

## Draft Terms of Reference for the GEO Mid-Term Evaluation

*This document is submitted to the Program Board for discussion.*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

The GEO-XV Plenary, following the recommendation of the GEO Executive Committee, directed that a comprehensive Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) be commenced in 2019 to permit delivery of a final report for the GEO-XVII Plenary in 2020. Draft terms of reference for the MTE are appended to this document as Annex A. Comments are sought from Programme Board members on these terms of reference. The terms of reference, with any required revisions, will then be presented to the Executive Committee for their approval prior to launching the MTE.

### 2 BACKGROUND

The term “evaluation” as it is used in this document—and by most international, governmental, and non-governmental organizations—refers to a systematic and objective assessment of an on-going or completed project, program, or policy, and its design, implementation and results. Evaluation in this sense is distinct from ongoing monitoring of performance against defined objectives and is also distinct from reporting on progress. Monitoring and reporting are generally considered to be management functions and, in the GEO context, are the responsibility of the Secretariat. In contrast, evaluations, in most organizations, are conducted by independent evaluators who are not directly involved in implementing or overseeing the program or other entity being evaluated. This is to reduce the possibility of bias in the findings and recommendations of the evaluation.

Following the process used prior to 2016, the MTE will be planned and conducted by an Evaluation Team (ET) convened specifically for the MTE. A call for nominations to the ET will be issued by the GEO Secretariat. ET members must be nominated by a GEO Member or Participating Organization and the costs of their participation in the ET must be borne by their home organizations. The ET will be responsible for designing and implementing the evaluation to meet the requirements of the terms of reference, as approved by the GEO Executive Committee. The final MTE report will be presented to the Executive Committee, which will then have the opportunity to prepare responses to the recommendations in the report. The final MTE report, together with the Executive Committee responses, will then be presented to GEO Plenary.

This evaluation process design was the subject of considerable discussion within GEO going back to 2007 and was used successfully through six evaluations in the period of 2010 to 2015. The process was intended to be consistent with GEO’s voluntary, non-binding principles, affordable within the limited resources of the Trust Fund, based on a transparent process open to GEO participants, and maintain a degree of autonomy sufficient to assure credibility of the findings within the GEO community.

Monitoring and reporting of progress in implementing the GEO Work Programme will continue as usual throughout the period in which the MTE is being conducted.

### **3 REQUEST TO PROGRAMME BOARD**

In reviewing the appended terms of reference, Programme Board members are asked to consider the following questions:

- Are there any sections that require clarification?
- Does the scope of the MTE reflect the most important issues for GEO at this time?
- Is the scope of the MTE sufficiently well-defined to be feasible within the time period?
- Are there any parts of the terms of reference that may cause difficulty for implementing the MTE?
- Do you think that the MTE will yield useful findings and recommendations?

Programme Board members are also requested to consult within their organizations and countries to identify suitable candidates for the ET.

## ANNEX A

### DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE GEO 2020 MID-TERM EVALUATION

#### 1 CONTEXT

The Group on Earth Observations (GEO) is an intergovernmental organization of more than 100 national governments and over 100 international Participating Organizations. GEO envisions a future where decisions and actions for the benefit of humankind are informed by coordinated, comprehensive and sustained Earth observations.

Together, the GEO community is creating a Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS) to better integrate observing systems and share data by connecting existing infrastructures using common standards. GEO activities are initiated, funded and carried out by partnerships of Member states, Participating Organizations and others. GEO provides a unified framework for the planning and implementation of these activities, which collectively comprise the GEO Work Programme. Support for GEO operations is provided by a small Secretariat, funded through voluntary contributions from GEO Members.

The GEO Plenary is the highest decision-making body of GEO, composed of Principals at the senior-official level of government, or their Alternates, representing GEO Member governments and Participating Organizations. Plenary meetings are held once a year and decisions are taken through consensus. Every few years, Ministers from GEO Member countries meet to review progress and decide on major changes in GEO's evolution. The last GEO Ministerial summit took place in Mexico City in 2015, with the next Ministerial summit planned for 2019 in Canberra, Australia.

#### 2 PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

The need for a 2020 Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) was identified in the *GEO Strategic Plan 2016-2025 Reference Document*, which stated that:

*Two comprehensive evaluations should be conducted with one mid-way through the Strategic Plan period and the other near the end. The evaluations will address the full scope of the activities within GEO, although their primary focus should be on the Strategic Objectives and the expected results. The mid-term evaluation will also include an assessment on the extent to which the priorities identified in the Mexico City Ministerial Declaration are being realized and re-orient / refine directions set out in the GEO Strategic Plan to take into account emerging trends and challenges.*

The MTE is thus intended to review progress realized by GEO since 2015 and to assess the experience in implementing the changes introduced in the *GEO Strategic Plan 2016-2025*. Further details regarding the evaluation questions will be addressed in section 3 below.

The findings and recommendations of the MTE will inform any course corrections needed during the latter half of the Strategic Plan period.

The primary audience for the final MTE report will be the GEO governance bodies: the GEO Plenary, Executive Committee and Programme Board. Included here are the Principals of each GEO Member country and Participating Organization. Additional stakeholders include the over 1000 contributors to the GEO Work Programme, as well as the many data providers, users of Earth observations data and information, and beneficiaries of the information products and services developed with the support of GEO.

The final MTE report will be posted on the GEO website as a public document.

### **3 SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION**

#### **3.1 Temporal coverage**

The MTE should focus primarily on developments within GEO since 2015, in particular, key priorities identified in the *Mexico City Declaration* and key changes implemented in the *GEO Strategic Plan 2016-2025*. When assessing outcomes and impacts of GEO activities, the activities giving rise to observed outcomes and/or impacts will likely have begun prior to 2015; however, the focus should be on outcomes and impacts that became apparent since 2015 or that have notably changed in a quantitative or qualitative sense. The evaluation should not address the development of the 2020-2022 GEO Work Programme except to the extent that it is observed to respond to needs identified as emerging from the implementation of the 2017-2019 GEO Work Programme.

#### **3.2 Geographic and thematic coverage**

The evaluation is intended to cover the full geographic extent of GEO (that is, global) as well as the full thematic range of GEO's activities as represented by the GEO Work Programme. However, given limitations of time, resources and team members, it is expected that it will not be possible to address all areas within this scope to the small level of detail; this may be accomplished through, for example, appropriate sampling during data collection. Therefore, it is not anticipated that, for instance, all GEO Members will be contacted, nor will detailed information on all GEO Work Programme activities be collected.

#### **3.3 Evaluation questions**

Specific questions to be addressed in the evaluation include:

1. What results have been realized with respect to GEO's strengthened focus on users and stakeholders; in particular, on working with United Nation institutions, multi-lateral environmental agreements, multi-lateral development banks, statistical agencies, and the private sector?
2. What evidence exists for the influence of Earth observation information products and services developed, produced or delivered through GEO Work Programme activities on decision making (by individuals, organizations, governments, etc.) and what evidence is there of benefits derived from such influence?
3. How has the implementation of "GEO engagement priorities" impacted GEO's work, including: the GEO Work Programme, the GEO Secretariat, GEO governance bodies (GEO Plenary, Executive Committee, Programme Board, Regional GEOs), relations with GEO Members and Participating Organizations, and relations with other organizations?
4. To what extent have the changes introduced in the GEO Strategic Plan 2016-2025 – including among other things: the distinction between GEO Flagships, Initiatives and Community Activities; the role of the GEO Programme Board; the concept of Core Functions; revisions to the Societal Benefit Areas; and the organization of the Foundational Tasks – led to increased effectiveness of the GEO Work Programme?

In each of these areas, the MTE should characterize the major decisions and actions which were taken by GEO governance bodies and by GEO Work Programme activities, identify any significant impacts of these decisions and actions (both positive and negative) and (to the extent feasible) other contributing factors, and provide recommendations to improve GEO's performance in the remainder of the 2016-2025 period.

#### 4 EVALUATION TEAM

The evaluation will be conducted by an evaluation team (ET) of between 8 and 20 members who are each nominated by a GEO Principal (of either a GEO Member or a Participating Organization). Nominations will be sought through a letter sent by the GEO Secretariat to the Principals, Alternates and correspondence contacts of all GEO Members and Participating Organizations.

ET members may have expertise in any scientific, technical, policy or management domain related to GEO's mission. Nominations of individuals with experience in project / programme evaluation, interviewing, survey design and other relevant techniques are particularly encouraged.

ET members should not be leads or participants in any GEO Work Programme activities, nor members of any GEO governance body or the GEO Secretariat, during the time of their participation on the evaluation team.

ET members will choose one to three members of the team to serve as chair or co-chairs at their first meeting.

ET members are expected to serve in an individual capacity (that is, not as representatives of their nominating GEO Member or Participating Organization or of their home organization) for the duration of the evaluation. Based on previous GEO evaluations, the time commitment is about 10% of working time on average over the period when the evaluation is conducted. For ET chair/co-chairs it may be 25% or more. This time commitment is unevenly distributed, however, with more time required during face-to-face meetings of the ET and during preparation of reports.

Costs of the participation by ET members in the MTE must be supported by the GEO Principal or the ET member's home organization, including their time and their travel expenses to meetings.

#### 5 EVALUATION METHODS

The specific methods to be used to conduct the MTE, as well as the development of the tools to be used, will be the responsibility of the ET. However, it is expected that the following methods which have been used in previous GEO evaluations will also be appropriate in this context:

- Review of documents, including:
  - Official GEO documents, including Ministerial declarations, key reference documents such as GEO Strategic Plans and GEO Work Programmes, documents submitted for consideration by GEO governance bodies, final reports from GEO governance bodies, and Implementation Plans from GEO Work Programme activities.
  - Unofficial documents as may be available, including other records maintained within the GEO Secretariat, documents produced by GEO Work Programme activities, scientific publications, etc.
  - Statistical and performance data collected by the GEO Secretariat or by individual GEO Work Programme activities.
  - Reports of reviews or evaluations relevant to GEO that may have been conducted by GEO Members, Participating Organizations, funding bodies or others.
- Key informant interviews
  - Interviews should generally be conducted with a sample of key categories of GEO stakeholders, which could include members of GEO governance bodies, leads and/or other participants in GEO Work Programme activities, GEO Principals or other representatives of GEO Members and Participating Organizations, users and/or beneficiaries of Earth observations information products and services produced by GEO Work Programme activities, and other stakeholders.

- Due to the geographic scope of GEO, interviews will often need to be conducted by tele- or video-conference, although opportunities to conduct in-person interviews, such as around key GEO meetings, should be explored.
- Interviews are generally expected to be used for qualitative identification of issues and themes and not as the basis for statistical inference. The number of interviews, questions and interview protocols will be the responsibility of the ET.
- Surveys
  - Surveys may be used as a means to gather more representative data than is possible through other methods. Given time and resource limitations, surveys will likely only be feasible for a few selected topics where preliminary analysis based on other methods suggests such an approach will be worthwhile. Electronic surveys should generally be used except in situations where this method may significantly bias the results. Though GEO operates in English only, large proportions of intended users use other languages and so single language survey instruments may not be sufficient.
- Case studies
  - Case studies should be considered as a means to address questions of attribution of outcomes to GEO activities, identify best practices, or to explore parts of the evaluation in greater depth than would be possible through other methods.

## 6 PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

### 6.1 Time frame

While preparatory work for the evaluation began in 2018, the MTE is expected to begin in May 2019 with the first meeting of the ET. The final MTE report is expected to be delivered by 30 May 2020. The co-chairs of the ET will be invited to present the findings and recommendations of the MTE to the GEO Executive Committee at their meeting in July 2020. The GEO Executive Committee will then prepare responses to each of the recommendations in the final MTE report. The final MTE report, plus the Executive Committee responses, will be presented to the GEO-XVII Plenary in October/November 2020.

### 6.2 Responsibilities of the evaluation team

The ET is collectively responsible, under the leadership of their selected co-chairs, for:

- Preparing a plan for the MTE, responding to the requirements in this terms of reference, and submitting it to the Secretariat Director for approval;
- Implementing the MTE as described in the evaluation plan;
- Informing the Secretariat Director (or designate) of progress on implementing the evaluation on at least a monthly basis;
- Submitting an interim report on findings to the Secretariat Director by the date identified in section 6.6;
- Promptly and proactively raising any issues that may arise which could impact the full and timely completion of the evaluation;
- Circulating the draft MTE report (or relevant portions of it) to selected subject-matter experts within the GEO community for review of factual accuracy; and
- Submitting a final MTE report to the Secretariat Director by the date identified in section 6.6.

It should be noted that the ET is solely responsible for the findings, conclusions and recommendations contained in the MTE interim and final reports. These sections are not subject to revision or approval by any GEO governance body.

### 6.3 Responsibilities of the GEO Secretariat

The Secretariat is responsible for assisting the ET in the implementation of the MTE in the following ways:

- Providing office space and administrative support to the ET chair /co-chairs, if requested by the nominating GEO Member;
- Providing reasonable access to documentation and records in the possession of the Secretariat as required for the MTE;
- Providing reasonable access to Secretariat staff to participate in interviews and other data collection processes where their personal knowledge is relevant to answering evaluation questions;
- Ensuring the availability of an internet-based tool to enable secure sharing of documents and other data supporting the MTE process among members of the ET;
- Providing assistance to the ET in identifying and contacting GEO stakeholders for purposes related to the evaluation; and
- Providing logistical support for meetings and tele/video-conferences of the ET.

### 6.4 Resources

Except for those services identified in section 6.3 above, which will be provided by the GEO Secretariat, all resources (human, financial, etc.) associated with the MTE will be provided as part of the voluntary contributions by GEO Members and Participating Organizations to the MTE process.

### 6.5 Deliverables

The ET is required to provide the following key deliverables to the Secretariat Director:

#### 1. Evaluation plan

The plan must include the following components:

- A summary of the ET's understanding of the evaluation questions (section 3.3 above) and how it proposes to address them;
- The evaluation methods the team proposes to use;
- Where sampling will be used, the proposed sample sizes and how the samples will be selected;
- Where case studies are proposed, the focus for these studies and the rationale for selection of the cases to be examined;
- A detailed schedule for the MTE, including the proposed dates of face-to-face meetings and teleconferences (which may be subject to change);
- Any changes proposed to the requirements set out in the terms of reference and the rationale for these changes; and
- Any key limitations to the MTE that have been identified by the ET.

Additional elements of the plan may be included as desired by the ET.

#### 2. Interim report on findings

The interim report should be a brief document, of no more than 5 pages, for distribution only to members of the GEO Executive Committee. It should describe each of the key expected findings, organized by the evaluation questions in section 3.3 above.

The interim report is intended to enable the GEO Executive Committee to take account of these findings in their planning and – as the representative of the GEO Plenary, the client of the evaluation – to provide feedback to the ET, for example, to direct their attention to particular areas of interest during the remainder of the MTE.

### 3. Final evaluation report

The final MTE report must contain, at a minimum, the following sections:

- An executive summary which provides an overview of the purpose and methods of the evaluation, a summary of the findings and a summary of the recommendations;
- A detailed description of the purpose of the MTE, its scope, description of the activities evaluated, and the evaluation approach and methodology;
- One or more sections describing the findings of the MTE;
- Recommendations to the GEO Plenary and Executive Committee on how GEO may improve its performance in the 2020-2025 period;
- Appendices which should include: a list of documents consulted, a list of persons interviewed, the interview protocols, any survey forms used, case study reports, and other appendices as required.

### 4. Presentation on findings and recommendations

A set of presentation slides, summarizing the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the MTE, must be prepared for presentation to the GEO Executive Committee after the conclusion of the MTE. The chair/co-chairs of the ET will be invited to present this information to the Executive Committee either in person or by videoconference.

## 6.6 Key Dates

The following are proposed as the target dates for the Mid-Term Evaluation, subject to amendment by the GEO Executive Committee:

Secretariat issues call for nominations to the ET	1 February 2019
Nomination period closes	31 March 2019
First meeting of the ET	week of 17 June 2019
The ET submits its evaluation plan	26 July 2019
The Secretariat Director approves the evaluation plan or requests amendments	16 August 2019
The ET submits its interim report on findings	21 February 2020
The ET submits its final evaluation report and presentation on findings and recommendations	5 June 2020
The GEO Executive Committee completes its responses to the recommendations	11 September 2020
The final MTE report, with Executive Committee responses, distributed to GEO Principals	late September 2020
Presentation of MTE findings, recommendations, and Executive Committee responses to GEO Plenary	October/November 2020