



***SWOT Analysis and Evaluation
of the GEO-3 Process from
the Perspective of GEO
Collaborating Centres***

2004 United Nations Environment Programme

ISBN: 92-807-2387-1

DEWA Job number DEW/0541/NA

For bibliographic and reference purposes this publication should be referred to as:

UNEP (2004) Global Environment Outlook (GEO): SWOT Analysis and Evaluation of the GEO-3 Process from the Perspective of GEO Collaborating Centres

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Executive Summary

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)'s Global Environment Outlook (GEO) process incorporates evaluation and improvement on a regular basis to live up to expectations as a learning and adaptive process. This evaluation, conducted by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) of Winnipeg, Canada looks at the GEO process from the perspective of the GEO Collaborating Centres (CCs).

The evaluation used a Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats (SWOT) analysis to elicit comments on:

- Performance of GEO as an assessment and reporting process;
- Performance of the GEO CCs;
- UNEP's performance as the overall leader of GEO;
- Assessment and reporting methods used in the preparation of GEO-3;
- The GEO CC network.

In addition, a focused questionnaire section dealt with other important aspects of GEO, including:

- Coordination and management;
- The GEO-3 process;
- Capacity issues;
- GEO production support.

The results are to be used by UNEP in the evaluation of individual CCs, so the evaluation was not anonymous. Out of 36 GEO CCs that received the questionnaire 28 (78per cent) responded.

The results confirmed that the CCs value their participation and mostly agree that GEO fills a niche and fulfils its mandate as a multi-scale assessment and reporting system with a strong capacity-building component. There were, however, many suggestions for improvement that collectively point to the need to upgrade the GEO system - in the words of one respondent *"taking it to the next level"*.

The participatory process involves interaction among GEO CCs, under UNEP's guidance, in preparing the assessment, and consultations with policymakers and key audiences. Participation is considered to be a key aspect of GEO and is essential for its

success. CCs view GEO's multi-scale integrated environmental assessment (IEA) approach as a possible model for others and point to the increasing interest in adopting it by regional and national entities.

The CC network has a broad thematic and regional coverage and many competent members, but interaction between network members is very uneven and goes from short periods of very intensive activity to long periods of inactivity and silence. This works against the goal of having a real network and building sustainable institutional capacity for IEA.

CCs also point to problems associated with capacity limitations and analytical and data gaps as some of the key problems that require attention. Inadequate funding is a serious issue that affects many CCs and can only be dealt with on the basis of a long-term strategy and through dialogue between UNEP, CCs and donors.

While CCs consider GEO's IEA framework a clear strength, many elements require further development, including data analysis, integrated policy assessment and scenario analysis.

Important opportunities are arising from the increasing popularity and awareness of GEO, and in many cases better access to environmental data. Both GEO and other global, thematic, and regional assessments would benefit from better coordination.

There are further opportunities for building capacity in the CC network that may lead to better GEO assessments and help the further spread of know-how on IEA in the regions.

Among the threats to GEO most commonly mentioned is inadequate funding, but CCs also point to potential weakening interest in the environment as other issues attract the interest of the public and decision-makers.

Lack of scientific credibility and inadequate quality control represent another possible threat, particularly as GEO tries to integrate scientific and policy perspectives and as other, thematically or regionally more focused science assessments come on line and divide the attention of the public and decision-makers. Ways of strengthening the science that should be considered include better use of peer review and more rigour in selecting individual contributors.

As most CCs already take part in other IEAs, most of them have successfully integrated GEO into their activities, with the support of senior management. Many CCs make significant in-kind contribution in terms of staff time. About half report improved capacity as a result of their involvement in GEO.

CCs rate communication and feedback with UNEP through the GEO process generally adequate, but also point to a need for more clarity in guidelines and regular interaction.

CCs consider the work of most GEO Working Groups dealing with data, capacity building and scenarios as being important, even if their involvement in them was uneven. Data availability and quality as well as time to prepare GEO inputs continue to be problems, and there is also a need to identify a small number of core indicators. CCs considered the integration of SoE analysis, policy analysis and scenarios in GEO as largely successful.

With regard to consultations, CCs point to the need for more substantive and earlier involvement of stakeholders in the process and also highlight relatively weak connections to the private sector and NGOs.

There was almost unanimous agreement that capacity building is essential to the success of GEO, but the usefulness or scope of previous capacity building activities has been limited. There is a need for better understanding and response to the capacity needs of CCs and to assist national and regional organizations to adopt aspects of GEO's methodology.

UNEP has developed a number of tools to support different aspects of the GEO process. Opinion on the usefulness of these, which include the GEO Newsletter, Data Portal, the GEO Production Guidelines and the GEO Support System (GEOSS) is divided, with GEOSS having lower levels of acceptance.

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