

## **Land Cover Side Event: “Harmonized Pathways Towards Policy Needs”**

**Coordinated by GEO and the UN Statistical Division  
GEO Week 2015, Mexico City, Mexico  
Monday, 9 November, 14:00-18:00**

GOFC-GOLD and USGS have also provided inputs to this side event.

### **Background**

Land cover is one of GEO’s top-priority Earth observation areas due to its cross-cutting importance to many Societal Benefit Areas. For example, it plays a major role in climate change processes, which affect all SBAs. It is also critically important for ecosystems and biodiversity, as well as water and disasters. Land cover and land use information is also getting increasing attention in emerging international frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals and is also an important feature of environmental accounting.

The GEO Global Land Cover Task is working to improve coordination of land cover activities around the world. It seeks to develop an international network where GEO Members and other partners can express their needs for land cover products and contribute mapping and monitoring resources to the development of those products. The Land Cover Task aims to meet the product needs of a variety of stakeholders, including environmental agencies, science communities, national mapping agencies, commercial users, and UN Conventions. However, more work is needed to efficiently coordinate activities and communicate related societal benefits and evidence of policy linkages.

### **Motivation for the Side Event**

With an increasing number of sensors, including most recently Landsat 8 and Sentinel-2, as well as tremendous increases in image processing power and greater availability of ancillary datasets, land cover monitoring has entered a new era. Several international teams have already made significant advances in the production of global land cover products at high resolution, and progress continues towards a suite of global land cover datasets, based on improved and validated land cover scenes.

However, despite these advances not all user communities are having their needs met. For example, while standardized global classification systems have been proposed, they are either still not universally used or do not always fulfil user needs at the regional and national scale; in fact it is unlikely that a single classification system will meet the needs of all users. And there are

other challenges, such as differences between datasets that make it hard for users to know which one to use, update frequency, and time lag. Efficient validation is also a challenge.

### **Objectives, outputs, and outcomes**

Meeting the needs of all users is a big challenge, with complications in a variety of dimensions including the difficulties of generating a global dataset. This side event will not attempt to address all these challenges but rather focus on increasing harmonization of the activities and outputs of the various groups developing land cover datasets. The needs and perspectives of the UN Statistical Division, which focus on ecosystem accounting, are of special interest. UNSD will outline those needs and suggest a project to help address them.

#### **Objectives**

- Identify paths towards greater harmonization
- Explore and identify new methods for improved utilization of existing LCLU datasets and available EO data and other information
- Identify potential partners for UNSD project

#### **Outputs and outcomes**

- Identification of key players that are able to engage
- A starting point for further exploration of ideas