



GEO Process

GEO is a participatory process for environmental assessment and reporting, aimed at bridging the gap between science and policy decision-making

Background

Assessing and reporting on the state of the world's environment is a fundamental mandate of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). To this end UNEP's Division of Early Warning and Assessment (DEWA) is responsible for undertaking assessments of the state and trends of the global environment.

What is an Assessment?

An assessment is the entire social process for undertaking a critical, objective evaluation and analysis of data and information designed to meet user needs and support decision making. It applies the judgment of experts to existing knowledge to provide scientifically credible answers to policy relevant questions.

Global Environment Outlook (GEO) Process

The Global Environment Outlook Process is the practical implementation of UNEP's mandate to keep the global environment under review. It was initiated at the request of the UNEP Governing Council in 1995.

What is GEO?

GEO is a consultative, participatory, capacity building process for global environmental assessment and reporting on the state of the environment, trends and future outlooks. GEO is both a process involving stakeholders from across the globe, as well as a product for environmental decision-making. The GEO process aims to facilitate the interaction between science and policy making.

A world-wide network of Collaborating Centres forms a strong assessment partnership at the core of the process and a focus for building capacity at various levels.

Comprehensive peer review and consultative mechanisms with governments, non-governmental organizations and scientific institutions are other integral stakeholders.

Advisory groups provide guidance on conceptual approaches and methodology development and capacity building. This process is underpinned by a dedicated, interactive online data system called the GEO Data Portal. This participatory and consultative process, as well as rigorous peer review, gives GEO assessments scientific credibility, accuracy and authority targeting a wide audience by providing information to support environmental management and policy development.

The GEO process has many benefits. It supports multi-stakeholder networking, provides a platform for the exchange of knowledge, promotes intra and inter-regional cooperation in identifying and addressing key environmental issues and concerns and builds capacity at many levels.

Outputs

Meeting user needs cuts across all elements of GEO outputs. The most tangible outputs of the process are the GEO series of publications that provides guidance for decision-making processes.

The comprehensive GEO series, published periodically, includes *GEO-1*, *GEO-2000*, *GEO-3*, and *GEO-4* which will be launched globally on October 25th, 2007. Other products include technical reports, manuals and GEO educational materials. A range of sub-global environment outlooks have been produced in the regions, using the GEO approach. Major publications are produced in the official United Nations languages of Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish in printed and electronic formats to broaden access for users.

Objectives of GEO

- To 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 internationally agreed environment goals;
- Facilitate the interaction between science and policy through multi scaled and multi-dimensional integrated assessment process and products of high legitimacy, credibility and utility;
- Build geographic and gender-balanced partnerships and capacity for environmental assessments.

The objective is achieved through an integrated environmental assessment approach which answers five fundamental questions:

1. What is happening to the environment and why?
2. What are the consequences for the environment and humanity?
3. What is being done and how effective is it?
4. Where are we heading?
5. What actions could be taken for a more sustainable future?

The essence of GEO's value as a tool for decision makers is its integrated approach linking science and policy.

GEO characteristics

The characteristics of the GEO process are its:

- Integrated approach
- Collaboration and partnership
- Capacity building
- Tools and Methodologies
- Monitoring and Evaluation



Johannes Aklavum

G L O B A L E N V I R O N M E N T O U T L O O K

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Integrated Approach

The essence of GEO's value as a tool for policymakers is its integrated approach. GEO links state of the environment assessment with policy analysis, incorporating historical, current and future perspectives, combining global perspectives with sub-global views.

GEO aims at being relevant to policymakers by identifying the state of and trends in the environment, how the current state was reached, in what direction trends are developing, how effective are the measures being taken and where the gaps are. In so doing, GEO identifies intervention points and opportunities for policymakers to address priority environmental issues. GEO also raises awareness of emerging environmental issues that require policy attention.

Collaboration and Partnership

GEO has developed a rigorous process for gathering information and data, sharing of knowledge and analysis in consultation and collaboration with partners and stakeholders at all levels from around the globe.

A network of GEO Collaborating Centres with regional mandates or with specialized thematic expertise is at the core of the GEO process. They engage stakeholders at the regional level and provide specific inputs to the assessment process such as scenario development, capacity building and data.

A number of GEO Working Groups focus on key areas and provide advice and support particularly on integrated assessment methodologies and process planning.

Other United Nations agencies contribute by providing substantive data and information on the many environmental and related issues that fall under their individual mandates and they also participate in the review process.

Working together with UNEP's GEO coordinating team at United Nations HQ in Nairobi and in all seven regions, including the polar areas, partners in Collaborating Centres research centres of excellence and individual experts, write and review major parts of each report.

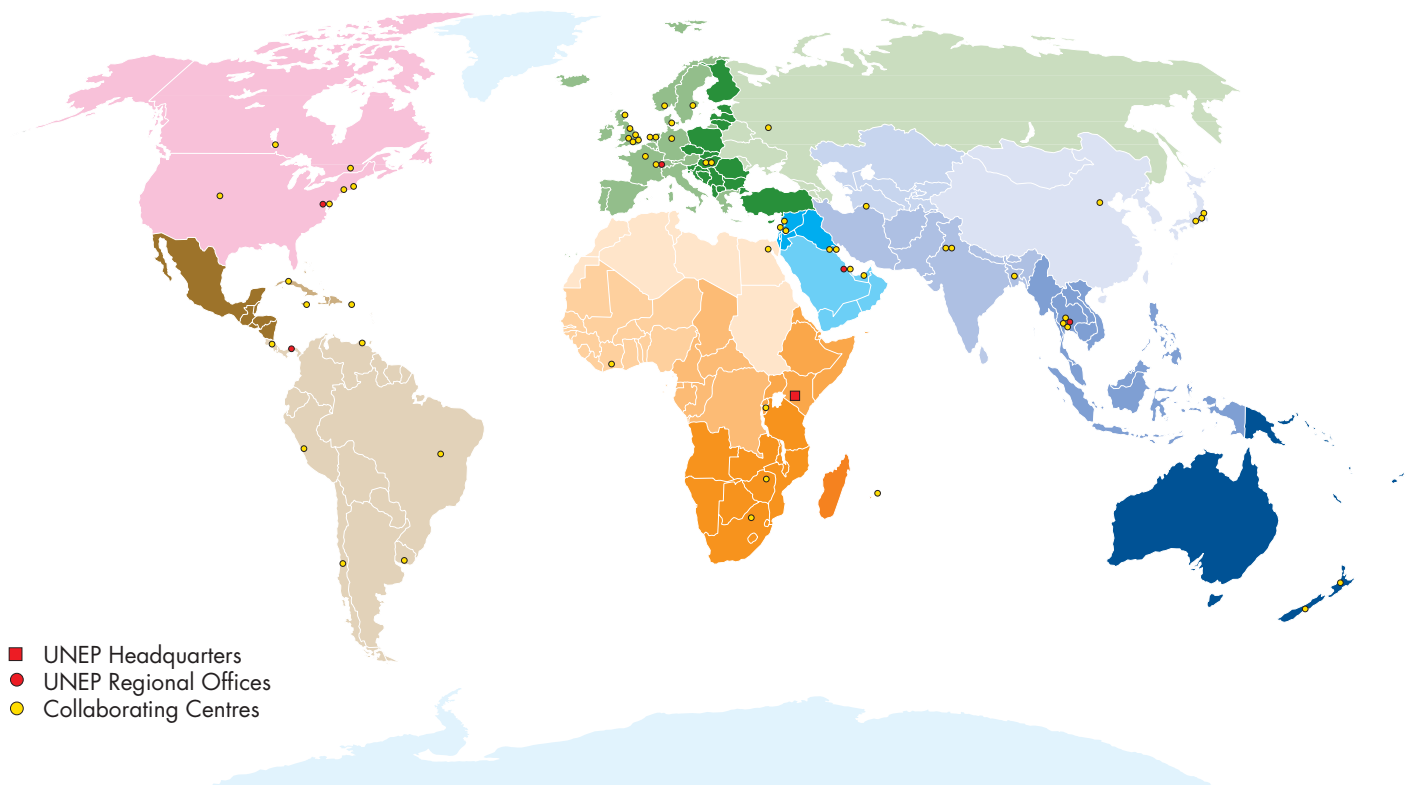
During the preparation of each report the GEO team organizes consultations inviting policymakers, Collaborating Centres, scientists, NGOs and other stakeholders to review and comment on the draft materials. These drafts are also subject to extensive peer review from individual experts, scientific and policy institutes and other United Nations organizations.

This process ensures that the contents of each report are scientifically credible, accurate and policy relevant to users in different parts of the world with different and specific environmental information needs.

This process of collaboration and consultation gives stakeholders a strong sense of ownership of the process and its products.



Collaborating Centre Network

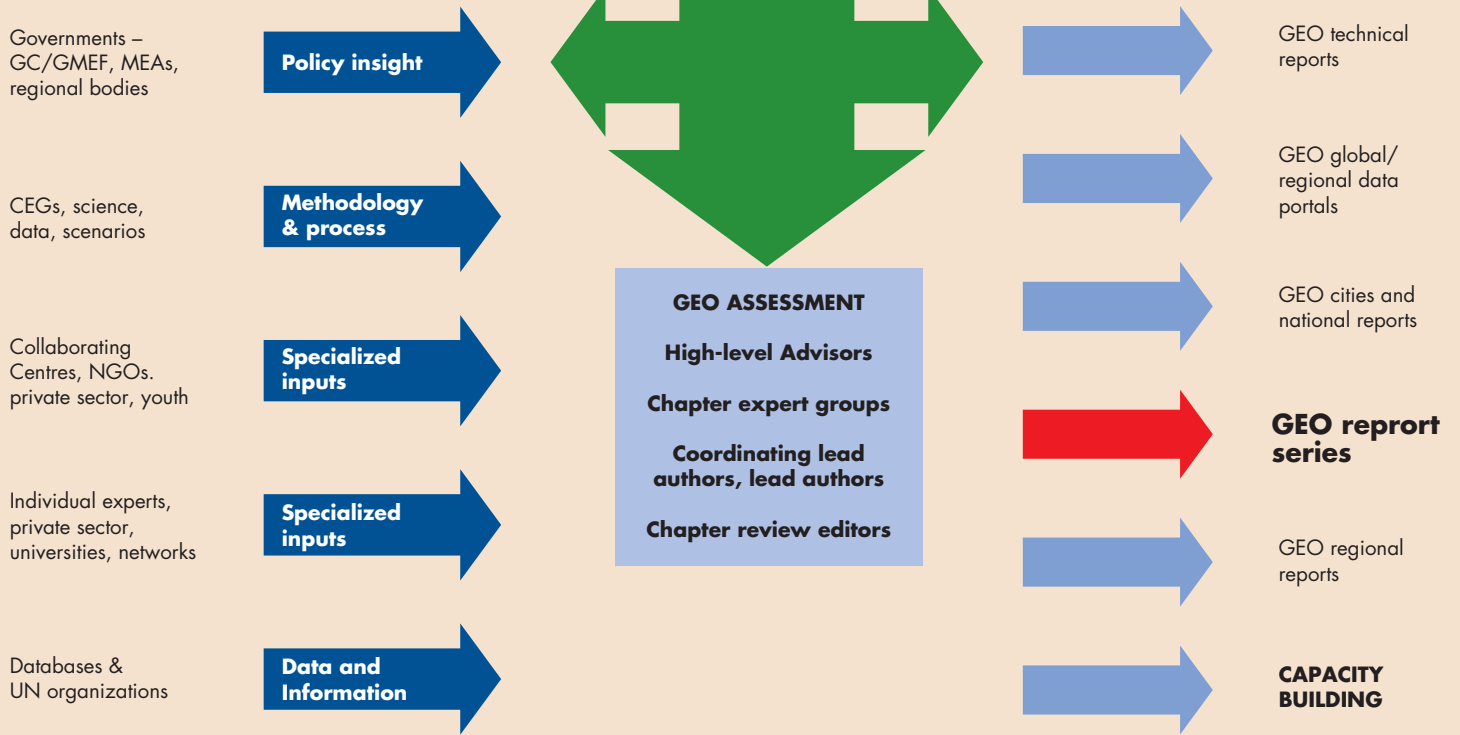


A coordinated network of Collaborating Centres is at the core of the GEO process. As the GEO process has evolved the number of centres has grown and they play an increasingly important role in preparing the GEO reports. They are now responsible for almost all the regional inputs ensuring both vertical and horizontal information flow - combining top-down integrated assessment with bottom-up environmental reporting.

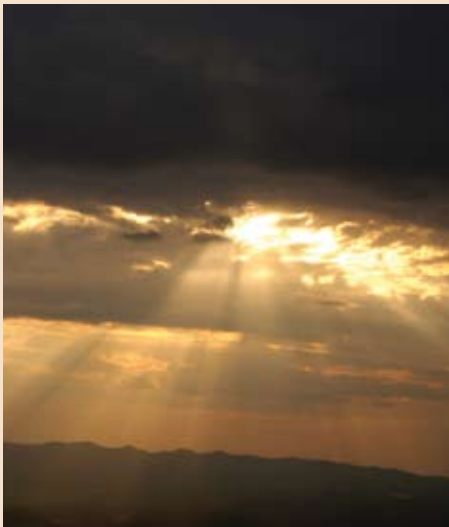
Involving partners and stakeholders throughout the GEO assessment and reporting process builds capacity at many levels

GEO Process

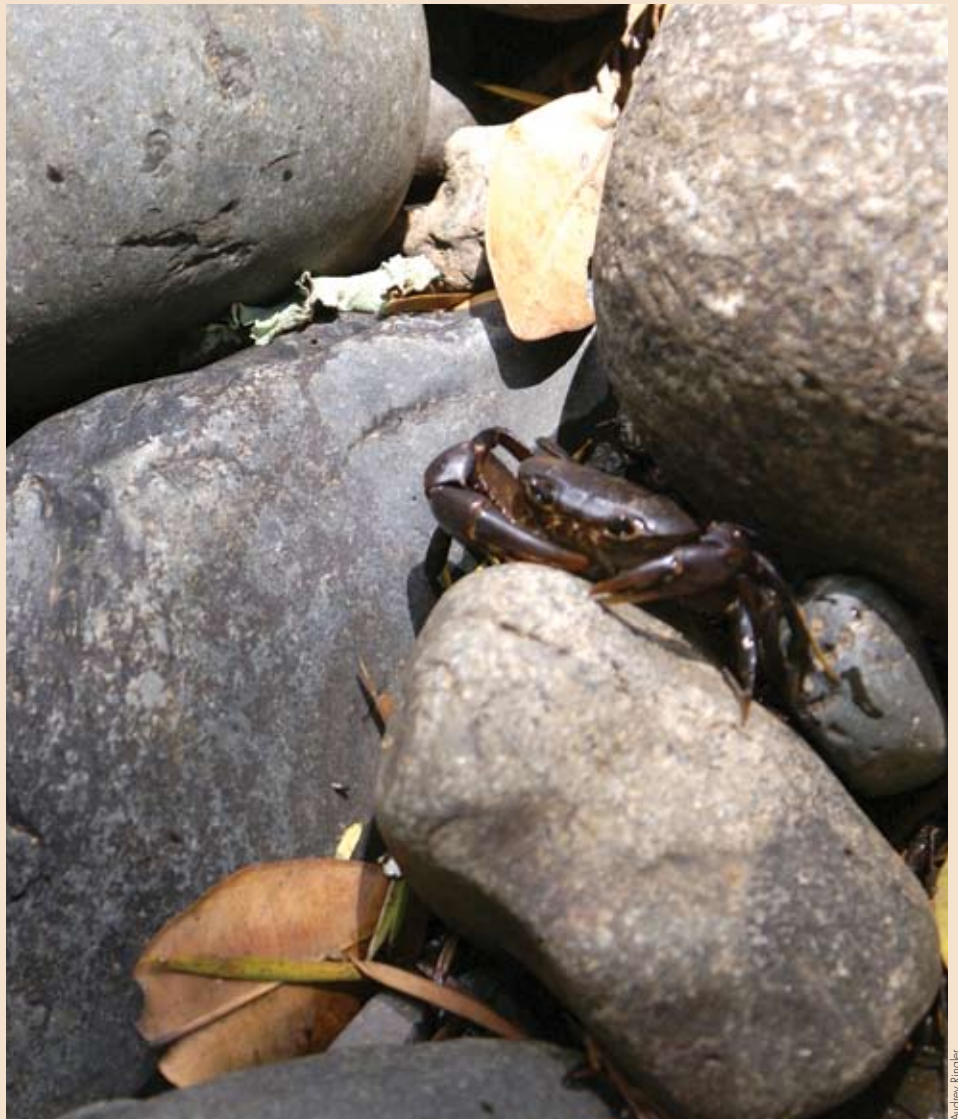
UNEP coordination



G L O B A L E N V I R O N M E N T O U T L O O K



Una Kingler



Audrey Kingler

Capacity Building

In fulfilling its mandate 'to ensure that emerging environmental problems of wide international significance receive appropriate and adequate consideration', UNEP receives requests from governments in developing regions to provide support and capacity building for undertaking integrated environmental assessments.

The GEO capacity building programme provides governments, partners and environmental assessment practitioners with the necessary tools and methods to implement integrated environmental assessments. It empowers partners through the provision of targeted training increasingly coupled with actual assessment and reporting initiatives providing hands-on experience.

Building partner capacity results in a win-win situation for UNEP and its partners because improved capacity translates to better national and regional reports that in-turn feed into and enrich the global process.

Tools and Methodologies

Tools and methodologies developed and refined to support partners and stakeholders in undertaking assessments are the foundations of GEO capacity building. The GEO 'tool box' includes conceptual frameworks, analytical tools, guidelines, processes and procedures and databases.



The GEO Data Portal, an online database, makes available more than 400 variables as national, sub-regional, regional and global statistics or as geo-spatial data sets (maps). It covers broad environmental themes such as:

- Climate
- Disasters
- Forests
- Freshwater

It also covers categories in the socio-economic domain including:

- Education
- Health
- GDP
- Population

Monitoring and Evaluation

As the GEO process has developed, strong emphasis has been put on monitoring and evaluation of both the process and its outputs. This is done through: user surveys; reader surveys; Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analyses; impact studies; and monitoring of web traffic and media coverage. The results are fed back into the process to improve and build upon the positive elements.



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