

# Towards GEO-4

GEO-4 aims to provide a comprehensive, reliable and scientifically credible, policy-relevant, up-to-date assessment of, and outlook for, the state of the global environment.

## GEO-4: Objective and Scope

GEO aims to ensure that environmental problems and emerging issues of wide international significance receive appropriate, adequate and timely consideration by governments and other stakeholders.

GEO-4's specific objectives are to:

1. Provide access to the best scientific knowledge for international environmental governance and the mainstreaming of environmental concerns into social and economic sectors and in support of the internationally agreed development goals.
2. Facilitate the interaction between science and policy through scientifically credible processes and products.
3. Build geographic and gender-balanced partnerships and capacity to better undertake environmental assessments.

To meet these objectives, GEO-4 will draw upon, assess and synthesize knowledge from the best available resources, including data and relevant assessments at global and sub-global levels. The scope of the report will encompass:

- Environmental conditions, trends and emerging issues
- Pressures and driving forces
- Interlinkages
- Primary and secondary effects
- Environmental values and costs to society
- Policy responses, response options and their future implications.



## Towards GEO-4

GEO-4 is expected to be available in 2007. Key elements of the GEO process which are being strengthened as GEO-4 evolves are:

- Policy relevance and legitimacy
- Scientific credibility
- Inter-linkages, coordination and partnerships
- Capacity building and support to sub-global processes.

The increasing complexity of environmental degradation requires an enhanced capacity for scientific assessment, monitoring and early warning.

In February 2003 the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial

Environment Forum (GC/GMEF) established the Science Initiative: a consultative process to identify the gaps and needs in the existing assessment structure and a means to address them.

Key strategies to strengthen the scientific base of GEO are being applied to the GEO-4 process:

- Establishing a scientific advisory mechanism
- Strengthening linkages with other assessments – such as the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment
- Strengthening the network of Collaborating Centres with institutions of high scientific credibility in all regions
- Involving more local experts and using indigenous knowledge as a substantive resource
- Strengthening the scientific peer review process
- Improving the quantity, quality and accessibility of environmental data.

## Partnerships

The Science Initiative highlighted the need to expand the collaborative assessment and monitoring structures of GEO with collaborating centres at all levels. The number of GEO Collaborating Centres has expanded since GEO was established in 1995; with 36 participating in GEO-3.

This network is being reviewed as part of the GEO-4 process, taking into account past performance and the contributions of individual centres and focusing on the specific substantive and geographical needs of GEO-4.

## Focus on Capacity Building

GEO-4 will provide targeted institutional capacity building, closely linked to 'hands-on' capacity building during the reporting cycle. Key targets include:

- Identifying and improving the use of existing capacity in current partner organizations in the GEO network
- Broadening networking and partnerships to fulfill the specific GEO-4 objectives
- Hands on involvement and formal training amongst partner organizations strengthening institutional capacity to undertake the GEO process
- Offering fellowships for scholars to work in GEO Collaborating Centres and with DEWA regional programmes
- Linking capacity building to the production of GEO-compatible assessments and reports
- Developing and promoting the use of integrated assessment tools and methods, GEO-4 guidelines and training modules.
- Upgrading the GEO data portal.

## Strengthening the Scientific Base

"The ultimate challenge underpinning UNEP's science initiative is how to better connect cutting edge science to policymaking and creating a true partnership for keeping our environment under review. We need to understand what is happening in our environment in order to protect it and secure the wellbeing of present and coming generations."

Klaus Toepfer, Executive Director, UNEP





climate change, land degradation, freshwater, coastal and marine environment, local and regional air quality, ozone depletion, and chemicals. It will be based upon the findings in the section on The State and Trends of the Global Environment.

### Challenges and Opportunities

This section will analyse the complex, crosscutting issues as well as emerging challenges. The crosscutting issues to be assessed include poverty, health, institutions and governance, science and technology and trade and will include a human vulnerability perspective.

### Global and Sub-global Outlook

This forms the main outlook component of GEO-4. Using the content and findings from the foregoing sections as a starting point, it describes a number of plausible short, medium and long term scenarios based upon different policy pathways. Projections are made under each scenario of future environmental trends and their implications for human well being and economic development. Considerations during the development of the scenarios will include references to internationally agreed goals and targets and a reality check against vision and expectations.

### Environment for Development

The final section of GEO-4 will synthesize the overall policy-relevant findings and conclusions of the GEO-4 assessment and present policy options in the form of tools for mainstreaming the environment into economic sectors.

## Draft Synopsis

The report will include the following:

- An introduction setting GEO-4 within the context of international environmental governance and introducing the scope and specific focus of the report
- An overview of the present state and trends of the environment, going into more in-depth and long term considerations than the GEO Year Book
- An outlook, projecting possible and plausible outcomes of current developments and trends
- Policy relevant findings, conclusions and options for action.

Each section of the report will undergo comprehensive peer review through the GEO consultative process.

## Contents:

### Introduction

The introductory section sets the stage for the whole GEO-4 report, putting the GEO-4 assessment into context and

introduces the scope and key focus of the report.

### State and Trends of the Global Environment

Presents an overview of the state, trends and emerging issues of the major environmental challenges seen from a global perspective reflecting their global characteristics. The assessment will relate to internationally agreed environmental goals and targets and make maximum use of indicators. Emphasis will be placed on status and trends of ecosystems and the geophysical environment and its contribution to human well-being.

### Interlinkages

This section presents an assessment of the interlinkages between the major environmental challenges and the consequences for policy and technology responses and tradeoffs. It will analyze the linkages between areas such as biodiversity,

## Indicative Time Schedule

### 2004

June	Initial Planning Meeting
July-Oct	Planning Processes for specific elements of GEO-4
Sept-Oct	Regional Expert Consultations on GEO-4
November	Design Meeting
Nov-Dec	Regional Partners' Meetings

### 2005

February	Global Consultation on GEO-4 (open to all Governments and Stakeholders)
March	Begin content development and first draft

### 2006

June	First draft completed
Jul-Oct	Peer Review and regional consultations
November	Revision

### 2007

February	Finalization
Mar-Aug	Editing, layout and printing



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