

SDG Coordination Across GEO Work Programme Activities

On July 6, 2017 a Webinar was convened with representatives of GEO Flagship and Initiatives to begin a consultation process regarding potential contributions through GEO towards achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). GEO would like to assist Flagship and Initiative teams increase their engagement with the SDG Process, especially through fostering the use of Earth observations resources by countries and communities as they report on progress towards sustainable societies through 2030.

The Webinar began a process to assist with coordination across the Flagships and Initiatives in responding to the SDGs. This process seeks to integrate the strategic direction provided by the Programme Board in adjusting the Work Programme to reflect activities that are relevant to the three GEO priority areas, in this case the SDGs. Speakers included Barbara Ryan, GEO Director, Max Craglia representing the Programme Board, Dr. Lawrence Friedl co-chair of the EO4SDGs Initiative, and Dr. Argyro Kavvada.

Participants were briefed on current GEO activities within countries and regions on SDG implementation, and were asked to communicate with the EO4SDG Initiative and Secretariat for coordination and support as additional opportunities might arise from their Flagship and Initiative activities. Participants were also briefed on participation in the SDG process within the UN system gained through EO4SDG involvement. A subsequent discussion emphasized the importance of coordination of Flagship and Initiative contacts with UN “custodian agencies” (those responsible for development of SDG indicator methodologies). Many Flagships and Initiatives have long experience with these Agencies, for example GEOGLAM with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). It was asked that those contacts, specifically regarding the SDGs, be coordinated with the EO4SDGs team and the Secretariat for maximum benefit across all GEO activities.

Next Steps

- Flagships and Initiatives should review the July 6th communication/request from the Programme Board requesting input on the three GEO priorities including review and contribution to the GEO Engagement Strategy;
- EO4SDGs and the Secretariat will set up a series of one-on-one consultations with Flagship and Initiative teams for discussion of SDG activities based in part on the questions distributed prior to the webinar that cover most of the topics discussed during the Webinar; and
- Flagships and Initiative should consider what topics they might suggest for training sessions and provide same to the EO4SDGs Initiative;
- A GCI SDG Webinar is scheduled for September 13 – It is designed to brief GEO Work Programme activity leaders on how the GCI can support their efforts related to SDGs and hear their views and requests for useful data access.

Work Continues with UN Custodial Agencies on SDG Goal 6 Series (surface water) and Goal 15 Series (Land Cover) Indicators

NASA coordinating with UNEP through the EO4SDG Initiative, will measure spatial extent of open water bodies in 8 countries (starting with Peru, Senegal and Jamaica), generate maps and analysis, and also test the use of very high resolution remote sensing in 3 of 8 countries. The NASA team will also provide maps & estimates of vegetated wetlands extent across a select group of the 8 countries. Regarding EO for water quality, the NASA team will be using Landsat and Sentinel-2 to produce concentrations of Total suspended solids (TSS) and Chlorophyll-a (Chl) products. All National EO analysis will be packaged by NASA and provided to countries by UN Environment (around October). Training sessions will follow dissemination of these EO data analyses.

UN Environment has informed us that by September 2017 the European Joint Research Center and Google Earth Engine will generate national trend analysis for 193 UN Member States, using 30 years of data (1984-2015 LandSat data series). The JRC has generously agreed to undertake this national extract analysis and provide it to UN Environment. National analysis will include the following components per country: the total extent of surface water; the percentage net change in extent of water; the total amount of new water bodies (Permanent and Seasonal as separate measures); and the total amount of lost water bodies (Permanent and Seasonal as separate measures).

GEO representatives participated in May FAO, UNCCD organized workshop on methods and collaboration process for SDG Indicator 15.3.1. The meeting brought together numerous experts on land cover issues with GEO providing input on monitoring and imaging systems that can provide value for country level reporting. The workshop covered a number of subjects in detail and reach preliminary conclusions or promised action on some including:

- Land cover - Participants mainly discussed the system of land cover classes. The default is the global CCILC data; with 22 land cover classes defined using the LCML;
- Land productivity - It was recommended to use a trend in land productivity to formulate the baseline;
- Soil organic carbon;
- Continued review and revision of a Good Practice Guidance for 15.3.1

UN High Level Political Forum – July

GEO representatives participated in organized side events and numerous bilateral conversations during the first week of the HLPF. GEO presented at a side event regarding Oceans (SDG 14). Many of the SDG 14 indicators remain in the lowest category of readiness and feasibility (Tier III). Consultations with participants including NOAA representatives suggested that GEO assistance to develop global ocean observatories methodologies for at least some of these indicators will be very welcome.

GPSDD and the GEO Earth Observations in Service of the 2030 Development Agenda Initiative (aka EO4SDGs) organized a side event learning session entitled “Applying Earth Observations Data for the SDGs” that brought representatives from the government of Colombia, NASA, NOAA and universities to discuss availability of methods and observations to enhance current statistics and monitoring for population data and natural resources. A number of interested national delegation members and NGOs attended.

Diana Carolina Nova Laverde of DANE, the Statistical Agency of Colombia, Compton J. Tucker, NASA, Alex de Sherbinin, CIESIN & NASA SEDAC, Gabrielle Canonico, NOAA, Frank Muller-Karger, University of South Florida, Matt Hansen, University of Maryland, Tyler Radford, Humanitarian Open Street Map all presented new approaches and techniques to support country reporting for the SDGs. In the case of DANE, they provided insights on the intragovernmental dynamics between ministries and agencies that deter or drive use of monitoring and observations.

The concluding discussion focused on a common perception that more needs to be done to drive demand for these techniques from governments and policy makers. It was noted that concrete examples of reproducible methods packaged for impact and use need to be developed and knowledge of their availability for use diffused through partnerships, international organizations and UN entities. It was also noted that the population data resources presented could be utilized to help create data disaggregation needed for much of the development data elements of the SDGs.

GEO also joined the International Council for Science (ICSU) in a side event to introduce their recent SDG synthesis report “A Guide to SDG Integration – From Science to Implementation”. GEO has incorporated some of the synthesis findings related to health in its analysis of its engagement on SDGs.

UN Working Group on Geospatial Information Management (GGIM) - August

Steven Ramage from the GEO Secretariat attended the UN-GGIM7 Committee of Experts meeting in New York in early August; there were two roles. First as a panelist on the 'Where's the data?' Panel as an invited speaker regarding Earth observation data and information to support the SDG process. Second, in the role as Observer from GEO during the formal UN-GGIM process.

On the panel Steven joined a number of people already working closely with GEO including Bob Chen from CIESIN and Aditya Agrawal from the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD). All three talked about the work being done via the GEO Work Programme on areas relevant to the SDGs, such as the work of the Joint Research Centre (JRC) on the Global Human Settlement Layer (GHSL) which is recognized by and linked to the WorldPop project, as well as the work of GPSDD supporting local country-level activities in South America and Africa. The discussion resulted in a conclusion about the need to highlight the value and usefulness of Earth observations to support the work of National Statistical Offices in monitoring and reporting on the SDGs.

During the UN-GGIM Plenary meeting, Steven made several interventions relating to the importance of integrating statistics and socioeconomic data with Earth observations to support decision making relating to SDGs. Also explicitly thanking the countries supporting the EO4SDGs initiative and inviting other UN Member States to contribute to or observe the activities. There was another intervention to highlight the inclusion of EO language in the Sendai Framework Data Readiness Review and further discussions are planned in Geneva with UNISDR to review the links between the Sendai Framework, the SDGs and the value added by EO.

Work is also planned around a strategic engagement plan relating to GEO and UN-GGIM since there are numerous touch points across the Member States, as well as thematic and regional activities.

Continued Assistance and Engagement Efforts with National Governments and Partners

Earth Observations for SDGs Initiative (EO4SDG) members with cooperation from other Work Programme activities such as AfroGEOSS and, the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD) in some cases, continued to develop and implement direct engagement with national governments to improve data, reporting and environmental policy for communities and individuals. The list of various country engagements includes: Ghana, Kenya, Colombia, Senegal, Albania and the Balkans, Bangladesh, Philippines, Pakistan, Costa Rica.

Upcoming Activities

The EO4SDGs Initiative in cooperation with other Work Programme activities will continue to engage with CEOS, data partnerships, data collaboratives and UN Agencies to assist national governments with improved data and knowledge for healthier communities and citizens tracked by reporting requirements for SDGs.

UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and major global events for the remainder of this year and next will include: the UN General Assembly, making sure delegations have information on Earth observations and geospatial data available to them; engagement at the UN Statistical Commission InterAgency Work Group (IAEG) meeting this fall supporting UNCCD and UN Environment actions to elevate aquatic ecosystem and land cover related SDG “Tier III” Indicators to more favorable status with Earth observations and geospatial data methods incorporated and supported by GEO; preparation for the UN Statistical Commission Annual meeting in March 2018 and the UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in June 2018 where the focus will be on natural resource related Goals.