

Our Ref: UNEA/GEOSC/pb/16

January 25, 2021

**‘Future of GEO’ Steering Committee Meeting Summary,
January 14, 2021**

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

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

1. Discussion on the status of the Future of GEO Steering Committee after the virtual session of UNEA-5 in February 2021 and before the resumed session of UNEA 5 in February 2022.
2. Discussion on the possible workplan for the Steering Committee in 2021
3. Any Other Business

On these agenda items the Steering Committee decided:

- An interim report on the Future of GEO will be submitted to the opening session of UNEA-5. The plan is to have UNEA take note of the report and defer its deliberations on it to the resumed UNEA in 2022. An operative paragraph will be provided for the UNEA decision to note the interim report and look forward to receiving the full report of the options paper on the Future of GEO in the resumed UNEA in 2022. The language in an operative paragraph of the decision which UNEA will adopt will be crafted to take note of the interim report and then allow the GEO Steering Committee to continue its work in accordance with its mandate during the period in February 2021 and February 2022 with a view to the Steering Committee submitting the final report for UNEA’s consideration at the resumed session in February 2022.
- The Steering Committee should stick to its mandate and seek to advance its work in the UNEA intersession period to improve its interim report.
- The Steering Committee’s workplan for the 2021 period should be lean and streamlined and should not propose additional work but focus on in-depth analysis and presentation of the already identified aspects of the interim report. In so doing, a focus should be drawn back to the criteria already developed by the Steering Committee to stay within the intended focus. An updated draft workplan should be prepared taking into account the Committee’s inputs and shared for commenting.
- The next call of the Steering Committee scheduled for early March 2021 will contain a presentation on other work related to the UNEA resolution 23.

Rapporteur	Signature
Mr. Rafael Monge Vargas	

Summary of the meeting

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

The meeting started with a welcome message and best wishes for the New Year 2021 from the Secretariat.

Discussion on the status of the Future of GEO Steering Committee after the virtual session of UNEA-5 in February 2021 and before the resumed session of UNEA 5 in February 2022.

Discussions on this agenda item started with a presentation from the UNEP legal office on the planned play of events for UNEA-5 and the expected implication to the work of the Steering Committee of the future of GEO. An open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives will happen between 15th to 19th February 2021. The meeting will be opened by the chair of the CPR and then proceed to the adoption of the minutes of the last CPR meeting before addressing the organization of work. After this step the CPR will probably then take note of the various documents including reports on the implementation of previously adopted resolutions. Taking note of these various reports will allow the reports to be sent to the virtual session of UNEA five which is scheduled to happen the next week after this CPR meeting. The CPR meeting will then proceed to deal with administrative and budgetary matters including a proposed new UNEP medium term strategy for the period 2022 to 2025 and the UNEP program of work and budget for the period 2022 to 2023.

For the opening session of UNEA-5 (which will happen virtually), a draft decision on its adjournment is being prepared. This decision will allow UNEA-5 to continue and resume in 2022. The draft elements of this decision are already available and basically provides that UNEA-5 will adjourn the fifth session of UNEA and resume its deliberations at its headquarters in Nairobi from 20 February to March 2022. There will be a further meeting of the CPR between the 21st to the 25th of February 2022, i.e. the week before the resumed session of UNEA 5. At the February 2021 session therefore, UNEA will take note of the various reports that have been submitted to its fifth session and decide to defer action on these reports to the resumed UNEA in February 2022.

As for the work of the Steering Committee on the Future of GEO, an interim report has been submitted to the opening session of UNEA-5. The plan is to have UNEA take note of the report and differ its deliberations on it to the resumed UNEA in 2022. An operative paragraph will be provided for the UNEA decision to note the interim report and look forward to receiving the full report of the options paper on the Future of GEO in the resumed UNEA in 2022. The language in an operative paragraph of the decision which UNEA will adopt will be crafted to take note of the interim report and then allow the GEO Steering Committee to continue its work in accordance with its mandate during the period in February 2021 and February 2022 with a view to the Steering Committee submitting the final report for UNEA's consideration at the resumed session in February 2022.

On this issue the Steering Committee expressed its gratitude for the briefing, it further enquired on the action needed from it. The action needed from the Steering Committee for this process is its interim report which has already been submitted for translation and submission for the opening session of UNEA-5.

Regarding planning, the Committee highlighted that there were several asks of the Steering Committee noted that there was some discomfort around taking on activities that governments may not have been or are not aware of and that there are other focal points responsible. The Committee therefore enquired if there would be some provisional language or discussion on the wordings intended for UNEA adoption. On this, the legal officer responded that the idea is that the Steering Committee will act in accordance with its mandate. There would be no additional functions that the GEO Steering Committee would assume in addition to the mandate that already exists. Acting in accordance with its terms of reference and the UNEA decision 23, the Committee will not be able to take on any additional actions unless authorized by the opening session of UNEA-5 which is very unlikely to happen because of the current modalities of that session.

The committee further enquired if the Secretariat was aware of any interventions that may make it difficult to obtain an agreement on the proposed procedure to allow work on resolutions to continue. In response the Secretariat noted that the language on the adjournment of UNEA had been discussed at the CPR meeting on the 10th of December last year, but no concrete agreement was reached yet. The issue is expected to be further discussed at the CPR meeting on the 25th of January 2021.

On the Committee's enquiry about any arrangements to present and discuss the interim report on side events, The Secretariat noted that it has not been informed of any side events during the open-ended CPR, or the high-level segment which will run for two days 22nd and 23rd of February 2021. Therefore, the Secretariat has no plans at the moment for any side event discussion or anything related to the interim report. The plan is therefore to simply provide the interim report on the website. The Secretariat is proceeding with the translations into the other languages and providing it for UNEA-5 consideration.

Discussion on the possible workplan for the Steering Committee in 2021

The Secretariat presented a draft workplan that had been prepared in consultation with the bureau of the Steering Committee. It was highlighted that the objective of the draft workplan is that as the Committee was waiting to learn the decision of UNEA-5 pertaining its work, it would start to deliberate on key issues that would be further advanced in the UNEA intersession period. The co-chairs of the Steering Committee noted that the idea was to have a first reading of the draft and a discussion by the Committee to allow for the advancement of the draft workplan.

The Secretariat noted that the document provided was a very tentative proposed outline of a work plan for the future of GEO Steering Committee through 2021. The proposed workplan depends on if there is a paragraph in the final resolution about the resumption of work after the opening session of UNEA-5 to allow continuation of work of the Steering Committee. This will allow for organisation of work of the Steering Committee going forward. The proposed workplan highlighted four areas based on the conclusions from the interim report and the output of the consultation for areas where the Secretariat felt the Steering Committee could do some valuable work to expand the knowledge on the future of GEO, the research and the content on the future of GEO and also provide a thorough analysis.

The proposed workplan suggests more work in four aspects of the future of GEO process i.e. a proposed feasibility study on the financial and administrative consequences of the options and approaches identified in section four of the interim report. More work is needed on the financial and administrative consequences of each of the options presented in the interim report. This was not done before or during the final workshop of the Steering Committee. Additionally, the interim report identified that more work would be needed on the process and methods for future GEO's. Certainly, it was identified both in the consultation and in the workshop that the some of the processes and methods for future GEO should be consistent with existing assessments such as IPCC, but that there should be some flexibility to be able to adapt the GEO processes and make them adaptable to the current policy and scientific situation. Therefore, understanding what processes and methods would need to be changed would be valuable. The Secretariat though the draft workplan proposed a virtual expert group consultation, and a report from that consultation produced on future process and methods of GEO. The third item in the proposed workplan draft is a second broad virtual consultation on the specific items of finance and governance of future GEO's. Some feedback was received on this during the main consultations but the Steering Committee did not end up having enough time to do deep research on that. Therefore, it would be good to have some external input from Member states, Stakeholders and Assessment experts on the financing governance questions. Finally, the intersession work of the Steering Committee would wrap with a second virtual or in person workshop, depending on the situation of the pandemic, on producing the final report of the Steering Committee in the form of a working document for the resumed session of UNEA-5 in February 2022.

On this issue, the Steering Committee sort clarity on the time structure of the proposed workplan. The Secretariat highlighted that the second broad consultation would again cover Member States Stakeholders and Assessment experts similar to the earlier consultation. The intent would be that the content of the feasibility study, either in a summary form or in an online package, similar to what had been done with the online questionnaire would be the main supporting evidence and supporting research for that consultation. The big question that still remains is whether the current options are detailed enough to allow sort of studies that would actually add value instead of being based on guesswork regarding how these broadly defined options would actually be

operationalized. The Committee emphasised that it would be logical to first spend some time on refining and fleshing out the details of the options before embarking on these studies and consultations. The Committee further enquired if the Secretariat felt that Steering Committee has made full use of the first consultation outcome for example, looking into the qualitative answers to the survey in more detail to find guidance on these questions in the existing material before conducting a second consultation. The Secretariat agreed that more detail on the options is needed before the work starts. What has been suggested is that rather than conducting the feasibility study as an external exercise, similar to the consulting work that has been done in the first phase of the Steering Committee's work, a structured Steering Committee process would be designed to come up with the parameters for the feasibility study. The Secretariat would support by providing the analytical work behind these financial and administrative questions. The Secretariat had done a detailed analysis of the consultations outcome but did not find relevant information on or recommendations on specific financial and administrative consequences. This would be valuable work to have also presented to a broader group and receive their more detailed inputs through this proposed second consultation period. The background document produced by the team of independent experts will be released as an information document for UNEA-5.

The Steering Committee emphasised on the need to remain within its mandate and prioritize finishing its work. Short analyses are envisioned which would then tie into the options discussed thus far. The Committee came up with the building blocks for the options where process and methods was one of the building blocks. The Committee's mandate also allows the Steering Committee to consult, therefore, a virtual expert group could combine all three groups in a consultation on process and methods, if the Steering Committee feels that this building block is important enough to further flesh out. It was further emphasised that the intersession work of the Steering Committee should also consider use of the Criteria that it had already developed in this work. The Committee further highlighted the need to restructure the workshop sessions to take place strategically along the period and earlier in the process if possible. The independent consultants would be useful to get independent views on the analysis at the beginning supported by the Secretariat, however some key analysis on the financing will have to be conducted by the Secretariat and the Steering Committee.

The Secretariat reminded the Committee that section five of the interim report was on finance and administrative consequences of the options and it ended up being a placeholder one paragraph section of the interim report. It would be great if the final report details this section. The Secretariat will therefore produce a revised draft and circulated again for comments by the Steering Committee.

Any other business

- The Secretariat brief the Steering Committee on the other work currently happening on the UNEA resolution 23. The Steering Committee agreed to have a briefing from the Co-chairs and the Secretariat of these other initiatives in their next planning call. This will be mainly an information sharing presentation to allow individual Steering Committee members decide if they would like to be part of those initiatives in their own individual capacities. It was emphasized that the Committee on the Future of GEO cannot formally take on other work other than that which it was mandated on in the UNEA resolution.
- It was agreed that the next planning call will be held in early March 2021. This is to allow for the Steering Committee members attending the CPR and the opening session of UNEA-5 to better prepare and attend the sessions.

Having no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 17h28.

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 draft workplan taking in consideration inputs from this call and circulated the new edition for inputs from the Steering Committee.
- The Secretariat will organize the next planning call of the Steering Committee where the Committee will be presented with other initiatives happening in the resolution 23 realm. A doodle poll will be set up with possible dates and times for this call targeting early March 2021.

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
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
Ivar Andreas	Baste	Norwegian Environment Agency	Norway
Rafael	Monge Vargas	Ministry of Environment and Energy	Costa Rica
Huang	Yi	Peking University	China
Chatchai	Intatha	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Thailand	Thailand
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Najib	Saab	Arab Forum for Environment & Development (AFED)	Lebanon
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Apologies

First name	Last name	Affiliation	Nominated by
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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
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Garry	Kass	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs-UK	United Kingdom and Northern Ireland
Jerome	Sebadduka Lugumira	National Environment Management Authority (NEMA)	Uganda
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Shanna (alternate)	Emmanuel	Ministry of Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development	Saint Lucia
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Ryan	Assiu	Environmental Management Authority	Trinidad and Tobago
Keri (alternate)	Holland	US Department of State	USA
Apsara	Mendis	Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment	Sri Lanka
Anshu	Singh	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate change, Government of India	India
Ivana	Stojanovic	Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism	Montenegro
Anna	Mampye	Ministry of Environment	South Africa
Teshia	Jn Baptiste	Ministry of Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development	Saint Lucia