

Work Programme Symposium – Future Orientation

This Document is submitted to the Executive Committee for Information.

DRAFT TEXT FOR INCLUSION IN THE DRAFT REPORT OF THE 40TH EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

The Executive Committee expressed its appreciation for the work the Programme Board (PB) has done with support from the GEO Secretariat, in preparing a tactical plan for the future of the Work Programme Symposium (WPS) as a GEO Symposium.

The PB outlined the risks from not having a semi-regular event that brings together the GEO Community as a whole, which would reduce the community's ability to achieve the strategic goals and also weaken the PB's function. The Executive Committee recognized that the event needs to meet the needs of the community as well as the PB. It is a forum where top down communication about priorities and direction needs to meet bottom up discussion and dialogue. Therefore, a critical mass of the GEO community needs to be present to secure practical benefits from the event, and through their participation and deliberations to bring support to two PB related processes:

- Optimizing the current GEO Work Programme, and
- Informing the co-design and development of the next Work Programme (WP), in particular in relation to priorities identified by the Executive Committee and GEO Plenary.

For this reason the WPS should be titled more broadly as "The GEO Symposium" with two varieties being foreseen, one focussed on WP development and one on community building. The Programme Board suggests decreasing the frequency of the GEO Symposium to about once every two years, connected to the broader timing of other GEO meetings, scientific conferences and the implementation of engagement strategy priorities and/or substantive agendas requiring more frequent meetings. The GEO Symposium on WP Development is foreseen to be held well in advance of approval of a new WP at Plenary, and take into account input from preceding regional GEO (Caucus) meetings. Both varieties of GEO Symposia should be guided by the PB's analysis, community inputs and other multi-annual meeting cycle contained herein.

Work Programme Symposium – Future Orientation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document was developed as part of the Programme Board (PB) plan of work presented to the Executive Committee in March 2017. The purpose of the document is to articulate a tactical plan as a guide for the GEO Community, Programme Board and GEO Secretariat to plan GEO Work Programme Symposium (WPS) events in future years.

The WPS has become a prominent feature in the GEO calendar of events, however the landscape has been evolving, with important features being the new Strategic Plan 2016-2025, the introduction of the PB, the multi-annual work programme and different implementation mechanisms. Whilst there is broad awareness of the WPS meetings, there is also confusion about its purpose with a multitude of expectations.

The WPS needs to reflect the role of GEO as a boundary organisation on the science - policy interface and therefore needs to relate to both scientific and policy events. Further the GEO Community must feel ownership and see the added value of the event. The connection to policy frameworks is both through implementation mechanisms (in particular Flagships) as well as through the GEO engagement strategy. The connection to science is through conferences and research funding frameworks.

From late 2016 onwards, the PB has aimed to answer two key questions:

- What does the PB need from the WPS in relation to its own functions and duties?
- What does the wider GEO community need within the context of GEO strategic plan?

The PB analysis indicates that there is a need for a semi regular forum that brings together the GEO community as a whole, to strengthen the community, enable exchange and awareness about activities and methods, and enable scaling and integration of discrete projects into the wider GEOSS. There was early agreement within the PB that the WPS needed to also have a clear standard function in relation to the Work Programme (WP) cycle, not be overly focussed on reporting, and deliver useful outputs for strengthening GEO community and work programme.

For the duties of the Programme Board, the WPS has two main functions:

- Optimizing the current Work Programme, and
- Informing the co-design and development of the next Work Programme, in particular in relation to priorities identified by GEO leadership and Executive Committee.

The GEO community needs to be able to fine-tune the current WP based on deliberations at the WPS as well as taking more top down input from engagement strategy processes into a revised WP prior to approval by Plenary. In addition, the WPS should be a place where top down communication about priorities and direction meets bottom up discussion and dialogue and thereby provides a clear purpose for the community to participate. The absence of a well-attended event would create risks which could prevent the PB from successfully completing its functions and duties and would weaken GEO. The PB feels it is important to acknowledge both functions, and to have different types of events to address them.

The WPS should be titled more broadly as “The GEO Symposium” with two alternating varieties being foreseen, one focussed on WP development and one focussed on community building. The GEO Symposium on Work Programme Development, is foreseen to be held well in advance of approval of a new WP at Plenary, and take into account input from regional GEO (Caucus) meetings. The GEO

Symposium on Community Building should be tied also to the more thematic and regionally focused events taking place through the year. There is a suggestion from the PB to reduce the frequency of GEO Symposia to about once every two years. The events should be connected to the broader timing of other GEO meetings and implementation of engagement strategy priorities as well as guided by the PB analysis, success criteria and multi-annual plan set out in annex.

ANNEX 1

THE ROLE OF THE WORK PROGRAMME SYMPOSIUM IN A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

1 BACKGROUND

This document was planned as part of the Programme Board (PB) plan of work presented to the Executive Committee in March 2017. It complements follow up of the action on roles and responsibilities. The purpose of the document is to propose a future scenario for the GEO WPS. The intended result is that this document can be used as a guide by the GEO community, PB and the GEO Secretariat to plan Symposia for future years.

The WPS has become a feature in the GEO annual cycle of events, however the landscape has been evolving, with important features being the introduction of the PB, the multi-annual nature of the Work Programme and differences in implementation mechanisms. Whilst there is broad awareness and recognition of the value of the meeting, there is also confusion about its purpose and a multitude of expectations which are not all being met. In this context, there is a need to address the challenge to address whether GEO needs a WPS and if so, the frequency, purpose and priorities for the event in the longer term. This note is based on statistics drawn from earlier WPS as well as the experience from 2016 and 2017, in particular the preparation for WPS 2017 that involved the PB, as well as consultations with stakeholders.

1.1 Context from the First Decade

GEO WPS have been held annually since 2010, usually in Geneva, in the April-May timeframe right before the Work Plan was circulated to GEO Principals for review. The WPS were held initially in conjunction with meetings of the four GEO Committees (User Interface, Science & Technology, Architecture & Data and Capacity Building). Later, the Implementation Boards (Institutions & Development, Infrastructure and Societal Benefits) met in conjunction with the WPS. The number of registered participants has fluctuated, but mostly been around 100 – 150 with fewer in 2010 (77) and 2017 (70).¹

1.2 WPS Objectives until 2016

Over the years, there has been a gradually evolving set of objectives in relation to the WPS, probably reflecting a combination of both changing ambitions and topical needs of the GEO community. There were a number of groupings of objectives that frequently appeared in the agenda in some form:

- Status of implementation of WP and progress reporting;
- Resolving issues and challenges;
- Updating and developing future plans;
- Consultation with the GEO community to elucidate case studies/ communication / inputs to Plenary; and
- Interaction between task leads and different sections of the community.

¹ See annex 2 for more detailed statistics.

1.3 Connection to other events

The WPS is linked to a number of other events. In some instances the events are preparation for a later event and in some cases they allow discussions on specific challenges to be progressed, in some cases the connection is awareness raising of activities. The explicit relationship is sometimes not very clear. Key linked events include

- Scientific conferences and symposia such as ISRSE, AGU, IGS, IGARSS and AARSE;
- Plenary (Side Events);
- Regional caucus meetings with an implementation focus;
- GEO domain meetings (e.g. on data sharing or on biodiversity or for a flagship); and
- GEO participation in policy events (IPCC, SDGs, etc)

Whilst the GEO WPS has been the event where there has been the opportunity for the whole GEO community to come together to exchange experiences, the event needs to be complementary to these other events and appeal to sufficient numbers of the GEO community to ensure that it has the critical mass to achieve desired outcomes.

1.4 What are the key drivers for change?

The need for change is due to:

- The shift from annual to a planned cycle of 3 yearly work programmes set out in the strategic plan (less annual change, means a greater need for annual course correction and priority monitoring, while preparing for a larger-scale WP renewal every 3 years);
- The shift from overall progress reporting to implementation-specific reporting and use of indicators, which may mean that broader awareness of what is happening across the community is reduced;
- The need for an opportunity for direction from Executive Committee on longer term (3+ year) perspective and priorities to be communicated and translated by the GEO community into WP activities; and
- The need to provide improvements to on-boarding and involvement of newcomers in GEO activities.

These drivers affect different stakeholder groups in different ways and may have different impacts on the design of GEO symposia in the future.

2 GEO SYMPOSIA FOR SECOND DECADE

2.1 Programme Board stakeholder needs

From late 2016 onwards, the GEO PB has been increasingly involved in the WPS development. During this period, the PB aimed to answer two key questions:

- What does the PB need from the GEO Symposium in relation to its own functions and duties? and
- What does the wider GEO community need within the context of GEO strategic plan?

There was early agreement within the PB that the WPS needed to have a clear standard function in relation to the WP programmatic cycle, not be overly focussed on reporting, and deliver useful outputs for strengthening GEO WP. There was also consensus on having the WPS deliver practical benefits to the participants (e.g. help secure resourcing, contacts, cooperation, data or knowledge about methods).

At the same time, it was noted that based on the experience from 2016 and 2017, the WPS provided limited outcomes critical for the success of PB work and the PB did not currently see a broader scope for WPS in relation to its own needs in the future. There is a clear need for an event to bring the whole GEO community together several months before a new annual WP is introduced.

Whilst the PB does not feel a strong need for a regular GEO symposium for its own function, there are risks from not having some semi-regular forum that brings together the community as a whole, which if unmitigated would prevent the PB from successfully completing its functions and duties. Key risks from no regular community event are:

1. Individual contributors and ‘clients’ do not feel a connection to the bigger ‘GEO’ and to the ‘top down’ priorities;
2. Lessons, techniques, data, contacts etc. are not shared as widely among project teams – wasting resources, leading to a sense of isolation, frustration, etc.;
3. Meetings of discrete projects, discipline groups and regional fora are by definition not ‘global’ and do not ‘integrate’ the outputs of the discrete projects into a GEOSS;
4. Missed identification of opportunities to scale up and operationalise specific initiatives in response to needs.

The PB also felt that some of the discussions and interactions that prior to 2015 had been foreseen to take place during GEO WPS, are currently and increasingly taking place in regional meeting settings, specific topic meetings, at Plenary Side Events or through participation in events set out in the engagement strategy implementation plan.

2.2 GEO WPS – An Event on the Interface of Science and Policymaking

The WPS needs to reflect the role of GEO as a boundary organisation on the science - policy interface and therefore needs to relate to both scientific and policy events. The connection to policy frameworks is both through implementation mechanisms (in particular Flagships) as well as through the GEO engagement strategy. The connection to science is through conferences and research funding frameworks.. In addition it connects to innovation agendas. On the science side, symposia such as ISRSE, AGU, IGARSS and AARSE are relevant. The connection to policy frameworks is both through implantation mechanisms (in particular flagships) as well as through the engagement strategy.

2.2.1 Connection to science: ISRSE – an example in focus

For the purpose of this analysis, the relationship between the WPS and ISRSE is taken as an example of the connection between GEO WPS and scientific conferences as well as a potential schematic relationship which might be applied more widely between WPS and scientific conferences. The intention is not to replace the WPS with a scientific conference, but to understand and optimise the relationship.

GEO WPS was co-located with ISRSE in 2017. The ISRSE conference focuses on applications, acknowledging that these are underpinned by science. Members of the ISRSE Conference Board prepare themes for the conferences by consulting first with the GEO Secretariat and reviewing related GEO documents.. Many issues and challenges were addressed in the ISRSE meeting in 2017 relating to the implementation of the GEO WP (e.g. in relation to SDGs), however ISRSE’s coverage is broader than GEO. In general, some participants to GEO WPS may participate in ISRSE, but the GEO WPS does not have the broad appeal of ISRSE, There are mutual benefits from strengthening the relationship, making it more explicit and complementary.

The experience from 2017 provides the impression that co-location and back-to-back events may not provide clear benefits and may create some downsides. A suggestion is that ISRSE and the WPS need to inform each other) more explicitly. For example, the GEO PB could serve as a conduit for planning/designing Sessions that would provide broader context of interest to GEO, and to ensure that

GEO attendees would get a good look at ISRSE and its applications' efforts. In principle, the Sessions could be responding to priorities identified by GEO Plenary or Executive Committee with a view to discuss how they might be addressed. This would provide an opportunity for the broader applied science community to engage in GEO. If ISRSE informed the WPS, we would then see value in action from an 'outside' organization. It also might increase cross participation.

This communication and use of applied science for policy support might be facilitated if the 2 yearly ISRSE (next foreseen for 2019) was held in alternate years to the WPS².

- GEO communicates needs from SBAs (policy and decision-making needs) to development of (applied) scientific symposia topics;
- Scientific symposia address issues and challenges in the GEO Work Programme;
- Scientific symposia present results of improved methods for implementation / use in GEO communities; and
- GEO community takes up results, scales up towards operations and involves expertise in implementation mechanisms (contribution or advisory role) to secure scientific best practice.

Flow of exchanges between WPS and scientific conferences.

2.2.2 *Engaging policy frameworks*

On the policy interface side, through the engagement strategy implementation plan, the GEO Secretariat has brought GEO into several COPs and UN scientific bodies for the priority engagement topics. It is clear that GEO needs to be at these events in order to better engage these communities. Enhanced communication with WP and WPS participants regarding these policy linkages is important. Policy events serve as a process to get GEO capacities acknowledged in policy documents as well as conversely those involved in the policy process itself aware of depth & breadth of activities in the GEO community and GEO WP. This offers them a possibility to connect to the GEO community and in particular those involved or leading activities to provide expertise into policy process (such as through technical working groups), which allows for subsequent fine-tuning of work programmes to avoid duplication, make use of capacities in GEO community and focus on real needs arising from policy processes.

On the one hand, the WPS needs to reflect the policy priorities that GEO has decided to engage with and these topics should be reflected in WPS, On the other hand, bringing too much policy into a practical implementation meeting could alienate the participants looking for expert exchange, as may have been the case in South Africa.

2.2.3 *Regional GEO Settings*

Regional settings include the GEO European Projects Workshop as well as the AfriGEOSS Symposium, GEOSS Asia-Pacific Symposium (and Asia Oceania GEOSS), Himalayan GEOSS or Cold regions GEOSS, etc. Whilst many of these events have an ambition to reach out to local communities and connect them to the GEO WPS, this connection does not seem to be happening very strongly in practice. This is possibly because there is a weak representation function to act as a conduit for messages and/or participants may choose one meeting or the other rather than both. The regional GEO meeting may deliver outcomes and lessons learned to the global meeting and the outcomes / lessons / discussions may be delivered to the regions.

² The ISRSE Advisory Committee has foreseen a meeting with the GEO Secretariat in September 2017

Participation in GEO WPS since 2010 has fluctuated at around 100-150 participants. Regional meetings have also been growing to similar rates of participation. These regional meetings are a strengthening aspect of the GEO community which should be welcomed and further developed through better connection to other GEO events, especially to the WPS.

3 SUCCESS CRITERIA FOR GEO SYMPOSIA

The following are tests for successful GEO Symposia, which can be used prior to the meeting to ensure that there is a valid decision point to hold an event.

- Clearly defined added value for GEO in relation to the strategic plan, GEO community and participants;
- The event is distinct from Plenary and regional GEO meetings in terms of process, timing and content. Clear sense of purpose which is consistent to some degree over time, but can be flexed to cater for emerging challenges and opportunities;
- Critical mass of participants invited and participating, with sensitivity to diversity of participants (e.g. to secure gender, age, newcomer, geography balance) as well as to the overall participation rate across GEO community (involvement in kinds of implementation mechanisms, domain, with a clear use case profile);
- Sufficient secretariat and Programme Board resourcing to prepare and follow up;
- Sufficient advance warning to community on dates, venue and purpose in focus (>120 days);
- Interaction loop between regional meetings and GEO Symposia;
- Target of time for presentations < 60% (i.e. at least 40% of time for discussion / breakouts / interactions);
- External speakers provide keynote presentations to community on strategic interest;
- Suitably sized and located venue; and
- Provides an opportunity for feedback on its own function (e.g. participant survey for continuous improvement).

Nice to have's:

- Information on upcoming events, awards, resourcing calls provided;
- Clearly defined outcome on one issue "Make progress in relation to one challenge;"
- Organising committee composed of members from PB, the GEO Secretariat, and members of GEO community (ex. implementation activities / regional GEOSS meetings); and
- More pro-active use of technology to enable remote involvement, consensus building on discussion topics, dynamic Q&A sessions and capturing of key points across parallel sessions.

3.1 WPS in the GEO Governance and Programmatic Cycle

The key purpose of the WPS for the functions of the PB are articulated around two processes:

- Optimizing the current Work Programme, and
- Informing the co-design and development of the next WP, in particular in relation to priorities identified by the GEO Plenary and Executive Committee.

In addition, the WPS should be a place where top-down communication about priorities and direction need to meet bottom-up discussion and dialogue and provide a clear purpose for the community to

participate. The GEO Community needs to be able to fine tune the WP as well as to take more top down input from engagement strategy processes into account prior to approval of a new WP.

For this reason the WPS should be titled more broadly as “The GEO Symposium” with two alternating varieties being foreseen, one focussed on WP development and one on community building. On average, a GEO Symposium should be convened about once every two years, connected to the broader timing of other GEO meetings and implementation of engagement strategy priorities. The GEO Symposium focused on development is foreseen to be held well in advance of approval of a new WP at Plenary and is therefore more fixed in the calendaring, as it should also take into account input from regional GEO (Caucus) meetings. The GEO Symposium on Community Building can be inserted more flexibly in the annual cycle of events and should aim to bring the whole community together.

| DATE | Jan | Feb | March | April | May | June | July | Aug | Sept | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|------|-----|-----------|-------|-------------------|-----------------|--------------------|------|-----|---------------------------------|---------|--------------------------------------|-----|
| 2017 | | | PB | | ISRSE & WPS, PB | Euro- & Afri-geoss | | | PB 10 th GEOSS AP | Plenary | | |
| 2018 | | | PB | Afri-GEOSS/ EU WS | | | | | WPS (Dev) | PB | Plenary 11 th GEOSS AP | |
| 2019 | | | PB | | ISRSE | | | | PB | | Ministerial (WP20-23 approval) | |
| 2020 | | WPS (Com) | PB | | | | | | PB | | Plenary | |
| 2021 | | | PB | | ISRSE | | | | PB | | Plenary | |
| 2022 | | WPS (Dev) | PB | | | | | | PB | | Plenary (WP23-25 approval) | |
| 2023 | | | PB | | ISRSE | | | | PB | | Plenary | |
| 2024 | | WPS (Dev) | PB | | | | | | PB | | Plenary | |
| 2025 | | | PB | | ISRSE | | | | PB | | Ministerial (WP26-30 approval) | |
| 2026 | | WPS (Com) | PB | | | | | | PB | | Plenary | |

Proposed multi-annual meeting cycle

3.2 Table Notes:

- *Two forms of the GEO symposium are foreseen “GEO Symposium on Community Building” (Com) and “GEO Symposium on WP development” (dev).*

- *The GEO symposia should be foreseen as standalone events which aim not to clash or be close in timing to other symposia on similar topics. Where scientific symposia (such as ISRSE are organized every other year, GEO Symposia could ideally take place in the alternating years. In an as yet undetermined way, GEO provides more explicit input and issues a scientific call relating to challenges to be addressed by scientific community.*
- *The Plenary meeting is foreseen to also include an Executive Committee and probably a short kick-off meeting for the new PB configuration. Plenary is foreseen to continue to include a series of side events as the “GEO week” which address implementation issues*
- *The timing of GEO Symposia and Regional GEO caucus and implementation meetings should take into consideration the need to provide input to the programmatic process (for GEO Symposia on WP development), ideally several months prior. In particular, June, September and October prior to GEO symposium are probably optimal months for regional GEO meetings.*
- *Participation and formal interventions are not the only way to make connecting link between these events. Poster sessions, information booths, pooled stands focussing on relevant highlights of GEO work can also be useful.*
- *The Programme Board considered a once in three year WPS cycle, but decided that this was too few and would not allow for issues important for the wider GEO community to be addressed. Summary proposed GEO Symposia schedule:*
 - *2018/09 WPS (Development). For approval of WP2020 – 2023 in Nov 2019;*
 - *2020/02 WPS (Community);*
 - *2022/02 WPS (Development). For approval of WP2023 – 2025 in Nov 2022;*
 - *2024/02 WPS (Development). For approval of WP2026 – 2030 in Nov 2025; and*
 - *2026/02 WPS (Community).*

3.3 Summary statistics from recent WPS and South Africa

| Month | Year | Venue | participants | objectives | Other events |
|-------------|------|----------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| May | 2017 | Pretoria | 70 | | |
| May | 2016 | Geneva | 162 | 11 | |
| May | 2015 | Geneva | 122 | 6 | |
| April | 2014 | Geneva | 104 | 2 + 15 | |
| June | 2013 | Geneva | 116 | 6 + 3 showcases | |
| April / May | 2012 | Geneva | 129 | 5 + title | |
| May | 2011 | Geneva | 133 | 4+4 | |
| May | 2010 | Pretoria | 77 | 4+10 | |