

Report of the Subgroup on Outreach to Regional GEOSS

This document is submitted to the Program Board for discussion.

1 INTRODUCTION

This document is developed as an initial discussion document to respond to the Executive Committee Action 44.13 for the Programme Board Subgroup on Outreach to Regional GEOSS to provide recommendations to the 45th Executive Committee meeting on the particular framing of Caucus-established Regional GEOSSes in GEO and consider the organisational and communications exchange needed to harmonise Caucus-established Regional GEOSSes activities in GEO and the GEO Work Programme (GWP).

The Outreach to Regional GEOSS Subgroup Co-Chairs and GEO Secretariat drafted the first version of the discussion document and received comments from the Subgroup members. The document currently does not address the “communication exchange” aspect of Regional GEOSSes and will be updated with this aspect following discussions at the Programme Board. It is suggested that the Programme Board discussions be organised, though not exclusively, along the following lines:

- Addressing the need to structurally accommodate Regional GEOSSes in GEO.
- Coordination between the respective work plans of the Regional GEOSSes and the GWP.
- Developing strong synergies between Regional GEOSS infrastructures, the GEOSS Platform and new Vision for a Results-oriented GEOSS
- Strengthening communications between Regional GEOSSes and the GEO Secretariat and the Programme Board.

2 CONTEXT

The Regional GEOSSes established by the GEO Caucuses have drawn attention of the GEO community in the last few years and their importance has been recognized in terms of raising GEO’s visibility, networking the regional communities and understanding regional/local demands. This is in addition to seeding and implementing tasks and projects that accord with GEO principles and the GWP. These Regional GEOSSes have also spurred the development of thematic activities which have adopted the Regional GEOSS moniker. While the thematic-level Regional GEOSSes, because of their specific thematic focus, are easily integrated as GWP activities and therefore could follow established procedures for inclusion in the GEO Work Programme¹, the inclusion of Caucus-established Regional GEOSSes in the Work Programme pose a challenge. This is principally due to Caucus-established Regional GEOSSes playing more of a “Regional GEO” coordination role. Questions that arise from this role involve their positioning in GEO, linkages with implementation mechanisms of the GWP (Flagships, Initiatives and Community activities), and alignment with the new GEOSS vision for a Results-Oriented GEOSS .

¹ Although there are still questions to be addressed regarding the relationship of thematic regional GEOSSes to the caucus-linked regional GEOSSes.

Following the outreach activities to the four Regional GEOSS initiatives by the Programme Board Subgroup since May 2018, Regional GEOSS session at the GEO Symposium 2018, the presentations by Caucus-established Regional GEOSSes leadership and the Programme Board on this topic at the 44th Executive Committee meeting, the Programme Board was directed to provide recommendations on the particular framing of Caucus-established Regional GEOSSes in GEO and consider the organisational and communications exchange needed to harmonise Caucus-established Regional GEOSSes activities in GEO and the GWP. This document presents initial thoughts for Programme Board discussions.

3 REGIONAL GEO DEFINITION

A consequence of the direction given by the Executive Committee at its 44th meeting was the need to examine the definition of “Regional GEOSS”. Literally, GEOSS stands for Global Earth Observation System of Systems. Regional GEOSS spells out as Regional Global Earth Observation System of Systems, which has the logical inconsistency in name.² Further, GEOSS by definition is “a set of coordinated, independent Earth observation, information and processing systems”³, and in many cases referred to as the infrastructure pillar of GEO, for example, the GEOSS Platform Foundational Task.

Regional GEOSSes may include various parts of the Earth observation value chain, but mainly focus on downstream products and services. Therefore, a recommendation would be to stop using the term “Regional GEOSSes” to avoid confusion. Also given the strong coordination role of “Regional GEOSS” in user engagement and resource mobilization, “Regional GEO” may be a better term to use to describe the Caucus-established Regional GEOSSes. Recognizing that each of the individual Regional GEOSSes is known to the community and may be not easy to change names, at least collectively they can be referred to as “Regional GEOs”.

Through the Programme Board Subgroup exchange with the Regional GEOs, the four Caucus-established Regional GEOs are distinct from activities like the emerging Arctic GEOSS, while defined geographically, have more in common with the thematic activities in the Work Programme. They are also different from sub-regional activities such as Himalayan GEOSS (a Community Activity in current GWP), which can rest in both Regional GEOs and thematic Initiatives. Therefore Regional GEO distinctions include: the geographic boundary based on the Caucus, working on Caucus-agreed priorities, and oversight by the Caucus.

Recommendation 1:

A “Regional GEO” should be defined as a set of GEO activities within the geographic boundary of a GEO Caucus, working on Caucus-agreed priorities, and overseen by the Caucus.

4 REGIONAL GEO POSITIONING

There are three type of activities in Regional GEOs:

- Coordination, including resource mobilization, communication and outreach, user engagement and so on (all 4 Regional GEOs)
- Subset of global activities. This includes majority of AfriGEOSS, AmeriGEOSS and AOGEOSS activities, e.g., Sustainable Forest Management of AfriGEOSS is part of GFOI; the Water task in AmeriGEOSS is part of GEOGLOWS; and AP-BON in AOGEOSS is part of GEOBON.

² It has been suggested that “Regional GEOSS” could be understood as “Regional component of GEOSS”, although this does not appear to be a universally-accepted interpretation.

³ *GEO Strategic Plan 2016-2025: Implementing GEOSS*, p.5.

- Production and/or adoption of new global/regional products and services. There are two different situations: Environment Monitoring and Assessment in AOGEOSS, which is also a Community Activity in GWP. The emerging Mekong River Basin pilot project in AOGEOSS, not included AOGEOSS implementation plan yet.

The second type of activities causes confusions from management point of view:

- These activities do not produce products and services, or they don't produce distinct products and services other than part of global Initiatives, Flagships or Foundational Tasks.
- They are double counted, which adds burden both to implementation teams in reporting and management teams in monitoring.

Understanding that RGs teams prefer maintaining the flexibility of RGs, and the necessity to maintain clarity and consistency of GWP activities, here proposed some options for RG positioning in GEO structure:

Option 1: Regional GEOs as part of GEO governance structure

This option focuses on and reinforces the coordination role of Regional GEOs. Regional GEOs will become part of GEO governance structure. The current Caucuses evolve to Regional GEOs and extend the function of Caucus from selecting Executive Committee members to overseeing regional GEO activities, including those downscaled from global activities, and those newly initiated by the region. The latter should be registered as Community Activities to meet the same criteria as other activities in the GWP.

Advantage: Regional GEOs formally recognized in GEO governance structure; GWP consistency improved; duplication and double-counting of activities resolved

Disadvantage: Regional GEOs lose visibility in GWP. Reformation of current GEO governance structure.

Option 2: Regional GEOs as a new category in the GWP

This option will create a new category called “Regional GEO”, parallel to Flagships, Initiatives, Community Activities and Foundational Tasks. To avoid duplication, only distinct tasks initiated by regions will remain in the category of Regional GEOs and those activities which just subset global activities will be pulled out. The Regional GEOs will be overseen by the Caucuses and Regional GEO activities will be monitored and assessed with the respectively same criteria with other activities in GWP.

Advantage: Duplication and double-counting of activities resolved

Disadvantage: The current Regional GEO activity structure will be broken. Caucuses may lose motivation in coordinating the regional networks of global activities. Monitoring and Evaluation for Regional GEOs may reduce the flexibility and constrain broad activities including emerging ones.

Option 3: Regional GEOs as a cluster of regional activities in the GWP

This option also creates a new category called “Regional GEO” in GWP. Different from Option 2, a Regional GEO here is only a cluster of regional activities, which are either part of global activities or separate activities registered in the GWP. The Regional GEOs will still be overseen by the Caucuses but they will not be monitored separately. They are just clustered for coordination purposes.

Advantage: Duplication and double-counting of activities are accepted by providing a new geographical axis to GWP and the integrity of Regional GEOs is maintained.

Disadvantage: More complexity of GWP structure, registration and reporting rules should be defined for avoiding confusion.

These options will be further explored with the Regional GEO implementation teams (AfriGEOSS, AmeriGEOSS, AOGEOSS and EuroGEOSS), Programme Board and Executive Committee to identify

the best solutions. It should be also noted that these discussions need to be taken with the thematic regional GEOSS initiatives.

5 OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to formally recognize the role of Regional GEOs and support the implementation of Regional GEOs, there are a few other recommendations regardless which of the above three options will be adopted.

Recommendation 2: Make changes to GEO Rules of Procedure to include the oversight and coordination role of Regional GEOs by Caucus (or the change of name of Caucus to Regional GEO under Option 1).

Recommendation 3: Organize quarterly teleconferences and annual inter-Regional GEO side meetings during GEO Week or the GEO Symposium by GEO Secretariat to advance communication among Regional GEOs and GWP activities.

Recommendation 4: Define expected Regional GEO functions to include the following:

- Explore local/regional needs for Earth observation applications and convey them to global GEO activities;
- Create and maintain an inventory of existing local/regional Earth observation activities within its regions, including Earth observation activities outside of the GEO community;
- Coordinate local/regional Earth observation activities by connecting GWP activities to local/regional Earth observation activities, by facilitating regional collaboration among local/regional Earth observation activities;
- Establish and maintain a user-friendly interface of global GEO to regional stakeholders, for example, translate GEO activities into local languages;
- Promote communication among local/regional governments and practitioners; and
- Identify funding opportunities for project-based activities to support creation of clear-defined products and services or adoption of existing products and services by regional/national/local decision-makers.