



GROUP ON
EARTH OBSERVATIONS

GEO-IX

22-23 November 2012

Report of the Executive Committee

Document 19

As accepted at GEO-IX

Report of the Executive Committee

1 INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the key actions and decisions taken at the 24th and 25th meetings of the Executive Committee held in Geneva, 19-20 March and 12-13 July 2012 respectively; and the 26th meeting held in Iguazu Falls on 21 November 2012, immediately prior to GEO-IX. The approved minutes of individual Executive Committee meetings can be found on the GEO website.

2 THE 24TH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The meeting was chaired by the GEO Co-Chair from China, Mr Cao Jianlin.

The meeting reviewed management of contributions for **specific initiatives in the GEO Trust Fund**. This issue was placed on the agenda at the request of several Committee meetings following the discussion regarding Australia's support for the Global Forest Observation Initiative (GFOI). The concern was that the growing contributions to global initiatives such as GFOI and GEOGLAM should not lead to a reduction in contributions to the general budget. The Secretariat proposed the possibility of re-negotiating the terms of agreement with WMO regarding special initiative funding contributions, and offered to submit paper on financial issues to next meeting of the Executive Committee.

The document outlining the transition to the new **Work Plan management structure** was discussed at length. Ms Alexia Massacand of the Secretariat presented the document, noting the management structure had been accepted by the GEO-VIII Plenary, along with the proposed schedule, and that the GEO community has been fully involved in the transition. The Executive Committee was asked to decide on a process for renewing the membership of the three Implementation Boards. Ms Yana Gevorgyan of the interim Infrastructure Implementation Board (IIB) also presented Annex 3 to the document, which had been contributed jointly by the Infrastructure and Institutions and Development Boards (IDIB). She recalled that the Boards had all drafted action plans and noted both Boards requested that the Executive Committee ask the Secretariat and the Co-chairs of the three Implementation Boards to work together to develop a paper for the Committee's July meeting to clarify respective functions and responsibilities.

The Committee also reviewed the progress being made on the **Global Forest Observation Initiative (GFOI)**. Mr Giovanni Rum of the Secretariat clarified how the two components of the Task – the Global Forest Observation Initiative (GFOI) and Forest Carbon Tracking FCT (FCT) – are working together, in that FCT activities are now part of GFOI and directly support it. There were questions from the Committee surrounding the relationship of the Secretariat to GFOI (Secretariat participation in first the Task Force, then steering committee, and location of the project office). The Secretariat Director then recalled the clear requests from Plenary that both FCT and GFOI be well coordinated and that the work under FCT continue. Secretariat involvement with GFOI presented an opportunity to develop a model for how such initiatives should be handled in the future. The Committee noted discussion of governance for global initiatives was important, especially as GFOI was not the only initiative of this type going forward, and recommended the Post-2015 Working Group examine this set of issues more fully and bring its ideas to the Executive Committee in July. The Committee also requested The GFOI Task team, together with the Secretariat, present a draft plan on its governance structure to the next meeting of the Executive Committee.

Progress on the **GEO Global Agricultural Monitoring (GEOGLAM) initiative** was then presented by Mr João Soares of the Secretariat. He explained that the French government had invited GEO to

present a proposal to the G20 on launching an action plan on food price volatility and agriculture. The Secretariat Director added that the G20 expected three things from GEO: the provision of a governance framework, coordination of the provision of space observations, and support for fund raising (unlike the GFOI, the necessary funds have not been provided upfront). Mr Soares explained that the G20 would soon be presented with a detailed work plan, worth \$40 million and that would support the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS), for feedback and guidance on fund-raising. This process was to conclude by summer. The Committee requested development of a scalable budget, which would reflect the opportunity for a phased approach for implementation.

The **AfriGEOSS initiative** to reinforce GEOSS in Africa was introduced by the Secretariat Director. He explained that, while GEO has organized regional activities in the Asia-Pacific and in the Americas, the same is not true for Africa. Many activities do exist in Africa relating to Earth observations, including those supported by AMESD and the EC. However, they tend to be poorly coordinated, and many African countries are not GEO members. Mr Humbulani Mudau of the Secretariat provided further details, and proposed the Secretariat distribute the AfriGEOSS document to all GEO Members and Participating Organizations in Africa. It will be crucial for GEO contributors in Africa to take ownership of the initiative and to make resources available so that it succeeds. The initiative will remain fully aligned with the Work Plan and will be implemented through its various Tasks. The document was informed by the Strategic Targets, including the Data Management Targets, and it takes stock of existing investments in Africa and identifies gaps. Mr Mudau explained that each sub-region will identify the themes it would like the workshops to focus on; East Africa has decided that its priority is agriculture and food security. The Secretariat Director confirmed that the African Union will be involved in AfriGEOSS, and that GEOGLAM and the African Water Cycle Initiative (AfWCCI) will also contribute. He also noted that the Secretariat would be pleased to work with New Zealand on a similar initiative for the South Pacific.

The Committee heard an update from the **Data Sharing Working Group (DSWG)**. Mr Alan Edwards, Co-chair of the DSWG, recalled that it had been established by GEO-VIII and that its members were nominated by GEO Principals from Members and Participating Organizations. He conveyed the Group's concerns about its somewhat geographically unbalanced membership and its request that the Executive Committee encourage greater participation. In addition the Group still needs to identify a fourth Co-Chair. The DSWG also requested guidance from the Committee concerning the proposed outputs and activities set out in draft Task Sheet ID-01. Mr Edwards also noted he viewed the GEOSS Common Infrastructure (GCI) as an envelope containing the key components of registries, a broker, a portal and a clearing house. The Infrastructure Implementation Board (IIB) has the major technical responsibility for implementing the Data-CORE, licensing schemes, monitoring, and so forth. While recognizing that many data do not qualify for the Data-CORE, GEO should not lose focus on the CORE. The Working Group will study how to incorporate and tag those data that have restrictions. The Terms of Reference were endorsed by the Committee.

A brief report from the **Post-2015 Working Group** was given by Mr. Michael Williams of the Secretariat. He noted that the GEO Post-2015 Working Group was established by the GEO-VIII Plenary in November 2011. Sixteen GEO Members and nine Participating Organizations nominated individuals to participate in the Working Group. A small writing group established by the Executive Committee finalized a discussion paper and forwarded it to the WG members in January 2012. The Committee noted its support of the Terms of Reference, stressed the importance of having broad and balanced participation in the WG, and recalled that the WG should provide an interim report to the next meeting of the Executive Committee.

The Committee took note of the end of the transition process for the **GEO Secretariat Director** and thanked the outgoing Director, Prof. José Achache, for his leadership and expressed their heartfelt thanks for his energy and accomplishments as well as for the great work by the Secretariat.

The status of preparations for the **Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development** was delivered by Japan, the European Commission, Brazil, South Africa, the United States and New Zealand. Several noted it had been difficult to include GEOSS or data sharing in the Rio document since the drafting process had been centralized within the UN Commission on Sustainable Development. Japan summed up the proposed actions for Rio: all Committee members were to explore how to introduce GEOSS into the Rio text, while the EC and Japan planned to host side events on 18 and 19 June (just prior to the 20 June opening of the summit). Japan also invited all members to contribute to the GEOSS exhibition booth organized by Japan together with the Secretariat and CEOS. Meanwhile, the Secretariat was asked to prepare a short document on how GEO and GEOSS could support the Rio process.

3 THE 25TH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The meeting was chaired by the GEO Co-Chair representing the United States, Kathryn Sullivan

The Committee extended a warm welcome to incoming **GEO Secretariat Director** Barbara Ryan, who in turn thanked the Committee for its support and noted that everyone in the Secretariat is committed to implementing the advice of the Executive Committee and the whole of GEO in constructing GEOSS.

The Committee reviewed the results of the **3rd GEOSS Evaluation Report** with respect to the Agriculture, Biodiversity and Ecosystem SBAs, presented by Mr. Lars Ingolf Eide. Recommendation highlights include: GEOSS Strategic Targets and outcomes should be revisited to see if they can be made more appropriate; GEO BON and GEO-GLAM are viewed as successes and can serve as models for future activities; desertification is mentioned in the Strategic Targets, but there are no activities in the Work Plan devoted to it; activities in the Ecosystem SBA are fragmented and need consolidation; lack of sufficient resource is a major recurring issue; and finally, it is not always clear who the end-users are. South Africa and the United Kingdom agreed to work together to produce a draft response to the issues raised by the report, by mid-September, to be followed by a full Executive Committee teleconference.

The **Work Plan Progress Report** was delivered by Alexia Massacand of the Secretariat for acceptance, who reviewed the draft of the report to be presented at Plenary. She noted the report does not aim to measure progress of GEOSS implementation towards the Strategic Targets, and thus does not point towards any gaps, this being the remit of the Implementation Boards (IBs). After some discussion, the Committee accepted the document with a request that the future report include additional information and not just activity report. Thus, for purposes of reporting to Plenary, it would be preferable to have one consolidated report on progress and requests the Secretariat and the Implementation Boards to work together towards this objective.

An update from the **Post-2015 WG** was provided by Peter Colohan (WG Co-chair), who noted that the group had made good progress via teleconferences since the last full meeting in late March. He explained that the text of the WG report to the Executive Committee represented a number of core ideas that have consensus within the group, such as the belief that GEO is valuable and should continue, and – though not without its faults - the governance structure was generally successful, including its voluntary nature. A key message delivered in response by several on the Committee was that the “Mission Statement” had not yet been developed, which was critical as it delivers the “why” of GEO’s existence. The mission statement should clarify whether GEO’s remit includes operating infrastructure, achieving governmental cooperation on investments in Earth observations, and/or supporting sustainable management of the planet. It was also noted that many in the GEO community feel the “O” in Earth Observations has been lost and the impression is that GEO is mainly about data, protocols, and architecture. Another topic of debate was whether GEO should deliver services. After lengthy discussion the Committee largely agreed that GEO should focus on demonstration and incubation of initiatives, but not go in the direction of service delivery. The Committee requested that

in the next phase the WG focus on a paper outlining options for the Plenary to consider, as a preparatory step towards producing a Ministerial document. The discussion concluded with a general plea for greater Executive Committee involvement in articulation of a convincing argument for GEO's continued existence, and development of a post-2015 mission statement.

The Committee next reviewed the **Report of the three Implementation Boards (IBs)** on progress of GEOSS implementation towards the Strategic Targets. Ms Yana Gevorgyan presented on behalf of Infrastructure, Mr Mark Noort on behalf of Institutions & Development, and Mr Rifat Hossain on behalf of Societal Benefits IB. A primary concern was settling on a common format for the report, and the Committee was requested to give its view. Several on the Committee responded by expressing the desire to return to a traffic light system by which Task progress could be easily indicated visually. The Committee also reiterated its view that the Work Plan Progress Report and IB report should be consolidated into a single document to provide a coherent, informative assessment of GEOSS implementation with respect to the Strategic Targets. Regarding IB membership, the US proposed that a pool of nominees be submitted to the Secretariat, which would be submitted to the Executive Committee at the summer meeting in 2013. The Executive Committee would then make recommendations for Board membership to the Plenary in November 2013 for final decision. The Committee supported the proposal, emphasizing the need to consider diversity in two dimensions: 1) expertise, and 2) geographic balance across developed/developing nation status.

Secretariat expert Giovanni Rum presented the recent activities of the **Global Forest Observation Initiative (GFOI) and Forest Carbon Tracking (FCT)**. Responding to a request for clarity on the scope between the two, the Secretariat Director remarked that GFOI provided a link between donors and national needs, whereas FCT works to develop capacity and is regional in scope. The mandate of the GFOI is to facilitate data acquisition in support of the needs of developing countries. The European Commission expressed the wish to see stronger collaboration between GFOI and the GEO Carbon office that has been recently established.

The latest activities of the **GEO Global Agriculture Monitoring (GEOGLAM)** initiative were presented by Secretariat expert João Soares. He underscored the need for a central coordination office and noted that GEOGLAM has secured the support of G20 Ministers. The European Commission noted that the 7th Framework Programme includes a call for proposals in support of GEO-GLAM implementation, with funding support of up to € million. The Secretariat Director observed that high-level connections at the national level by each Executive Committee member will help advance identification of additional resources for moving the initiative forward. The Committee remarked that more precise information on next steps / building blocks, associated costs, and ownership of those blocks is needed.

During the **Review of Secretariat Performance Indicators**, the Director emphasized three points: 1) there is a declining trend with respect to the number of secondments to the Secretariat (a staffing plan is being developed to clarify future Secretariat operations); 2) better coordination with the WMO is needed with respect to the Global Framework for Climate Services (GFCS); and 3) help is needed from the M&E WG to fine-tune the Secretariat Performance Indicators. The Committee requested that the Secretariat circulate its comment to the WMO on GFCS, to better inform its members in their communications with the WMO.

Japan reported on the “High-level Thematic Debate on Global Earth Observations” event it had organized during the **UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)**, at which it introduced the Tokyo Statement. As a result, an outcome of the Conference is mention of GEOSS in the Rio+20 Declaration, which reads:

274. We recognize the importance of space-technology-based data, in-situ monitoring and reliable geospatial information for sustainable development policymaking, programming and project operations. In this context, we note the relevance of global mapping and recognize the efforts in developing global environmental observing systems, including by the Eye on Earth Network and

through the Global Earth Observation System of Systems. We recognize the need to support developing countries in their efforts to collect environmental data.

The efforts by Japan and the European Commission to raise the visibility of GEO and GEOSS were applauded by the Executive Committee. The US was also recognized for the participation by Assistant Secretary Kerri-Ann Jones at the high-level debate organized by Japan.

4 THE 26TH MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The meeting was chaired by the GEO Co-Chair representing South Africa, Philemon Mjwara.

Each of the Committee Co-Chairs thanked the delegation from Brazil for hosting the GEO-IX Plenary.

The Committee then reviewed the agenda and supporting documents in preparation for the GEO-IX Plenary. The US requested that, as a matter of good practice, a 30-minute executive session be added to the end of the agenda. The agenda was then adopted without further changes.

In the **Secretariat Operations Report**, the Committee noted that:

- 1) More work was required on the Secretariat performance indicators. The Secretariat is therefore requested to present a reworked set of indicators to the 27th Executive Committee at the March 2013 meeting.
- 2) Adequate Secretariat staffing is a concern, especially for preparation of the 2013 Ministerial Summit. Clarification will be sought during the executive session with respect to renewal of fixed-term staff, as well as the level of expertise needed and expected from secondments.
- 3) There is a need for a coherent outreach/engagement strategy, and the need to respond to recurrent themes appearing in Monitoring & Evaluation WG assessments (proper understanding of end-users, for example).

GEO-IX Plenary:

The Committee noted the new Membership of Ivory Coast (Document 2).

The Committee also supported the three applications for recognition as Participating Organizations (Document 3), noting that the Rules of Procedure need to be clarified with respect to admission of subsidiary organizations.

Noting the progress made in providing a consolidated report assessing the progress of GEOSS implementation with respect to the Strategic Targets, the Committee reiterated its view that the Assessment of Progress against GEOSS 2015 Strategic Targets (Document 5) and GEO 2012-2015 Work Plan Implementation Report Task Assessment (Document 6) should form a single report and document in the future.

South Africa reported on common findings from each of the previous M&E WG evaluations (Document 7):

- 1) **The issue of clarity of the GEO mandate.** On the one hand, previous evaluations have reported a lack of clarity with respect to GEO's mandate. This lack of clarity was also mentioned by people involved in specific GEO Tasks. Others noted that the GEO mandate is clear and that all Members and Participating Organisations become associated with GEO after accepting and identifying themselves with the spirit and the letter of GEO principles. What this ambiguity points to is the need to intensify awareness raising programmes and perhaps to highlight that which makes GEO unique or its value add.
- 2) **Lack of user engagement.** This could be a perceived problem, but still needs attention. GEO's ultimate impact is to be felt or measured at users' level. It is therefore logical to expect

that our activities will be informed by users needs and for this reason user engagement will be critical. Findings one and two also point to possible gaps in communication.

3) **Providing evidence of GEO value-add:** A question of GEO's value-add has come up time and again. This also happens to be the question that needs answering even as we look into the future of GEO beyond 2015. The question keeps coming up perhaps because it has not been sufficiently clarified or communicated to all stakeholders.

4) **Gap analyses:** All previous evaluations alluded to the need for gap analyses. Current and previous responses to this issue suggest it is being partly addressed by the evaluators, partly by Implementation Boards, and partly by the Work Plan team. In other words no single entity is solely responsible for gap analysis. The context of this finding is central to the very existence of GEO. It questions whether we shall be able to meet our goal or not, and if not, what needs to be done to rectify the situation.

5) **Coordination and alignment of Tasks and Strategic Targets:** The question has been raised on how each Task aligns with the Strategic Targets of GEO. It would seem because of the voluntary nature of GEO some tasks are just accepted because Members and Participating Organisations are willing to contribute. Some Tasks are registered and never followed up.

The Committee will be considering steps to address these recurring challenges.

The Committee noted in the discussion surrounding Engaging the Private Sector in the Implementation of GEOSS (Document 14), it must be emphasized that the private sector includes both commercial and not-for-profit entities.

The EC emphasized that the Post-2015 WG interim report (Document 15) is being presented for consultation only, and the response from Plenary should focus on providing guidance as to which options to develop further. Although the document is not for negotiation, comments can be incorporated into the final report to be delivered by the WG.

The Committee was divided on whether to schedule a Ministerial Summit in 2013. Some members felt that, since this had been committed to by the previous Ministerial Summit (Beijing Declaration, 2010), it was imperative to adhere to this schedule. Others argued that the primary concern should be the ability to adequately prepare such an important Ministerial with respect to the future of GEO. Most shared the view that two decision points were necessary by 2015, one to provide direction and commitment on the future of GEO, and the other for development of an implementation plan which Ministers will commit to. There was consensus that Plenary should be requested to establish a Ministerial Working Group in order to fast-track preparations.

Annex

Performance of the Secretariat and Secretariat Director

Duties, Documents and Assessment

GEO Secretariat duties	Supporting documents	GEO Secretariat assessment	Executive Committee comments
a) Prepare and submit, for Plenary approval, the Annual Work Plan - including activities and budgets;	3-Year Work Plan Update (Plenary document).	Fulfilled.	The Executive Committee agrees with the GEO Secretariat's assessment.
b) Support the implementation by Members and Participating Organizations of the Annual Work Plan and execute expenditure of the budget;	Periodic Reports on Secretariat operations (Executive Committee document).	Fulfilled. Budget remained balanced each year since GEO was established.	The Executive Committee agrees with the GEO Secretariat's assessment.
c) Provide annual reports on the performance of GEOSS, including milestones of the Annual Work Plan;	Work Plan Progress Report (Plenary document) Monitoring and Evaluation Report (Plenary document).	Fulfilled. Task Sheet updates coordinated by GEO Secretariat. Three reports prepared for Executive Committee meetings and one major for GEO-IX.	The Executive Committee agrees with the GEO Secretariat's assessment.
d) Provide annual reports on Secretariat operations, including execution of annual budget expenditures;	a) Periodic Reports on Secretariat operations (Executive Committee document); b) Financial statement and Report on income and expenditure (Plenary documents).	Fulfilled. Secretariat operations and financial statements have been submitted to all Executive Committee meetings. Financial statements have been audited every year and successive "audit (s) revealed no weaknesses or errors" A working capital of CHF 2 million was set aside in 2005/ 2006 and maintained since then.	The Executive Committee recognised that the Audit did not find any problem in the financial management of the GEO Secretariat.

GEO Secretariat duties	Supporting documents	GEO Secretariat assessment	Executive Committee comments
e) Organize, prepare, and support meetings and other work of the GEO Plenary, Executive Committee, and other GEO committees and working groups;	Implementation Board reports to the Executive Committee and to Plenary.	Fulfilled. Three Executive Committee meetings, multiple teleconferences of Boards and Co-Chairs, Board meetings, Work Plan Symposium and co-located Board meeting in Geneva, Plenary.	The Executive Committee agrees with the GEO Secretariat's assessment.
f) Pursue activities to identify and secure funds for Secretariat operations and GEO activities in accordance with the direction of GEO;	Periodic Reports on Secretariat operations (Executive Committee document).	Fulfilled. Conversations have been held with GEO Members to ensure continuous funding of GEO.	The Executive Committee notes the continuing need to actively encourage GEO Members to contribute to the GEO Trust Fund.
g) Oversee the implementation of the GEO communication strategy;	Periodic Reports on Secretariat operations (Executive Committee document).	Fulfilled. E-newsletters are circulated. Publications/interviews appeared in professional journals.	The Executive Committee believes there is a need for the GEO Secretariat to develop a comprehensive communication strategy. A critical vacancy exists in the Secretariat. This post should be filled as soon as possible. The Executive Committee notes that newsletters and journals are tools to support this strategy. The use of these tools may/may not fulfil the communications needs.
h) Organize the GEOSS		Fulfilled	The Executive

GEO Secretariat duties	Supporting documents	GEO Secretariat assessment	Executive Committee comments
user and other fora as required in coordination with GEO Boards as appropriate;			Committee agrees with the GEO Secretariat's assessment.
i) Facilitate overall cooperation and liaise with GEO Members, Participating Organizations, and other programmes and bodies as appropriate or as needed to support the work of GEO, with particular emphasis on existing systems and Earth observation coordination mechanisms;	Periodic Reports on Secretariat operations (Executive Committee document).	Fulfilled.	The Executive Committee agrees with the GEO Secretariat's assessment.
j) Identify staffing and other resources necessary to support the Annual Work Plan, develop indicators for Secretariat performance, and report to Plenary on Secretariat performance against indicators;	Periodic Reports on Secretariat operations (Executive Committee document).	Ongoing. New Performance Indicators are being developed by the GEO Secretariat.	The Executive Committee has concerns regarding the current staffing level. GEO Members and Participating Organizations are asked to urgently address this issue.
k) Ensure an open and transparent process is utilized for all Secretariat employees, including short-term contractors, and for the designation of experts to the various GEO Boards and working groups;	Periodic Reports on Secretariat operations (Executive Committee document).	Fulfilled. All positions were advertised on the GEO website and notified to the GEO Leadership.	The Executive Committee agrees with the GEO Secretariat's assessment.
l) Facilitate and coordinate the updating of the 10-Year Implementation Plan as directed by the Plenary;	GEO 2012-2015 Work Plan Update.	Fulfilled	The Executive Committee agrees with the GEO Secretariat's assessment.

GEO Secretariat duties	Supporting documents	GEO Secretariat assessment	Executive Committee comments
m) Conduct the day-to-day administrative activities of the Secretariat;	Periodic Reports on Secretariat operations (Executive Committee document).	Fulfilled.	The Executive Committee agrees with the GEO Secretariat's assessment.
n) Carry out additional duties as required by GEO.	Periodic Reports on Secretariat operations (Executive Committee document).	Fulfilled.	The Executive Committee agrees with the GEO Secretariat's assessment.