

Summary Report
25th Executive Committee Meeting
Geneva, 12-13 July 2012
(As accepted at the 26th Executive Committee meeting)

THURSDAY, 12 JULY 2012

1 GENERAL BUSINESS

The GEO Co-Chair representing the United States, Kathryn Sullivan, opened the meeting by expressing her pleasure at the full Executive Committee participation, an indication of the importance of the work to be accomplished. Dr Sullivan also welcomed new Director Barbara Ryan and expressed excitement and encouragement in working closely with the Secretariat in the important years ahead. She also noted that Dr. Steven Fetter had returned to academia and was therefore no longer with the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP). Dr Sullivan was asked to carry out his functions at this meeting. She conveyed his regards to the Executive Committee and noted his strong support of GEO. In general, the US was very pleased to see the progress that has been made thus far. At the same time, it viewed the work to be undertaken in the coming months as equally important. Work is needed to develop a clear, compelling, aspiring view of GEO for the next 10 years, and making this case to Ministers is not trivial.

The GEO Co-Chair representing South Africa welcomed all members of the Executive Committee, thanked the Secretariat for its work, and formally welcomed the new Director Barbara Ryan. The Co-Chair noted that these are exciting times: there are a number of changes including new members, new Co-Chairs, and a new Director. Although any change can be unsettling, he was optimistic these changes will lead to improvements.

The GEO Co-Chair representing the People's Republic of China welcomed all Executive Committee members to the meeting and observed the agenda contained several important items for discussion. The Co-Chair also welcomed the new Director, and noted that China has been doing many things to promote GEO, citing the example of China and Brazil renewing their commitment to releasing data from CBERS. This is a tangible outcome from the work of GEO, and China looks forward to more progress.

The GEO Co-Chair representing the European Commission welcomed the new Director to the meeting, and indicated the Commission was looking forward to working with the Secretariat on new ideas and new ways of conducting business. The EC emphasized that in these changing times GEO must maintain its primary focus on the task that it is charged to undertake, namely the execution of the GEOSS 10-Year Implementation Plan and that GEO should look to show what has already been accomplished as it works towards finalizing issues surrounding the transition into the post-2015 period.

The Secretariat Director, Barbara Ryan, thanked everyone for their support, and stated she was honoured to have been selected for the post. She briefly described her national and international experience with GEO, and her desire to advance the implementation of GEOSS. She expressed her views that all nations need to be persuaded to invest in their national infrastructures, whether remote or *in-situ*, and this is where the value added of GEO, carefully articulated, could have an impact. Her observation is that too many organizations want to own more than they should, whereas she subscribed

to an “own what you must, influence what you can” philosophy. She concluded by noting that everyone in the Secretariat is committed to implementing the advice of the Executive Committee and the whole of GEO in constructing GEOSS, citing the relevance of the Chinese proverb: if you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.

1.1 Adoption of Agenda (Document 1)

The US Co-Chair informed the Executive Committee that the Co-Chairs had met the evening before and recommended rearranging the agenda, given the importance of two topics: 1) the progress of GEOSS with respect to the Strategic Targets, and 2) the Post-2015 GEO discussion. Both Canada and the UK endorsed the revisions.

Noting no objections, the US declared the meeting would proceed with revised agenda.

2 REPORT OF THE MONITORING AND EVALUATION WORKING GROUP

2.1 Presentation of the 3rd GEOSS Evaluation Report (Document 10 - for acceptance)

The presentation was given by Lars Ingolf Eide who noted the Evaluation Team’s starting point was whether there were sufficient resources within the Agriculture, Biodiversity and Ecosystem SBAs to both carry out tasks and meet the Strategic Targets.

Conclusion highlights:

- GEO has both had an impact and been recognized by some international bodies, such as G20 for Agriculture;
- GEOSS is adding value, but more in terms of partnerships than in the use of Earth observations;
- Progress is rated slightly better than neutral;
- Task leads generally tend to be more positive with respect to progress than do the end users;
- Most interviewed feel the Strategic Targets will not be met by 2015.

Recommendation highlights:

- The Strategic Targets and outcomes should be revisited to see if they can be made more appropriate;
- GEO BON and GEO-GLAM are viewed as successes and can serve as models for future activities;
- Desertification is mentioned in the Strategic Targets, but there are no activities in the Work Plan devoted to it; the Team suggests eliminating it if no one is willing to address it;
- Activities in the Ecosystem SBA are fragmented and need consolidation;
- Major recurring issue is that of resources: there is a strong need for more support if GEOSS is to be successful;
- Finally, not always clear who the end-users are; Task Leads often are primarily focused on establishing collaborations and do not understand who they should be targeting as users;

The report concluded by expressing the hope is that the Executive Committee will look at recommendations and provide guidance.

Discussion:

In looking at this and the previous evaluation, the United States pointed out that two prior evaluations highlighted some similar issues. The United States was also struck by the notion that there seems to be a higher value placed on activities than on results. It was also noteworthy that participants felt GEO was bringing value mainly through networking: GEO will need to do more than this if its grand vision is to deliver Earth observations for society's benefit, because if GEO disappeared, other ways would be found for creating networks.

South Africa thanked the Team for raising difficult questions, but cautioned these questions will not be answered in a linear way since there is a complex set of issues involved, some of which are due to the way GEO functions as a voluntary partnership. South Africa also noted request for the Executive Committee to strengthen M&E WG by making it a permanent fixture. They also stressed the need to identify who the data users are.

Germany thanked the Evaluation Team and believed the findings were important for assessing the health of GEO. Although a response is needed from the Executive Committee, it was difficult to see how to deal with all 18 recommendations; some mechanism needs to be defined and asked whether this should be a consideration for the post-2015 Working Group.

Canada wondered whether the issues identified were systemic to all of GEO, or specific to the SBAs evaluated. He also maintained that a response by management (Executive Committee (not Secretariat) was critical and recommended that one of the Co-Chairs take responsibility on behalf of the Executive Committee to track how these recommendations are responded to and implemented. Canada also highlighted the need to clarify relationships between GEO and Participating Organizations, especially when the leadership engages in GEO.

Japan observed that the report uncovers an essential issue, which is that resources will always be an issue given the non-binding, voluntary nature of GEO. Nevertheless, GEO has demonstrated that a governance structure based on voluntary partnerships can be successful and should not be discounted.

The European Commission agreed with the comments made and suggested that the Societal Benefits Implementation Boards be given an opportunity to provide feedback to the Executive Committee on the Evaluation Report, with the Executive Committee being responsible for the final response.

The UK remarked that, given the discussion thus far, there needed to be some accountability – that the Executive Committee needed to decide 1) what it thought of the recommendations and 2) what it was going to do about it. The UK suggested that the Committee could look to other bodies to help implement suggested courses of actions. Some responsibilities may go to the Implementation Boards, some to the Post-2015 WG, some to the Task Leads, and some to the Executive Committee. In any case, a process to monitor actions and progress must be developed. The UK supported the EC's proposal that the Implementation Boards be given the first opportunity to respond, followed by finalization from the Executive Committee.

Canada responded by saying that, in its view, the Executive Committee is ultimately accountable to Plenary and thus should take full responsibility for responding to the recommendations.

The Secretariat Director observed that - at a high level - everyone appeared to agree with the content of the recommendations. Now, the task at hand was to develop a set of responses to the more specific recommendations. Her preference would be for the solution proposed by Canada.

The US summarized by stating the primary concern is how to drive recommendations into actions and noted the effective proposal by Canada, that the Executive Committee take on this responsibility.

South Africa suggested that a volunteer from among the Executive Committee Co-Chairs should be identified to work with the M&E WG, to take stock of all recommendations and consider how they

should be addressed and clustered. The next step would be to find the appropriate bodies to help with implementation.

The US offered an amendment to Canada's proposal and suggested expanding the involvement of the Executive Committee to 1-2 members in addition to the Co-Chair.

South Africa offered to Co-Chair, provided its involvement would not be seen as a conflict of interest since it was also Co-Chair of the M&E WG. Initial work should be reflected in a document within 2 months and circulated to the Executive Committee, with a response back in time for submission to the 26th Executive Committee meeting. Canada responded that it saw no conflict of interest in South Africa's offer.

The UK announced it would be glad to work with South Africa.

Canada mentioned it would like to see the Canadian M&E WG Co-Chair assist the group.

The US noted that 11 October 2012 is the deadline for submission of Plenary documents, and suggested that an initial document responding to the recommendations be circulated by mid-September with a follow-up teleconference shortly thereafter for finalization.

The Director remarked that a response to the recommendations could be developed in the short-term, with decisions on process for follow-up to be decided at a later date. However, she would like guidance on the issue of Strategic Target revision issue now since this would have implications for work the Implementation Boards are doing.

The United States responded that this topic may come up for review in the Post-2015 WG discussion. However, the initial view of the US is to leave the Strategic Targets as they currently stand, preferring rather to see work done on defining success of GEOSS implementation against them.

Canada supported the US view, since GEO needs to be careful of the kind of message revisions to the Strategic Targets would send to Ministers.

New Zealand also supported the view of not revising the Strategic Targets, and favored a more realistic approach in assessing actual progress of the Targets.

The US concluded by saying that, although the Strategic Targets should not be modified, it would see value in recounting lessons learned in a statement to Ministers. The lesson for the moment is that GEO needs to be clearer about setting goals and objectives, perhaps establishing a tight-set of priorities. The report was accepted by the Executive Committee.

Action 25.1: South Africa and the United Kingdom to work together and produce a draft response to the 3rd GEOSS Evaluation Report by mid-September, to be followed by a full Executive Committee teleconference.

2.2 Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group - Progress Report (Document 11 - for information)

The document was presented simultaneously with Document 10.

3 TRUST FUND

3.1 Report of the External Auditor for 2011 (Document 7 - for information)

The external auditor, Steve Townley of the National Audit Office, UK, presented the results of the final audit of his firm's mandate. No irregularities were found and everything was in line with accepted accounting standards. He said this reflected well on the Secretariat, Director and WMO staff. The overall financial position at the end of December 2011 was healthy, and he recommended setting aside reserve accounts for certain specific needs as mentioned in the report. He also mentioned that

GEO should review its Service Level Agreement (SLA) with WMO as it was unclear which items were included in overhead charges.

Discussion:

China wished to correct its contribution on page 13 for fiscal year 2011 and noted it will increase its contributions for the current fiscal year.

South Africa wanted to know how certain recommendations would be handled. For example, with respect to recommendation 5, one would expect the SLA with WMO may need to be renegotiated.

The Director responded by indicating there will be a meeting with WMO to go over every component of the SLA, and clarify what is included in overhead.

The US was glad to note the Director will work to see that the audit report recommendations are taken into account, and also thanked the auditors for the excellent work done.

Mr Townley responded it had been a privilege to serve GEO, and stated he will work closely with the Swiss audit group who will be the successors.

4 2012-2015 WORK PLAN

4.1 Work Plan Progress Report (Document 12 - for information)

Work Plan Coordinator Alexia Massacand reviewed the draft of the report to be presented at Plenary. She noted the report does not aim to measure progress of GEOSS implementation towards the Strategic Targets and thus does not point towards any gaps, since this is the remit of the Implementation Boards.

Discussion:

The US remarked that, at the Task and Component level, there are a great number of items listed but wondered whether they are all active, inactive, or yet to achieve a critical mass. Ms Massacand replied that all Tasks are active. An attempt has been made in the report to identify upstream resources that would ensure Tasks make progress. The US asked if we are going to meet our Strategic Targets. Ms Massacand responded that, since the Secretariat is working mostly at the Task level, the progress report is more an inventory of everything being achieved, something outside the scope of the Implementation Boards.

The European Commission commented that the topic of outreach and communication has been referenced in a number of M&E WG reports, but it is unclear who is actually taking the lead on this. The Commission also wondered whether we are really achieving true integration or if the Components are functioning more as individual Tasks.

Canada noted the expectation is that the Implementation Boards are going to provide a synthesis view with respect to GEOSS implementation. From this perspective, Canada found that, absent an analytical assessment, it is unsure how to proceed with this particular report. The US Co-Chair concurred and noted it would like to see some sort of synthesis between this particular progress report and the reports from the Implementation Boards. She reiterated the need to be more discriminating and indicate Components that are not functioning. Ms Massacand responded that the Implementation Board reports would not be a synthesis but rather serve the function of indicating what is not working, with recommendations for changes in the Work Plan itself. The US wondered, as a member of Plenary, whether the expectation would be to read both documents to form an opinion as to the status of GEOSS implementation, or if this was the job of the Executive Committee. The Director responded that it was unrealistic to expect a 52-page document to be read in great detail, and that perhaps a higher-level format would be more suitable for this report.

Canada remarked that it is important for a document to establish a clear set of expectations for the reader. Moreover, if every Task is showing the same level of progress, we do not have an informative assessment tool and it would be preferable to return to a full “traffic-signal” system. The US echoed Canada’s comment, noting it does not wish for the Secretariat to do work which does not provide analytical insights as to how well GEOSS is faring. The UK also endorsed Canada’s comments and was concerned about seeing two reports that both refer to “progress.” The UK would like to see the Executive Committee bring these reports together. South Africa shared the sentiment of reading merely an activity report and thought the report would be of greater use to the Implementation Boards as an appendix in a detailed analysis of how activities relate to achievement of the Strategic Targets. South Africa also wondered whether recommendations from the Committees given at the last Plenary had been incorporated at some point.

New Zealand remarked that, in its view, for the Executive Committee to do its job, a simplified reporting structure was necessary and suggested a common template for the Implementation Boards.

The EC pointed out that the Terms of Reference of the Implementation Boards go beyond solely carrying out an assessment of Task progress against the Strategic Targets; they also have to perform an overview of the Tasks and need to ensure that the Tasks are reporting accurately. In this respect, the Implementation Boards were asking for guidance on development of a common methodology from the Executive Committee.

The US concluded by noting that, although the document was accepted, the Executive Committee is evolving and its needs now require more than an activity report. Thus, for purposes of reporting to Plenary, it would be preferable to have one consolidated report on progress and requests the Secretariat and the Implementation Boards to work together towards this objective.

Action 25.2: the GEO Secretariat and the Implementation Boards to work together to develop a consolidated reporting process to Plenary on and progress towards achieving the Strategic Targets and Work Plan implementation.

5 UPDATE FROM THE POST-2015 WORKING GROUP (DOCUMENTS 17 & 18 - FOR INFORMATION)

Post-2015 WG Co-Chair Peter Colohan introduced WG Report (Document 17) by thanking all WG members and noting that the group had made good progress via teleconferences since the last full meeting in late March. He explained that the text of the WG report to the Executive Committee represented a number of core ideas that have consensus within the group, such as the belief that GEO is valuable and should continue, and – though not without its faults - the governance structure was generally successful, including its voluntary nature. One major issue is whether GEO should deliver services. From the discussion thus far, it appears most can agree that GEO should focus on demonstration and incubation of initiatives, but not go in the direction of service delivery. He ended his comments by noting the next physical meeting had been scheduled for 6-7 September in Geneva.

The US Co-Chair opened the discussion by complimenting the WG for its efforts. Canada found it significant that item 2.2 “Mission Statement” had not yet been developed, which was critical as it delivers the “why” of GEO’s existence. Canada stressed the need to clearly articulate a mission and a vision. Key questions the mission statement should clarify is whether GEO’s remit includes operating infrastructure, achieving governmental cooperation on investments in Earth observations, and/or supporting sustainable management of the planet. Germany endorsed the statement from Canada and reiterated the need to have the entire GEO community involved in the development of the mission statement. Japan likewise agreed with Canada’s remarks and noted that its position paper, submitted at the time of the GEO-VIII Plenary, discussed the need to address the “operational” issue, but that consensus had not yet been reached.

The US observed that the value proposition had been discussed but still needed refinement. She further remarked that many in the GEO community feel the “O” in Earth Observations has been lost and the impression is that GEO is mainly about data, protocols, and architecture. The focus should rather be on what observations are needed, gaps that exist, etc. Could GEO play a role in determining the need for observations to address critical issues such as food and water security needs. The planet is comprised of a collection of systems and GEO needs to better integrate information to inform decisions.

In the EC’s view, Plenary will need to discuss the future of GEO based on a paper outlining options, as a preparatory step towards producing a Ministerial document. The US agreed, and commented it would rather see options developed and put forward for a post-2015 GEO, as opposed to a document merely raising a series of questions. Canada suggested a useful perspective would be in terms of a promise the GEO community wants to deliver, as it had done in 2005 (which was to better intergrate – in a planetary sense – observations that were needed to make decisions). Canada also noted that we are not good at resource mobilization or sustaining an emphasis on training – and noted that multiplicity comes from the private sector. Things are different today: Rio+20 has occurred and the expectation is that work towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) or even the nascent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be enhanced because countries have access to information they need.

South Africa remarked that if the assumption is that our planet is under pressure, we need to find a way to better understand the Earth system, and decide whether creating GEOSS is even possible within the current governance structure, while noting that the Disaster Supersite is a great example of the value of GEO: information for a quick decisionmaking. Russia responded by noting the experience thus far suggests the current governance structure is the best way forward, and – though not perfect - there are many positive aspects in the current structure of GEO which make it attractive compared to a formal UN body. Russia also noted that GEO does not build GEOSS – it does not have the resources to do this. Rather, we have the possibility to collect data on existing systems, which is important; the main mission of GEO can be to serve as the point of contact for Earth observing data. Japan added that sharing of basic scientific information among countries is important and the groundwork has been laid for this to happen. This is a great achievement and the next 10 years need to build on this foundation with a focus on a renewed mission to pursue a sustainable product. An attractive political message is needed to reinvigorate GEO and grab the attention of Ministers. Taking inspiration from the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence project (SETI) which harnesses thousands of private PCs during the night-time to economically gain super computing power, the US suggested that we can have a great impact through a more active participation of the entire GEO community. Russia noted that most current difficulties in finding the way forward seem to centre on definitions and we need to be absolutely clear in our terminology.

Canada reiterated a key message for Ministers is that something that they value will be lost if GEO ceases to exist in 2015. These items could include the interdisciplinary nature of GEO, the virtual constellations in CEOS, data sharing principles, and examples of cooperation such as backup by the Canadian Space Agency when Envisat ceased to function. Japan noted the GEOSS Asian Water Cycle Initiative (AWCI) has successfully demonstrated the need for data sharing and collaboration, and more importantly, that this is a path for sustainable development (similar actions are happening in Africa). GEO’s Mission statement needs to reflect that the system of systems construct is crucial for supporting sustainable development. Germany concurred, and suggested the Global Forest Observation Initiative (GFOI) as another example of a success story for inspiration regarding the mission statement.

The US Co-Chair concluded the discussion by noting the Post-2015 WG would benefit from having Executive Committee members included in development of a post-2015 mission statement. Additionally, the US suggested that all Executive Committee delegations consider developing convincing arguments, from a Ministerial standpoint, as to why GEO should carry on past 2015, and contribute them to the WG.

Action 25.3: Secretariat to request volunteers from Executive Committee to work with the Post-2015 WG in preparation of the post-2015 GEO mission statement.

Action 25.4: Secretariat to request contributions from Executive Committee members for the justification of the continuation of GEO and GEOSS post-2015, to help prepare convincing arguments for the Ministerial Summit.

FRIDAY, 13 JULY 2012

Roundtable Summary of Day 1

The US Co-Chair opened by stating the discussions of the first day and late afternoon strategy session had been very constructive, and thanked the Secretariat for its support. In the discussions, the US found it evident that new ways of working with the Secretariat should be given thought, as should what the actual work of the Secretariat and Executive Committee ought to be. She then gave the floor to the Director for her reflections.

The Director responded by stating she was encouraged by the advice and level of engagement from the Executive Committee. She agreed there is a need to be clear on roles and responsibilities, noting that, both nationally and internationally, organizations need governing bodies that are fully engaged and willing to provide strategic guidance. She added that, given the candid nature of the previous day's discussion, she was pleased at the level of interaction and advice received. She cautioned that not all is perfect – a key message she was taking from the discussion is that the Secretariat needs to do a better job preparing the material so that it is clear what is being asked of the Executive Committee, and what guidance is being sought by the Secretariat. In sum, what the Secretariat needs to supply is information that is more concise, synthesized and clearer in its expectations, so that entire system is both understandable and better integrated.

The UK agreed that the further strategy session had been helpful and was looking forward to the synthesis report.

Russia found the discussions had been excellent and will work to engage Russian speaking countries more fully in GEO.

New Zealand felt fortunate to have joined the Executive Committee at this point in time and appreciated the more open discussion format. Digging into other issues more deeply, such as articulating the added-value of GEO, would be desirable.

Morocco noted the importance of defining how we will continue to work together, which means consideration of procedures and means needed to continue to deliver and provide services through GEO; in addition, attention needs to be focused on developing nations and how their participation can be improved.

South Korea commented that it had been a very good opportunity to learn about all aspects of GEO.

Japan found the strategy session had been very informative, the discussions encouraging, and was confident that member countries will want to continue supporting GEO despite differences in motivation. At this juncture it is crucial to find the proper way to move forward with respect to the future of GEO.

Germany appreciated the good debate, especially about services, and noted that given the importance of the post-2015 discussion alignment of thought regarding services is important.

Canada remarked that the sessions had been productive and noted the importance of being clear about expectations. The take away message thus far is that GEO has a dual role: that of providing the operating infrastructure for Earth observations, and allowing the community to obtain information from it. Also, more discussion is needed regarding the relevance question in relation to priorities for

the future. A final message is the need to come to a common understanding of definitions; this is essential for communicating GEO to the outside community.

Brazil found the discussions had been good, providing the opportunity to explore compromises with respect to GEO's provision of data and services. Brazil also fully supported the statement from Morocco regarding the importance of supporting participation by developing nations

The People's Republic of China appreciated the good discussion, including the clarification on GEO and GEOSS. China wants to do more to support GEO, and proposed a 3-tiered approach for the next 3 decades: 1) establish rules, procedures, data sharing principles, and an interoperability platform, using the nine SBAs; 2) implement rules, principles, and standards in a regional GEOSS among member countries, and 3) integrate all regional/country efforts into a global GEOSS.

South Africa found the discussions helped reaffirm what we are trying to do as GEO, while highlighting the complexity of working together over a period of time. With sometimes rapid changes in representation, GEO must be careful not to lose sight of its mission and goals. Though we may use different terms to express the vision of GEO, all want to see it continue. Especially valued are the inputs of new members since they provide new and different perspectives.

The European Commission was pleased at the depth of the discussions, and thinks more of these types of constructive dialogue are needed to inform the future of GEO. One suggestion would be to have a strategic discussion on a given issue at each Executive Committee meeting, with a Committee member serving as facilitator of the discussion.

6 2012-2015 WORK PLAN, CONTINUED

6.1 Initial Report of the three Implementation Boards on target completion progress (Document 13 - for information)

With respect to the reports from the Implementation Boards, Yana Gevorgyan presented on behalf of Infrastructure, Mark Noort on behalf of Institutions & Development, and Rifat Hossain on behalf of Societal Benefits.

Discussion:

The US thanked each of the presenters and noted the need for the Executive Committee to respond to the requests for a common format the Implementation Boards' report should take.

New Zealand wished to acknowledge the great work accomplished by the Data Sharing Task Force, and noted the need for keeping in contact and engaging with the user community.

Canada noted that reference to *in-situ* measurements had been missing from the post-2015 discussion, and wanted to know if the Infrastructure IB was planning on calling attention to this. The US agreed, going as far as to say there is a structural problem around the issue of *in-situ* data and that perhaps there should be a Task dedicated to *in-situ* networks and data. Ms Gevorgyan replied that it is essential to build relations with key entities (such as EEA, WMO) to make certain their *in-situ* data it can be discovered through the GEOSS Common Infrastructure (GCI; the WMO Information Systems is now interoperable with the GCI).

South Africa wanted to know what kind of systematic gap analysis was being performed. Ms Gevorgyan responded that gaps were being identified in relation to bullet points, but questions of a more philosophical nature were out of the scope of the IB.

Japan stated its interest in the development of indicators for interoperability with respect to a given user or SBA. Also, the Asian Water Cycle Initiative (AWCI) has been successful in acquiring *in-situ* data from the participating river basins, which is comprised of a harmonized approach to web-based input, archiving, data quality and accessibility.

Canada remarked that, with respect to technical issues such as data exchange protocols, the WMO has made progress and GEO does not need to duplicate the work that's been done. Rather GEO should focus on areas such as establishing ecosystem and biodiversity service inventories, which could be supported by *in-situ* monitoring.

The EC informed everyone that 28+ million resources are now discoverable in the GCI through the GEO Portal. By the time of Plenary it should be possible to access any data discoverable through the GCI. In addition, considerable efforts are ongoing to get data sets flagged and tagged (including *in-situ* data) within the DataCORE.

The Director commented that, regarding access to *in-situ* data, there is more of a coordination issue as opposed to a technical one, and efforts are needed to make best use of the GCI architecture and broker strategies to access *in-situ* datasets (e.g. USGS stream gauges, AWCI data).

The UK responded that it would like see a common methodology developed quickly, noting it would be helpful to know why there were gaps in these reports.

Japan asked the Boards to quantify as much as possible so that actual progress and issues to be solved can be readily identified, both broadly and with respect to specific topics.

Germany remarked that, in order to be effective and point out gaps, a unified progress report combining the work from the Secretariat and the Boards is essential.

Canada observed that 1) the WMO has an individual who looks aggressively for resource mobilization, and GEO needs to find an innovative solution to this recurring theme; 2) with the same banks contributing to capacity building efforts, governments (OECD) have an interest in a coordinated approach to this issue and GEO must find an innovative way to capture and engage with them; 3) the traffic-light approach to indication of Task progress is preferable to a lot of text.

Russia commented that there was an unreasonable amount of material for participants to absorb prior to Plenary and called for shorter, succinct documents underlining main results.

The US supported Russia's comments and requested that the Secretariat produce a single Work Plan progress report, combining the work of the Implementation Boards and the Secretariat.

The Director agreed, and suggested an individual from the M&E WG be a part of the process.

6.2 Implementation Boards Issues (Document 14 - for acceptance)

The Work Plan Coordinator, Alexia Massacand, responding to a request from New Zealand, presented a diagram of the structure of GEO and introduced a summary of the process for membership renewal on Boards. Issues needing to be dealt with include the inactivity of some Board members and a general imbalance of representation across the Caucuses.

The UK requested clarification on the role of the Secretariat with respect to the Implementation Boards and felt an estimation of time resources for the different roles (e.g. for a Task Coordinator) should be provided so that individuals have a better understanding of commitments required. Germany supported the remarks of the UK. New Zealand suggested adding the Executive Committee and the Secretariat to the structure diagram.

The US remarked that the number of representatives from the Caucuses, and the total number of Board members generally, should be limited. Ms Massacand noted that the limits proposed in the document specify a total of approximately twenty individuals per Board, of which eight would be nominated through the Caucuses to ensure balanced geographical representation. The EC concurred with the proposal, noting that – for the sake of efficiency - the maximum number of members per Board as outlined should not be exceeded.

Canada was concerned that emphasis on geographical balance might come at the expense of providing strong technical expertise to each Board. The US agreed, stating that the primary concern should be

nomination of individuals with the appropriate competencies for the Boards' work rather than geographic representation; they further noted that geographic representation in GEO is achieved through the governing mechanism (Executive Committee and Plenary) rather than the implementation mechanism. Ms Massacand commented that the Secretariat was not in a position to accept or reject nominations made to the Boards, and had simply suggested the Caucus approach to nominations would help with geographic balance. Both Japan and Brazil concurred that it was important to include a wide distribution of Member governments on the Boards.

The US Co-Chair summarized by observing that Boards membership needed both requisite expertise and geographic balance pertaining to developed/developing nations. The US proposed a pool of nominees (complete with brief résumé of background and expertise) be collected by the Secretariat, which would be submitted to the Executive Committee at the summer meeting in 2013. The Executive Committee would then make recommendations for Board membership to the Plenary in November for final decision. Canada supported the proposal, emphasizing the need to consider diversity in two dimensions: 1) expertise, and 2) geographic balance across developed/developing nation status.

The European Commission cautioned that it had reservations assuming this new role as it was not entirely clear how the selection criteria would be defined. It preferred the Caucus-nomination approach put forth by the Secretariat proposal.

The Director observed there were several issues surrounding the US proposal that would require further elaboration, including: the time commitment required for serving on a given Board; the process for assembling the pool of nominees; whether the nominee has sufficient backing from his/her government to perform the duties adequately; and how to find an equitable solution to the developed/developing nation question.

In addition to Canada, the UK, Russia, New Zealand and China supported the US Proposal. The EC was not in favour but noted it could go along with the decision.

The US Co-Chair indicated that the US proposal was therefore accepted, subject to modifications by the Secretariat Director.

Action 25.5: Secretariat to revise Document 14 in light of the Executive Committee's request to produce a single report on progress from the Secretariat and the Implementation Boards (see Action 25.2), and the US Board membership nomination proposal. The revision should be submitted at the 26th Executive Committee meeting for acceptance.

Action 25.6: New Zealand requests the Secretariat to produce a map of the entire GEO governance structure at the next Executive Committee.

6.3 Progress on the Implementation of the Global Forest Observation Initiative (GFOI) (Document 15 - for comment)

Secretariat expert Giovanni Rum presented the recent activities of the GFOI/FCT as outlined in Document 15.

The US remarked that the differences between GFOI and FCT need clarification. She also stressed the need to ensure that the international piece does not overwhelm the national component – or get ahead /out in front of the UNFCCC negotiations. The GFOI was approved by Plenary in order to link the GEO Forest project with international policy mechanisms, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), while the FCT focused on research & development activities to address capacity building (in terms of demonstration activities). The SilvaCarbon project was cited as an example through which developing countries can elaborate Measurement Reporting and Verification (MRV) methodologies.

The Director remarked that GFOI also provided a link between donors and national needs, whereas the FCT is voluntary and regional in scope. The mandate of the GFOI is to facilitate data acquisition in support of the needs of developing countries.

The European Commission expressed the wish to see stronger collaboration between GFOI and the GEO Carbon office that has been recently established.

The People's Republic of China also indicated the GFOI office and Chinese GEO office should improve collaboration.

6.4 GEO-GLAM Work Plan (Document 16 - for information)

Secretariat expert João Soares presented Document 16. He underscored the need for a central coordination office and noted that GEOGLAM has secured the support of G20 Ministers.

The European Commission noted that the 7th Framework Programme includes a call for proposals in support of GEO-GLAM implementation, with funding support of up to € million.

The UK asked for clarification as to who actually owns the initiative as well as what systems GEO-GLAM will be built upon, and requested these issues be clarified as the program evolves.

China expressed the need for clarification on the cost of GEO-GLAM initiatives and of supporting a coordination office, as well as the role CEOS will play in the initiative.

The Director agreed and added that high-level connections at the national level by each Executive Committee member will advance this effort.

The US concluded by reiterating the need for more precise information on next steps / building blocks, associated costs, and ownership of said building blocks.

7 SECRETARIAT OPERATIONS

7.1 Summary Report of the 24th Executive Committee Meeting (Document 2 - for acceptance)

The Secretariat Director presented the document and noted the comments received from the European Commission had been reflected in the current revised draft. There being no further comments, the report was accepted.

7.2 Review of Actions from Previous Meetings (Document 3 - for comment)

The Secretariat Director presented the document and reviewed the two open items, Actions 24.7 and 24.10.

With respect to Action 24.7, New Zealand noted that this is an ongoing action and was exploring activities that could be leveraged with the WMO and USGS. Also, the AfriGEOSS initiative could serve as a model. Japan indicated its wish to collaborate with New Zealand on the project and noted the proper reference should be "Pacific Island Nations" (not "South Pacific").

With respect to Action 24.10, the Director noted the Post-2015 WG had identified several key messages and requested this action be deferred until the WG had reached a greater level of consensus. The action remains open.

7.3 Report (Document 4 - for comment)

7.4 Secretariat Operations (Document 5 - for comment)

7.5 Review of Secretariat Performance Indicators (Document 6 - for comment)

The Secretariat Director introduced the documents and emphasized three points:

- There is a negative trend with respect to secondments to the Secretariat; a staffing plan is being developed to clarify future Secretariat operations;

- Better coordination with the WMO is needed with respect to the Global Framework for Climate Services (GFCS); and
- Help is needed from the M&E WG to fine-tune the Secretariat Performance Indicators.

The Director also thanked Japan for sending new secondee Tomoko Mano to the Secretariat, South Africa for the secondment extension of Humbulani Mudau, and South Korea for Seonkyun Baek's secondment which had just ended.

UK stated it would like to see the development of scenarios with respect to the structure of the Secretariat and a description of expert positions, including Terms of Reference.

Germany agreed with the GFCS analysis and suggested development of a concept paper in consultation with the WMO. The Director responded that written feedback had been provided from the Secretariat to the WMO on the latest draft of the GFCS Implementation Plan. The US asked that these comments be shared with the Executive Committee. In its view, the US found there was complementarity between GEO and GFCS, and the way forward would be to identify which parts of GFCS could be provided by GEO.

Canada noted that the WMO will be holding an extraordinary session of Congress at the end of October to discuss the status of GFCS, and this will be a very good opportunity for visibility/outreach on behalf of GEO.

The US Co-Chair concluded by expressing satisfaction at the status of the items outlined.

Action 25.7: The Secretariat to circulate to the Executive Committee comments issued to the WMO on the GFCS Implementation Plan.

Action 25.8: Secretariat to develop a staffing plan and performance indicators.

7.6 Report on Income and Expenditure, January to May 2012 (Document 8 - for information)

The Director noted that, although the contribution from the People's Republic of China was not shown in the external auditor's report (Document 7) due to the fiscal year boundary, the contribution does appear in the current document.

Germany reported that it will contribute €100,000 this year to the Secretariat Trust Fund.

The European Commission reported that it will contribute €600,000 this year to the Trust Fund, and is working on the same level of support for next year. The Commission will also continue to make limited funds available for supporting travel to GEO meetings for participants from developing countries.

The US reported that its contribution to the Trust Fund will be in range of \$900,000.

The Director also acknowledged the contribution made by South Korea that came after Document 8 had been prepared.

7.7 Management of the GEO Trust Fund (Document 9 - for comment)

The Director presented the document and noted that it represents the Secretariat response to findings from the external auditors report (Document 7).

GEO Programme Manager, Natasha Brutsch, observed that capital forecasts have always been performed with respect to the Secretariat Trust Fund, and copies are available from the Secretariat upon request.

Regarding the 1st recommendation, the US questioned how the 15% figure from the Trust Fund to be held on reserve to cover overheads was derived. The Director responded that 7% of contributions to the Secretariat are reserved to cover WMO's overhead, and the additional 8% was estimated to cover Secretariat costs for managing special projects.

The European Commission supported the 1st recommendation, but noted that EC rules precluded compliance with the 3rd recommendation of making contributions in Swiss Francs. Germany commented that it, too, could not comply with a request for contributions in Swiss Francs, and underscored the importance of the notion of voluntary contributions. The US remarked that it, too, could not make contributions in Swiss Francs, but that it was sensitive to the issue of currency fluctuations being borne by the Secretariat Trust Fund, and suggested working towards greater contributions such that currency fluctuations become less of an issue. Canada observed that, for effective planning of GEO, pledges could be made in Swiss Francs with payment to follow in national currencies. He felt the real issue is sustaining the performance of GEO and suggested there should be some incentive to make contributions as early as possible. The EC concurred that the issue of contributions was difficult, but suggested it could be time to ask other Members who are not contributing to consider giving as well. The Secretariat noted that Appendix B of Document 9 shows contributions over time, highlighting the fact that only a small subset of 89 Members have contributed. The Secretariat also noted that even getting small amounts from the developing world would send a strong signal.

With respect to the 4th recommendation, South Africa questioned if the implication was that cash flow available to operate the Secretariat would decrease. The Director responded that the monetary figures mentioned represent about 25% of total operating costs and thus could have some impact on Secretariat operations. It was therefore vital to increase commitments as even the smallest contributions from developing nations would be useful.

8 REPORT ON RIO+20

Japan reported on the “High-level Thematic Debate on Global Earth Observations” event it had organized during the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), at which it introduced the Tokyo Statement. As a result, an outcome of the Conference is mention of GEOSS in the Rio+20 Declaration, which reads:

274. We recognize the importance of space-technology-based data, in-situ monitoring and reliable geospatial information for sustainable development policymaking, programming and project operations. In this context, we note the relevance of global mapping and recognize the efforts in developing global environmental observing systems, including by the Eye on Earth Network and through the Global Earth Observation System of Systems. We recognize the need to support developing countries in their efforts to collect environmental data.

The efforts by Japan to raise the visibility of GEO and GEOSS were applauded by the Executive Committee.

Appreciation was also extended to the European Commission for its significant involvement in the GEO-related events at the Rio+20 Conference.

The work of the staff from the GEO Secretariat in support of GEO’s engagement in Rio+20 was also gratefully acknowledged by the Executive Committee.

9 UPDATE ON PREPARATIONS FOR GEO-IX

Cláudio Almeida, representing Brazil, gave a presentation that provided an update on the plans, location and venue of the GEO-IX Plenary at the Mabu Thermas & Resort in Iguazu Falls, 22-23 November. He noted that preparations for the Plenary are on track and that the Secretariat had distributed an information packet, complete with important deadlines, on 13 July. He wished to draw attention to the fact that the Plenary website has just been updated with a new information note (www.earthobservations.org/geo9.shtml).

10 PREPARATIONS FOR GEO-X AND THE 2013 MINISTERIAL SUMMIT

Canada reported that the Ministry of Environment had been briefed and that deliberations were still in process. There were two major concerns with the proposed timing of the 2013 Ministerial Summit:

- potential overlap with the UNFCCC-Conference of the Parties meeting;
- state of content and declaration preparedness.

The US noted that, while there was an obligation to report to the Ministers in 2013, there were various ways of doing so and proposed to either:

- postpone the Ministerial by approximately 6 months in order to address the concerns of Canada;
- convene only the Plenary in 2013, with the Ministerial to be postponed by one year.

Japan observed that, while it is important to conduct the Plenary on an annual basis, a Ministerial Summit should be convened when adequate preparation was made.

South Africa reminded the Executive Committee that:

- Ministers will need to debate a post-2015 GEO;
- it may take some time for new Ministers who are not aware of GEO to become informed about GEO and GEOSS.

The European Commission commented that it was important to keep the Ministerial Summit in 2013, since this had been agreed to in the Beijing Declaration, and all subsequent activities have been geared towards this date. EU funded GEO projects all have schedules that include the 2013 Ministerial Summit as a major milestone. The EC further recommended that, should it be decided to hold the Ministerial Summit in 2013, a working group should be established by GEO-IX Plenary to ensure the necessary preparations were handled appropriately.

The US indicated it will work with the Post-2015 WG to identify the most appropriate date for the Ministerial Summit, keeping in mind the discussion from this Executive Committee.

11 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Secretariat noted that a track-changes draft of the Rules of Procedure had been circulated for comment, as requested by the GEO-VIII Plenary. The Secretariat has thus far received comments from Australia, Germany and the European Commission which have been incorporated. The revised Rules will be resubmitted for "adoption" as a living document at the GEO-IX Plenary, together with any additional modifications received.

In closing, the Director wished to acknowledge the specific efforts of the European Commission in leveraging the 7th Framework Programme (FP7) research funding mechanism to advance GEO goals, objectives, and Tasks within the Work Plan. She requested that other members of the Executive Committee give consideration to a similar approach within their own national research grant programmes, citing it as a no-cost best practice for advancing GEOSS implementation.

25th GEO Executive Committee

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