The Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects
Multi-stakeholder Dialogue/Capacity-building Partnership Event

The importance of integrated assessments for decision making (science and policy perspectives)

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Outline

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What is an Assessment

Assessments are formal efforts to assemble selected knowledge with a view toward making it publicly available in a form intended to be useful for decision-making.

In context integrated assessments; that is, assessments that cover environmental, economic and social aspects, across industry sectors, and across ecosystem components (which may include land-based sources of inputs as well as land-based industries that depend on marine resources) as is the case with the Regular Process.

Types of Assessments: Classify by main focus of the assessment

- Status and Trends Assessments
- Impact Assessments
- Response Assessments

"Thematic" and "Sectoral" assessments

Any type of assessment is legitimate if it meets the needs of those who requested it.

Importance of Assessments

Assessments have a key role in **informing decision-makers by developing sound responses based on knowledge** about what the problems are, the causes, and the relative significance of each in environmental and socio-economic terms.

Assessments Support Sound Responses (SCIENTIFIC) by providing :

- Increased knowledge of what the problems are, their causes, and their relative significance in environmental, social and/or economic terms.
- Analysis of effectiveness of past responses and of likely consequences and risks of available policy options for current needs.
- Better understanding and continuing growing and new data coming available, so periodic re-assessments become necessary

Importance of Assessments

In order to appreciate the science and policy perspectives of integrated assessments one has to understand a basic feature of an assessment, that it must be conceived both **as a product and a process**.

The influence or importance of an assessment could be defined by three main attributes: **its relevance, legitimacy and credibility.** An assessment is relevant if the user is aware of it and it informs his/her decisions or behaviour.

Legitimacy is a measure of the acceptability or perceived fairness of an assessment. **Credibility** is concerned with whether the knowledge assembled in the assessment is believed to be valid. An assessment gains **credibility and authority by virtue of its information, methods and procedures.**

Importance of Assessments

The *product* includes both the expert reports and underlying data and information used in the analyses. There may be additional outputs like a summary for decision-makers, alternative future scenarios, products geared towards different user communities or briefings for the public and the media.
The *process* includes the institutional arrangements (composition, mandate, procedures) established to govern, guide and conduct the assessment and to ensure that the mandate and procedures are followed.

The *product* of an assessment can have obvious value as an authoritative presentation of expert findings and interpretations, but it is the *process* that underlies the modalities, methods and procedures that make the products authentic and influential. Moreover, the process can strengthen relationships and understanding among experts in different fields and with different types of knowledge on the one hand, and between experts and decision-makers and other stakeholders on the other. To really understand the influence that an assessment might have, it is critical to understand the process that produced it.

Importance of Assessments

Design Features: Assessment design features that may enhance one of these attributes or may diminish another. Some design feature to consider:

- Objectives and scope
- The science/policy relationship
- Stakeholder participation
- Nomination & selection of experts
- Data and information
- Treatment of lack of consensus
- Treatment of uncertainty
- Peer review
- Effective communication
- Capacity building and networking
- Post-assessment evaluation
- Institutional arrangements

Important to agree on design features in pre-assessment stage

Some decided when process is established, others agreed by institution(s) that guide and manage the process

GEO-6 Process

The Global Environment Outlook is UN Environment's flagship integrated environmental assessment produced every 4-5 years. It is an independent, expert-led assessment process that reviews the current state of the global environment, the effectiveness of our policy response and the outlook for the future. In 2014 Member States requested through resolution UNEA 1/4 that the Executive Director to produce the sixth Global Environment Outlook and its accompanying Summary for Policymakers. As part of this request 6 regional assessments were produced and published in 2016. Inter-Governmental Negotiation Meeting – finalizing the 'Summary for Policymakers' (GEO-6) - Nairobi, 21-24 January 2019
We are now at the stage where the global report of the sixth Global Environment Outlook and its Summary for Policymakers are being finalized for publication and endorsement at the fourth UN Environment Assembly (March 11-15, 2019).

Some numbers on GEO-6

Members of Advisory Bodies: 78 [High Level Group – 33; Scientific Advisory Panel – 23; Assessment Methodology Group – 12]
Authors: 146 [Authors – 120; Young Fellows- 26]
Quality Assurance: 41 [Review Editors- 36; Science and Copy Editors- 5]
UN Team: 301 [UN Environment chapter coordinators- 15; GEO-6 core team- 7; Wider team of UN expert reviewers- 279]
Peer Reviewers: >1,370 [Technical reviewers- 1,006; Intergovernmental reviewers and government review focal points- 364 (noting that each government focal point coordinates inputs from several experts)]

Some numbers on GEO-6

In total the GEO-6 assessment has been **reviewed five times** at different stages of its development and the process has yielded a **total of 14,388 comments** that were addressed by the authors.

- The **gender and geographical balance** in all advisory bodies and in the community of authors was ensured though close collaboration between the UN Environment team and the Scientific Advisory Panel
- The GEO-6 Global process was completed over a period of **18 months**, with a total of **7 face-to face meetings** organized and several **hundreds of virtual conference calls** to coordinate and support advisory bodies and the community of authors

The Science/Policy Relationship

- Regular dialogue experts & decision-makers
- Policy-relevant questions at outset
- Guidance for priority-setting
- Identified target audience(s)
- clear role of governments and other stakeholders vis-à-vis experts

Institutional Arrangements-3 issues of special significance:

- Appropriate science/policy boundary but encourage regular dialogue
- Provide for appropriate stakeholder involvement
- Build a coherent system of assessments

Conclusion

The results of an assessment and its use:

Key sources of knowledge they provide are research and monitoring. Decision-making processes in turn provide feedback on the scope of future assessments and related monitoring and research needs. Research provides better insights into how natural processes and human activities affect the ocean and how to achieve sustainability in human uses of the sea. Monitoring makes it possible to detect changes over time and assess the effectiveness of policies previously adopted. But this knowledge needs to be gathered and evaluated on a regular basis if decision-makers are to develop appropriate and timely responses to threats to the oceans, and to track progress and effectiveness of actions including those for mitigation. This is a core role of assessments.

The aspiration of the 2030 agenda can be tie in with integrated assessment which can use indicators to track and monitor progress of the SDG targets. – how close are we to achieving targets by 2030? Are our indicators the most appropriate measures? What happens when there is no available official data to support assessment? Year 2030 is only a decade away, and relative success in meeting 2030 targets depends on how well we can conduct the required integrated assessments.

Thank you

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