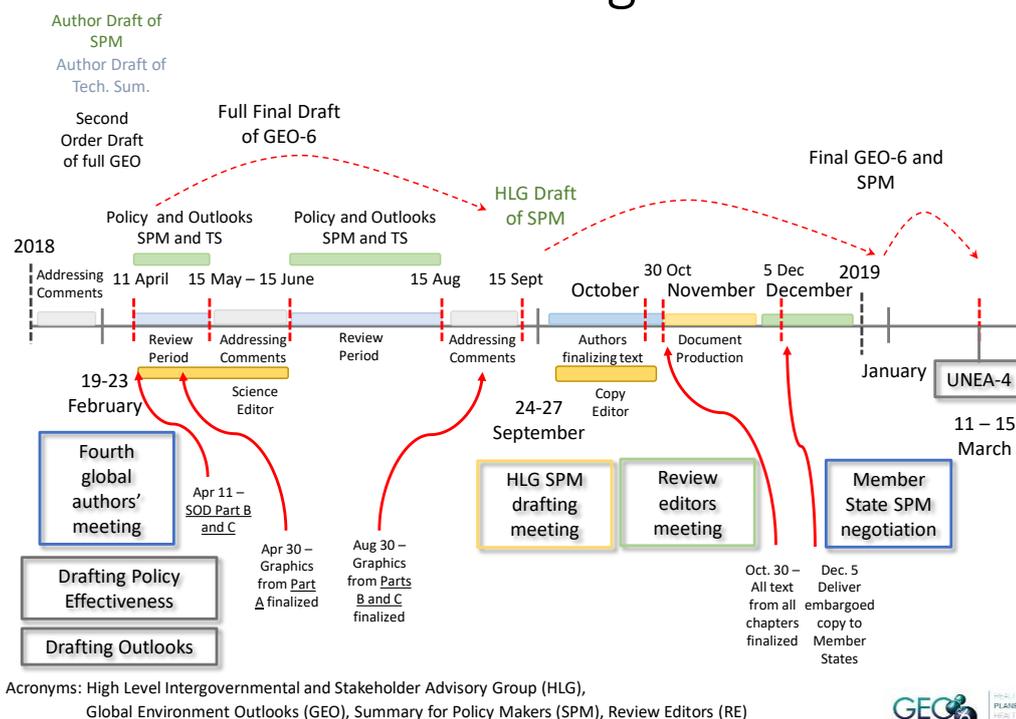
- Extension of the completion date to coincide with the UN Environment Assembly 3, or 'no later than 2018';
- The targets for regional assessments have reduced from 12 to 6.
- The required number of Massive Open Online Courses has reduced from 2 to 1.

40. The revisions were primarily due to changes in deliverable milestones as requested by CPR members. A fully revised budget was required due to these milestone changes. In addition, there was a revised approach to managing author teams, requiring more interaction among authors, and so requiring more workshops. The revisions appear to be appropriate given the circumstances.

41. At the time of writing, even this extension of time as envisaged in 2016 has been surpassed. As Figure 1 indicates, the current aim is to have GEO-6 presented at UNEA 4 in March 2019. The figure also indicates the tightness of the timeline over the next 12 months, given the time required for various reviews and Member State negotiations.

Figure 1: GEO-6 Remaining Work Programme

GEO-6 2018 Work Programme



42. The structure of the project, in terms of outputs, outcomes, and impact is analysed in more detail in the reconstructed Theory of Change, which is presented in Section 4 of this report.

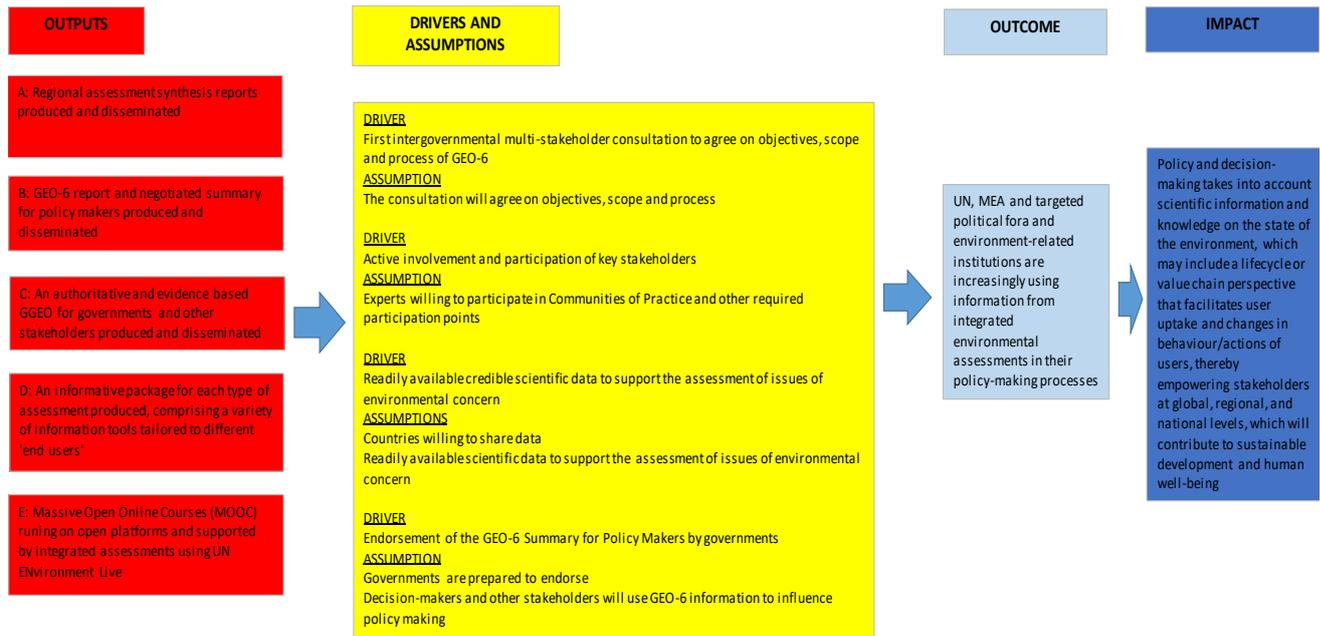
⁵ Project Revision #1. 712.1 Global and Regional Integrated Environmental Assessments. April 1, 2016

4. THEORY OF CHANGE AT EVALUATION

4.1 Reconstructed Theory of Change

43. A Theory of Change (ToC) is a key component for evaluation. It should illustrate how the intervention intends to achieve the desired results. The Project Document presented a 'Theory of Change at Design', and this is shown in a slightly redrawn style in Figure 2. The Development of a ToC for GEO-6 is a significant step forward, as no specific ToC was developed at the design stage for GEO-5.

Figure 2: Theory of Change at Design



44. The GEO-6 ToC at Design is clear and straightforward. The Outputs are especially 'robust', to the extent that their production is easily verifiable and so relatively simple to monitor. In addition, 'drivers', and 'assumptions' are clear and sensible.

45. What the ToC at Design does not make entirely clear is that, for the projected Impact to be achieved, the project needs to concentrate on both product and process. The five outputs listed in Figure 2 are all tangible products. Along the way, however, the project will need to focus just as much on process, so as to build capacity, and so inspire involved stakeholders to encourage end users to apply the knowledge presented in the GEO products.

46. This idea about the importance of process draws attention to the projected Outcome, of which there is only one. While the Outcome is entirely legitimate in and of itself, it is highly 'aggregated'. In other words, it assumes that the five Outputs are all equally salient for each of the end users listed in the Outcome box. It is suggested that this may not necessarily be the case. Consequently, a Reconstructed Theory of Change has been produced, and is shown in Figure 3.

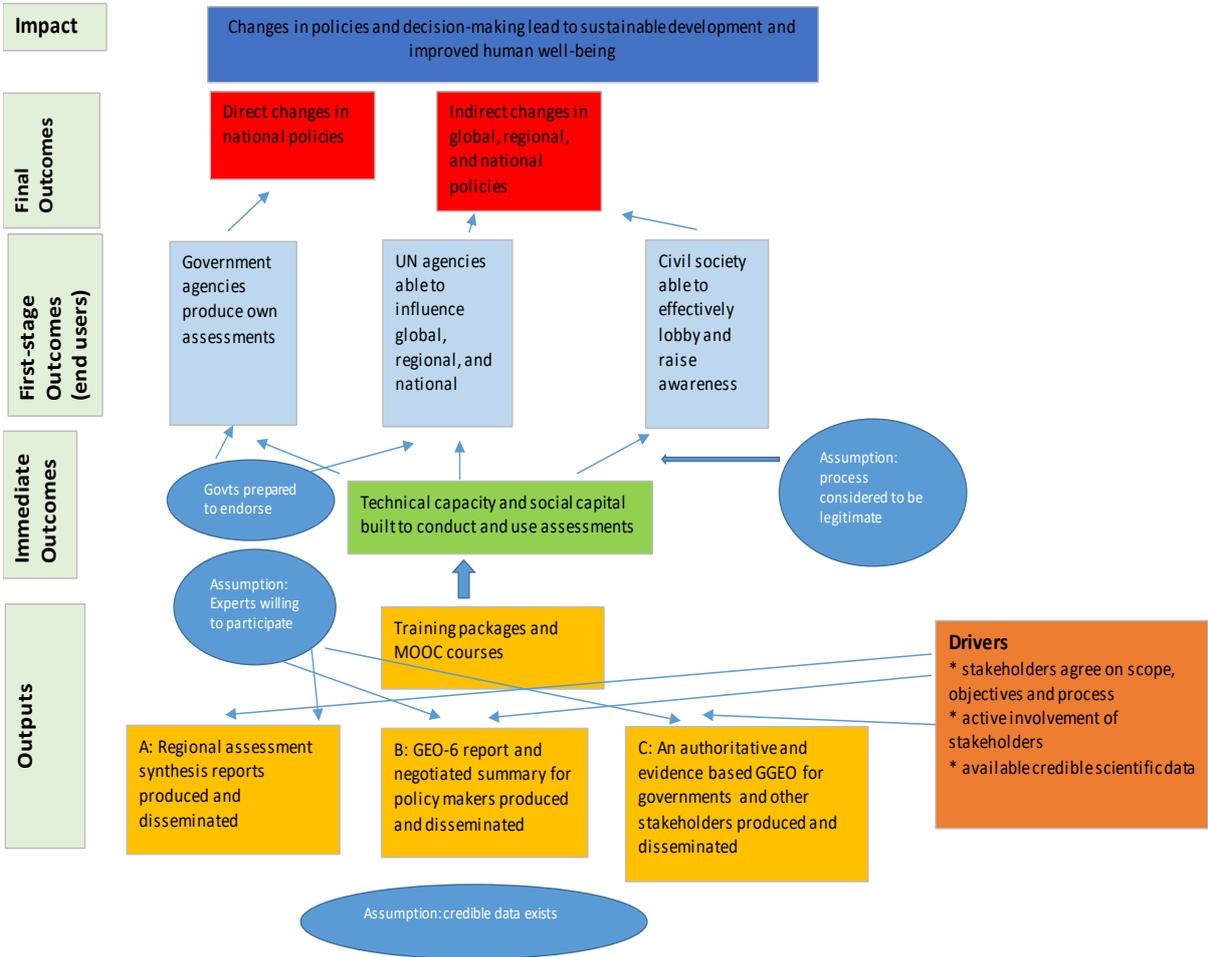
47. Figure 3 should be read from the bottom upwards. Unlike the ToC at Design, the reconstructed version disaggregates the five Outputs, thereby making it clear that the three assessment products are initially "operationalized" by way of the proposed training packages and the MOOC. The immediate outcome of the training products should be improved technical capacity and social capital to enable countries to undertake their own integrated assessments, and for the global and regional assessments to be effectively used. With this capacity built, the project should lead to different first-stage outcomes, depending on the interests and policy

focus of the end users. The ProDoc makes it clear that there are three main end user groups: national government agencies; UN Agencies; and, civil society organisations.

48. GEO-6 will influence these groups through different pathways. For example, national government agencies using the regional and global assessments could have a direct influence on policy in their respective countries, whereas the UN agencies can only exert an indirect policy influence through providing proposals to governing bodies, and through examples such as national UNDAFs. Civil society also only has indirect policy influence, through awareness raising and lobbying.

49. However, if the GEO process has been effective, then these three end user pathways should result in changes in the way global, regional, and national development policies are designed and implemented, thereby leading to a final impact of more sustainable development and improved human wellbeing.

Figure 3: Reconstructed Theory of Change



5. EVALUATION FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

50. Section 2.3 outlined the nine strategic questions that the MTE is required to address, as specified by the Terms of Reference for the evaluation. To meet the requirements of the Evaluation Ratings Table, these strategic questions have been nested within nine groups of evaluation criteria: strategic relevance; quality of project design; nature of external context; effectiveness; financial management; efficiency; monitoring and reporting; sustainability; and, factors affecting performance. The relevant evaluation questions are presented in Table 2, and the summary Evaluation Ratings Table, which includes an Overall Project Rating, is appended as Annex A⁶.

5.2 Strategic Relevance

51. There is clearly a continuing need for timely and credible environmental information and analysis at different scales so that policy and decision makers at all levels can make sound decisions in support of environmental sustainability. The GEO series of assessments are expected to fill that need. The GEO-6 project is intended to provide an up-to-date, scientifically credible, global integrated environmental assessment that is considered legitimate by a broad range of environmental decision makers, and that will result in policy relevant options to help inform decision-making at the global and regional level.

The issue of strategic relevance was addressed by the following four questions:

- (i) Has the project maintained an alignment with the MTS and PoW?
- (ii) Has the project maintained an alignment with the Bali Strategic Plan and South-South Cooperation?
- (iii) Is the project responding to the needs of countries, sub-regions, or regions?
- (iv) Has the project made an effort to be complementary to other relevant interventions?

52. There is no question that GEO-6 lies within the mandate of UN Environment. The UNEP Medium-Term Strategy for 2018-2022 covers seven areas of UNEP's current mandate, and the GEO-6 project is in line with area seven "environment under review". The project is also aligned with the 2016-2017 and 2018-2019 Programme of Work, under subprogramme 7 ("environment under review"). The GEO-6 project also directly responds to the UN Environment Assembly resolution 1/4 on the science-policy interface, in which the Assembly requested the Executive Director to undertake the preparation of the sixth GEO. In addition, two revisions of the Project Document have been issued to ensure that the project remains aligned across different biennia (2014-2015, 2016-2017, and now 2018-2019).

Evaluation Finding: Highly Satisfactory

53. Regarding the second question, the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity Building addresses the provision of technology support to developing countries, and countries in transition. Capacity building within GEO-6 is not a core directive, but the process of developing the document involves hundreds of scientists and policy experts. Consequently, capacity building takes place "on the job", and especially within the chapter-based and cross-cutting author groups.

Evaluation Finding: Highly Satisfactory

54. The questionnaire survey elicited significant response regarding the third question ("response to the needs of countries etc.").

⁶ The outcomes of the overall project rating are further explained in Section 7.

55. Responses were mixed. Some strong voices concluded that GEO works best for individual governments at the multi-lateral scale, where policy makers use GEO as a credible source of information to push their agendas in multi-lateral fora. GEO-6 is an inter-governmental process, involving all governments in the design of the assessment, during the peer review of drafts, and then for the negotiation and endorsement of the Summary for Policy Makers. Countries such as the US and Norway frequently go on record to say they use the findings of GEO for setting policy relevance and international agendas. At the regional scale, some regions, for example: Africa; Asia/Pacific; LAC; and West Africa, are known for their use of regional assessments.

56. At the country level, where GEO could, in theory, be used for country decision-making, uptake is less. Given the high heterogeneity of environmental problems, downscaling findings to the level of countries remains a challenge, not only for GEO but for most international assessments. When all the articulated needs of countries are read together, and given the chapter size restrictions, it is impossible for GEO to address all country needs.

57. A specific response is also worthy of note at this stage:

"I believe that broadly the sixth Global Environment Outlook process is responding to the needs of UN Member States, however, I am concerned that due to funding and structural issues the UN Secretariat is not equipped to deliver on the project at the level of detail and rigour that Member States might require."

Evaluation Finding: Satisfactory

58. Regarding the fourth question that asks about complementarity with other interventions, it is clear that the GEO-6 process is generally aware of other extant global assessments. For example, several participating authors in GEO-6 are also involved in the workings of the IPCC, and IPBES. However, survey responses indicated considerable concern over the lack of contact and collaboration between GEO-6 and global assessments such as the IPBES, IPCC, the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) and the International Resource Panel (IRP).

59. One respondent indicated that IPBES and GEO-6 were conducting regional assessments at the same time, but that the Secretariats had only recently begun engaging with each other. Given that both assessments sit within UN Environment's Science Division, this perceived lack of communication was considered by the respondent to be significant, as it would likely have budget implications, and also could result in policy makers choosing whichever assessment might be most "convenient". Another respondent claimed that there was not enough cooperation between the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and GEO-6, especially given that the CBD apparently has significant information that could be drawn upon, and that it is currently working on a new assessment.

60. With regard to a potential GEO-7 process, a number of respondents indicated that relationships should be restored with the major international data collectors such as: the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA); the US Geological Survey (USGS); the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA); the European Space Agency (ESA); the European Environment Agency (EEA); as well as think tanks in the EU, Japan, Canada, Australia and other data collection systems. It was also suggested that the International Resource Panel (IRP) has established a regional process that could "feed in" to a potential GEO-7.

Evaluation Finding: Moderately Unsatisfactory

5.3 Quality of Project Design

5.3.1 Introduction

61. Quality of project design was initially assessed as part of the Inception Report. This assessment was based on the Project Document, the logical framework, and the Theory of Change. Outcomes of this work are presented in Section 5.3.2. In addition, the questionnaire survey sent to GEO-6 participants also elicited views on project design. A summary of responses

is contained in Section 5.3.3. The combination of these two pieces of evaluation allows for an overall Evaluation Finding to be determined.

5.3.2 Quality of Project Design as Presented in the Inception Report

62. A review of the GEO-6 project documents was undertaken during the inception period to assess the overall quality of project design. The detailed review is presented in a separate Excel file⁷ and is summarized below in Table 5.

63. GEO-6 appears to have been appropriately designed. The scoring matrix presented in the Inception Report’s Annex 1 indicates that the overall project design rating score is 4.80, meaning that the design should be considered as “satisfactory”.

Table 5: Overall Ratings of Project Design

Nature of External Context: Highly Favourable
Because the project does not take place in ‘field setting’, it is unlikely that the operational environment will negatively affect project performance
Project Preparation: Satisfactory
Problem and situation analysis are clearly presented in the Project Document. Gender and human rights needs are very clearly dealt with through the production of the Global Gender and Environment Outlook. The only uncertainty related to project preparation is whether stakeholder consultation was undertaken during design. This is not entirely clear.
Relevance – Satisfactory
The project is clearly relevant to regional, sub-regional and national priorities. There is no doubt that a knowledge of global environmental trends will assist regions and countries to prioritize their approaches to environmental policy. The logical framework clearly links the project to the UNEP Programme of Work, and to other relevant interventions. There is no significant mention of alignment with the priorities of other donors.
Intended Results and Causality – Satisfactory
A Theory of Change (ToC) was presented in the Project Document. This was not the case for GEO-5. Only one Outcome is proposed for the project, so there is only one causal pathway, and therefore a relatively simple ToC. This ToC will need to be 'reconstructed' to disaggregate the single outcome, which does not consider the different needs of potential end users. It is perhaps unrealistic to assume that end users will be "increasingly using information from integrated environmental assessments" before GEO-6 is actually produced. However, this would certainly be a relevant outcome in the short-to-medium term after GEO-6 dissemination.
Logical Framework and Monitoring: Moderately Satisfactory
The logical framework captures the key elements of the current ToC, and indicators are all quantitative and so theoretically ‘measureable’. Mention is made of a monitoring plan in Section 6. The text indicates that the monitoring plan is attached as Annex 4. However, this was not included in the version of the ProDoc provided to the evaluation consultant.
Governance and Supervision Arrangements – Highly Satisfactory

⁷ Available on request from the Evaluation Office

<p>Structures and governance arrangements were clearly designed and presented including roles and responsibilities for the project implementation which were clear and feasible. A very comprehensive system of supervision and governance is proposed, incorporating a High Level Inter-governmental and Stakeholder Group and a Scientific Advisory Panel.</p>
<p>Partnerships – Moderately Satisfactory</p>
<p>Roles and responsibilities for partners are specified at various points in the Project Document, but their relative capacities are not directly assessed.</p>
<p>Learning, Outreach, and Communication – Highly Satisfactory</p>
<p>The project’s proposed Outcome, and overall Impact, will not be reached unless the approach to outreach and communication is well designed. The Project Document indicates that there is a significant focus on information analysis and dissemination. An elaborate process for consultation and communication is proposed through the organisation of a series of meetings for specific groups of stakeholders.</p>
<p>Financial Planning / budgeting – Moderately Satisfactory</p>
<p>Financial planning, budgeting and general management was satisfactorily addressed in the Project Document. However, the uncertainty about adequate funding of the budget was problematic, especially for such a high profile complex undertaking.</p>
<p>Efficiency – Moderately Satisfactory</p>
<p>It is clear that GEO-6 is built on experience gained through other GEO exercises. It uses institutions that have participated in previous GEO exercises. It also draws on data sources from proposed partners. Annex 3 provides a long list of relevant assessment reports and processes that will feed into GEO-6. The final document will be produced much later than originally planned.</p>
<p>Risk identification and Social Safeguards – Moderately Satisfactory</p>
<p>Critical risks were adequately identified, and assumptions implicitly noted. There is a safeguards section within the ProDoc, but the project itself has no negative safeguard implications, other than those associated with travel to meetings. No mechanisms were introduced that would reduce the negative foot-print associated with meetings.</p>
<p>Sustainability / Replication and Catalytic effects – Highly Satisfactory</p>
<p>Various factors impact on the sustainability of projects, in particular large projects such as GEO. GEO-6 continues the GEO approach of employing best practices shown to promote use of global environmental assessments by strongly emphasising the knowledge process. The proposed link to UN Environment Live is made clear.</p>
<p>Identified Project Design Weaknesses, Gaps: Highly Satisfactory</p>
<p>The Project Review Committee made extensive comments on the original project design. All issues raised by the PRC appear to have been adequately addressed.</p>

64. The project design indicates that, to some extent, some of the lessons learned from GEO-5 have been taken into account. For example, a significantly greater focus on gender and human rights has resulted in the production of the Global Gender and Environment Outlook. More effort

has clearly been placed on the production of a Theory of Change, although the presentation of only one Outcome may be an over-simplification.

65. As indicated in Table 5, some aspects of project design could have been presented in more detail. These include:

- How stakeholders were involved in the original design of the project. This is especially significant, as one of the main recommendations from the terminal evaluation of GEO-5 was that the *utility of future GEOs would be enhanced by reaching lower scales and addressing stakeholder interests directly affected by/affecting environmental change.*
- With regard to the aspect of 'relevance', very little mention was made about how the project would align with the priorities of other donors.
- While monitoring indicators are specified in the logical framework, no monitoring plan was attached to the Project Document.
- Unlike the case with previous GEOs, GEO-6 does not intend to engage 'collaborating centres'. While project 'partners' are listed, no attempt was made to assess their capacity, and nor were their roles clearly elaborated.
- As was the case for GEO-5, there appears to be some uncertainty about whether the required budget will be committed and available.

5.3.3 Quality of Project Design as Discussed by GEO-6 Participants through the Questionnaire Survey

66. As would be expected, survey responses indicated that there is a disconnect between the project design as originally conceived in the Project Document, and the "lived experience" of the GEO project itself. On the positive side, several respondents commented that GEO-6 has kept many of the good practices from previous GEOs and moved forward with improvements of its own including: increased author participation; increased stakeholder participation; different approaches and methodologies; different emphasis on policy and outlooks; and systematic, timely and comparable regional assessments. Others commented positively on the integrated environmental assessment methodology that facilitates the interaction between science and policy.

67. On the other hand, however, a consistent concern about project design was that its implementation is challenged by insufficient human resources and insecurity over financial resources. Another common theme of concern for some was the perception that the scoping process for GEO-6, as delivered at the Berlin meeting in 2014, was not thorough enough. The underlying issue here was a perception that not enough guidance was provided to authors as to the basic questions that needed to be asked. Some respondents were also concerned about weaknesses in the design regarding outreach, dissemination, and capacity building activities.

68. A final issue discussed by some was the "administrative architecture" of the overall process. Some thought that the management structure was too hierarchical, leading as it did from "fellows" ... to lead authors ... to coordinating lead authors ... to the High Level Intergovernmental and Stakeholder Group (HLG)/Science Advisory Panel (SAP) ... and to the GEO Secretariat. This was considered by some to be "cumbersome" and encouraging of tensions due to the attempt to combine a political process through the HLG, with a technical process.

69. Despite these concerns, the balance of the 42 responses to the three "quality of project design" questions leads to the conclusion that the final rating should remain as satisfactory.

Evaluation Finding: Satisfactory

5.4 Nature of External Context

70. According to the background document that supports the completion of the Evaluation Ratings Table⁸, the consideration of a project's external context would usually focus on issues such as the prevalence of conflict, natural disasters, and political upheaval. None of these issues have directly affected the GEO-6 process. However, the evaluation asked the following question: *Are there any social or political factors that may influence the progress towards impact?* Survey respondents understood this question to relate to political influence on scientific content, and the role of internal advisory bodies.

71. There is no doubt that external direction has been crucial to the focus of GEO-6. The agreement of UN Member States on Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals in Sept. 2015 has had a significant impact on the project. Both authors and the advisory bodies have specified that the analysis of GEO-6 should focus on how to achieve the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, the advisory bodies and co-chairs of the process have asked for analysis of the social and economic impacts of the various options presented in the report.

72. From a political standpoint, there is strong interest from Member States in the preparation of the Summary for Policy Makers (SPM) and how this document will reflect the findings of the main report. The HLG monitors the process from the perspective of its policy relevance, which may include some aspects of political acceptability. Because GEO is sponsored by countries it cannot be considered to be a fully "independent" scientific assessment. It needs to serve the countries. The final SPM therefore needs to be carefully managed. For example, country "scoring" is avoided, even though including such a rating could provide a strong scientific and political message.

73. Within the GEO-6 "family" there is strong disagreement about the relative roles, and proper relationships between the HLG, the SAP, the GEO secretariat, and authors. It is clear that many participants believe that authors contribute to the GEO-6 assessment in their professional capacity as experts in their field, to provide a balanced view of the issues they have been asked to assess. These contributors accept that the principle of avoiding any undue influence has been applied to the authors, and the advisory bodies make every effort to minimize perceived or actual undue influence. On the other hand, some interviewees criticize the process because they believe either that the Secretariat or the HLG have too much influence.

Evaluation Finding: Highly Favourable

5.5 Effectiveness

74. As Table 4 indicates, seven questions were asked of participants to better understand the issue of GEO-6 effectiveness. The questions focused on three main issues: scientific credibility; the proposing of policy options; and, the planning and management of the project by UN Environment.

5.5.1 Scientific Credibility

75. The scientific credibility, technical accuracy and overall quality assurance of GEO-6 is a joint responsibility of the authors, reviewers, the GEO-6 Secretariat, the UNEP Chief Scientist Office and the Scientific Advisory Panel. However, the SAP and the UNEP Chief Scientist Office have an overarching role in ensuring that the GEO-6 is scientifically credible, technically accurate and quality assured.

76. According to responses received during this evaluation from the SAP, standards of scientific excellence and integrity have been applied to ensuring scientific credibility for all

⁸ Evaluation Office of UN Environment (2017), Evaluation Criteria and Ratings Table. Last revised: 13.03.2017

aspects of the GEO-6 assessment process. Scientific credibility recognition rests upon the assurance that i) the research, data and information used in the GEO assessments come from reliable and verifiable sources, are accessible and wherever possible openly available through UNEP Live; ii) the assessment procedures and the application of different scientific methods and approaches are validated with respect to their objectivity and scientific robustness; iii) the processes used to nominate and select experts are based upon criteria of excellence, transparency and declarations of interest; and, iv) the assessment, evaluation and peer-review of information and materials for inclusion in GEO-6 are undertaken in a transparent manner and by independent experts. These applied procedures are informed by a range of activities, standards and principles endorsed by the international scientific community including professional societies and institutions such the International Council for Science (ICSU), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the International Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). In addition, specific guidance has been provided on the extent to which “grey” literature can be referenced.

77. The extensive peer-review process was commented on by several respondents as supporting scientific credibility. In late January 2018, over 4,000 review comments from approximately 159 reviewers were received on the second order draft of chapters. The SAP’s view is that, with the regard to the “states” and “trends” section of GEO-6, the standard of science is good.

78. There were only three areas where concerns were raised. First, some respondents indicated that the scientific content of the regional assessment reports was not as well reviewed, or as strong as was the case with the global GEO. Second, there was a certain sensitivity about the role of indigenous and local knowledge, with some suggestions that IPBES has done a better job of incorporating and acknowledging such information. Third, there were numerous comments about lack of consistency through the report as it currently stands. It was suggested that the chapters read as though they have been written by different people, without consistency in style, and with considerable repetition. It should be noted, however, that these criticisms were evident before the Singapore authors’ meeting, during which a special “report consistency” group met on a regular basis to address the issue.

79. Despite these concerns, overall it appears that the assessment process, and associated products, are credible, legitimate, and salient.

Evaluation Finding: Highly Satisfactory

5.5.2 Policy Options

80. Through the questionnaire survey, GEO-6 participants were asked whether the process has been capable of proposing relevant policy options for the global and regional scales. Respondents understood this question in one of two ways: either whether there is evidence that the GEO process is already influencing policy; or, whether it has the potential to influence global and regional policy.

81. Those who addressed the question in the former conception focused entirely on the earlier regional assessments, as the policy influence of GEO-6 itself cannot yet be ascertained. The regional assessments provided detailed analysis of regional environmental challenges as well as key findings and policy messages for the six UN Environment regions. There was general agreement that the regional assessments are very different, and that there is no consistency across the six. Views differed as to their policy utility. Each has a 2-page summary, which consist mostly of “key findings” rather than policy prescriptions. Some then concluded that the assessments were not all that useful for policy makers. Others, however, indicated that the regional assessments highlighted effective policy measures in the region at both the regional/ sub-regional scale and some at the country scale. These policy options have been considered relevant and are showing signs of being effective /or promising.

82. Those who addressed the question in the second conception, i.e. whether GEO-6 has the potential to affect policy change, were unanimous in their praise for the introduction of the policy

effectiveness section in this new GEO. Member States have pushed for the inclusion of the policy sections of the document. One response is worthy of full quote here:

"If we aren't able to come up with good policy recommendations, many of us will look back in anger. That is the purpose here. The more precise assessments come from others (IPCC, GBO, etc.) – GEO is the meta-assessment. What distinguishes it is that it has the potential to come up with well-integrated policy recommendations using the cross-cutting themes. The value added here should be the ability to make cohesive and cross-sectoral recommendations".

Evaluation Findings: Satisfactory

5.5.3 Planning and Management of the Project by UN Environment

83. Across the survey responses, there was strong agreement that the GEO Secretariat has done a good job under trying circumstances. Some direct quotes support this conclusion:

"The Secretariat has a very difficult job, and Pierre and his team have maintained a positive, constructive approach even in the most trying of situations".

"UN Environment has planned and managed GEO-6 wonderfully. They are a flexible, open minded, and incredibly capable group. I am constantly amazed by their ability to handle last-minute changes to everything from a daily schedule that has been planned for months, to the entire rearrangement of a chapter due to expressed interest by the authors".

84. Given the complexity of the process, however, it is not surprising that the management of the project has had its critics. Most of the concern focuses on human resources and budget. Starting in 2016, funding levels for projects such as the Global Environment Outlook fell by up to 50% across UN Environment. This meant that all activity funds (for meetings, travel, etc.) were cut from the budget and it was necessary to mobilize external resources for almost all aspects of the project. Within the core team of the Global Environment Outlook, funding was available to cover the salaries of the P5 project manager, a P4 programme officer and two administrative assistants. Extra-budgetary resources were needed to fund two UN Volunteer staff and one Junior Project Officer. Extra-budgetary resources have also needed to be raised to ensure travel and meeting costs were covered for 4 authors' meetings, 1 meeting of the High-level Group, 1 Review Editors' meeting and the final meeting of Member States for negotiating the Summary for Policy Makers. It is likely that more than USD 4.5 million will have been raised for the project by its delivery date of March, 2019.

85. The reliance on intermittent funding has led to adaptive management/mitigation. The process of developing the GEO-6 products has relied on hundreds of experts who mostly work for free and are very busy people who cannot be managed in the way an organisation would usually manage its staff. Consequently, there are countless variables and hurdles that have to be managed along the way.

86. Perhaps because of these resource constraints, other, more specific concerns about management were raised by some survey respondents. For example, it was suggested that the Secretariat does not always acknowledge that the process is evolving ... that the Secretariat, Co-Chairs, CLAs ... are "making this up as they go along" and every once in a while adjust the course. While this is understandable, such changes in course have not always been acknowledged as such. Consequently, the authors sometimes feel like they are asked for one thing ... go off and work ... and then at the next meeting, are asked for something different. Those frustrated by this issue believe that acknowledging changes in direction would have gone a long way to alleviating frustration.

87. Another perceived downside of the planning and management process relates to what are perceived to be changing parameters for what the final product should look like (in terms of the structure of the individual chapters, the positioning and role of the cross-cutting issues, and the overall conceptual approach). A result of these shifting parameters is that changes between

meetings ... and the delayed communication of those changes ... has resulted in work being undertaken that, in the end, was not needed, or needed to be completely revamped.

88. Two other consistent concerns have been aired. The first relates to personnel changes within the GEO Secretariat, and UN Environment as a whole. There have been entirely different leadership teams within the organisation over the course of the project. It is recognised that it is difficult for GEO Secretariat leaders to manage a process that they did not set up. The second concern focuses on the relationship between the regional assessments and the global assessment. There is a perception that the former should have been capitalized upon to a greater extent, given the time and money allocated. However, on the other hand some contributors believe that many of the learnings of the regional assessment process were applied to the planning stages of the global assessment process and the work programme has been designed to ensure a much greater engagement of the advisory bodies throughout the process. These contributors tend to think that the global assessment process has been better managed by the UN Environment Secretariat than the regional assessment process.

89. Finally, a perhaps more pedestrian criticism relates to travel management. This was roundly slated by respondents. Many people complained that the agency offered flights that were more expensive and less efficient than alternatives that could be easily found and booked by participants themselves with simple online tools.

Evaluation Findings: Satisfactory

5.6 Financial Management Outlook

90. Based on discussions with GEO Secretariat staff, and an analysis of financial reports, the GEO-6 funding and staffing situation for year 2018 and 2019 remains critical. The current staffing level of the core Secretariat team supporting the Global Environment Outlook is at its lowest point in history. The core team consists of one P-5 staff member, who is Head of the GEO secretariat, and who is funded from regular budget. Two Junior Professional Officers support the Head, and they are extra-budgetary funded. The team also consists of one G5 Administrative Assistant, and one G6 Logistics Assistant, both financed by the Environment Fund.

91. In addition to this core team, ten UN Environment technical staff provide some level of ad-hoc and part-time support to the process. However, the Global Environment Work is not part of their primary job and they do not report to the head of the Global Environment Outlook team, which means that other operational priorities often prevail, making their support limited and variable.

92. The final stages of the GEO-6 process in late 2018 and early 2019 will require a major spike in the Secretariat's support to the process. The work of the community of volunteer experts and authors will be largely completed by October 2018. The main tasks of supporting the Global Environment Outlook High Level Group and the Member states in the crafting and negotiation of the GEO Summary for Policy Makers will fall mainly onto the UN Environment Secretariat.

93. The Secretariat envisages that the essential additional workforce required to support the final stages of the process includes at least eight additional staff: two UN Volunteers; one Junior Professional Office; and, five Expert Consultants. This additional workforce is required to provide adequate technical support to: the GEO authors and co-chairs; the High Level Group and Member States during the final stages of crafting the Summary for Policy Makers and the subsequent government negotiation process; foster synergies with other major assessments (i.e. IPBES, IPCC, GSDR, IRP etc.); manage partnerships; organise logistics for all the meetings and especially the final major inter-governmental negotiation process; ensuring quality control of the report; science editing; and, publishing and production of the main document, the technical summary and the summary for policy makers. Info-graphics and other outreach efforts will also be needed to ensure the right level of impact is achieved.

94.

95. Table 6 provides a summary of the main tasks, staffing, and other essential cost elements that will be required to complete the GEO-6 process. These costs are not yet funded.

Table 6: Budget Required to Complete GEO-6 (at February 15th, 2018)

Cost Elements	Budget Required (USD)
Workforce	
Salary for 2 UN Volunteers to mid-2019	64,000
Salary for one Junior Professional Officer P2 (2019)	151,000
Expert Consultants (Five consultants x 12 months to step-up capacity in the final stages of Global Environment Outlook-6)	360,000
Lead Authors' and Co-chairs Stipends - 48 people* (note: this item may be covered by Regular Budget in 2018 and 2019 - if received – as in prior years)	240,000
<i>Sub total workforce costs</i>	<i>815,000</i>
Meetings & other essential tasks	
Software Licenses: e-book, Yudu, Anti-Plagiarism, EndNote, GoTo	43,000
High Level Group Meeting to prepare the Summary for Policy Makers (Latin America?)	250,000
Review Editors Meeting - quality assurance of final report	150,000
Summary for Policy Makers - inter-governmental and stakeholders' negotiation meeting	700,000
Global Outreach and Communications	200,000
Editing and Production of the full Global Environment Outlook publication	100,000
Translations of Summary for Policy Makers into 6 UN languages	60,000
Translations of the full Global Environment Outlook report	200,000
Scoping Study for Global Environment Outlook-7 structure and financing	40,000
Global Environment Outlook Launch events (Africa, Europe, Asia, Americas)	130,000
<i>Sub-total meetings and other essential tasks</i>	<i>1,873,000</i>
Total Main Global Environment Outlook-6 (unfunded shortfall)	2,688,000

96. Table 6 includes only items that are not yet funded at the time of writing. Costs of the existing UN Core team on Global Environment Outlook-6, and the value of all in-kind contributions by Governments and the community of authors are not included.

97. Other additional processes and products are normally associated with the release of the Global Environmental Outlook, and are listed in Table 7. Funding for these items is not secured. However, several external partners have already informally expressed interest in financing these additional items, and the timeline for resource mobilization is longer as these products will be developed during 2019.

Table 7: Budget Required for Associated Products and Processes

Global Environment Outlook for Youth	300,000
Global Environment Outlook for Business	300,000
Global Environment Outlook for Cities	300,000
travel and operations	60,000
Support team for Derivatives (12 months - 5 consultants)	250,000
Total Global Environment Outlook-6 Derivatives (in 2019)	1,210,000

98. Given the significant unfunded shortfall of \$2,688,000 the evaluation rating for this criterion is “unsatisfactory”.

Evaluation Rating: Unsatisfactory

5.7 Efficiency

99. The questionnaire survey asked three questions that attempted to address the issue of project efficiency: (i) Has the move away from ‘collaborating institutions’ affected the efficiency of report production, and the quality of the assessments?; (ii) To what extent has GEO-6 built on pre-existing institutions, agreements, data sources, and complementarities with other initiatives?; and (iii) How well have partnerships and collaborations functioned between contributors to chapters, and collaboration within different advisory bodies and working groups?

5.7.1 Impact of the Move Away from Collaborating Institutions

100. In previous GEOs, the predominant authorship model was for UNEP to effectively contract the production of content to a group of “collaborating institutions”. The GEO-5 Terminal Evaluation lists 47 institutions that were involved with GEO-5⁹. The institutions then allocated specific staff to assist with developing the report content. GEO-6 moved away from this model, with authors being invited to participate as individuals, rather than because of their affiliation with a collaborating institution.

101. The majority of Lead Authors for GEO-6 were not involved with previous GEOs, so there were fewer responses to this question. Those who could answer were split as to the utility of the move away from direct use of collaborating institutions. Arguments in favour of the “new” model included the belief that the GEO-5 model may have had a built-in institutional bias. In this view, the GEO-6 model increases diversity. There appear, however, to be more arguments in favour of the old model. Collaborating institutions were strategic allies who promoted the engagement of local or regional stakeholders. The view was that this helped to institutionalize the process and to develop a strategy to assure ownership of the process and the report. The institutions took responsibility for their inputs and were engaged throughout. Working with collaborating institutions was a valuable inter-institutional exchange that generated positive externalities and spinoffs. In addition, a small number of respondents were concerned that the GEO-6 model put too much control over content in the hands of the GEO Secretariat/UN Environment.

5.7.2 Has GEO-6 Built on Pre-existing Initiatives?

102. Overall, survey respondents agreed that GEO-6 was doing a good job of building on other initiatives ... both earlier GEOs, and other data sources. Several Lead Authors indicated that they have been repeatedly reminded that they are not “reinventing the wheel”. Pre-existing institutions, agreements, sources etc. were discussed from the beginning during planning calls and were placed in table form to provide guidance for each chapter/section. The policy effectiveness chapter is based predominantly on pre-existing information, the main reason being that its purpose is to evaluate policies developed by other institutions, such as fisheries policies under FAO or biodiversity policies from the Convention on Biological Diversity. One respondent noted:

“In the chapters I have worked on, the GEO-6 has made extensive use of pre-existing institutions, agreements etc. It has gleaned small bits from a wide range of sources and tried to blend them into value-added syntheses. It has had mixed success in doing so, but I have seen no complete failures”.

⁹ UNEP Evaluation Office (2014), Terminal Evaluation of the Project Fifth Global Environment Outlook: Integrated Environmental Assessment, Annex 9.

103. There were, however, some dissenting views. The analysis presented in the Strategic Relevance section (5.2) pointed to some concerns about lack of complementarity with other global assessments, and especially those taking place concurrently.

5.7.3 Efficiency of Internal Collaboration

104. Given that chapters are being written by so many different authors, and that the majority of participants are working pro bono, it is perhaps surprising that there were not more complaints about the nature of collaboration within the GEO-6 “family”. One quote perhaps best sums up why this generally positive attitude appears to prevail:

“We are all researchers and differences of opinion are essential to ensure academic rigour. We need different ideas and critical assessment of our own ideas by others to move forward. In this spirit, we can all work together and “pull on the same string”.”

105. Having said this, there are clearly significant challenges associated with encouraging positive collaboration, especially given the hierarchical nature of the GEO-6 process. Some of the tensions between the HLG, authors, and the GEO Secretariat were outlined in the earlier section dealing with Project Design. The survey pointed to other concerns about relationships within the writing teams. For example, some authors believe that the participation of the chapter authors has not been very consistent. Some lead authors have had to finish work started by or assigned to others. Another significant frustration felt by some CLAs is associated with recruiting subject matter experts and contributing authors. These CLAs knew people who could provide the material needed but were apparently told that they had to maintain gender and geographic balance when recruiting contributors. This proved to be difficult. As the process moved forward, more authors and experts were brought into the process by the Secretariat, but without much consultation. Although this assistance was appreciated, some CLAs indicated that the new additions have not tended to fill the gaps in expertise.

Evaluation Rating: Satisfactory

5.8 Monitoring and Reporting

106. The main question underlying this criterion is: to what extent is the logic of GEO-6 clearly presented and to what extent is it used to monitor progress?

107. With regard to monitoring design and budgeting, the project has been supported by a detailed monitoring and budget plan what was attached as Annex 4 to the Project Document. The plan provides a system that allows for tracking of progress against indicators towards the achievement of the project outcome and outputs.

108. Budget allocated for the mid-term evaluation and terminal evaluation are clearly indicated in the original project budget, and in recent budget projections. Resources appear to be adequate for these tasks.

Evaluation Rating for Design and Budgeting: Highly Satisfactory

109. Regarding monitoring implementation and reporting, the purpose of the mid-term evaluation was to assess whether the monitoring system was operational and facilitated the timely tracking of results and progress towards project objectives. UN Environment has a centralized Project Information Management System in which, in theory, project managers upload six-monthly status report against project milestones.

110. The most up-to-date PIMS report provided to the evaluators was extracted on October 10th, 2017. At that point, the project should have completed reporting for June 2017, but this was not the case, meaning that the last report was submitted in December 2016. No direct evidence was provided to the evaluators that would allow an assessment to be made about whether information generated by the monitoring system has recently been used to adapt and improve project execution. It should be noted, however, that Project Revision no. 1 (signed

January 4, 2016) was based on monitoring of the outcome and output indicators, indicating that monitoring results have, in the past, been used to adapt project design.

Evaluation Rating for Monitoring Implementation and Reporting: Moderately Satisfactory

5.9 Sustainability

111. In the background text supporting the UN Environment Office's Evaluation Criteria and Ratings Table, "sustainability" is understood as the probability of direct outcomes being maintained and developed after the close of the intervention.

112. Four questions were asked in the survey to determine the likelihood of the projected outcomes being socio-politically, financially, and institutionally sustainable. The questions were: (i) Is the level of 'ownership' by the main stakeholders and end users sufficient to allow for the project results to be sustained?; (ii) Does sufficient capacity exist to use and apply the assessment knowledge?; (iii) Who are the target audiences for GEO-6 processes and the different products, and are the products appropriate?; and, (iv) Has there been a process for identifying capacity gaps in the GEO 'team'. If yes ... how have these been addressed?

5.9.1 Ownership

113. Given the hoped-for high-level global policy outcomes of GEO-6, evaluating the degree of 'ownership' of the product is problematic, especially as the global report is yet to be completed, and so end users have not yet identified themselves. Stakeholders were earlier defined in Section 3, and in detail in the Inception Report, as a combination of those involved in the production of the assessments, and the so-called 'end users'.

114. With respect to the former, survey responses universally confirmed that ownership within the GEO-6 assessment group is strong. In addition, there is a perception that stakeholders as defined by "Member States" are also fully committed to the GEO-6 process. The original mandate for the sixth Global Environment Outlook was provided by Member States at the first UN Environment Assembly and this was followed by an intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meeting (in Berlin in October, 2014) where the broad parameters of the project were established.

115. The High Level Group is made up of government representatives and broader non-government stakeholders. This is the main forum for broad stakeholder input into GEO-6. However, a small number of respondents indicated that this arrangement does not allow for strong representation of the interests of indigenous people or community representatives.

116. Not much can be said about ownership on the part of end users, except to say that the document review process involves eliciting views from 159 reviewers from around the world. These commentators have provided over 4,000 comments on the second order draft of GEO-6, the majority of which need to be responded to by chapter authors. It could be said that these reviewers are proxies for end users, as many will presumably end up using the document. Clearly, their level of ownership is strong.

5.9.2 Does Sufficient Capacity Exist to Use and Apply the Assessment Knowledge?

117. Most developed countries have the capacity to use and apply the assessment knowledge emanating from GEO-6, but significant capacity building would be needed in many developing countries to ensure the take-up of the findings. The following quote illustrates this point:

"(Many developing countries) struggle with basic things, e.g. information management, having credible statistics on the state of their environment, let alone their applying the GEO. This would require a lot of study of the reports, what is meaningful locally, etc. This is a niche for UN – to develop capacity building projects that take GEO to the country level to break down the findings and help countries to use them.

118. At present there does not appear to be budget allocated for this capacity building effort. Existing budget is focused on delivering the assessment product.

5.9.3 Target Audiences?

119. In any project intervention, being clear about the nature of the “audience” is of paramount importance. If the characteristics of the audience are unclear, it will not be possible to easily assess outcomes and impact. In one sense, the audience for GEO-6 is clear. This is a global assessment, so every living person is a target. A more nuanced view has it that a more refined definition is required, because the GEO cannot and should not try to serve every purpose and every need.

120. The only serious attempt in the GEO-6 Project Document to define the audience appears in Section III, under the heading of Public Awareness and Communication Strategy, where the target audiences of the proposed publications are listed as “governments, regional fora, and stakeholders in the region”.

121. The posited end users of the Global Gender Environment Outlook were more clearly identified in the GEO-6 Project Document, where they are listed on page 28 as:

- UNEP’s United Nations Environment Assembly;
- Government representatives of other sectors that influence the work of the environment ministries;
- United Nations programmes, agencies and funds (particularly those who work on issues related sustainable development and internationally agreed goals);
- High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development;
- Network of Women Ministers and Leaders for Environment (NWMLE);
- Multilateral Environmental Agreements (their subsidiary bodies and COPs);
- Regional Policy Fora; and,
- UNEP’s Major Groups and Stakeholders and UNEP Collaborating Centres

122. One respondent suggested that GEO-6 “set the expectation that it would be useful”. It was argued that the process should have been clearer about target audience at the beginning.

5.9.4 Process for Identifying Capacity Gaps in the GEO Team?

123. Identification of capacity gaps for the remaining period of GEO-6, until UNEA 4 in March 2019 where outlined in section 5.5.3.

Evaluation Rating for Sustainability: Satisfactory

5.10 Factors Affecting Performance

124. Guidance provided with the Evaluation Ratings Table indicates that the following criteria should be considered under the broad heading of “factors affecting performance”: preparation and readiness; quality of project management supervision and management; stakeholder participation and cooperation; responsiveness to human rights and gender equity; country ownership and driven-ness; and, communication and public awareness. As directed by guidance for the Ratings Table, these factors have been discussed as cross-cutting themes under previous evaluation criteria.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

125. This final section of the Mid-Term Evaluation is divided into three parts. The first section summarizes the main conclusions from the evaluation, focused on the nine key strategic questions posed by the Terms of Reference, and applying the Evaluation Ratings Table. The second section puts forward suggestions for how the GEO-6 process could be optimized in the short amount of time that remains. The final section proposes options for the design of what might come next in a potential new GEO process, either as GEO-7 or “GEO 2.0”. These suggestions should be seen as preliminary pending on the finalization of GEO-6 and an assessment of its impact.

6.2 Summary of Main Conclusions

126. Application of the Evaluation Ratings Table, as shown in Table 8 indicates that the overall Project Rating is “SATISFACTORY”.

Table 8: Overall Evaluation Ratings Table

Criterion	Reference	Rating
A. Strategic Relevance		
<i>1. Alignment to MTS and POW</i>	See section 5.2	HS
<i>2. Alignment to UN Environment /GEF/Donor strategic priorities</i>	See section 5.2	HS
<i>3. Relevance to regional, sub-regional and national environmental priorities</i>	See section 5.2	S
<i>4. Complementarity with existing interventions</i>	See section 5.2	MU
B. Quality of Project Design	See section 5.3	S
C. Nature of External Context	See section 5.4	HF
D. Effectiveness	See section 5.5	
<i>1. Scientific credibility</i>	See section 5.5	HL
<i>2. Policy options</i>	See section 5.5	S
<i>3. Likelihood of impact</i>	See section 5.5	ML
E. Financial Management Outlook	See section 5.6	U
F. Efficiency	See section 5.7	S
G. Monitoring and Reporting	See section 5.8	
<i>1. Monitoring design and budgeting</i>	See section 5.8	HS
<i>2. Monitoring of project implementation</i>	See section 5.8	MS
<i>3. Project reporting</i>	See section 5.8	MS
H. Sustainability	See section 5.9	L
I. Factors Affecting Performance	See section 5.10	
<i>1. Preparation and readiness</i>	See section 5.10	S
<i>2. Quality of project management and supervision</i>	See section 5.10	HS
<i>3. Stakeholders participation and cooperation</i>	See section 5.10	S
<i>4. Responsiveness to human rights and gender equity</i>	See section 5.10	S
<i>5. Country ownership and driven-ness</i>	See section 5.10	S
<i>6. Communication and public awareness</i>	See section 5.10	MU
Overall Project Rating		SATISFACTORY

Table Notes:

- (i) Most criteria are rated on a six-point scale as follows: Highly Satisfactory (HS); Satisfactory (S); Moderately Satisfactory (MS); Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU); Unsatisfactory (U); Highly Unsatisfactory (HU). Sustainability and Likelihood of Impact are rated from Highly Likely (HL) down to Highly Unlikely (HU) and Nature of External Context is rated from Highly Favourable (HF) to Highly Unfavourable (HU). The overall project rating is calculated using a weighted scoring approach. Details of the scoring system are provided in Annex A.
- (ii) While ratings are required for each of the “factors affecting performance”, they are discussed within the main evaluation report as cross-cutting issues as they relate to other criteria.

127. This mid-term evaluation has pointed to both strengths and weaknesses in the process of design and development of GEO-6. Responses to a detailed survey instrument, along with semi-structured interviews and document review have indicated that the process has illuminated significant strengths. It is clear that the depth and breadth of author expertise, combined with increased author and stakeholder participation, has resulted in a learning exercise that should result in a high quality product. GEO-6’s new focus on policy effectiveness and early involvement of policy-makers should result in better facilitation of policy/science interaction. There is also evidence of strong support for the UN Environment GEO-6 team’s management, under difficult resourcing circumstances.

128. While it will not be possible to evaluate the final impact of the project as presented in the Theory of Change until the report has been completed and disseminated, it seems clear that the process and early products are credible, legitimate and salient as far as the process participants are concerned.

129. Not surprisingly, given the extent of the task and the multiplicity of participants, there are numerous criticisms of both the process and the content of the product as it currently stands. These issues were dealt with in detail in Section 5. In summary, and using the Terms of Reference key strategic questions as an organizing structure, the main concerns were as follows.

130. The incorporation of regional assessments into the GEO process is a new approach adopted by GEO-6, since in the past, the regional assessments used to be prepared by UN Environment for some regions but on irregular cycles. While the assessments appear to have been produced in a timely manner, survey respondents indicated that their usefulness is uncertain, and their contribution to the global assessment has been minimal. There was general agreement that the regional assessments are very different, and that there is no consistency across the six. Concern was expressed that the scientific content of the regional assessment reports was not as well reviewed as has been the case for the global exercise.

131. It appears to be undeniable that significant capacity building is required in many developing countries to ensure the take-up of the findings that will be a fundamental part of the final GEO-6 products. Many countries struggle with basic issues such as information management and having credible statistics on the state of their environment. The current GEO-6 process does not have budget allocated for this capacity building effort.

132. The survey and interviews uncovered significant concern about the lack of a communication plan, and uncertainty about whether the key messages from GEO-6 would be properly disseminated. While the GEO-6 team has been clear that a communication plan is being produced, a number of participants were critical about the timing of this activity, with comparisons being made to other global assessments, the perception being that these appeared to have more effective dissemination plans.

133. Most of the critiques of GEO-6 project design and management are relevant for the structuring of a potential GEO-7, and these inform the recommendations presented in Section 6.4. GEO-6 has kept many of the good practices from previous GEOs, and has implemented improvements of its own, including increased author and stakeholder participation; different approaches and methodologies; and, a much stronger emphasis on policy and outlooks. On the

other hand, it is clear that implementation and management has been consistently challenged by insufficient human resources and insecurity over financial resources. As indicated in Section 5.5.3, funding levels for projects such as GEO have fallen by up to 50% since 2016, and the current staffing levels are clearly militating against the efficient and effective conclusion of the project.

6.3 Recommendations for Optimising GEO-6

134. The remaining work programme for GEO-6, as shown in Figure 1, indicates that a full final draft is due by mid-September (2018). It only makes sense, therefore, for recommendations to be tailored to this time frame. Anything more ambitious should be left as considerations for a potential GEO-7. The following recommendations are organized according to the evaluation categories introduced in Section 5.

6.3.1 Strategic Relevance

Recommendation 1

In the time remaining, the GEO-6 Secretariat should maintain regular contact with other global assessment processes such as the IPBES, IPCC, Global Sustainable Development Report and the International Resource Panel, to ensure that information is openly shared, and that duplication is avoided.

6.3.2 Effectiveness

Scientific credibility:

Recommendation 2

Journal database access should be provided to Lead Authors who do not have free access to University journal databases.

Recommendation 3

A high-level editor should be contracted during October/November to ensure consistency and accuracy of the final draft.

Planning and management by UN Environment:

Recommendation 4

The final stages of the GEO process will require a major spike in the Secretariat's support to the process. The work of the community of volunteer experts and authors will be largely completed by October 2018. The main tasks of supporting the GEO High Level Group and Member states in the crafting and negotiation of the Summary for Policy Makers will fall mainly to the GEO-6 Secretariat. It is recommended that UN Environment contract the following additional staff:

- two UN Volunteers;
- one Junior Professional Officer; and,
- five expert consultants.

In addition, the co-chairs and vice-chairs should have a local technical support unit to provide administrative and substantive support.

Recommendation 5

For the remaining meetings, it is recommended that the GEO-6 Secretariat find a more efficient travel arrangement service.

6.3.3 Financing

Recommendation 6

UN Environment should move rapidly to ensure that \$2,688,000 is secured to cover the current projected budget shortfall.

6.3.4 Sustainability

Ownership and capacity:

Recommendation 7:

Summary documents should be produced for different user groups

Recommendation 8:

The proposed communication and dissemination plan needs to be produced as soon as possible.

Recommendation 9:

The communication and dissemination plan should include a strategy for capacity building in targeted developing countries, to ensure country take-up of GEO-6 findings.

6.4 Recommendations for a Potential GEO-7

135. Responses to the questionnaire survey, along with follow-up interviews, provided a wealth of suggestions for what follows after GEO-6. Some commentators went as far as to suggest that the structure of the process should be changed so fundamentally, that referring to it as GEO-7 would give the wrong impression. However, for the purpose of brevity, this section uses “GEO-7” as short-hand for whatever reporting process follows after GEO-6 has been completed. These recommendations should be seen as preliminary, pending the finalization of GEO-6 and an assessment of its impact.

136. The key question posed in the ToR, that this section addresses is: “what are the key lessons learned from the GEO-6 process that could be incorporated to improve the design of the next GEO phase?”

6.4.1 Design of the Global Environmental Assessment System

137. There is concern about what some consider to be the “proliferation” of global assessments, with the end result being possible duplication. At the same time, sectoral assessments are necessary, notably to underpin integrated global assessments. Inputs from past and present Chairs and Executive Secretaries of the main global assessments on how to improve synergies between assessments would be a positive step

Recommendation 1:

The UN Environment’s Science Policy Forum should convene a high-level meeting of global assessment secretariats to discuss reforms of the global assessment system.

6.4.2 Project Design

138. Even if the overall global assessment system does not fundamentally change, and a new GEO process is launched, there is still a need to examine the structure of the GEO process. There is general agreement that the GEO-6 process has been unnecessarily cumbersome, and under-resourced. One option for radical reform is to continue with the regional assessment process as introduced in GEO-6, but to significantly enhance scientific review. The global GEO should then consist of a genuine synthesis of these enhanced outputs, but produced only by a small expert team led by UN Environment. If this model is adhered to, there would not be a need to recreate an entire administrative and technical structure for the global process. At the very least, options for complete redesign of the overall structure for a potential GEO-7 should be considered

Recommendation 2:

If embarking on a new GEO process, UN Environment should undertake a thorough “scoping” of ideas as to how the overall process should be structured. This scoping exercise should be

fully open to stakeholders, and should take place over the course of 12 months. A model for this approach is the recent World Bank review of its Environmental and Social Safeguard policies.

6.4.3 Scientific Credibility

139. While the overall scientific credibility of GEO-6 has not been challenged during the course of this mid-term evaluation, suggestions have been made as to how the scientific content of potential future endeavours could be further strengthened. It seems clear, for example, that the scientific credibility of the GEOs would be enhanced if strong relationships with data collectors are restored. This would mean reintroducing the collaborating institutions model used in previous GEO processes.

Recommendation 3:

Whatever structure is chosen for potential future GEOs, consideration should be given to significantly strengthening relationships with important international data providers.

6.4.4 Communication

140. How the outputs of GEOs are communicated is clearly a fundamental aspect of project impact. There is a concern that the production of large, text-based reports may no longer be an effective model for information dissemination. If one of the main purposes of the GEO remains reporting on the state of the global environment, then an alternative would be to produce a much shorter product, based around key indicators.

Recommendation 4:

As part of the scoping proposal put forward in Section 6.4.2, different options for communicating GEO outputs should be examined.

6.4.5 Capacity Building

141. If there is an intention to increase the use of the global GEO in developing countries, then a more serious effort needs to be placed on building country-level capacity to use the products. This will also involve the production of summary documents for different end user groups.

Recommendation 5:

The scoping process put forward in Section 6.4.2 should examine the options for country-level and end user group capacity building into the design of future GEO processes.

6.4.6 Financing/resourcing

142. Clearly, one of the most significant issues facing potential future GEO processes is the provision of secure resourcing. There should not be a need for the administrators of GEO exercises to spend time attempting to find funding during the course of GEO preparation. Adequate staffing and funding should be secured before the project starts.

Recommendation 6:

UN Environment should ensure, through internal resource allocation, that a potential future GEO process is adequately funded and staffed.

ANNEX A: EVALUATION RATINGS TABLE WITH WEIGHTED SCORES

Evaluation criteria	Rating	Score	Weight	Weighted Score
Strategic Relevance		5	6	0.3
<i>Alignment to MTS and POW</i>	Highly Satisfactory	6	1	
<i>Alignment to UNEP/GEF/Donor strategic priorities</i>	Highly Satisfactory	6	1	
<i>Relevance to regional, sub-regional and national issues and needs</i>	Satisfactory	5	2	
<i>Complementarity with existing interventions</i>	Moderately Unsatisfactory	3	2	
Quality of Project Design	Satisfactory	5	4	0.2
Nature of External Context	Highly Favourable	1		
Effectiveness		5	45	2.2
<i>Achievement of outputs</i>	Satisfactory	5	5	
<i>Achievement of direct outcomes</i>	Satisfactory	5	30	
<i>Likelihood of impact</i>	Moderately Likely	4	10	
Financial Management	Unsatisfactory	2	5	0.1
Efficiency	Satisfactory	5	10	0.5
Monitoring and Reporting		4	5	0.2
<i>Project reporting</i>	Moderately Satisfactory	4		
<i>Monitoring design and budgeting</i>	Highly Satisfactory	6		
<i>Monitoring implementation</i>	Moderately Unsatisfactory	3		
Sustainability		5	20	1.0
<i>Socio-political sustainability</i>	Likely	5		
<i>Financial sustainability</i>	Likely	5		
<i>Institutional sustainability</i>	Likely	5		
Factors Affecting Performance		5	5	0.2
<i>Preparation and readiness</i>	Satisfactory	5		
<i>Quality of project management and supervision</i>	Highly Satisfactory	6		
<i>Stakeholder participation and cooperation</i>	Satisfactory	5		

<i>Responsiveness to human rights and gender equity</i>	Satisfactory	5		
<i>Country ownership and driven-ness</i>	Satisfactory	5		
<i>Communication and public awareness</i>	Moderately Unsatisfactory	3		
<i>Catalytic role, replication and scaling up</i>	Satisfactory	5		
			100	4.69