

Proposed Structure for Foundational Tasks in the 2020-2022 GEO Work Programme

This document is submitted to the Program Board for discussion.

1 INTRODUCTION

While most GEO Work Programme activities are conceived, organized and led by GEO Members and Participating Organizations, one category of Work Programme activities is generally coordinated and implemented by the GEO Secretariat, namely, the Foundational Tasks. For this reason, there has not been a call to the GEO community to propose Foundational Tasks as was done for Flagships, Initiatives, Regional GEOs and Community Activities. This document is intended to begin a conversation with the Programme Board regarding the structure of the Foundational Tasks for the 2020-2022 Work Programme, which will be followed by a more detailed proposal on the details of each of the Foundational Tasks.

2 BACKGROUND

Foundational Tasks were introduced in the GEO Strategic Plan 2016-2025 as the organizing framework for selected enabling functions that support the other Work Programme activities. These functions may include, among other things: coordination actions, gap analyses, implementation of technical elements for accessing GEOSS, and routine operations of the Secretariat. Collectively, the Foundational Tasks account for the entirety of the GEO Trust Fund Budget¹, as well as contributions, either financial or in-kind, from GEO Members, Participating Organizations and other partners.

The 2016 Transitional Work Programme included 18 Foundational Tasks organized into four groups: GEOSS Development and GCI Operations; Community Development; and Secretariat Operations. This list was developed from both an analysis of the Core Functions identified in the Strategic Plan and from the Tasks in the 2012-2015 GEO Work Plan under the “Infrastructure” and “Institutions and Development” categories. Following a detailed analysis by the Programme Board in 2016, the list of Foundational Tasks was reduced to the current set of 10. A key driver for this reduction was the capacity of the Secretariat to support the Foundational Tasks, given that Trust Fund resources were limited and the majority of these are required to support Secretariat Operations. In some cases, activities that had originally been included as Foundational Tasks were reclassified as Community Activities, for example, Communications Networks and Socio-Economic Benefits. It was also suggested at the time that the Secretariat could make adjustments to the set of Foundational Tasks based on resource availability and other considerations.

3 SECRETARIAT PROPOSAL

In December 2018, the Secretariat held an internal discussion regarding the experiences with the Foundational Tasks in the 2017-2019 period and how the Foundational Tasks might be expected to

¹ Except for funds managed by the Secretariat on behalf of specific Flagships, Initiatives or Regional GEOs.

evolve in light of current priorities. An initial proposal was developed from this discussion, which is presented below for consultation with the Programme Board.

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The major activities included in each of the proposed Foundational Tasks are described briefly:

Engagement Priorities Coordination

- GEO engagement strategy
- Coordination of GEO activities on Agenda 2030 (SDGs), Paris Agreement, Sendai Framework, and New Urban Agenda
- Coordination of engagement with UN organizations
- Commercial sector strategy
- GEO communications strategy
- GEO website management

GEOSS Data and Information Resources

- Coordination between GEO and CEOS
- Development and implementation of a GEO strategy on advancing in situ observations
- Advancing implementation of GEOSS Data Sharing Principles and Data Management Principles
- Management and support of the GEO-Amazon Cloud Credits programme and other similar activities
- Development and implementation of a GEO Knowledge Hub

GEOSS Platform Operations

- Support for continued operations of the GEO-DAB and GEOSS Portal
- Development and implementation of any new functionalities of the GEOSS Platform

GEO Work Programme Support

- Support to the GEO Programme Board
- Liaison with GEO Work Programme activities
- Resource mobilization to assist Work Programme activities
- Capacity building for Work Programme activity leads and participants
- Monitoring and evaluation

Secretariat Operations

- Organization and support to GEO Plenary meetings and Ministerial Summits
- Support to the GEO Executive Committee
- Liaison with, and management of application processes for, GEO Members, Participating Organizations, Observers and Associates
- Resource mobilization for the GEO Trust Fund
- Management of the GEO Trust Fund and support to the Budget Working Group
- Secretariat administration

Four of the proposed Foundational Tasks will be led by the Secretariat; the exception is the GEOSS Platform Operations which is expected to continue to be led by the European Space Agency, with the support of various contributors across the GEO community. Implementation of the Tasks led by the Secretariat may also involve organizations or teams from the GEO community, such as the Data Sharing Working Group and the Capacity Building Working Group.

Changes from the 2017-2019 Foundational Tasks to the proposed set are based on the experience gained during implementation over the past two years. In some areas, the needs and priorities within GEO evolved such that much greater Secretariat support was seen to be required than was originally anticipated in 2016. In other areas, the means that were initially identified to meet requirements were re-examined and replaced with other approaches. At a general level, the Secretariat is also of the view that a simpler structure, with fewer Foundational Tasks, will be easier to manage and support under current budget levels.

The rationale for changes related to each of the new Foundational Tasks is as follows:

- Direction from GEO Plenary and Executive Committee to focus on the GEO Engagement Priorities, combined with a reduction in secondments to the Secretariat from GEO Members, has led to a shift from a staffing model based on Societal Benefit Areas (SBAs) to one oriented toward coordination of GEO support to the key international agendas associated with the Engagement Priorities. Further, since much of the communications effort is also directed toward supporting the Engagement Priorities, the communications and website functions are best managed as part of these efforts. Finally, the commercial sector strategy, which is principally engagement-related, also is included here.
- Another consequence of the reduction in secondments and the shift away from an SBA-based model has been the need to provide an enhanced level of support and interaction with the activities in the GEO Work Programme. This is now being addressed through a team approach in the Secretariat, which makes achievement of goals a joint rather than an individual responsibility. It also promotes better understanding of the various interactions between Secretariat staff and Work Programme activities, which is especially important in a work environment using temporary secondments. Another key new element is a shift identified by the Capacity Building Working Group to re-orient its focus from capacity of users of Earth observations to building capacity within the GEO community, particularly within the Work Programme activities. Based on these considerations, various functions related to the support of Work Programme activities and to the Programme Board have been grouped together into a single Foundational Task.
- The GEOSS Data and Information Resources Task is derived from three existing Foundational Tasks, those related to in situ EO resources, satellite EO resources, and data sharing. The first of these has come to be viewed as a key priority for GEO, but the previous approach has not proven to be successful. Stronger Secretariat leadership to this Task is necessary for additional progress, though with the continued engagement from across the GEO community. The satellite resources Task has been well-managed under CEOS leadership, which is expected to continue, though the rationale for a separate Task for this function is not obvious. On data sharing, while the Data Sharing Working Group continues to be active, the level of effort in this area does not justify a separate Foundational Task at this point. On the other hand, emerging needs in the areas of cloud computing support and knowledge management, which are receiving considerable attention across the GEO Work Programme, would benefit from greater coordination and support from the Secretariat.
- Secretariat Operations is largely the continuation of the existing Management and Support Foundational Task. The key changes anticipated here are the need to provide more regular contact with GEO Members and Participating Organizations and to meet the somewhat greater workload requirements associated with managing the new GEO Associates category.

- GEOSS Platform Operations remains essentially unchanged in the proposed structure, though it is expected that an updated Implementation Plan will be prepared by the team responsible for management of the Task.
- Two existing Foundational Tasks are not carried over from the existing set. GEONETCast Development and Operations is proposed to be moved to a Community Activity. This activity is already coordinated by organizations within the GEO community with little regular interaction or guidance from the Secretariat. Placement as a Community Activity, which had been proposed in 2016, recognizes this situation and may well give greater profile to the activity. User Needs and Gap Analysis is proposed to be discontinued. The Task has been inactive for some time and has not been viewed as a priority for Secretariat staffing. The originally-proposed approach to conduct user needs assessments on an SBA-by-SBA basis has proven to be impracticable to implement and, as was discussed by Programme Board in 2017, the preferred approach to identification of user needs is to integrate it into the work of individual Flagships and Initiatives. Efforts toward common GEO tools to support knowledge management, which were part of the User Needs and Gap Analysis Task, will be included within the GEOSS Data and Information Resources Task.

4 QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

The proposed structure is presented here for comment by the Programme Board. Based on those comments, a revised and more detailed description of each of the Foundational Tasks will be prepared for consideration at the 13th meeting of the Programme Board.

In reviewing the proposed structure, Programme Board members are asked to consider the following questions:

- Are there any activities or functions which do not appear in the set of Foundational Tasks but which clearly ought to be included (and which would be high priority for support from Trust Fund resources)?
- Does the alignment of specific functions within the Foundational Tasks make sense? Are there any functions that should be realigned elsewhere?
- Are there any activities or functions identified under the proposed Foundational Tasks that should not be undertaken or that would be better positioned elsewhere in the Work Programme?