

## **Monitoring and Evaluation Lessons Learned 2005-2015**

*This Document, prepared by the co-chairs of the GEO Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group is being submitted to GEO-XII for information.*



## Monitoring and Evaluation Lessons Learned 2005-2015

### 1 PURPOSE

This report contains a brief review of the monitoring and evaluation efforts undertaken by the Group on Earth Observations during the first decade of activity and provides notes and recommendations with the goal of informing future GEO efforts for measuring progress and performance.

### 2 BACKGROUND

A Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group (M&E WG) was incorporated into the GEO Rules of Procedure with a charge to: "*coordinate monitoring and evaluation of GEOSS implementation until 2015, the end of the 10-year Plan.*"

The form of the GEO M&E WG emerged from a series of *ad hoc* meetings and discussions during the first years of GEO implementation (~2005-2008). Formal M&E WG activities began in 2009. The duties of the M&E WG included:

- Develop a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, including a schedule for evaluations;
- For each evaluation: prepare an initial evaluation plan; recruit a team to conduct the evaluation; oversee the evaluation process; transmit the final evaluation report to GEO Executive Committee;
- Develop performance indicators.

The early operations of the M&E WG were marked by a series of successes. Of particular note were the development of a Monitoring & Evaluation Framework Document that was accepted by Plenary (GEO-VI, Document 13), recognition in the Strategic Targets document (GEO-VI, Document 12) of the need for more concrete and measurable objectives (e.g., listed under each societal benefit area as *to be demonstrated by...*), and coordination of a comprehensive mid-term evaluation of GEOSS implementation.

The mid-term evaluation reviewed all of the SBAs and transverse areas of the contemporary GEO Work Plan. This effort yielded a series of recommendations and also provided momentum for four subsequent annual evaluations that each focused on a subset of GEO's Strategic Targets. The annual evaluations ultimately addressed all nine SBAs and two transverse areas. From late 2014 through 2015, a final summative evaluation once again reviewed the entire scope of GEO activities with a focus on the major and common themes that had been identified in prior evaluations.

During the course of the evaluations, GEO recognized that the evaluation team reports were generating numerous recommendations for GEO and GEOSS. The M&E WG took on the additional charge to monitor and report to Plenary on the implementation of those evaluation recommendations. This monitoring revealed a high degree of success by GEO in implementing and responding to evaluation recommendations (45/46 completed or with satisfactory progress by GEO-XI).

The M&E WG experienced difficulty in attempts to propose and establish effective performance indicators for GEO and GEOSS. While performance measures could be developed for GEO Secretariat operations, they were much more difficult to apply to the diverse, distributed and voluntary efforts of the GEO Work Plan. However, the evolution of the GEO Work Plan and Boards structures created the opportunity for target-task assessments by the Boards, which were supported by the M&E

WG. And, the realignment of work plans to the strategic targets enabled the Boards reports to provide regular reviews of task performance for the past several years.

For the past two years, the M&E WG has also been engaged with the IPWG efforts to chart a course for GEO through and beyond 2016 and to incorporate monitoring and evaluation activities into those plans.

### **3 KEY LESSONS LEARNED**

#### **3.1 What worked well?**

The evaluation report process was a particular highlight for the M&E WG. We were able to recruit strong evaluation teams (ETs) with the support of GEO Members and Participating Organizations. These teams worked well together and consistently generated helpful reports and recommendations to GEO. Importantly, these reports were taken seriously by Ex Com and Plenary, leading to action to improve GEO.

The M&E Working Group found the support of the GEO Secretariat to be very strong and this was critical for many of the M&E accomplishments. Additionally, the GEO Secretariat mechanism, combined with the CoPs and then Boards, allowed for the communication and collaboration necessary integrate M&E activities with the rest of GEO.

#### **3.2 What could be improved?**

The M&E WG and evaluation teams consistently struggled with Strategic Targets that were too broad, not concrete or readily measurable.

Performance indicators didn't get off the ground due to a variety of factors.

The planning and reporting processes associated with GEO activities can be cumbersome and result in informational gaps that hinder effective M&E.

While each evaluation was individually successful, as a whole there were too many evaluations and too little time for each.

Recruitment to WG or ETs has been a perennial problem. It is difficult to engage evaluation experts who are often outside of the GEO community and there was a lack of regional balance in participants for both the WG and ETs.

### **4 RECOMMENDATIONS PROVIDED TO THE IPWG FOR THE FUTURE OF GEO M&E**

Based on the experiences of the M&E WG and in light of the various drafts circulated through the IPWG process, the M&E WG provided several recommendations for M&E in the post-2015 GEO framework:

- Define key intended outcomes of GEO in the Strategic Plan;
- Ensure measurability of those outcomes at the start;
- The Strategic Plan should be supported by two evaluations: one at mid-term, the other near the end of the Plan and both timed to report during Ministerial years;
- Incorporate greater capacity within GEO Sec to support M&E activities;
- The M&E WG is difficult to maintain, the oversight of M&E function should be assumed by the Programme Board;
- Build required info for M&E into Implementation Plans of GEO Flagships and GEO Initiatives and set M&E expectations proportionately to the size and status of the activity.

## **5 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The chairs and members of the Monitoring & Evaluation Working Group thank the GEO Members and Participating Organizations for enabling our activities through contributions of time, support, and information. We thank especially the GEO Secretariat for the incredible support provided to our activities and Giovanni Rum in particular for tireless service as the coordinator of our efforts who made sure our reports were completed on time. It has been a privilege to be a part of GEO; it is a vitally-important endeavour and an incredible group of people to work with.

Much has been learned in the last 10+ years; we must now do our best to include this hard-won knowledge into the next 10-year Plan. We look forward to continuing to participate in GEO in the future.