

GEO and Commercial Sector Engagement

This Document is submitted to the Executive Committee for discussion.

1 GEO AND COMMERCIAL SECTOR ENGAGEMENT

1.1 General Summary of Interviews

Following the March Executive Committee meeting, an appointed subgroup took an action to interview representatives of the commercial companies for their feedback on Executive Committee's considerations of the possible modes of engagement between GEO and the commercial sector. This subgroup consisted of representatives from Australia, the European Commission, France, and USA. Using an interview guide (Appendix 1) that included a narrative describing ExCom's considerations for the modes of engagement and a set of questions to solicit feedback, the group was able to gather responses from 25 different organizations and companies including a remote sensing industry association, which represents 77 commercial remote sensing entities in Europe (Appendix 2).

1.2 Emerging Key Messages

- Generally speaking, companies saw value in developing a relationship with GEO – for being parts of a larger geospatial ecosystem, but also for potential new commercial opportunities - seeing GEO as a potential enabler for the commercial sector to reach the users through access to the resources of GEO community, including through GEO's public infrastructure to become a platform for innovation. The companies would like to see GEO move towards realizing this potential, which will then impact their views on the cost-benefit relationship regarding a deeper commitment;
- Engagement for a purpose, i.e. with in-kind contribution for real problem-solving has a greater appeal than mere financial support;
- There is interest in a GEO-Commercial Sector dialogue/forum, provided it is designed to be an integral part of the GEO plenary and not an isolated side event, which may have limited attendance and participation from the GEO members. The real value of engagement will be in the open trust-based dialogue between the commercial sector and GEO Members;
- Companies' resource availability impacts their ambitions for engagement with GEO, with several SMEs indicating reluctance to attend multiple international meetings and preferring to be represented by umbrella companies, e.g. industry associations/professional societies to which they belong;

** The concept of paying a fee to GEO for formal association didn't get addressed in most interviews.*

- Regional approach to engagement with the commercial sector should be considered; while GEO as a venue should be open to all willing participants, concerted effort to engage with commercial sector within the geographic region of the GEO Plenary event should be encouraged;

- There's been mixed response on the value of having a formal and defined relationship with GEO. Those favouring a defined relationship noted that rules of engagement would need to be defined and understood by both sides.

2 REMAINING CONSIDERATIONS FOR EXCOM

2.1 Type of arrangement between GEO and the Commercial Sector

- Corporate Associate – a new category in GEO organization, with an expected financial contribution (fee) to the GEO Trust Fund as a means to resource mobilization and diversifying financial risks for the sustainment of GEO;
- Corporate Associate – a new category for companies who are interested in direct engagement with GEO, without any expected fee to the Trust Fund;
- Ad hoc participation in GEO-Commercial Sector dialogues as a Guest of GEO/Secretariat on a case-by-case basis;
- GEO could refuse individual companies' participation in the GEO [Plenary], relying on existing Participating Organizations that are Industry Associations to represent industry interests/views.

The Executive Committee should review these potential options and decide the best course for moving forward. As a reminder, GEO, as reaffirmed at Mexico City is an intergovernmental, voluntary organization. Therefore, the arrangement between GEO and the commercial sector should be made in such a way that it does not run against this fundamental characteristic. More specifically, the option to be selected by the Executive Committee should guarantee the predominance of the governments in the GEO governance. This aspect was also brought to the attention of the commercial sector in the discussions that took place with the subgroup.

2.2 GEO-Commercial Sector Forum/Side Event vs. a Dialogue session as part of the GEO Plenary

The proposition to develop a GEO-Commercial Sector engagement forum is generally universally supported. The open issue is whether it should take the form of a side event open to all companies and associations (on the margins of the Plenary) or a session integrated into the GEO Plenary agenda.

The interviewees made a compelling case for GEO not to attempt a separate side event for the commercial sector that would be on the margins of the GEO meetings. The subgroup recommends "piloting" a dialogue with the commercial sector at the St. Petersburg Plenary as part of the Plenary agenda to test the efficacy of this concept in practice. Given the expressed interest to frame a dialogue in the context of "purpose-based" opportunities, due consideration will need to be given to the theme/topic of the dialogue.

2.3 Consultation Phase

The subgroup recommends the Executive Committee consider that consultation continue through GEOSEC publishing an online survey based on the subgroup's Interview Guide and Questions inviting direct input from companies through end of September. Alternatively, consultations with the Commercial Sector could continue unofficially. All input received will inform the development of the dialogue session at the St. Petersburg Plenary.

APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW GUIDE: GEO NARRATIVE AND QUESTIONS FOR USE IN CONSULTATION WITH COMMERCIAL SECTOR REPRESENTATIVES

1 WHAT GEO IS ABOUT

The intergovernmental Group on Earth Observations (GEO) is a partnership of 102 governments, including the European Commission, and 95 Participating Organizations, who collectively pursue a mission to increase the use of Earth observations and geospatial information in decision-making within the public and private sector. To accomplish this mission, GEO works to (i) promote broad and open sharing of Earth observation data globally, (ii) coordinate strategies and investments in observing capabilities; (iii) develop an information architecture to enable sharing of data and information, (iv) and develop new integrative initiatives to deliver services tailored to specific end-user needs, creating and fostering the connection between data providers and users.

For example, GEO has pioneered a Global Forest Observation Initiative (GFOI) that has been indispensable in helping developing countries develop national forest inventories and qualify for capital payments from the World Bank Climate Fund for complying with the requirements for reporting on their forest maintenance. GFOI was developed with a specific objective to assist the developing countries that wish to receive payments for their forest maintenance by routinely submitting detailed reports on the state of their forests. It provides a methodology approved by the World Bank, all the basic satellite data needed to implement the methodology together with software and hardware tools and training in the end-to-end process. This enables the countries to submit valid reports to qualify for fund payments.

As another example, GEO operates a Global Agricultural Monitoring Initiative known as GEOGLAM that contributes to broader international efforts to stabilize food commodity markets, strengthen food security, and promote sustainable agriculture. It leverages satellite-based and ground-based Earth observations collected throughout the growing season to strengthen the international community's ability to provide dynamic, timely, and accurate policy-relevant information on the status of croplands at national to global scales. In this vein, GEOGLAM works to enhance capacity for utilizing Earth observations, maintains an active global research and development network, and works with satellite data providers to ensure that sufficient and appropriate data are acquired for agricultural monitoring activities worldwide.

A major achievement of GEOGLAM is the Crop Monitor for the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS), through which GEOGLAM produces monthly, multi-source, consensus reports on the conditions of the 4 major commodity crops: wheat, corn, rice, and soybean. Produced operationally since September 2013 for AMIS as input to their broader economic analyses, this kind of international consensus reporting around crop conditions is a global first. In February 2016, GEOGLAM launched its Early Warning Crop Monitor – an analog to Crop Monitor focused instead on countries at risk of food insecurity and their regionally relevant crops, conditions, and drivers.

2 GEO AND COMMERCIAL SECTOR - THE BROAD FRAMEWORK

The Members of GEO are contributing significant global and regional capabilities to help improve the state of decision-making and are keen to extend the benefits to more categories of users. We are looking towards the commercial sector as a key strategic partner to get this done. From partnerships with Earth observation providers, to cloud services providers, to application and software developers, to big data analytics within sector specific businesses – we see major opportunities on the horizon. GEO has partnered with a number of commercial companies and associations at a programmatic level in selected projects, and we are seeing promising early results of these collaborations.

We would like to forge closer ties with the commercial sector in a more systematic way, and hope you can offer feedback on the various approaches that we have been considering. Our goal is to create a framework that would provide the most opportunities and benefits to a commercial entity and GEO to be associated with each other. We would like your views on what kinds of association might be most appealing to you.

The GEO leadership has debated a spectrum of possibilities that can be broadly followed from an informal arrangement on one end of this spectrum – involving commercial companies in a regular forum, likely co-located with the annual meeting of the GEO Plenary – the largest gathering of all GEO member governments and participating organizations, to a more defined relationship like a Corporate Associate that would entail more specifically defined terms of engagement – mutual promotion of brands, logos and corporate reputation; collaboration on strategic communications used in the context of major events (both in the trade and policy venues); possible corporate contributions to GEO to support its mission.

Between these two ends of the spectrum, there may be an option of concluding individual Agreements between GEO and a commercial company, especially in the event of specific services to be contributed or exchanged. And there are most likely other modes of engagement and association that we would be happy to consider.

3 QUESTIONS TO SOLICIT VIEWS ON POSSIBLE MODES OF ENGAGEMENT:

We are interested in your views on what type of association would be most appealing to you.

1. Do you have experience with either form of engagement?
2. As a company, what do find most valuable in being associated with other organizations?
3. What opportunities would your company be most interested in?
4. What type of association would you wish to cultivate with GEO?
5. Given GEO's work, what types of mutual benefits could you envision?
6. What would you expect to provide in return for an association with GEO?
7. If GEO were to commit to organizing a regular engagement forum, are there any particular characteristics that the forum should have to be worthwhile to you?
8. Does the notion of entering into a defined relationship with GEO as a Corporate Associate appeal to you? How would you see it working?
9. As a Small/Medium-size Business, what particular considerations can you think of that may be relevant to GEO's engagement with Small and Medium Size Enterprises?
10. Is there an international or regional association of commercial companies working in the same sector as you that could represent a collective interest and act as a conduit within GEO?

11. Would you prefer to interact with GEO through such an intermediary organization, or would you prefer direct engagement?

In the end, what drives this effort is our interest to ensure that public and private sectors are making well-informed decisions, making a full use of the best science and data that GEO members collectively contribute as a public good.

APPENDIX 2

Commercial Sector Engagement - Europe: Interview Breakdown						
Responses:	1	2	3	4	5	6
Question 6: What would you expect to provide in return for an association with GEO?						
Active contributions						X
Sharing ideas/expertise			X	X	X	X
technical assistance				X	X	
Workshops and Symposiums			X		X	
Data access/validation		X	X	X		X
Question 7: If GEO were to commit to organizing a regular engagement forum, are there any particular characteristics that the forum should have to be worthwhile?						
Specific thematic focus		X	X			X
Held jointly with Plenary					X	
Easy venue location				X		
individual presentations				X		
Official forum report			X			X
Question 8: Does the notion of entering into a defined relationship with GEO as a corporate associate appeal to you?						
No - no clear benefit seen						
hesitant but could be persuaded		X				
No strong feelings						
Interested but need some further explanation				X		
Yes - clear positives seen			X			X
Question 9: As a SME, what particular consideration can you think of that may be relevant to GEO's engagement?						
Financially constrained	X		X	X	X	X
Large company collaboration		X				
Support research efforts			X			X
Lower technical capacity			X			
Question 10: Is there an international or regional association of commercial companies working in the same sector as you that could represent a collective interest and act as a conduit within GEO?						
No			X			
Yes	X	X		X	X	X
Question 11: Would you prefer to interact with GEO through such an intermediary organization?						
No				X	X	X
Yes			X			
Both	X	X				

Commercial Sector Engagement - Europe: Interview Breakdown						
Responses:	1	2	3	4	5	6
Question 6: What would you expect to provide in return for an association with GEO?						
Active contributions						X
Sharing ideas/expertise			X	X	X	X
technical assistance				X	X	
Workshops and Symposiums			X		X	
Data access/validation		X	X	X		X
Question 7: If GEO were to commit to organizing a regular engagement forum, are there any particular characteristics that the forum should have to be worthwhile?						
Specific thematic focus		X	X			X
Held jointly with Plenary					X	
Easy venue location				X		
individual presentations				X		
Official forum report			X			X
Question 8: Does the notion of entering into a defined relationship with GEO as a corporate associate appeal to you?						
No - no clear benefit seen						
hesitant but could be persuaded		X				
No strong feelings						
Interested but need some further explanation				X		
Yes - clear positives seen			X			X
Question 9: As a SME, what particular consideration can you think of that may be relevant to GEO's engagement?						
Financially constrained	X		X	X	X	X
Large company collaboration		X				
Support research efforts			X			X
Lower technical capacity			X			
Question 10: Is there an international or regional association of commercial companies working in the same sector as you that could represent a collective interest and act as a conduit within GEO?						
No			X			
Yes	X	X		X	X	X
Question 11: Would you prefer to interact with GEO through such an intermediary organization?						
No				X	X	X
Yes			X			
Both	X	X				

Commercial Sector Engagement - Rotterdam: Interview Breakdown								
Responses:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Question 1: Do you have experience with either forms (informal relationships or specified corporate partner) of engagement?								
No previous experience								
Experience informal relationships								
Experience formal relationships								
Experience with both	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Question 2: As a company, what do you find most valuable in being associated with other organizations?								
Networking			X	X	X	X	X	
Exchanging development ideas			X					
Cost/risk sharing	X	X						
Technology/expertise transfer				X	X	X		
Unified communication/vision			X					
Question 3: What opportunities would your company be interested in?								
Technical development			X	X	X	X		
Competitive advantage/added value								
Collaboration opportunities			X		X	X	X	
New commercial opportunities	X	X						x
Question 4: What Type of association would you wish to cultivate with GEO?								
No association								
Informal, side event	X	X						x
Formal, Corporate Associate			X	X	X	X	X	
Any considered								
Question 5: Given GEO's work, what type of mutual benefits could you envision?								
Better understanding of GEO's mission								x
Increased innovation					X			
Increased income								
Complementary capacities			X			X		x
Shared expertise			X	X		X		
Venue for data sharing			X		X		X	x
Expanded Network			X			X	X	x
Question 6: What would you expect to provide in return for an association with GEO?								
Active contributions								
Sharing ideas/expertise			X				X	
technical assistance	X		X		X	X	X	x
Workshops and Symposiums								x
Data access/validation	X		X		X	X		x

Commercial Sector Engagement - Rotterdam: Interview Breakdown								
Responses:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Question 7: If GEO were to commit to organizing a regular engagement forum, are there any particular characteristics that the forum should have to be worthwhile?								
Specific thematic focus								
Held jointly with Plenary			X		X	X	X	X
Easy venue location								X
Individual presentations								X
Official forum report					X			
Question 8: Does the notion of entering into a defined relationship with GEO as a corporate associate appeal to you?								
No - no clear benefit seen	X	X						x
hesitant but could be persuaded								
No strong feelings								
Interested but need some further explanation			X	X		X	X	
Yes - clear positives seen					X			
Question 9: As a SME, what particular consideration can you think of that may be relevant to GEO's engagement?								
Financially constrained		X						
Large company collaboration		X						
Support research efforts								
Lower technical capacity								
Question 10: Is there an international or regional association of commercial companies working in the same sector as you that could represent a collective interest and act as a conduit within GEO?								
No			X					
Yes	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Question 11: Would you prefer to interact with GEO through such an intermediary organization?								
No								
Yes	X	X						
Both			X	X	X	X	X	

Commercial Sector Engagement - Australia: Interview Breakdown					
Responses:	1	2			
Question 1: Do you have experience with either forms (informal relationships or specified corporate partner) of engagement?					
No previous experience					
Experience informal relationships					
Experience formal relationships					
Experience with both	X				
Question 2: As a company, what do you find most valuable in being associated with other organizations?					
Networking	X	X			
Exchanging development ideas	X	X			
Cost/risk sharing					
Technology/expertise transfer	X				
Unified communication/vision					
Question 3: What opportunities would your company be interested in?					
Technical development	X	X			
Competitive advantage/added value		X			
Collaboration opportunities	X				
New commercial opportunities					
Question 4: What Type of association would you wish to cultivate with GEO?					
No association					
Informal, Side event					
Formal, Corporate Associate	X	X			
Any considered					
Question 5: Given GEO's work, what type of mutual benefits could you envision?					
Better understanding of GEO's mission					
Increased innovation	X				
Increased income					
Complementary capacities	X	X			
Shared expertise					
Venue for data sharing		X			
Expanded Network	X				

Commercial Sector Engagement - Australia: Interview Breakdown					
Responses:	1	2			
Question 6: What would you expect to provide in return for an association with GEO?					
Active contributions					
Sharing ideas/expertise	X	X			
technical assistance	X	X			
Workshops and Symposiums					
Data access/validation		X			
Question 7: If GEO were to commit to organizing a regular engagement forum, are there any particular characteristics that the forum should have to be worthwhile?					
Specific thematic focus					
Held jointly with Plenary	X				
Easy venue location					
individual presentations	X	X			
Official forum report					
Question 8: Does the notion of entering into a defined relationship with GEO as a corporate associate appeal to you?					
No - no clear benefit seen					
hesitant but could be persuaded					
No strong feelings					
Interested but need some further explanation	X	X			
Yes - clear positives seen					
Question 9: As a SME, what particular consideration can you think of that may be relevant to GEO's engagement?					
Financially constrained					
Large company collaboration					
Support research efforts					
Lower technical capacity					
Question 10: Is there an international or regional association of commercial companies working in the same sector as you that could represent a collective interest and act as a conduit within GEO?					
No					
Yes					
Question 11: Would you prefer to interact with GEO through such an intermediary organization?					
No		X			
Yes					
Both					