The Group on Earth Observations (GEO) has been very active since the 2019 Ministerial Summit in Canberra, Australia. This document highlights a few of many organizational and programmatic advances. The annual GEO Highlights Report summarizes project-level and technical activities.

GEO activities and achievements since the last Ministerial Summit

GEO adopted “Resilient Cities and Human Settlements” its fourth strategic Engagement Priority in 2021. This endeavor aligns with the New Urban Agenda endorsed by the United Nations as the policy driver around urban resilience and sustainable urbanization and promoting urban well-being. With this additional priority, GEO Work Programme activities can develop services to support uses of Earth observations to face challenges in urban areas to become more sustainable and resilient.

In 2021, GEO issued a Statement on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI), articulating the GEO community’s commitment to these ideals. It conveys GEO’s resolve to create a “sense of belonging for all individuals that enables them to share ideas and experiences as well as foster innovative solutions.” A five-pillar framework supports the attention to EDI in all aspects of GEO, including community leadership, accountability, supportive environments, accessibility, and engagement.

The New Urban Agenda (NUA) joined the Sendai Framework, the Paris Agreement, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as the policy drivers for GEO’s Engagement Priorities.

GEO and UN-HABITAT jointly developed the Earth Observations Toolkit for Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements. Launched in 2021, this Toolkit puts urban-related Earth observation data and tools into context for analysts and decision makers in support of the NUA and SDG Goal 11 to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

GEO promoted Land Degradation Neutrality (GEO LDN) as its newest Flagship activity in 2022, supporting global efforts to avoid, reduce and reverse land degradation globally. Through data quality standards, analytical tools and capacity building, governments and organizations can prioritize interventions and monitor outcomes to manage land better, enabling the goal for zero land degradation by 2030 globally. Earth observations for monitoring land degradation is instrumental for reporting and for planning and decision-making processes for sustainable land management at sub-national levels.
GEO published a Statement on Open Knowledge, supporting the generation and sharing of knowledge, especially for decision making.

GEO advocates for open knowledge “to create a commons environment that is transparent, diverse, collaborative, timely and sustainable with respect to addressing societal challenges through the application of Earth observations.” For GEO, open knowledge encompasses numerous open components working together to increase trust, inclusion, and innovation, such as open data, open science, open licensing, and open education.

LINK: Open Knowledge

GEO completed a Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE), assessing progress toward the 2016-2025 Strategic Plan and Engagement Priority goals.

This MTE identified 15 findings and put forward 10 recommendations to optimize GEO’s operating model, improve internal and external connections, clarify GEO’s value proposition, include all GEO regions, and more. Follow-on efforts crafted responses to the recommendations and actions to implement them, with numerous items addressed in the new Post-2025 Strategy, such as a refined value proposition.

LINK: MTE Documents

Ghana hosted GEO Week 2022 – the first in-person GEO Plenary after the Covid pandemic forced virtual gatherings in 2020 and 2021.

The week yielded Land Degradation Neutrality as a new GEO Flagship activity, best practices for National GEOs, and commitments toward an ecosystem extent product. The week featured numerous highlights by African representatives about progress by the AfriGEO regional initiative, DigitalEarth Africa, and more.

LINK: GEO Week 2022

GEO developed and issued new Work Programmes for 2020-2022 and for 2023-2025. These Work Programmes (WP) are the primary instruments used to facilitate project-level collaborations in fulfilling GEO’s mission.

The 2020-2022 WP featured 4 Flagships, 19 Initiatives, and 33 Community Activities, and it created Regional GEOS as a new category of activity. This WP merged several activities working on similar theme, and it highlighted the linkages of each activity to the Sustainable Development Goals, Paris Climate Agreement, and Sendai Framework. The 2023-2025 WP introduced Pilot Initiatives to replace the Community Activities category, and it streamlined the number of activities to 48 overall. In 2023, this WP engaged over 1600 individuals spanning more than 685 organizations from over 90% of GEO member countries. The Highlights Report features key areas of progress and impact from the Work Programmes.

GEO supported national coordination Mechanisms:

Since Canberra, GEO focused significant effort at supporting Member Countries to improve their internal coordination mechanisms on Earth Observations.

GEO organized a special event at the 2022 GEO Week in Ghana featuring smart practices from numerous nations on their coordination activities and mechanisms. These National Coordination Mechanisms provide a framework for national organizations – environmental agencies, disaster organizations, space agencies, natural resources ministries, and more - to improve how they work together and optimize the use of EO. Document 7.1 for this 2023 GEO Week features good practices, examples, limitations, and key takeaways to help GEO Members establish or improve their coordination mechanisms.

Since the Canberra Summit, six countries joined GEO as new Members: Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominican Republic, Namibia, Nicaragua, Rwanda, and Trinidad and Tobago.

These additions bring GEO to 115 Member Countries. In addition, the total number of Participating Organizations (PO) rose to 152 with 16 new POs. Also, nine organizations joined as GEO Associates, bringing the total number of Associates to 20. New Associates include: AmericaView, Centre for Spatial Law and Policy, D4DInsights, Eversis, GEOTERRAIMAGE, Planet, RECETOX, Research Institute for Innovation and Sustainability, and Water Youth Network.