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June 23, 2020

**‘Future of GEO’ Steering Committee Meeting Summary,
August 17, 2020**

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

The Steering Committee on the Future of GEO met at its twelfth virtual call to discuss progress and plan next steps for the advancement of the process. Agenda items included:

1. Review and discussion of the virtual consultation process
2. Overview, discussion and approval of the documentation for the consultation process.
3. Any Other Business

On these agenda items the Steering Committee decided:

- The questionnaire will be the main tool for the consultation process. The current co-chairs summary will be renamed to a co-chair’s discussion paper and together with the background paper developed by the consultancy team will form the background resources for the consultation.
- The questionnaire will be redesigned to allow for checkboxes where multiple choices are appropriate. The “Other” option will be designed to highlight its importance in the responses and allow for new ideas from the respondents through text.
- The co-chairs discussion paper and the background document will be edited after this meeting and approved on a no-objection basis towards the end of the week in anticipation for the start of the consultations on Monday 24th August 2020.

<u>Rapporteur</u>	<u>Signature</u>
Mr. Rafael Monge Vargas	

Summary of the meeting

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

Review and discussion of the virtual consultation process

The meeting started with a brief on the consultation plan by the Secretariat and the planned webinar approach by the consultancy team.

The Secretariat had shared a consultation plan with the Steering Committee in the past week. The initial options document has been split into a background paper which reviews and analyses assessment landscape and provides important background for the consultation process and a Co-chairs summary. The planned consultations will be guided by the three main principles highlighted in the consultation plan; the best possible scientific and technical advice should be submitted through a wide distribution and inclusive process in an objective, open and transparent manner. The consultation process will entail the three categories identified in the resolution, namely, Members States, Stakeholders and assessments experts. The process will be implemented through a password protected website containing all the relevant background documents and information and a questionnaire to receive inputs from the three categories intended. The Secretariat is looking into having some checkboxes and radio buttons in the questionnaire to enable semi quantitative information from the questionnaire's responses while allowing textboxes for participants own choices into the questionnaire. Microsoft forms platform will be used for this questionnaire work. Additionally, during the four weeks consultation period, targeted as tentatively 18th August to 18th September, the consultancy team will conduct six webinars to help participants understand what is being asked in the questionnaire. The webinars will be designed to cover three groups of time zones to allow for participants from all time zones. They will mainly focus on explaining the context of what the consultation is about, and the types of questions being asked then directing them to go online to be able to complete the questionnaire. This will ensure informed participation on the consultation process with online responses being processed for Steering Committee use after the process.

The Secretariat informed the Committee that in the draft that they had received that week, there were a set of old questions based on a previous proposal for the online consultation. Those questions have now been replaced with the basic questions that are in the Co-chairs summary. Currently six questions have been designed on GEO's objectives, function, scoping, utility, main users, governance and implementation structure process, methods and criteria. Secretariat's hope is that the background document will also be reviewed by assessment experts to hopefully improve it. Members States will be invited through their Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) delegation in Nairobi. An invite will be sent through the UNEP governance office to all accredited Stakeholders and a direct communication will be made by the Secretariat to the assessments experts at the start of the consultation period.

The Secretariat then made a presentation on the six key questions intended for the questionnaire. The objective was to present to the Committee the functionality and the content of the questionnaire. The Consultancy team on their part briefed the Steering Committee on the planned webinars. Webinars will be attended by the Cochairs, the Secretariat and the consultancy team representatives. Steering Committee's chairs and the consultancy team will take turns in providing clarity for all the six aspects covered by the questionnaire to give the participants appropriate background to make informed responses on the questionnaire.

The Steering Committee enquired on the number of questions since the last consultation draft shared had different questions than the current draft. In response the Secretariat noted that when the consultation plan was originally distributed, a week ago, all inputs had not been received on the Co-chairs summary. The draft was therefore circulated with the old set of questions in the consultation plan. This has since been updated and the consultation plan will focus on the six questions that are in the online questionnaire. The Steering Committee further enquired on the design of the questionnaire to allow fresh inputs into the process. It was reiterated that the questionnaire should be designed for all participants to suggest additional information and not just select what is provided. In cases where options can be multiple choiceless, checkboxes can be enabled. In response, the Secretariat demonstrated the 'Other' option is the questions already designed. This will enable participants to select this option and have a text box for their elaboration. Through this option participants can type in other comments and inputs. This option will be available for each question to enable such inputs. The Secretariat further agreed that there was need to redesign the questionnaire to allow for multiple selection in appropriate questions to avoid limiting participants' responses to only the available answers. Checkboxes will be used for such questions.

The Steering Committee then enquired on the limitations to attend the webinars, since Member States would be invited through the CPR, the Steering Committee wanted to know if there were restriction should one want to participate although not invited through that channel. In response, the Secretariat noted that in all of its previous consultations it has encouraged as broader participation as possible. The intent of sending the invitation to the Permanent Representative in Nairobi is so that they would distribute it to all the appropriate people that need to be involved in the consultation. In the invitation, dates and times of the webinars will be indicated so that anybody who wishes to attend the webinars can attend. Reminders will be sent out to the representatives to ensure adequate participation. Additionally, the Secretariat will request that the permanent representatives identify, or send back the names and email contacts of the people who will be participating. For the assessment experts, the Secretariat has emails that go directly to them and with the stakeholders, the distribution will be handled by the UNEP's major groups and stakeholder's office.

The Steering Committee then reiterated the importance of structuring the consultation process in clear manner to ensure clarity on the documents provided, role of the background document and their presentation that leads to the questions in the questionnaire. It was reiterated that the structure of the consultation will be key for the consultation's success. The Secretariat in response outlined a detailed process of the planned consultations. The website will have the three main elements; the background document which can be downloaded and read and consulted, the co-chairs summary which can also be downloaded read and consulted, and then a link to the online questionnaire. In the webinars, an explanation of the findings of the main contents of the two documents will also be explained in addition to how to use the questionnaire.

The Steering Committee was then invited to share their views on the best methodology of ensure clear and direct communication to the participants on what main feedback is needed on. It was noted that the focus should be paced on the feedback intended. This should inform the questionnaire's design. The Secretariat will use both avenues in distributing material at the start of the consultations. The Steering Committee will be informed alongside the CPR members in order to reach out to all relevant participants in the consultation process. The Secretariat further reminded the Steering Committee that in its earlier deliberations, there had been some thoughts that the proposed options in the co-chair's summary were not fully representative of all of the options that might be considered. The current draft of the co-chair's summary is very clear that these are illustrative options, and they're not a comprehensive list of the options that might be considered. They were just meant to illustrate

how the building blocks might be put together into a set of options. Therefore, the questionnaire does not specifically ask on options. It seeks to probe further the illustrative building blocks to enable the Steering Committee to make its decision in the future analysis.

The Steering Committee further noted that since the questionnaire is the primary tool for the consultation, it should be clearly communicated and put forward as such. It was proposed that the co-chairs summary having not yet been agreed on by all the Steering Committee members, should be renamed to a co-chairs discussion paper to avoid confusion that may emerge from the name during the consultation period. The discussion paper should be submitted for consultation as a summary of the key aspects being consulted on and should be a key resource material together with the background paper developed by the consultancy team. This will shift the focus from the co-chairs discussion paper and allow for more inputs to the questionnaire during the consultation period.

On this item, it was decided that the questionnaire will be the primary means for consultations with the co-chair's discussion paper and the background document supporting the process as resources. The questionnaire will be redesigned to accommodate for multiple choices selection through checkboxes were appropriate. The design should also consider enhancing the importance of the "other comment" option to ensure that participants use the option to input fresh ideas and views into this process. The Steering Committee should value this category of responses during the analysis phase. The co-chairs summary will be renamed to a co-chair's discussion paper for the consultation period.

Overview, discussion and approval of the documentation for the consultation process

The agenda started with a presentation from the Secretariat on the changes that had been made on the co-chair's summary and the background document after the Committee's review period. The co-chairs summary has been through a speed review on burning issues before the recent Steering Committee review. In that review phase, the co-chairs had addressed most of the comments but had struggled in addressing a comment on inserting the options before the discussion on the process and the governance structure. Co-chairs felt that the governance structure and process are really important elements to ensure legitimacy, credibility and resiliency, or relevance of the process. They are so important building blocks for the options and it has to do with points made in the background document that assessment process can be both product but also service oriented. GEO has been known to be service oriented and like other current global assessments, really focus on the dialogue between policymakers and the scientists. Co-chairs further pointed out that the key thing now after an agreement on the first agenda of the day that the questionnaire will be the primary means of consultations and rename the co-chairs summary to a discussion paper, is to ensure that the Steering Committee is happy with the questions in the draft which is shared as an annex in the co-chair's summary.

The Secretariat then presented the changes made on the co-chair's summary in view of the comments received from the Steering Committee. The secretariat had provided two versions of the Co-chairs summary; a marked-up version which contains all comments from Committee members, and a cleaned-up version of the document to give a sense of the types of changes made. One overarching comment repeated extensively was that GEO's role should be expanded in the science policy interface. This is definitely a very important goal of GEO. It's a critically important piece of UNEP science policy interface, but UNEP has a much broader science policy interface than just GEO including the World Environment Situation Room, the SDG methodologies and capacity

building work. Additionally, UNEP supports national governments through the common country analysis. It has several reports that are specifically timed to influence the different policy processes, such as the missions gap report which is important for the UNFCCC process. UNEP's Frontiers report is important for the UNEA resolutions process. The Secretariat therefore highlighted that there are a number of pieces that are outside the scope of what GEO does. GEO specific role within the science policy interface is its independent expert led periodic assessment of the entire environmental sphere. The policy response to the effectiveness of the policy response and the outlook for the foreseeable and long-term future. That is really why the assessment part of the GEO process is so important because it complements all the other pieces of the UNEP science policy interface.

There are elements of the current GEO already touching on the science policy interface. GEO is already doing more work on increasing synergies across assessment, on education through developing education products around GEO findings. Capacity building and data provision component could be improved. Directing science policy research priorities could be improved and certainly there hasn't been a lot of scenario model development work done for quite some time. There are therefore areas where the science policy interface could be expanded, and, in the questionnaire, there is a specific question on the science policy interface where other science policy roles can be probed.

The Steering Committee thanked the co-chairs and the Secretariat for already incorporating their comments in the draft. It was noted that in the process GEO could structure to feed into the SDG implementation. In view of the current COVID-19 crisis, there is need to design GEO along health and environment assessment for relevance. On governance of GEO, it is important to establish technical support units as already established in the other assessment processes. An enquiry was made on the possibility of availing a key messages paper from the co-chair's summary in view that some countries may find it difficult to read the full co-chairs discussion paper. A further enquiry was made on the need or not) to have the annex with the analysis of the different options at the current place in co-chairs discussion paper. It was noted that the annex seems a very detailed analysis of what is already presented in the summary as illustrative options. It may be mistaken for a predetermined outcome to the participants in the consultations. The current illustrative options should also be presented in a balanced and neutral way. The Steering Committee reiterated that the path of using a co-chairs discussion paper is useful for the future of this process. The paper will help the Committee move closer to the end product. It was further highlighted that some comments had been submitted late and would be valuable to address them before uploading the paper on the consultation website. On the background paper it was noted that there are some repetitions which will have to be addressed before the document is submitted for the consultation process. Some Committee members also had some comments on the accuracy of the information presented in the background paper and will be submitting them in writing.

An enquiry was also made on the utility question in the questionnaire where its responses only refers to types of assessments. It doesn't refer to any other products like models and scenarios or indicators or possible tools or data services, etc. It was proposed that this might therefore require a separate question because it entails two issues; the main users and then products.

In response the Secretariat noted that it had tried to incorporate all precise comments about text changes. The Secretariat will check to ensure all comments submitted on the co-chair's discussion paper are addressed before the start of the consultation period. In case of any clarification needed, the Secretariat will get in touch with the respective Steering Committee member for clarity.

Textboxes will be used in case of more information e.g. in the case of other GEO utility. In addition, each question will have an explanatory paragraph about the issue. This can be pulled from the co-chairs discussion paper and the background paper to be able to craft an introductory paragraph so that if people don't actually take the time to consult the two documents, they will at least get the most basic information that they need to be able to respond to the questions. This will answer the question raised on the need for a key findings summary.

On this agenda item, it was decided that Annex 1 on the analytical information about the illustrative options be removed from the co-chairs discussion paper for now to allow for open consideration by the participants in the consultation period. Any comments based on the discussions in the meeting on the questionnaire should be submitted to the Secretariat. Co-chairs and the Consultancy team will revise the drafts of the two documents and share with the Steering Committee in the course of the week for the Committee's approval on a no-objection basis and allow the consultation process to start on Monday 24th August. In revising the co-chairs discussion paper, Annex one will be removed as agreed by the Steering Committee

Any other business

Being no other business to discuss the meeting was adjourned at 17:34 (EAT)

Action items

- The Secretariat will prepare a written summary of the meeting and share the link to the recording of the call.
- The Secretariat will revise the questionnaire as per the discussions of the day taking into account the need for checkboxes in questions containing multiple answers and importance to text boxes to receive 'other' suggestions not provided in the questionnaire. The Secretariat to go through the background paper and make sure that we have all of the choices available in the questionnaire.
- Co-chairs will rename and revise the current co-chairs summary to a co-chairs discussion paper and remove Annex 1. These revisions should also take into account all comments from the Steering Committee and balance the presentation of the illustrative options.
- The Consultancy team should revise the background document addressing all comments from the Steering Committee and removing all duplicates identified by Committee members.
- The Secretariat to include the Steering Committee in the communication at the start of the consultation for them to reach out to all relevant people for this consultation.

List of Participants

First name	Last name	Affiliation	Nominated by
Sebastian	Jan Konig	Swiss Federal Office for the Environment,	Switzerland
Marek	Haliniak	Ministry of the Environment, Poland	Poland
Cathy (alternate)	Maguire	European Environment Agency (EEA)	European Union
Teshia	Jn Baptiste	Ministry of Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development	Saint Lucia
Shanna (alternate)	Emmanuel	Ministry of Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development	Saint Lucia
Kazuhiko	Takeuchi	Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)	Japan
Charles	Lange	National Environment Management Authority (NEMA)	Kenya
Marcos	Serrano	Ministry of Environment Chile	Chile
Mona	Westergaard	Ministry of Environment and Food	Denmark
Andrew	Stott	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs-UK	United Kingdom and Northern Ireland
Keisuke (alternate)	Takahashi	Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)	Japan
Suzan	Alajjawi	Supreme Council for Environment, Bahrain	Bahrain
Toral	Patel-Weynand	US Forest Service	USA
Salla	Rantala	Finnish Environment Institute	Finland
Nino	Gokhelashvili	Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia	Georgia
Claudia	Kabel	German Environment Agency	Germany
Marcel	Kok	Environment Assessment Agency (PBL)	The Netherlands
Ivar Andreas	Baste	Norwegian Environment Agency	Norway
Ryan	Assiu	Environmental Management Authority	Trinidad and Tobago
Rafael	Monge Vargas	Ministry of Environment and Energy	Costa Rica
Huang	Yi	Peking University	China

Ivana	Stojanovic	Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism	Montenegro
Anna	Mampye	Ministry of Environment	South Africa
Nora	Mazavanadze	Consultancy Team	
Laszlo	Pinter	Consultancy Team	
Gillian	Martin-Mehers	Consultancy Team	
Jill	Jaeger	Consultancy Team	
Klaus	Jacob	Consultancy Team	

Apologies

First name	Last name	Affiliation	Nominated by
Ouedraogo	Desire	Ministry of Environment, green economy and climate change	Burkina Faso
Nadia	Chenouf	Ministry of the Environment and Renewable Energy	Algeria
Christine Okae	Asare	Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	Ghana
James	Mathew	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate change, Government of India	India
Aliya	Shalabekova	Ministry of Energy	Kazakhstan
Jock	Martin	European Environment Agency (EEA)	European Union
Paul (alternate)	Lucas	Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL)	The Netherlands
Celso	Moretti	Agricultural Research Corporation	Brazil
Carlos (Alternate)	Cordero Vega	Ministry of Environment and Energy	Costa Rica
Isaac	Dladla	Eswatini Environment Authority	Swaziland
Najib	Saab	Arab Forum for Environment & Development (AFED)	Lebanon
Chatchai	Intatha	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Thailand	Thailand
Keri (alternate)	Holland	US Department of State	USA
Apsara	Mendis	Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment	Sri Lanka
Mery	Harutyunyan	Ministry of Environment	Armenia
Garry	Kass	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs-UK	United Kingdom and Northern Ireland

Narges	Saffar	International Affairs & Conventions Center, Department of Environment	Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Jerome	Sebadduka Lugumira	National Environment Management Authority (NEMA)	Uganda
Ambinintsoa Lucie	Noasilalaonomenjanahary	Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development	Madagascar
Mira	Zovko	Ministry of Environment and Energy	Croatia