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**International environmental policy and governance
issues**

Information on the implementation of resolution 5/3 on the Future of the Global Environment Outlook

Note by the Executive Director

Introduction

1. At its resumed fifth session held from 28 February to 2 March 2022, the United Nations Environment Assembly adopted Resolution [UNEP/EA.5/RES.3](#) on “Future of the Global Environment Outlook.” The Resolution requested the Executive Director to undertake the preparation of the seventh edition of the Global Environment Outlook to be submitted for endorsement by the Environment Assembly at a future session no sooner than 2025 (Paragraph 6) and also requested the Executive Director, with guidance from an intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder advisory group, to undertake a number of specific tasks to ensure sound governance of the process (Paragraphs 3,7 and 10). This report contains an update on progress on these requests for the period March 2022 to September 2023.
2. As stated in Resolution 5/3, the objective of the Global Environment Outlook (GEO) process is to keep the world environmental situation under review in order to periodically inform and support collective and individual action by United Nations Member States and stakeholders, while strengthening the science-policy interface of the United Nations Environment Programme.
3. Following discussions with Member State experts at the GEO-7 Scoping Meeting in October 2022, GEO-7 will build on the conclusions of GEO-6 by analyzing how human systems relating to food, energy, and materials/waste, are affected by and in turn contribute to the three planetary environmental crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. Even more than previous GEOs, GEO-7 will focus on the development of transformative solutions pathways to meet internationally agreed environmental goals, how these solutions can be implemented, and presentation of the findings in a way that is relevant to Member States.

* UNEP/EA.6/1.

I. Progress in the implementation of resolution 5/3

- A. *“Establish an ad hoc intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder advisory group, governed by the rules of procedure of the Environment Assembly, ensuring geographic balance across all United Nations regions and also ensuring disciplinary and gender balance; “(Para 3).*

The [Intergovernmental and Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group \(IMAG\)](#) was established in October 2022 to provide crucial policy advice to guide the Executive Director and the team of authors in the production of a policy-relevant GEO-7. The IMAG membership was selected to be geographically and gender balanced, with 25 Member State experts (5 per UN region) and 10 representatives from Major Groups and Stakeholders. Details of its expert membership can be found [here](#).

It has met face to face twice and virtually every month since the start of the GEO process. Its first face to face meeting took place on 21 October 2022 in a hybrid form. The outcomes document from this meeting can be found [here](#). Its second face to face meeting took place in Bangkok from 14-16 March 2023 and the outcomes document from this meeting can be found [here](#).

The IMAG decided that the GEO-7 report and its Summary for Policy Makers will be submitted for endorsement at UNEA-7.

- B. *“Undertake the preparation of the seventh edition of the Global Environment Outlook assessment, to be submitted for endorsement by the Environment Assembly at a future session, no sooner than 2025” (Para 6)*

UNEP started the preparation of the seventh edition of the Global Environment Outlook (GEO-7) and its accompanying Summary for Policymakers by organizing two Ad-Hoc Open-Ended Meetings, one to approve the procedures for conducting the assessment and the second to agree the scope, work plan and budget of the assessment process. Following these meetings, calls for authors, fellows, review editors and collaborating centres were initiated. The first authors meeting began with a workshop on the methodology for developing solutions pathways and modelling of scenarios held in Bangkok from 8-10 March 2023. The workshop discussed the range of economic, development and environmental models available and how to integrate models operating at different scales and themes. A second workshop on solutions pathways and scenarios was held in Shanghai from 4-7 September 2023 with modelling work scheduled for completion in November 2023 to feed into the first order draft.

The authors met in person in Bangkok from 13-17 March to develop the chapter outlines provided in the scoping document agreed in October 2022. A further online authors collaboration meeting in June 2023 drilled down into detailed discussion on the gaps and overlaps in each section of GEO-7. In September 2023, a one-month internal review took place of all the zero draft GEO-7 chapters prior to preparing a first order draft for external peer review commencing February 2024.

- C. *“The Global Environment Outlook process should identify intergovernmentally defined needs and terms for the provision of support for capacity-building, knowledge generation and policymaking, in line with the mandate of the United Nations Environment Programme, and should provide support services for addressing those needs, in partnership with relevant institutions as appropriate.” (Para 7)*

An intergovernmental survey is now underway to ascertain the capacity building and development needs of Member States regarding GEO. These supporting services fall into broad categories of capacity building, knowledge generation and policy making. The proposed scope of these services is available [here](#). The results of the intergovernmental survey will inform the development of a programme of work whose outcomes will be improved science-policy linkages and the uptake of policy recommendations to achieve transformative change at national and regional levels.

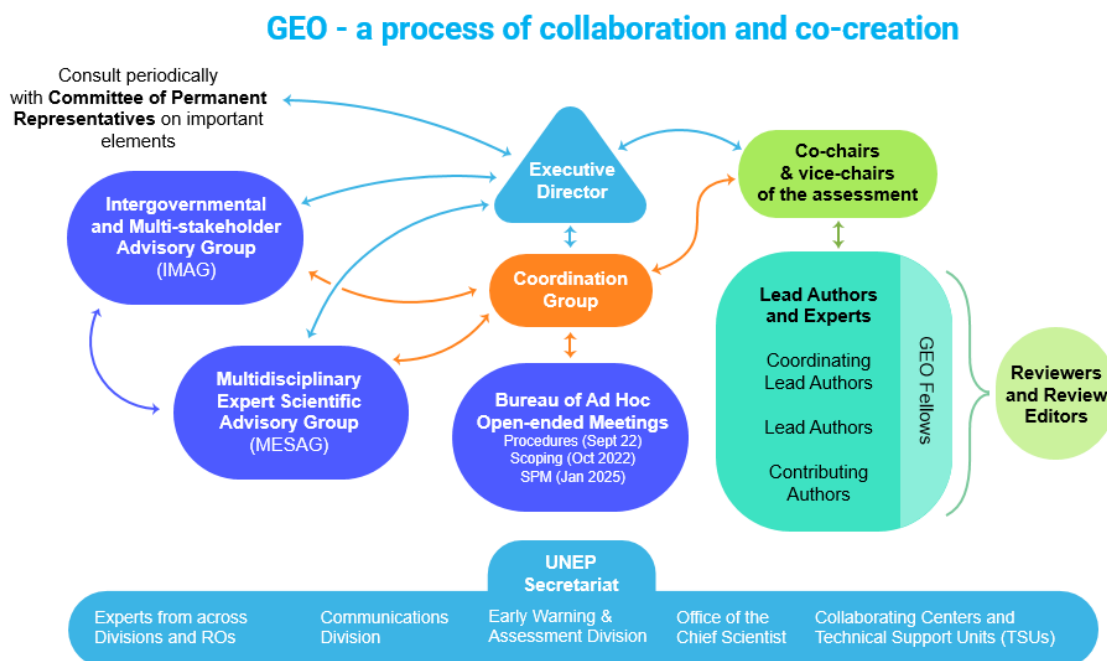
- D. *“Convene an intergovernmental, multi-stakeholder and expert meeting to establish a set of procedures that reflects the objectives and core function of the Global Environment Outlook process.” Para 10a)*

In September 2022, a comprehensive set of intergovernmental and scientific assessment procedures to guide the delivery of GEO was agreed at an Ad-Hoc Open-ended Meeting. The experts nominated by Member States to the Ad-Hoc Open-Ended Meeting for the Assessment Procedures and Supporting Functions of the Global Environment Outlook (GEO) (19-22 September), met virtually (attended by 145

online participants) and focused on the review and adoption of the assessment procedures document. The outcomes document from this meeting can be found [here](#).

The final procedures document *Global Environment Outlook (GEO) - Intergovernmental and Expert-led Scientific Assessment Procedures* can be found [here](#).

The document describes how clear governance and procedures will uphold GEO's operational principles of consistency, relevance, legitimacy, credibility, accessibility, added value, feasibility, transparency, authority, and visibility. The diagram below summarizes the roles and relationships of GEO's advisory bodies.



- E. “Conduct nomination and selection processes for external experts who will contribute to the Global Environment Outlook process, including members of advisory groups, authors, fellows, peer reviewers and review editors, ensuring geographic balance across all United Nations regions, as well as disciplinary and gender balance;” (Para 10b)**

As well as the appointment of the four Co-Chairs¹ and the IMAG and MESAG members, more than 250 external experts have been selected as authors and fellows to contribute to the preparation of GEO-7. Author nominations and selection took place during January and February 2023. The gender balance across the author teams is 50:50, and the table below shows the geographic balance of the GEO-7 author cohort across United Nations regions.

GROUP	Male	Female	Total number of authors	% by region
Africa	20	23	43	17%
Asia Pacific	37	27	64	25%
Eastern Europe	8	16	24	9%
Latin America and the Caribbean	18	26	44	17%
Western Europe and other Groups	43	35	78	31%
	126	127	253	100%

¹ Sir Robert Watson (UK/US), Prof. Nyovani Madise (Malawi), Prof. Edgar E. Gutierrez-Espeleta (Costa Rica) and Prof. Wang Yi (China).

- F. “Ensure that the Global Environment Outlook process draws from the evidence base of peer-reviewed literature, national peer-reviewed assessments in various languages, and other international and United Nations-led assessments, data and analysis, and information from other credible sources, such as the World Environment Situation Room and elements of knowledge generation within and outside the United Nations Environment Programme; “(Para 10c)**

Multiple sources of information and knowledge are being used by authors in the preparation of draft text for GEO-7; for example relevant global and regional environmental assessments published since GEO-6 in 2019, data sources accessible through the World Environment Situation Room; a suite of global environmental and economic data sets underpinning models used to create the multiple scenarios of possible futures and peer-reviewed literature from across the globe. Linkages with the work of other major global assessments are maintained through the [Ad-Hoc Global Assessment Dialogue](#).

In order to reflect alternative sources of knowledge within GEO, the Co-Chairs agreed to establish a task force to systematically integrate indigenous and local knowledge (ILK) across all relevant chapters. The task force aims to include ILK within the chapters of GEO-7, develop and carry out ILK methods for the assessment, and develop overall ILK narratives for the GEO-7 assessment. An in-person planning meeting of these ILK experts took place in October 2023 and regional Indigenous Peoples and Local Community dialogues are planned for 2024.

- G. “Establish a multidisciplinary expert scientific advisory group responsible for overseeing the scientific integrity of the Global Environment Outlook process, pursuant to the terms of reference and guidance for the selection process set out in the annex to the present resolution;” (Para 10d)**

A [Multidisciplinary Expert Scientific Advisory Group \(MESAG\)](#) was established in February 2023 which will play a critical role in providing guidance to UNEP’s Executive Director, authors, and experts on the scientific credibility of the GEO process. It consists of a group of 30 geographically and gender balanced members appointed by the Executive Director on the advice of the IMAG. Its membership is shown [here](#). The Advisory Group is responsible for presiding over expert meetings, providing scientific oversight, selecting experts, and representing the Global Environment Outlook process. The first face to face meeting of the MESAG took place in Bangkok 14-16 March 2023 and the outcomes document can be found [here](#).

- H. “Develop a flexible, multi-year workplan and time-bound budget, setting out a programme of activities, such as assessments and support services, according to the needs identified by the Environment Assembly in the present resolution “(Para 10e)**

A detailed multi-year work plan and time-bound budget was proposed to Member States at the Ad-hoc Open-ended Meeting on the Scoping Document (see clause). The work plan and budget included the timeline and process for producing the GEO-7 assessment and its accompanying Summary for Policymakers as well as the process for identifying and delivering the supporting services. The work plan and budget were approved by Member State experts shortly after the Scoping Meeting, along with the annotated outline of the GEO-7 assessment.

- I. “Strengthen the science-policy interface by developing, for each assessment, a scoping document and a summary for policymakers prepared by experts, to be considered for review and endorsement by representatives of Member States at ad hoc open-ended meetings;” (Para 10f)**

The [scoping document for GEO-7](#) was developed and agreed by Member State experts in December 2022. Experts nominated by Member States to review and approve the scoping document for GEO-7 met in an ad-hoc open-ended meeting in Nairobi in hybrid format from 17-20 October 2022. The meeting also included three expert dialogues on transformation of energy and food systems and transformations towards circularity, plus an information item on the approach to the digital transformation of GEO. Key decisions taken by the meeting included:

- Adaptation of the Drivers, Pressures, State, Impact, Response (DPSIR) framework for use in this innovative GEO-7. Consideration should be given to the following drivers: population/demographics, economic and financial; urbanization; science and technology; political, cultural, social (including, but not limited to inequity, gender, values, lifestyles); institutions; shocks such as pandemics, disasters, and conflict.

- GEO-7 will develop solutions pathways for a) economic and financial models, b) energy systems, c) food systems, d) circularity and e) environmental systems. It will include an outlooks section which will a) assess different scenarios, including the target-seeking scenarios and their socio-economic implications, b) present pathways for countries with different economic, resource and environmental situations and c) assess likely regional implications of the different solutions pathways.
- GEO-7 will include regional specificities in two regionally focused chapters on the state of the environment and the outlook for their futures.
- Inclusion of four chapters on the current state of key natural systems (Air, Land and soils, Oceans and coasts, and Freshwater).
- Methodology chapters for the solutions pathways and the outlooks to ensure the scientific credibility of these approaches.

The Secretariat shared a revised draft of the scoping document after the meeting; it was finally approved on 14 December 2022 and can be found [here](#). The final Ad-Hoc Open-ended Meeting for review and approval of the GEO-7 Summary for Policymakers is planned for January 2026.

J. “Scope and approve the undertaking of intergovernmental and expert-led assessments approved by the Environment Assembly in accordance with the multi-year workplan and time-bound budget;” (Para 10g)

Following the approvals received at the Scoping Meeting, UNEP has proceeded to undertake the GEO-7 assessment, based on the approved work plan and time-bound budget in the scoping document.

K. “Continue the Global Environment Outlook fellows programme for youth to enhance the participation of younger generations;” (Para 10h)

The GEO Fellows programme continues to provide early career scientists with a stimulating learning opportunity through participation in the preparation of a major global environmental assessment. A total of 43 Fellows has been recruited to work alongside authors and secretariat staff on all chapters in GEO-7. Fellows received a full induction and will participate in an 11-week structured learning course on Global Science to Policy to increase their knowledge of the GEO methodology, to develop skills in communicating science to policymakers, and to understand the role of science to inform environmental decision making in a multilateral context, with a priority focus on the GEO process.

REGION	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	% BY REGION
Africa	5	5	10	23.3
Asia and the Pacific	6	3	9	20.9
Eastern Europe	1	3	4	9.3
Latin America and the Caribbean	3	4	7	16.3
Western Europe and Other Groups	2	11	13	30.2
TOTAL	17	26	43	100%

L. “Administer the Global Environment Outlook process by developing and implementing streamlined and cost-effective governance and administration; providing adequate, predictable and stable financial resources from core funds, including the Environment Fund; allocating sufficient human resources for the process within the secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme; fostering in-house contributions and expertise; facilitating partnerships with collaborating centers and assistance from technical support units; and, where appropriate, facilitating the mobilization of extrabudgetary resources for the process;” (Para 12)

a. Cost effective governance and administration;

Work to foster increased digital collaboration in the production of GEO-7 is progressing at pace. Four new digital functionalities have been developed and built into a single digital platform to support the production of GEO-7. These are: an author collaboration platform to support drafting of the assessment; online graphing and mapping capabilities and tools; online tools for development of terms, definitions, and glossaries; online management of peer review processes (through GEO-READ (Review Editing Analytical Database)). An eventual final digital innovation for the GEO will allow digital presentation of GEO-7 in a fully online, interactive, and user-friendly way.

b. Stable core funds

In the Member State approved work plan and budget in the GEO-7 [Scoping Document](#), the overall production costs for GEO-7, its accompanying Summary for Policymakers and the delivery of the supporting services was estimated at USD 10.3 million, of which only part can be covered with core resources. The UNEP Secretariat will continue to work with Member States and Partners to secure the full budget.

c. Adequate human resources in Secretariat

The preparation of the GEO requires intensive co-ordination and management of a global network of scientists, experts, institutions, governments, and funders. The Secretariat’s capacity has been supplemented by the appointment of UN volunteers, contract staff and assignment of UN staff from across the Early Warning and Assessment Division. Staffing processes to ensure sufficient capacity to deliver the GEO-7, its accompanying Summary for Policymakers, and the supporting services in the 2022-26 period, are also underway.

d. Inhouse contributions and expertise;

The requirement to address regional specificities as part of the content of GEO-7 has resulted in UNEP regional staff playing an important co-ordination role within each of the regional chapters and their subregional sections. Other in-house thematic experts on energy, food and materials/waste systems have also provided valuable support to chapter authors during the various stages of content development.

e. Facilitation of partnerships with collaborating centers and TSUs;

The creation of a network of 15 GEO collaborating centers is expected to provide strong assessment expertise at the core of the process and help build capacity at various levels. The Secretariat initiated a call in late 2022 for expressions of interest from institutions wishing to become collaborating centers to support thematic areas of the GEO process. The response to this call was outstanding, with 45 applications received of which 15 were selected by the Secretariat for the first phase of engagement, following guidance from the IMAG that the selection process of collaborating centers should be strategic, regionally balanced and include both those with a track record in supporting GEO and other centers which can develop capabilities to support GEO in the future.

Each collaborating center will sign a Memorandum of Understanding supported by a work plan reflecting their distinctive contribution in partnering with UNEP based on specific center expertise and skills. Member States will be kept informed of any outreach to institutions in their countries in this regard. These strategic collaborations with GEO will help ensure the relevance of its findings and its enhanced impact.

f. Mobilize extra budgetary resources

Since the approval of the GEO-7 work plan and budget, more than USD 1.4 million has been generously contributed by different Member States or groups of Member States. The UNEP Secretariat welcomed support both cash and in-kind received from European Union, People's Republic of China, Germany, The Netherlands, and Norway and will continue to work with Member States and Partners to secure the full budget. Some of these contributions have been targeted to delivery of the supporting services, while others are meant to support Secretariat capacity, the participation of the GEO Fellows in the GEO process and hosting of author meetings.

M. “Consult periodically with the Committee of Permanent Representatives to the United Nations Environment Programme on important elements of the Global Environment Outlook process.”.(Para 13)

Five briefings in various formats have been provided to the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) since UNEA 5.2. These are listed below.

- A [written briefing](#) and presentation on the implementation of UNEA resolution 5/3, Future of the Global Environment Outlook, to the CPR for discussion at its subcommittee meeting on 16 June 2022.
- A [written briefing](#) on the implementation of UNEA resolution 5/3 Future of the Global Environment Outlook to the CPR for discussion at its 159th meeting on 29 September 2022.
- A [side event](#) held on 24 October 2022 as part of the 9th Annual Subcommittee Meeting of UNEP's CPR to present the Progress and Outcomes of Global Environment Outlook (GEO-7) Inaugural Meetings.
- A [written briefing](#) and presentation provided at the CPR subcommittee meeting on 10 November 2022.
- A written [briefing](#) to the 161st meeting of the CPR on 9 March 2023 within the Report of the Executive Director.

III. Lessons learned

The coordination of GEO-7 has been quite different from GEO-6. The digital platform has dramatically improved collaboration across the author teams and also streamlined how the Secretariat manages the overall process. This is mainly due to the production of the chapters being visible in one place in near-real-time.

Challenges have arisen in coordinating the regional chapters of GEO-7. Without much space to communicate the regional state of the environment and outlooks findings, the authors are struggling to prioritize which issues they feel are the most important. In addition, the quantitative modelling results are taking some time to produce and the regional outlooks, which are dependent on these, will also take time.

The engagement of authors in the GEO-7 solutions-focused approach is high, partly because of the more positive focus of this approach. However, developing the methodology for elaborating the solutions pathways is taking some time to draft. This seems to be because the limited extent of literature on how to intentionally drive transformation, and how to sequence actions to make this happen.

Although the work plan and budget for the GEO-7 was adopted by Member States, some unfunded elements have subsequently emerged. For example, the request by Member States to incorporate Indigenous and Local Knowledge (ILK) into GEO-7 was not costed in the original budget and new resources are needed to do this well. In addition, learning across the author teams about approaches to develop solutions pathways is evolving and more face-to-face collaboration is needed to bring this to a conclusion. This necessitated a second solutions pathways and outlooks workshop, which has added to the overall budget.

IV. Recommendations and suggested actions

Approaches will be needed to incorporate the uncostered elements into the work plan and budget to properly meet the requests of Member States. These can include resource mobilization but also can include identifying partners who could contribute in-kind to helping with these deliverables. Some adaptive management for the project is needed to achieve these objectives.