

## **GEO STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT FORUM**

**December 9, 2014**

The Group on Earth Observations (GEO) convened a Stakeholder Engagement Forum “Making Wise Choices in an Uncertain World: Earth Observations for Sustainability” on 9 December 2014. The Forum was hosted by the World Bank Group in Washington, D.C. GEO is currently preparing its strategy for 2016-2025, and the Forum was designed to solicit input for the strategy from a wide range of stakeholders on their needs and priorities for earth observation data.

A priority for the future GEO is to enhance its engagement with a wider group of potential stakeholders, notably those who put knowledge into the hands of decision-makers and have built interfaces at the level of end users. The forum was conceived as a further opportunity to establish such partnerships.

Forum participants included development banks, foundations, global think tanks, conservation and relief organizations, technology innovators, commercial sector, scientific researchers and government representatives. These communities use Earth observation data for a wide-range of applications, including building resilience to climate change, ecosystem monitoring, mapping, global health, agriculture, conflict prevention, and disaster response.

Three major questions framed the discussion in the forum:

1. What socio-economic challenge will you and your organization be most focused on over the next 3-5 years?
2. What do you need to address these challenges- capabilities, data, tools, partners, etc.?
3. How can we create a viable and effective framework for ongoing collaboration so that the right information can be generated for specific users to answer particular needs?

The roundtable discussions brought forward a series of significant issues:

- The importance of being able to estimate the economic value of environmental data in government policy;
- The need for a clear perspective on the ambitions, objectives and incentives of user organizations before designing a service;

- The need for an end to end service development taking into account not only technical but financial, structural, policy and all other relevant aspects in order to establish a sustainable and useful service;
- The importance of not being driven by current technological limitations, as these are the most easily transcended in establishing new services.

At a tactical level, several needs were identified for GEO to include in its deliberations for strategy development:

- Examine realities of data availability, accessibility and use;
- A workable solution/approach for scaling up successful initiatives;
- Identify systemic deficiencies that aren't being answered in the market place and design solutions;
- Foster good practices at country level advocating for releasing and digitizing national and sub-national level data and mashing multi-source data.

Specific institutional needs were articulated by a number of participants, for which a set of recommendations has been proposed.

The World Bank expressed keen interest to foster a culture at the client country level that would recognize the economic value of geospatial information and make the most use of it in national policy planning. In parallel, for effective operations of its projects, the World Bank is looking to leverage the capacities and capabilities of the data and information supply community, and offered to explore investing with partners to develop multipurpose data infrastructure and tools that could be used throughout the life span of the projects across the Bank.

Two actions were proposed in partnership with the World Bank

- (i) a further seminar at the WB with a wider group of technical staff from all relevant Global Practices and GEO community in order to establish better the potential for partnership between the two and
- (ii) a proposal that WB should host regional workshops of their clients – finance and other relevant ministries – in the developing countries to establish local dialogue with relevant GEO technical agencies.

The World Resources Institute and AidData both pointed to the need to document best practices and point people towards the best way to use geospatial information. GEO could serve as the technical body to guide interested entities. It was suggested that ESIP Federation and NSF EarthCube both have experience in this area and it was recommended that GEO utilize them as resources.

GEO was encouraged to undertake further work to advance the technical and legal interoperability of data. The international community still has more work to do in this area. AidData's community is that of interactive map operators and is looking for easy ways to integrate other indicator data and create information layering. AidData offered to partner with GEO on a test case to pilot mashing up of Earth observation data with the existing data layers in AidData's maps to test interoperability.

Further on the topic of partnerships, the Gates Foundation announced their efforts to develop a multi-partner initiative to pull together core data layers for all countries – geographic information, administrative boundaries, population data, transportation networks. This information will be collected to support the needs of individuals working on any program in the field. Pilot projects are expected to be conducted in the next year. Success of this initiative relies on the active participation of the national governments towards releasing the relevant data.

Stakeholders identified the strengths of GEO that should be leveraged during the coming decade. Namely, GEO is in a unique position to act as the convener of stakeholders from diverse communities who can engage in productive partnerships to address global sustainability challenges. GEO should be creating a framework(s) for integrating environmental domains into economic planning; quantification of economic value; framework(s) for nations to connect with innovators and other partners to leverage appropriate technical and scientific capabilities to bring tailored services to users.

GEO expects that this Forum will lead to continued dialogue on cooperation in Earth Observation data between and among GEO and its multiple stakeholders.