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July 26, 2021

‘Future of GEO’ Steering Committee Meeting Summary, call #2 of the iterative process, June 30, 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 nineteenth virtual call to discuss progress and plan next steps for the production of the feasibility study. Agenda items included:

1. Review of the enhanced descriptions and costings of the different options
2. Review of the annotated outline of the feasibility study
3. Discussion of the costing methodology approach
4. Any Other Business

On these agenda items the Steering Committee decided:

- Costs estimates for SPMs should be included for options 2 to 4 for comparability.
- The service-oriented GEO option could benefit from other case studies and could be transferable to other options. This option strengthens the science policy interface in all the options and its costs could be considered as a component of other options. This option could also be more suitable for GEO derivative products. Regional GEOs together with GEO derivative products should be properly positioned in the expanded descriptions of options. Ways to describe regional GEOs and derivative products should be found because they are well received in their targeted community and are unique to the GEO process.
- The Synthesized GEO option could benefit from a more intergovernmental process similar to the Comprehensive GEO option other than the Making Peace with Nature case.
- Assessing all options against the full set of criteria will be important to assess utility of the options. All options may not meet all the criteria set, however, assessing them against the criteria will give more accurate information on what is desirable. Consequently, each option should be assessed against all criteria and pros and cons presented in each option.
- Costing elements should be presented in table format for ease of comparison across different options. The Secretariat will continue to detail the costs in the spreadsheet to ensure they are clearly comparable against each other. Meetings proposed for options particularly for the Comprehensive GEO option were absolutely essential in ensuring full participation of developing countries who often experience difficulty in connection through virtual means. Other cost-effective ways of producing GEO could also be considered while ensuring quality, timeliness and efficiency of GEO products and processes.
- The process and deliverables of GEO should be separated. This may allow UNEA to not only decide on the outputs of GEO but also the governance and implementation structure of GEO.
- An assessment of the four GEO options against the criteria will be conducted for the next Steering Committee call together with the two governance proposals presented as alternatives in the draft feasibility study report. A section of the report will be developed to present the results of that analysis. Written comments on the draft expanded GEO descriptions will be allowed up to early the following week.

- Some information in the feasibility study report could be annexed to keep the report short and focused. Governance material presented in the draft feasibility study report could be such material to reduce the length of the document.
- Costing for all GEO options will be undertaken and a function in the 'mix and match' sheet provided for section of element to cost different functions across the options. A summary comparison sheet will also be provided for each of the options to give different costs per option.
- The upcoming consultation period should be reduced from a month-long period to two-weeks consultation period to allow enough time for production and review of the consultation material. Further, the review modality should be switched to a peer-review approach with a supporting questionnaire during that period. The Secretariat will consult the Governance affairs office on the timeline in producing documents for the Annual subcommittee meeting. In case of a tight schedule to submit a document at the Annual subcommittee meeting of the CPR, a verbal report from the co-chairs could be presented.

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 review of provisional agenda. The timeline of the Steering Committee was added for discussion under 'Any Other Business'.

Review of the enhanced descriptions and costings of the different options

The Secretariat presented draft expanded descriptions for all the four options of GEO. The Secretariat had presented the first GEO option in previous Steering Committee meeting and had developed it further in discussions with the Steering Committee task team before this call. The main comments were to present how the criteria would be met and what the advantages and disadvantages of that option would be. That analysis is yet to be completed because more thoughts are needed and that will be presented in mid-July at the task team meeting.

The Thematic GEO option had been expanded to allow for its costing. The description included the meetings needed and their cost and the administrative and collaborative functions. It was highlighted that a Summary for Policy Makers (SPM) had not been included in this option because typically such assessments won't have them. However, the GEO procedures document presented in the last Steering Committee meeting had presented an SPM for all types of assessments. If such an outcome would be expected, two extra in-person meetings would be needed for this option.

The Service oriented GEO was expanded by including educational material and the fellowship programme to this service. This would be done with partners at different levels. A fellowship programme would be initiated after the Master's level programme. It was noted that GEO already has a fellowship programme through the GEO-fellows programme that has been running for a long time now. The only additional component therefore will be the educational piece that would need a consultant in developing the educational material and programme for the Master's level students. Additionally, two advisory bodies will be needed, one for the educational material itself and the other for the fellowship programme. Meetings of the advisory groups have also been costed. The production of eLearning and eProduction modules had also been considered and costed.

The Synthesis GEO option had been expanded using the Making Peace with Nature example. For this option it was noted that an SPM had been excluded although both IPCC and IPBES produce summaries for these types of reports. If this would be the case for GEO, two additional meetings would be needed for this option.

On this issue, the Steering Committee asked for clarity on the number of thematic reports that could be envisioned in a four-year period. Such information will help the Steering Committee assess its feasibility. Further, the service-oriented GEO was identified as failing to address the 'keeping the environment under review' mandate of the organization. Therefore, as much as the option gives GEO a strong capacity building function, this option should be costed under other options that fulfil the mandate of the organization in 'keeping the world environment under review'. The gaps also exists in the synthesized GEO for this will be taking already existing material and repackaging it comparatively, hence leading to gaps in new knowledge generation.

The Steering Committee further noted that there were differences in dimensions across the options. Harmonizing those dimensions around commons issues like objectives, timings, assessments parameters, outputs and the added values, to identify their benefits is needed in addition to their costs. These would lead to ensure coherence in costing across the options. Further, the description of the Service-oriented GEO is not clear yet in the Steering Committee. The focus of the option description is too narrow as presented now. It will be important to state that the costing undertaken are assumptions therefore estimates. Additionally, the Steering Committee highlighted that a lot of

experience is being gained on the use of virtual working to ensure cost saving while achieving full participation of everyone involved.

On this issue it was decided that costs for SPMs should be included for options 2 to 4 for comparability. Option 3 could benefit from other case studies and could be transferable to other options. Option 4 could benefit from a more intergovernmental process than Making Peace with Nature, as with option one. Assessing all options against the full set of criteria will be important to assess utility of the options. All options may not meet all the criteria set, however, assessing them against the criteria will give more accurate information on what is desirable. Regional GEOs together with GEO derivative products should be properly positioned in the expanded descriptions of options. Further, the costing elements should be presented in table format for ease of comparison across different options. Option 3 could be more suitable for derivative products.

The Secretariat reminded the Steering Committee that proceeding with any assessment process required a request from governments. UNEP produces a lot of products without using an intergovernmental process but GEO is an intergovernmental and expert-led process. The Secretariat cannot, on its own, determine the number of thematic assessments per period. Such an estimate can only come from knowledge about the governance structure and procedures of a GEO.

The Service oriented GEO option supports all the other options. This strengthens the science policy interface in all the options and its costs should be considered as a component of other options. The synthesis report has a feature of introducing new literature into the report because the different findings and reports considered are limited in time and scope. Therefore, a synthesis report under GEO would allow flexibility for additional research to fill in any information gaps. This will make the Synthesis GEO closer to the comprehensive GEO assessment option. Therefore, the options are not mutually exclusive.

The Secretariat welcomed the Steering Committee's thoughts on developing the options around their objectives, timings, assessments parameters, outputs and their added value. However most of these elements will likely be decided at the scoping meeting of a GEO. Further, the Secretariat agreed that the Service oriented GEO option is heavily focused on capacity building at the moment and it would be interesting to see how other services like rapid assessments and on-demand focused assessments could be included for this option. On the meetings and the lessons learned from working remotely, the secretariat emphasized that the meetings proposed for options, particularly for the comprehensive GEO option were absolutely essential in ensuring the full participation of developing countries, who often experience difficulty in connection through virtual means. The Secretariat agreed with including SPMs for all the other options because the assumption is that GEO continues to be an intergovernmental process. Further, the costs are fairly transferable across the options. The Secretariat will continue to detail the costs in the spreadsheet to ensure they are clearly comparable against each other. Additionally, each option will be assessed against the criteria and pros and cons presented in each option. The Secretariat will seek ways to describe regional GEOs and derivative products because they are well received in their targeted community and are unique to the GEO process.

Review of the annotated outline of the feasibility study

The Secretariat presented the annotated outline of the feasibility study report. The discussion with the Bureau before this meeting suggested to add the table of contents to the feasibility study to give the basic structure. A co-chair gave a brief presentation on some of the content of the draft outline that they had added in the feasibility study outline from the interim report. The overview section of the feasibility study was therefore developed following the objectives and functions of GEO copied from the Steering Committee's interim report. The methods section had also been developed by the standard elements already available in the costing matrix of the expanded GEO options. Further, it was highlighted that the approach on the main feasibility study itself had deviated from the interim

report to start with the financial and administrative consequences first. The options have been presented in this way to allow UNEA to make an informed decision on the future of GEO.

The Steering Committee noted that there is a need to ensure that the GEO process does not compete with other assessment products. A focus on the objectives and relevance of GEO is therefore needed. Further, the criteria under the governance options is needed to assess the alternatives. It was suggested that the title of the section 'financial and administrative consequences' could be edited to include an assessment of options and governance against the criteria in this section. Further, the Steering Committee suggested that the governance material presented in the report could be annexed to reduce the length of the document. The Steering Committee advised that separating the process and deliverable of GEO may be effective in presenting information for UNEA.

On these issues, the Secretariat noted that the process envisioned will allow the feasibility study to feed into the consultation period in the month of September. The draft of the final report will then be produced from late September through October. This will lead to the final workshop of the Steering Committee before submission for UNEA's decision. There may therefore be some decision by the Steering Committee at that final meeting or the Committee may leave some decisions for UNEA, but it may also need to present the decisions in a way that is relatively straightforward for UNEA. The Secretariat also agreed on annexing some information of the report to allow for reduction of the size of the report and allow focus on key areas of the study. Further, an assessment of the criteria against the four options will be conducted for the next Steering Committee call, together with the two governance proposals presented as alternatives in the draft feasibility study report. This may allow UNEA to not only decide on the outputs of GEO but also the governance and implementation structure of GEO. A section of the feasibility study will be developed to present the results of that analysis. Written comments on the draft expanded GEO descriptions will be allowed up to early the following week.

Discussion of the costing methodology approach

The Secretariat presented the costing sheet that had been presented before for the Comprehensive GEO option. Similar costing will be undertaken for all the other GEO options and then have a function in the 'mix and match' sheet to allow for selection of elements to cost different functions across the options. A summary comparison sheet will be provided for each of the options to present different costs per option. That table could be presented in the feasibility study report to present the overall summary of costs of the four GEO options. The background report produced last year has a comparison with key global assessment reports like the IPCC and IPBES. This will be used for the comparable elements.

Any other business

The Secretariat highlighted that after discussing with the Bureau, it was realized that there is a time crunch coming up in the late August to early September time frame. The Secretariat believes it will have a good draft of the feasibility study by late August. However, some time will be needed for the Bureau and the Task Team to comment and refine it before the start of consultations. Further, the annual subcommittee meeting of CPR starts on the 25th of October and the Secretariat wishes to have a meeting on the result of the consultations so that the Steering Committee can use those inputs in the production of the final report. The Secretariat therefore suggested to change from a planned month-long consultation to a two-week consultation period. This will be a peer-review type of feedback with a supplementary questionnaire approach but with reduced numbers of webinars as compared to the broad consultations conducted last year. This change will allow the Secretariat more drafting time for the feasibility study and a little more time for Steering Committee review as well as reporting out to the Annual subcommittee meeting.

The Steering Committee welcomed the proposal, indicating that this timing will allow for greater reach of the consultation after the summer holiday. Further, it was noted that since the previous

consultation was broad enough, leading to the production of the interim report, this coming period could be shortened through a peer review approach. The Steering Committee further enquired if there was enough time in the workplan for the Committee to develop and review the material needed for the annual subcommittee meeting of the CPR. On this the Secretariat will check with the Governance affairs office on the timeline for producing documents for that Annual subcommittee meeting. The Secretariat can synthesize the outcome of the questionnaire in a week's time and schedule a call of the Steering Committee to discuss the outcome after that. In case of a tight schedule to submit a document at the Annual subcommittee meeting, a verbal report from the co-chairs could be presented.

Having no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 16h45 (EAT).

Action items

- The Secretariat will prepare a written summary of the meeting.
- Secretariat in interaction with the Steering Committee's task team to continue expanding the GEO options to enable assessments against the set criteria and comparability in costs
- The Secretariat to produce an updated timeline indicating a two-week consultation period instream of a moth long consultation period.
- The Secretariat to consult the Governance affairs office on the timeline in producing documents for that Annual subcommittee meeting.

List of Participants

First name	Last name	Affiliation	Nominated by
Marek	Haliniak	Ministry of the Environment, Poland	Poland
Cathy (alternate)	Maguire	European Environment Agency (EEA)	European Union
Marcos	Serrano	Ministry of Environment Chile	Chile
Keisuke (alternate)	Takahashi	Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)	Japan
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Ivar Andreas	Baste	Norwegian Environment Agency	Norway
Rafael	Monge Vargas	Ministry of Environment and Energy	Costa Rica
Chatchai	Intatha	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Thailand	Thailand
Anshu	Singh	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate change, Government of India	India
Jerome	Sebadduka Lugumira	National Environment Management Authority (NEMA)	Uganda
Huang	Yi	Peking University	China
Toral	Patel-Weynand	US Forest Service	USA
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Keri (alternate)	Holland	US Department of State	USA
Andrew	Stott	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs-UK	United Kingdom and Northern Ireland
Anna	Mampye	Ministry of Environment	South Africa

Apologies

First name	Last name	Affiliation	Nominated by
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Salla	Rantala	Finnish Environment Institute	Finland
Marcel	Kok	Environment Assessment Agency (PBL)	The Netherlands
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Kazuhiko	Takeuchi	Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)	Japan
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