

Report
51st Executive Committee Meeting
Teleconference, 19-20 March 2020

As Accepted at the 52nd Executive Committee Meeting.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Chair: Li Pengde, China.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Outcome: The Executive Committee approved the timeline and vacancy notice for the selection of the next GEO Secretariat Director.

1 SESSION 1: GENERAL BUSINESS

1.1 Welcome from Lead Co-Chair, Co-Chairs, and Secretariat Director

1.2 Adoption of Agenda (Document 51.1 (revision 2) – for decision)

Outcome: The second revision of the agenda was adopted as distributed.

1.3 Draft Report of the 49th Session (Document 51.2 – for decision)

Outcome: The document was approved as distributed.

1.4 Draft Report of the 50th Session (Document 51.3 – for decision)

Outcome: The document was approved as distributed.

1.5 Review of Action Items from Previous Meetings (Document 51.4 – for decision)

Outcome: The document was approved as distributed.

1.6 Secretariat Operations Report (Document 51.5 – for information)

2 SESSION 2: STRATEGY AND PLANNING

2.1 Lead Co-Chair Goals and Objectives for 2020 (Document 51.6 – for information)

Outcome: The Secretariat will take note of the comments provided by some Executive Committee members as it implements the indicators.

2.2 GEO Secretariat Engagement Plan for 2020 (Document 51.7 – for discussion)

Outcome: The Executive Committee:

- Requested that stronger links be established between the engagement priorities and the GEO Work Programme, which would be primarily through the Climate Change Working Group and the Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group; and
- Encouraged the Secretariat to continue to engage with national GEOs.

Action 51.1: The Secretariat to identify its key staff who are working with UN and other international organizations listed in the engagement plan. **Due: 10 April 2020.**

2.3 Engagement with the Commercial Sector (Presentation by the Secretariat Director – for discussion)

Outcome: The Executive Committee:

- Welcomed the presentation by the Secretariat;
- Emphasized the importance of transparency in dealings between the Secretariat and commercial sector entities; and
- Requested that the Secretariat share information regarding concrete offers from commercial sector entities with Executive Committee members with minimal delay.

2.4 Update on the development of the implementation plan for the Knowledge Hub (Document 51.8 – for information)

3 SESSION 3: CANBERRA DECLARATION

3.1 Strategy for implementing the resolutions and outcomes of the Canberra Declaration (Presentation by the Secretariat – for discussion)

Outcome: The Executive Committee:

- Established an Advisory Group to propose a strategy for engaging Pacific island nations, the Advisory Group to be open to participation by non-members of the Executive Committee and to Participating Organizations;
- Recognized the establishment of the Programme Board Private Sector subgroup and will look to this group to provide strategic guidance on engagement of small, medium, and micro-sized enterprises (SMMEs); and

- Requested the Secretariat to include in its Operations Reports and the annual Highlights Reports details of actions and results related to implementation of the Canberra Declaration.

Action 51.2: Executive Committee members to indicate their interest in participating in the Pacific Islands Advisory Group by email to the Secretariat. **Due: 30 April 2020.**

Action 51.3: The Programme Board to include in the terms of reference of its Private Sector subgroup specific attention to article 16 of the Canberra Declaration including the “need to create opportunities for SMMEs to leverage Earth observations”. **Due: 52nd Executive Committee meeting.**

4 SESSION 4: FINANCE AND RESOURCES MOBILIZATION

4.1 Report of the Budget Working Group (Presentation by the co-chair of the Budget Working Group)

Outcome: The Executive Committee:

- Welcomed Australia and South Africa as new members of the Budget Working Group;
- Encouraged GEO Members to contribute to the GEO Trust Fund;
- Recommended that GEO Members consult the voluntary indicative scale when planning their contributions.

Action 51.4: The Secretariat to ask Finland if it is still interested to join the Budget Working Group. **Due: 10 April 2020.**

4.2 Interim Report on Income and Expenditure at 31 December 2019 and Projections for 2020 (Document 51.9 – for information)

4.3 GEO Resource Mobilization 2020 Strategy Outline (Document 51.10 – for discussion)

Outcome: The Executive Committee:

- Thanked the resource mobilization team for their efforts;
- Supported the general approach which was proposed;
- Stated their interest to better leverage existing projects, improve the visibility of these projects, and ensure better integration across the GEO community; and
- Encouraged Executive Committee members to provide specific comments on the document to the Secretariat.

5 SESSION 5: 2020-2022 GEO WORK PROGRAMME

5.1 Report of the Programme Board (Document 51.11 – for information)

5.2 Terms of Reference of the Working Groups (Document 51.12 – for decision)

Outcome: The Executive Committee:

- Thanked the Secretariat and the Programme Board for their efforts in addressing the concerns raised by Executive Committee members;
- Approved the terms of reference for the four Working Groups, as distributed;
- Requested that the Data Working Group take account of the FAIR principles in its work;
- Suggested that greater consistency be sought in the Duties across the terms of reference of the Working Groups in any future revisions; and
- Encouraged nominations to the Programme Board Equality, Diversity and Inclusion subgroup, especially to reflect greater regional and gender balance.

5.3 Update on the 2020 Mid-term Evaluation (Document 51.13 – for decision)

Outcome: The Executive Committee:

- Approved the proposed changes to the terms of reference for the evaluation;
- Requested that the evaluation team address, as part of its response to question five, the effectiveness of the current funding model for the GEO Trust Fund; and
- Requested that the Budget Working Group also independently review the current funding model.

6 SESSION 6: GEO WEEKS 2019 & 2020

6.1 Review of GEO Week 2019 (Document 51.14 – for information)

6.2 GEO Week 2020 (Document 51.15 – for information)

Outcome: The Executive Committee:

- Thanked South Africa and the Secretariat for their efforts in planning GEO Week 2020 events; and
- Recommended that GEO Week 2020 address how GEO (and Earth observations) might contribute to informing the response and recovery to COVID-19 and similar future challenges, in part to highlight the value of existing GEO Work Programme activities.

7 SESSION 7: PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS AND ASSOCIATES

7.1 Proposed removal of Participating Organizations with no recent engagement (Document 51.16 – for decision)

Outcome: The Executive Committee approved removal of the seven organizations named in the document from the list of GEO Participating Organizations.

7.2 Proposed revision of application forms for Participating Organization and Associate status (Document 51.17 – for decision)

Outcome: The Executive Committee approved the changes to the application forms for GEO Participating Organizations and GEO Associates, as recommended by the Secretariat.

7.3 Review of applications for Associate category (Document 51.18 – for decision)

Outcome: The Executive Committee accepted the Centre for Spatial Law and Policy and GEOTERRAIMAGE Ltd. as GEO Associates.

8 SESSION 8: ANY OTHER BUSINESS AND REVIEW OF ACTION ITEMS

8.1 Any other business

8.2 Review of action items

8.3 Closing remarks

Report

51st Executive Committee Meeting Teleconference, 19-20 March 2020

FULL REPORT

Thursday, 19 March 2020

Meeting convened at 13:00

Chair: Li Pengde, China.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Outcome: The Executive Committee approved the timeline and vacancy notice for the selection of the next GEO Secretariat Director.

1 SESSION 1: GENERAL BUSINESS

1.1 Welcome from Lead Co-Chair, Co-Chairs, and Secretariat Director

Li Pengde, China Lead Co-Chair representative, opened the meeting by noting that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this was the first Executive Committee meeting held via teleconference. He thanked South Africa for their willingness to chair the meeting when there was a possibility of having a hybrid teleconference/in-person meeting.

1.2 Adoption of Agenda (Document 51.1 (revision 2) – for decision)

The agenda was circulated prior to the meeting. No requests for changes were submitted by Executive Committee members.

Outcome: The second revision of the agenda was adopted as distributed.

1.3 Draft Report of the 49th Session (Document 51.2 – for decision)

Japan requested some minor changes to the list of participants.

Outcome: The document was approved with the requested changes.

1.4 Draft Report of the 50th Session (Document 51.3 – for decision)

No requests for changes were submitted by Executive Committee members.

Outcome: The document was approved as distributed.

1.5 Review of Action Items from Previous Meetings (Document 51.4 – for decision)

No requests for changes were submitted by Executive Committee members.

Outcome: The document was approved as distributed.

1.6 Secretariat Operations Report (Document 51.5 – for information)

No questions were raised by Executive Committee members.

2 SESSION 2: STRATEGY AND PLANNING

2.1 Lead Co-Chair Goals and Objectives for 2020 (Document 51.6 – for information)

Japan proposed that the following text be removed from the first indicator for Objective 2.2: “GEO Members, Participating Organizations”. Their concern was that the counting methodology would vary by countries and organizations, making it difficult to interpret the indicator value.

The European Commission proposed that the indicator for Objective 2.1 be revised to: “The approval of the Executive Committee of the pre-release (alpha) version of the GEO Knowledge Hub in GEO Week 2020 in Port Elizabeth” (added text underlined). The Commission also suggested that the reference to the GEO-Google Earth Engine programme be removed from the second indicator for Objective 2.2 since the endorsement of the programme is still under discussion by the Executive Committee.

Outcome: The Secretariat will take note of the comments provided by some Executive Committee members as it implements the indicators.

2.2 GEO Secretariat Engagement Plan for 2020 (Document 51.7 – for discussion)

Steven Ramage, Senior External Relations Manager in the Secretariat, introduced the topic with a short presentation. He noted that it was five years since the GEO Engagement Priorities were first introduced. The 2020 Engagement Plan for the GEO Secretariat includes a number of meetings and key activities for each priority. While the pandemic has put a temporary stop on travel, it will not stop many of the other activities that can be conducted remotely. Approval of the terms of reference of the Working Groups for Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) will be key in continuing to make progress. Mr Ramage also noted that 2020 is a key year for biodiversity organizations including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity (IPBES). While biodiversity is not a GEO engagement priority, it has linkages to the engagement priorities in various ways, such as the potential for nature-based solutions, and is important for several GEO Work Programme activities, such as GEO-BON. However, given the resource limitations in the Secretariat, there is limited ability to support these directions. Mr Ramage emphasized that the plan is based on the resources available in the Secretariat, but involvement of others in the GEO community was welcomed. He drew attention to the ongoing vacancy for a Secretariat coordinator for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the upcoming vacancy for a DRR coordinator, thanking James Norris, the outgoing DRR coordinator, for the significant impact he made during his time in the Secretariat. Mr Ramage stated that the Secretariat has been working with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), France, Japan, Sweden and the Pacific Disaster Centre to recruit candidates for both posts. On Climate, the Secretariat is continuing to push for Observer status with the UN Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and requested support from GEO Members to this end. It is also working

with IPCC on the 6th Assessment Report (AR6), UNFCCC on the Global Stocktake, and with the Global Framework for Climate Services. Much of this work will continue remotely and is not dependent on face to face meetings. Mr Ramage noted that AR6 will take a systems approach that cuts across the GEO engagement priorities and thus represents a very important opportunity for GEO to contribute. On the SDGs, attention was drawn to the SDG Toolkit, which is an online facility for sharing data, tools, platforms, etc. from the EO4SDG website and which will eventually be linked to the GEO Knowledge Hub. The initial focus for the Toolkit will be on SDG 11, focusing on urban issues, and will be advanced in collaboration with UN-Habitat.

The Secretariat has also been meeting with ministries of foreign affairs and international development agencies of several GEO Members to highlight opportunities for collaboration and funding.

Mr Ramage mentioned work underway on resource mobilization, while recognizing that there would be a separate discussion later in the agenda. He stated that the focus of these efforts is on helping GEO Work Programme activities to prepare requests for funding with various possible funding sources. He emphasized that the funding in question is not a few thousand dollars, but about seeking millions of dollars which would enable scaling tools and solutions to a global scale. The Secretariat, along with Justyna Nicinska from the United States, is working with development agencies on how GEO Work Programme activities can help address key issues faced by these agencies.

The United States indicated that they would be providing comments to the document in writing. Noting that there would likely be changes to the plan especially with respect to meetings given the crisis, the question was asked whether the activities listed were funded in the budget. Also, though the explanations provided were thorough, it would be helpful to identify key points of contact in the Secretariat for activities involving international organizations. Steven Ramage responded that all of the meetings described in the document were included in the forward travel plan of the Secretariat.

The European Commission stated that it was good that GEO was maintaining the momentum established at the Canberra Summit and that climate and biodiversity was highlighted, as these are issues which are important to the Commission. The Commission was glad to hear that the Secretariat is trying to fill the vacant positions as soon as possible. Efforts to engagement UN organizations is welcome and should be viewed as part of the overall efforts on SDGs rather than standalone activities. The Commission also welcomed the meeting with the IPCC in Paris and stressed that it is important that at least some of the actions emerging from the engagement efforts are translated into the GEO Work Programme.

Japan said that it views engagement as one of the most important missions for the Secretariat and noted that it was essential to link these efforts with the GEO Work Programme and with national GEO efforts. For GEO's engagement strategy to have optimal effect, the Secretariat's efforts should be closely linked to those of GEO Members and of the GEO Work Programme activities. One approach to do this would be to introduce a plan-do-check-act (PDCA) cycle to the engagement activities. Japan also emphasized the importance of engagement with GEO Members and their national GEOs.

Chile stated that it will support disaster risk reduction work in the Americas. In this regard, it noted that the VII Regional Platform for DRR in the Americas and the

Caribbean will take place in Jamaica and that coordination is needed with the GEO Secretariat and the DRR Working Group. Chile drew attention to the good work underway between AmeriGEO and UN-GGIM in the Americas, including plans for a joint week in September 2020 in Mexico which will include training sessions. Chile requested additional help from the Secretariat to promote national GEOs.

China suggested that the Secretariat should increase its contacts with national GEOs and share experiences with other Members.

Sara Venturini, Climate Coordinator in the Secretariat, provided some additional details of meetings with the IPCC in Paris. She said that the Secretariat followed the discussions regarding the organization of future work in the IPCC to respond to the Global Stocktake, noting that no decisions were made at that time. It was clear, however, that better coordination was needed among the various players in the Earth observations community to respond effectively to this opportunity and, to that end, the Secretariat was working with CEOS and other partners on this. Ms Venturini also reported that the Secretariat had had a good meeting with the IPCC vice-chair Thelma Krug in which various opportunities for cooperation between IPCC and GEO were discussed, including a possible joint expert meeting. It was hoped that proposals could be presented for approval at the IPCC meeting in October. It may be possible for GEO to organize side events at the IPCC pavilion at the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP-26), with a focus on greenhouse gas inventories. Such events would also involve other partners within GEO.

Outcome: The Executive Committee:

- Requested that stronger links be established between the engagement priorities and the GEO Work Programme, which would be primarily through the Climate Change Working Group and the Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group; and
- Encouraged the Secretariat to continue to engage with national GEOs.

Action 51.1: The Secretariat to identify its key staff who are working with UN and other international organizations listed in the engagement plan. **Due: 10 April 2020.**

2.3 Engagement with the Commercial Sector (Presentation by the Secretariat Director – for discussion)

Gilberto Camara, GEO Secretariat Director, introduced the item, noting that it had been added to the agenda at the request of the European Commission. He started by drawing attention to two articles in Annex C of the GEO Rules of Procedure which were most relevant to the recent discussions between the Secretariat and commercial sector organizations. Mr Camara noted that the Rules of Procedure do not require that agreements between the Secretariat and commercial sector entities be approved by the Executive Committee or even put on the agenda of an Executive Committee meeting, but only that the Secretariat inform the Executive Committee in advance of signing any agreements. Mr Camara also stated that the allocation of credits in the GEO-Amazon Web Services programme and the GEO-Google Earth Engine (GEE) programme is not based on ad hoc decisions by the Secretariat but on the recommendations of a review board that includes members of the Programme Board among proposals submitted by the GEO community. For the GEO-GEE programme, Mr Camara explained the timeline of the initiation of the programme, noting that the Secretariat sent a draft call for

proposals for the GEO-GEE programme to Executive Committee members on 5 November. He observed that the Secretariat received only one set of comments from Executive Committee members and that the call was amended to address the comments. Apart from Amazon and Google, Mr Camara stated that the Secretariat has had discussions with five other firms and reviewed the status of those discussions, noting the offer that was made by Microsoft to GEO-BON. He concluded by outlining the criteria that guided Secretariat negotiations with the firms.

The European Commission thanked the Chair for including the item on the agenda and thanked the Secretariat Director for setting out the procedures and issues so fully and clearly. The discussion was requested because the topic is a sensitive one for the Commission and for other GEO Members. It is important that GEO not become overshadowed by the interests of large commercial firms. The Commission acknowledged that the process used in the GEO-GEE programme followed the Rules of Procedure but expressed the view that it was not about just going through the motions. Information needs to genuinely inform Executive Committee members and allow for discussion. The Secretariat should “go the extra mile” to provide all relevant information on any future agreements and asked that the Secretariat share the written agreement with Google. The Commission stated that there should be a balanced approach in terms of the various kinds of firms that GEO works with, including also small and medium-sized enterprises, and not give the impression that GEO is only working with large global players. The concern being raised is not about whether the procedures were scrupulously followed but a political appeal to ensure that the discussions are conducted in a very open and transparent way.

The United States agreed with the European Commission that following the process is necessary but not sufficient. It is a sign of success that GEO’s mission is attractive to the commercial sector. The United States observed that GEO is on a threshold now and can expect more such offers in the future. Established practices may not be sufficiently agile to respond to larger numbers of such requests and so GEO must prepare for more of this activity in the future. It was noted that it will also be incumbent on Executive Committee members to respond quickly to future requests from the Secretariat.

France stated that it fully supported the European Commission position on this matter. While it is a success for GEO to obtain such offers from the commercial sector, transparency and coherence are required.

South Africa stated that they appreciated the work of the Secretariat and were of the view that the Secretariat had been transparent on this matter and that the rules had been followed. They agreed that it was necessary to maintain transparency in future.

Switzerland thanked the Secretariat for their efforts on engaging the commercial sector and noted the recognition that GEO was receiving from major actors. The use of more standardized approaches was recommended, perhaps creating a focal point in the Secretariat where all such transactions were handled.

Italy stated that they agreed with the European Commission position. They acknowledged the great efforts of the Secretariat to engage the commercial sector and the substantial outcomes that are being realized. Italy supported the suggestion by Switzerland regarding provision of more information by the Secretariat, especially regarding commercial sector contributions to the GEO Work Programme.

The United States responded to Switzerland and Italy, stating that centralizing all commercial sector engagement in a single place in the Secretariat would throttle innovation. GEO wants the commercial sector to engage with our activities, not to be channelled and managed.

The Secretariat Director responded to the discussion, recognizing that the issue raises sensitivities. He noted that no agreement or memorandum of understanding has been signed by the Secretariat with Amazon or Google. This is because no funds are to be received by the GEO Trust Fund as part of these programmes. Cloud credits that are allocated go to the selected projects directly and thus any agreements are between the companies and the project leads. The only documents that have been developed with the agreement of the Secretariat are the calls for proposals. Mr Camara agreed with the European Commission that a balanced approach is needed with respect to working with both large and smaller companies. The Secretariat is continuing discussions with all of the firms that had expressed interest. Mr Camara agreed that it was important to go to the fullest extent when sharing information and apologized to Executive Committee members for not making it fully clear that the GEO-GEE application form and call were the only documents that would be shared, that there would not be an agreement. He committed to providing information on any future arrangements as soon as it is available.

Outcome: The Executive Committee:

- Welcomed the presentation by the Secretariat;
- Emphasized the importance of transparency in dealings between the Secretariat and commercial sector entities; and
- Requested that the Secretariat share information regarding concrete offers from commercial sector entities with Executive Committee members with minimal delay.

2.4 **Update on the development of the implementation plan for the Knowledge Hub (Document 51.8 – for information)**

3 NO COMMENTS WERE RECEIVED REGARDING THIS DOCUMENT. SESSION 3: CANBERRA DECLARATION

3.1 **Strategy for implementing the resolutions and outcomes of the Canberra Declaration (Presentation by the Secretariat – for discussion)**

Craig Larlee, Work Programme Coordinator in the Secretariat, presented the item on behalf of the Secretariat. The presentation reviewed 12 paragraphs in the Canberra Declaration that proposed for GEO either new actions or increased effort in certain areas. Mr Larlee indicated that the Secretariat is already working on many of these topics, however, these actions would likely not be sufficient to meet the aims of the Declaration. He drew attention to three areas where action by GEO Members is likely needed: engagement of Pacific and other island nations; engagement of national statistical and international development agencies; and increased support for delivery of GEOSS and other elements of the GEO Strategic Plan. Mr Larlee concluded by also pointing to three topics where GEO might benefit from a broader strategy: use of Earth

observations in an inclusive digital economy; in situ data; and development of institutional capacity for Earth observation.

The United States observed, with respect to the issue of building institutional capacity, that the Committee on Earth Observation Satellites (CEOS) and the Coordinating Group for Meteorological Satellites (CGMS) both address capacity building. It was suggested that the Secretariat and the Programme Board look at best practices in these activities, both within GEO Work Programme activities and in other organizations, including CEOS and CGMS.

Australia noted that they are clearly attached to the Declaration and to realizing progress against it. It was proposed that the Executive Committee include a standing item on the agenda to have a report on progress on implementing the Declaration. Some additional comments would be provided in writing to the Secretariat.

South Africa proposed that an Executive Committee advisory group be established to look at providing opportunities for the private sector, especially small, medium and micro-sized enterprises (SMMEs). The advisory group would be asked to provide advice on GEO's policy and approach on this matter.

Australia stated that they supported the South African proposal and that they would be interested in participating in this activity.

China observed that the GEO Knowledge Hub (GKH) will be very important to deliver GEO's mission and to deliver benefits at regional and national levels. It recognized the advance of the GKH concept and progress in its development. China stated that it is scaling down the SDGs to the national level and this experience can be shared regarding how to implement the SDGs and GEOSS at a national level. This work is closely connected to the GKH.

The European Commission stated that it is important to work collectively to maintain the political momentum that was generated at the Canberra Summit. This requires effort not just by the Secretariat but also by GEO Members. The Commission agreed with the suggestion by Australia about taking stock of progress, at least at the GEO Plenary. From a European perspective, the outcomes related to climate action, biodiversity and the SDGs are high on the political agenda.

Japan explained, regarding the digital economy, that they are implementing a policy which is called "Society 5.0", noting similar policies in other countries. GEO should aim to convert Earth observations into actionable information, for example, to enable businesses to understand climate risks that may affect them. They stated that communication has been initiated with the Japan International Cooperation Agency and their Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, which is responsible for national statistics.

Australia proposed that an Executive Committee advisory group be created to recommend how to make progress on engaging Pacific and other island nations. Pacific islands have already stated their interest in working with GEO in the Talanoa session during GEO Week 2019. This offers GEO a great opportunity to respond. Australia suggested that a paper should be brought back to the Executive Committee at the 52nd meeting regarding initial ideas.

The United States observed that the Programme Board is also looking into the engagement of the commercial sector, including SMMEs, through its Private Sector subgroup. Any action by the Executive Committee should be done in conjunction with work already underway in the Programme Board.

South Africa agreed with the United States.

The Secretariat Director proposed that the Secretariat would accept the recommendation to provide regular updates on progress in implementing the Canberra Declaration. As there is already a Programme Board subgroup on engagement of the private sector, he suggested that another advisory body in the Executive Committee was not needed.

China stated that they fully endorsed and supported the Canberra Declaration and supported the engagement of the Pacific islands. China supported the proposal from Australia regarding creation of an advisory group on the Pacific islands and offered to participate.

The United States also supported the Australian proposal.

Outcome: The Executive Committee:

- Established an Advisory Group to propose a strategy for engaging Pacific island nations, the Advisory Group to be open to participation by non-members of the Executive Committee and to Participating Organizations;
- Recognized the establishment of the Programme Board Private Sector subgroup and will look to this group to provide strategic guidance on engagement of small, medium, and micro-sized enterprises (SMMEs); and
- Requested the Secretariat to include in its Operations Reports and the annual Highlights Reports details of actions and results related to implementation of the Canberra Declaration.

Action 51.2: Executive Committee members to indicate their interest in participating in the Pacific Islands Advisory Group by email to the Secretariat. **Due: 30 April 2020.**

Action 51.3: The Programme Board to include in the terms of reference of its Private Sector subgroup specific attention to article 16 of the Canberra Declaration including the “need to create opportunities for SMMEs to leverage Earth observations”. **Due: 52nd Executive Committee meeting.**

4 SESSION 4: FINANCE AND RESOURCES MOBILIZATION

4.1 Report of the Budget Working Group (Presentation by the co-chair of the Budget Working Group)

Yana Gevorgyan (United States) spoke on behalf of the Budget Working Group (BWG), drawing attention to the need for additional BWG members which has only two members, plus Secretariat support. Ms Gevorgyan also highlighted the updated voluntary indicative scale of contributions, which is based on the most recent scale approved by the UN General Assembly. She stated that the BWG was of the view that one of the Lead Co-Chair Objectives for 2020 could be tasked to the BWG, that being mobilization of resources for the GEO Trust Fund from non-Member sources. She noted

that this area was not currently being given much attention in the resource mobilization strategy. It was proposed that the BWG, in collaboration with the resource mobilization team, assess approaches for raising funds from non-Member sources, although this would be dependent on identification of new members for the BWG.

South Africa volunteered to participate on the BWG.

The European Commission strongly agreed that it would be good to expand the membership of the BWG but asked whether it was permitted to have BWG members who were not members of the Executive Committee. It was noted that Finland had previously expressed interest in participating on the BWG.

South Africa asked about trends in contributions from GEO Members.

Ms Gevorgyan stated that the Rules of Procedure do not prevent a non-Executive Committee member from joining the BWG. She stated that Finland would be contacted to clarify any misunderstanding. She noted that the Secretariat has made progress in meeting with Members and that one of the aims of this process was to increase contributions to the Trust Fund.

Australia offered to join the BWG.

Patricia Geddes, Senior Administrative Manager in the Secretariat, noted that earlier efforts to encourage Members to contribute at the indicative scale amount had seen some positive results but some Members had also shared concerns with the use of the scale. Ms Geddes also observed that the scale amounts for most developing countries were very small.

Outcome: The Executive Committee:

- Welcomed Australia and South Africa as new members of the Budget Working Group;
- Encouraged GEO Members to contribute to the GEO Trust Fund;
- Recommended that GEO Members consult the voluntary indicative scale when planning their contributions; and
- Requested that the BWG identify options for obtaining resources for the GEO Trust Fund from sources other than GEO Members.

Action 51.4: The Secretariat to ask Finland if it is still interested to join the Budget Working Group. **Due: 10 April 2020.**

4.2 **Interim Report on Income and Expenditure at 31 December 2019 and Projections for 2020 (Document 51.9 – for information)**

Japan stated that its contribution for 2020 is expected to be approximately CHF 317,000, similar to 2019. This amount includes the budget for the 13th AOGEO Symposium, which is jointly organized with the GEO Secretariat.

4.3 **GEO Resource Mobilization 2020 Strategy Outline (Document 51.10 – for discussion)**

Steven Ramage presented the item on behalf of the resource mobilization team. He stated that the team is working with several GEO Member countries to understand their major investments from international development agencies, philanthropies, and other

donor agencies that may have interest in Earth observations. The document provided to the Executive Committee describes the current thinking behind the development of a strategy for resource mobilization. This strategy is intended to support both the GEO Trust Fund and the activities in the GEO Work Programme. Mr Ramage noted that it is easier to obtain funding for the GEO Work Programme and for specific projects than it is for the Trust Fund. With respect to GEO Work Programme activities, the aim is to obtain funding which will enable them to scale up their activities. The team helps the activities to adjust how they communicate their work, away from a scientific description to one that is more focused on impact and value, and also that aligns with the priorities of potential funders. The resource mobilization team seeks feedback from Executive Committee members on the document as well as contacts in national government agencies that may be interested in supporting Earth observations.

The European Commission stated that it was important for Executive Committee to spend some time to consider how to obtain the necessary resources for GEO. There is a need to give attention to both resources required to implement GEO Work Programme activities and resources for the Trust Fund. There may be better ways of leveraging existing resources, such as through funding programmes, which could be better linked and given more visibility.

The United States concurred with the European Commission comment that resourcing of the GEO Work Programme and of the Trust Fund are parallel and require independent focus.

The Secretariat Director observed that the European Commission had recently concluded an important agreement with the European Space Agency and stated that the Secretariat was ready to discuss how GEO could support this.

China stated that it provided approximately USD 12 million in funding to GEO Work Programme activities in 2019 and expected to provide a similar amount in 2020. It also funds travel support for experts to travel to China for meetings and other cooperation activities.

The Lead Co-Chair representative encouraged Executive Committee members to provide input to the Secretariat on the document and thanked members for their involvement and input.

Outcome: The Executive Committee:

- Thanked the resource mobilization team for their efforts;
- Supported the general approach which was proposed;
- Stated their interest to better leverage existing projects, improve the visibility of these projects, and ensure better integration across the GEO community;
- Requested that the resource mobilization team assist the Budget Working Group in its efforts to identify resources from sources other than GEO Members; and
- Encouraged Executive Committee members to provide specific comments on the document to the Secretariat.

Meeting adjourned at 16:00

Friday, 20 March 2020

Meeting convened at 12:00

5 SESSION 5: 2020-2022 GEO WORK PROGRAMME

5.1 Report of the Programme Board (Document 51.11 – for information)

The United States drew attention to the imbalance in the membership of the Programme Board Equality, Diversity and Inclusion subgroup, noting that the members were mostly women from developed countries. Executive Committee members were encouraged to identify additional members for this subgroup.

Japan stated that it very much appreciated the efforts and contributions of the Programme Board and welcomed the establishment of the engagement teams to support the GEO Work Programme. Further information would be appreciated if provided in the future regarding the goals of the activities by these engagement teams and when their results will be shared with the GEO community.

China observed that the special sessions between GEO and UN-Habitat and UNDRR were feasible ways to dialogue and look into cooperation opportunities. It suggested special sessions to be organized regarding Climate Change and SDGs if possible. China appreciated the job GEO Awards Subgroup did in 2019 and would like to suggest that Asian contribution be fully taken into consideration this year noting that no Asian people were awarded in 2019.

5.2 Terms of Reference of the Working Groups (Document 51.12 – for decision)

Craig Larlee, GEO Secretariat, presented the item on behalf of the Programme Board. He reminded Executive Committee members that the approval of the terms of reference for the Working Groups was deferred to allow members to request specific changes. In total, the Secretariat received 35 requests for changes. The disposition of each of the requests was described in Annex A of the document. The revised versions of the terms of reference were then presented to the Programme Board at their 16th meeting for review and comment. Several additional changes were made at that time. Mr Larlee then drew attention to the key changes across all four Working Groups, which included the addition of a reference to the Canberra Declaration in the Purpose section, a requirement for nomination of members by a GEO Principal, and a requirement for at least annual reporting by each Working Group to the Programme Board. Other changes were specific to particular Working Groups. Notable here was the change in name to the now “Climate Change Working Group” and a greater emphasis for that group in supporting Member countries. The terms of reference of the now renamed “Data Working Group” reflect a greater emphasis on data policy and ethics.

France thanked the Secretariat for taking its points into account but asked why the FAIR principles were not reflected in the terms of reference and asked also that the GEO Knowledge Hub be mentioned. Mr Larlee responded that the group was expected to take up an action begun by the previous Data Sharing Working Group on a comparison between the GEOSS Data Sharing Principles / Data Management Principles and the FAIR principles. References to the GEO Knowledge Hub could be added to the terms of reference once the former is approved for implementation.

The European Commission stated that they were happy to see the role for the Working Groups in translating the Canberra Declaration into specific actions. It is important that the groups be confirmed quickly so they may begin their work. A concern was raised regarding whether there should be a Secretariat co-chair of the GEOSS Infrastructure Development Task Team.

The United States remarked that the terms of reference showed greater consistency and improved focus.

China noted that there were still differences in the number and level of detail in the Duties across the Working Groups.

The Lead Co-Chair representative observed that there was strong support for the Working Groups in the Executive Committee and that the terms of reference were accepted. He emphasized that the Working Groups were expected to play important roles in implementing the Canberra Declaration.

Outcome: The Executive Committee:

- Thanked the Secretariat and the Programme Board for their efforts in addressing the concerns raised by Executive Committee members;
- Approved the terms of reference for the four Working Groups, as distributed;
- Requested that the Data Working Group take account of the FAIR principles in its work;
- Suggested that greater consistency be sought in the Duties across the terms of reference of the Working Groups in any future revisions; and
- Encouraged nominations to the Programme Board Equality, Diversity and Inclusion subgroup, especially to reflect greater regional and gender balance.

5.3 Update on the 2020 Mid-term Evaluation (Document 51.13 – for decision)

Craig Larlee presented the item on behalf of the Mid-term Evaluation Team. He started by reviewing the schedule for the evaluation which had been approved by the Executive Committee at its 49th meeting. He noted that the schedule provided an opportunity for the evaluation team, once it had reviewed its mandate, to request changes to the terms of reference, particularly concerning the evaluation question, which are the core of the terms of reference. The evaluation team did, in fact, wish to recommend revisions to two of the five evaluation questions. These revisions were intended to ensure that the questions were evaluable, that their meaning was clear, and that the questions did not suggest a bias in a particular direction. The revised wording which was proposed by the team was intended to retain, to the extent possible, the original intent of the questions approved by the Executive Committee.

The United States stated that they supported the revisions. A question was asked regarding whether the evaluation team would address the gap between expectations and actual performance and the extent to which this may be due to insufficient resources, as well as other factors.

The European Commission observed that the questions were pertinent, and the team was well balanced. Addressing the question from the United States, it would be good if the evaluation team could provide some critical analysis of the current funding model of the Trust Fund. Perhaps a different model would secure a more reliable funding stream. The Commission recognized that such a model would need to be developed within the

financial capacity of the GEO Members. It was suggested that it might be worthwhile for the Budget Working Group to also look at this question in parallel.

South Africa stated that the evaluation team member from South Africa had provided a good briefing on this issue that that South Africa was supportive of the changes.

Australia said that they supported the changes and thanked the team for their work.

Justyna Nicinska, a member of the evaluation team, asked if any wording changes to the evaluation questions would be required to reflect the work that is being proposed. She also noted that the team did not believe that the schedule for the evaluation would be impacted by the coronavirus pandemic, however the team would discuss this further.

The United States replied to the question, saying that they did not believe that changes to the question wording were necessary.

Outcome: The Executive Committee:

- Approved the proposed changes to the terms of reference for the evaluation;
- Requested that the evaluation team address, as part of its response to question five, the effectiveness of the current funding model for the GEO Trust Fund; and
- Requested that the Budget Working Group also independently review the current funding model.

6 SESSION 6: GEO WEEKS 2019 & 2020

6.1 Review of GEO Week 2019 (Document 51.14 – for information)

No comments were received regarding this document.

6.2 GEO Week 2020 (Document 51.15 – for information)

Patricia Geddes presented the item on behalf of the organizing committee. Ms Geddes reviewed the key events of the week, noting that the first day of the industry track was to take place prior to the start of the Plenary meeting to allow for participation by both industry representatives and GEO Member policy makers. This would mean that the Plenary would take place on the Thursday and Friday this year, with the post-Plenary Executive Committee meeting, should there be one, held on the Saturday. The week prior to Plenary would also have related events, which are expected to include the AfriGEO Symposium and a GEO Blue Planet event.

Regarding the GEO Week 2020 theme, the focus was on bringing together influencers and decision makers, emphasizing the important role of Earth observations in supporting the formulation of policy. The planning is based on several core principles:

- Building GEOSS;
- Industry and private sector development;
- Island nations;
- Earth observations for global to local communities;
- Building capacity; and
- Role of in situ data.

Speakers in the various sessions will be balanced based on the “Three Gs”: Geography, Gender and Generation. There is interest in integrating the Port Elizabeth community

into the event, including a welcome address by the local mayor. The keynote address will ideally be by a speaker from Africa but will provide a more global perspective. The main sessions will have a parallel structure and will follow the engagement priorities with the addition of a session on urban resilience. It was noted that GEO Blue Planet has a large presence in the region and is included on the organizing committee. Other elements to be integrated will include the water-energy-food nexus, SDGs, and climate.

South Africa added that the agenda for GEO Week is still being developed and that suggestions from Executive Committee members is welcome. It was noted that there has been interest expressed by some private sector companies to hold their meetings in the region close to GEO Week. However, the planning is also tempered by the recognition that the meeting could be affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The United States thanked South Africa and the Secretariat for their work in preparing the agenda. A question was raised concerning how GEO is contributing to understanding the impact of Covid-19 on the planet, how to mitigate its effects, and how to help in recovery, with this perhaps being a theme for the Plenary.

The European Commission agreed that GEO should look to adjust the content of the Plenary in light of the situation. It welcomed the strong emphasis on the industry track and the reduction of overlap between the industry track and the Plenary itself. The proposed role of the regional GEOs in the event was raised as a question.

France supported the inclusion of including attention to Covid-19 in the Plenary. The development of a “toolbox” for countries to track the effects of efforts was proposed.

Australia stated that they liked the reference to the “three Gs”. It was suggested that a side event on Covid-19, along with an opening statement or presentation, was likely sufficient and that it was not necessary to turn the entire focus of the event to this. Australia appreciated having a day when industry and policy makers can meet and suggested that an opportunity be provided for industry to report back to Plenary after the second day of the industry track. The importance of making decisions early on whether to hold the Plenary or not was emphasized.

Japan asked about how the GEO Week theme was related to the potential Plenary theme. Ms Geddes replied that the focus of the Plenary is on involving decision makers, ideally Cabinet level, who would be engaged in discussions with the GEO community and industry members. It was the intention of the organizing committee to include successes from Regional GEOs, especially on service delivery, in the various sessions.

The United States asked how SMMEs would appear as a theme in the Plenary. South Africa replied that the industry track this year would have a focus on SMMEs. It is also intended to build stronger linkages between the industry track and the Plenary.

China offered to host or co-organize a side event on recovery from Covid-19 at GEO Week.

Outcome: The Executive Committee:

- Thanked South Africa and the Secretariat for their efforts in planning GEO Week 2020 events; and
- Recommended that GEO Week 2020 address how GEO (and Earth observations) might contribute to informing the response and recovery to COVID-19 and

similar future challenges, in part to highlight the value of existing GEO Work Programme activities.

7 SESSION 7: PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS AND ASSOCIATES

7.1 Proposed removal of Participating Organizations with no recent engagement (Document 51.16 – for decision)

No comments were received regarding this document.

Outcome: The Executive Committee approved removal of the seven organizations named in the document from the list of GEO Participating Organizations.

7.2 Proposed revision of application forms for Participating Organization and Associate status (Document 51.17 – for decision)

No comments were received regarding this document.

Outcome: The Executive Committee approved the changes to the application forms for GEO Participating Organizations and GEO Associates, as recommended by the Secretariat.

7.3 Review of applications for Associate category (Document 51.18 – for decision)

No comments were received regarding this document.

Outcome: The Executive Committee accepted the Centre for Spatial Law and Policy and GEOTERRAIMAGE Ltd. as GEO Associates.

8 SESSION 8: ANY OTHER BUSINESS AND REVIEW OF ACTION ITEMS

8.1 Any other business

No other items were raised by Executive Committee members.

8.2 Review of action items

Executive Committee members reviewed and approved the outcomes and actions from the meeting.

8.3 Closing remarks

The Secretariat Director thanked the Lead Co-Chair for a well-run meeting and also thanked the Secretariat staff for their preparation of the documents and for providing technical support to the meeting.

The European Commission noted that this was not the first time that the work of GEO has had to adapt to respond to epidemics and thanked the Lead Co-Chair for an effective meeting in challenging circumstances. The Commission looked forward to taking on the various work streams emerging from the Canberra Declaration, highlighting their significant outreach in the areas of biodiversity, climate change and sustainability.

The United States noted the very good production from the Programme Board and the Secretariat and thanked the Secretariat as well for their organization of the meeting. The option of holding future Executive Committee meetings via teleconference was raised as an option, perhaps for one meeting a year. They looked forward to the Plenary as a forum to show the value of the GEO community, including in the response to Covid-19.

The Lead Co-Chair representative thanked Executive Committee members for their good cooperation and involvement. The meeting was a success despite the situation, and it resulted in substantial achievements and outcomes even with the limited time. China pledged to do its utmost to fulfil its duties as Lead Co-Chair for the remainder of the year.

Meeting adjourned at 15:30

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