

**Report**  
**40<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee Meeting**  
**Geneva, Switzerland, 11-12 July 2017**  
(As accepted at the 41<sup>st</sup> Executive Committee Meeting)

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Chair: Robert-Jan Smits, European Commission (EC).

**1 GENERAL BUSINESS**

- New representatives from China, South Africa and South Korea were welcomed;
- The 40th Executive Committee agenda was adopted with the addition of a presentation by Mexico under agenda item 2.3;
- The report of the 39th Executive Committee Meeting (Geneva, Switzerland, 9-10 March 2017) was approved as distributed;
- The Executive Committee approved the closing of all Actions from the 39th Executive Committee meeting, pending discussion of referenced documents;
- The Executive Committee:
  - Welcomed the work of the Secretariat and reiterated the need to focus activities on the three Engagement Priorities;
  - Noted that GEO is addressing the “Paris Agreement”, which includes climate mitigation and adaptation;
  - Recalled that a key aspect of the added value of GEO is in its convening power, collaborating with organizations bridging the gap between geospatial and socio-economic information, and finding global solutions with local applications.

**2 ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**

**2.1 GEO Engagement Strategy Implementation Plan 2017–2019 – Revision (Document 4 – for decision)**

The Executive Committee:

- Extended its appreciation to the Secretariat for revising the document;
- Acknowledged that GEO involvement in the Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction (GPDRR) was a good example of a successful engagement process that should serve as a model for future engagement campaigns;
- Recalled that while the Working Group identified five engagement strategies (which also included Ecosystem Accounting and Urban Resilience), Plenary assigned initial priority status to three;

- Stressed the importance of having the appropriate tools to measure the delivery and impacts of the Engagement Actions and to respond to lessons learned;
- Noted that the Implementation Plan is a living document;
- Recognized that specific elements of the plan may be impacted by the availability of resources and requisite skills;
- Requested that the Secretariat report to Plenary on progress in implementing the Engagement Strategy;
- Recalled that engagement is the job of everyone in GEO and not just the Secretariat; and
- Approved the revised Engagement Strategy Implementation Plan 2017–2019.

## 2.2 Commercial Sector Engagement – Revision (Document 5 – for decision)

The Executive Committee:

- Extended its appreciation to the Commercial Sector subgroup for its additional work on this document;
- Confirmed its commitment to engage with the Commercial Sector, building on the successful engagement at the GEO-XIII Plenary;
- Recognized that engagement is already happening through many ongoing activities across the Work Programme;
- Acknowledged that strategic engagement with the Commercial Sector should be two-way and, to start this process, expressed interest in meeting with representatives of the Commercial Sector in Washington, D.C. at its 42<sup>nd</sup> session; this initial engagement will leverage the UN-GGIM Private Sector Network and others, while acknowledging the need for additional diversity in future engagements; and
- Noted that GEO-XIV will contain opportunities (such as an Exhibition, sponsorship, and Side Events) to further engage with the Commercial Sector.

**Action 40.1:** Co-Chairs to develop points for discussion with the Commercial Sector at the 42<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Executive Committee, including items such as, but not limited to, how the Commercial Sector views GEO, the Work Programme, the GEOSS Portal and the website, as well as what the Commercial Sector can offer to GEO. **Due: 11 July 2017.**

## 2.3 GEO at the Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction (Presentation from Mexico – for information)

- The Executive Committee expressed its appreciation for Mexico’s presentation.

# 3 STRATEGIC OUTLOOK

## 3.1 Sustainable funding for the GEO Trust Fund (Document 6 – for decision)

The Executive Committee:

- Expressed concern about the long-term financial stability of the GEO Trust Fund;
- Noted that there are many Members who are not contributing to the Trust Fund;
- Recommended creating awareness of this issue by circulating an indicative scale of equitable contributions; and
- Suggested the Secretariat consider alternative means of soliciting funds through resource mobilization, including with the Commercial Sector.

**Action 40.2:** Secretariat to draft a letter from the Co-Chairs to Members regarding suggested contributions to the GEO Trust Fund, referencing the indicative scale. **Due: 31 July 2017.**

### **3.2 GEO Secretariat 2017 Programme of Work – Revision (Document 7 – for information)**

- The Executive Committee expressed its appreciation to the Secretariat for revising its 2017 Programme of Work to show a stronger alignment with the Executive Committee's 2017 priorities and for articulating clearer outcome statements. It also reiterated the importance of maintaining synchronization of Secretariat activities with the priorities of the Executive Committee and Lead Co-Chair, with the Programme Board, and with the Engagement Priorities.

### **3.3 Executive Committee meetings 2018 – Proposal from the Subgroup**

- The Executive Committee accepted the recommendation to continue the current practice of three Executive Committee meetings in 2018 due to the upcoming change of Secretariat Director and the need to establish a sound working relationship between the Executive Committee and the new Director.

**Action 40.3:** Regional caucuses are requested to nominate representatives to the 2018 Executive Committee well in advance of Plenary so that these representatives may be invited to the 42<sup>nd</sup> Executive Committee meeting which is scheduled for the day following the Plenary. **Due: 31 August 2017.**

## **4 GEO WEEK 2017 UPDATE FROM THE SUBGROUP (DOCUMENT 9 – FOR DISCUSSION)**

- The Executive Committee expressed its appreciation to the Subgroup on its work; and
- GEO Plenary 2018 will be held in Kyoto, Japan.

## **5 WORK PROGRAMME 2017–2019**

### **5.1 Report from the Programme Board (Presentation – for information)**

- The Executive Committee extended its appreciation to the three Programme Board co-chairs and to the Programme Board members for their excellent work.

### **5.2 GEO Secretariat Review of the 2017 Work Programme Symposium (Document 10 – for information)**

- The Executive Committee noted the Secretariat's analysis, views on future events, report and survey results of the 2017 Work Programme Symposium. The Committee acknowledged that there are different reasons and perspectives for holding Work Programme Symposia, particularly given the respective roles and responsibilities of the Secretariat and the Programme Board. The Committee expressed its appreciation to the Secretariat and the Programme Board for organizing the 2017 Work Programme Symposium and to the government of South Africa for hosting the event.

### **5.3 Work Programme Symposium – Future Orientation (Document 11 – for information)**

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

#### **5.4 GEOSS Implementation – Status of GEO Indicators and Report on Progress (Document 12 – for discussion)**

- The Executive Committee acknowledged the complexity of monitoring in the GEO context and encouraged the addition of tools to support automation of data collection. The Committee endorsed the proposed directions for monitoring and reporting, recognizing the need to begin the process, while noting that the challenge will be to focus on the results achieved.

### **6 REPORT OF THE BUDGET WORKING GROUP**

#### **6.1 2016 Financial Statements and Audit Report (Document 13 – for decision)**

- The Executive Committee acknowledged the 2016 Financial Statements and Audit Report and recommended submission to Plenary for approval.

#### **6.2 Interim Report on Income and Expenditure as of 31 May 2017 and Staffing Plan (Document 14 – for information)**

- The Executive Committee extended its appreciation to the Budget Working Group for its leadership and also to the Secretariat for doing their best to manage expenditures within available income, notably by reducing travel expenditures for the remainder of 2017. The Committee further called on Members to represent GEO at events held within their Region, as indicated in the forward travel plan included within the Secretariat Operations Report. The Committee also noted that the Working Capital Fund is intended to serve as a buffer for managing fluctuations in cash flow due to unforeseen changes in the receipt or timing of contributions, but should not be used to achieve a budgetary balance.

### **7 UPDATE OF RULES OF PROCEDURE (DOCUMENT 15 – FOR DECISION)**

- The Executive Committee approved in principle the proposed Annex C (less the Appendix containing the “Template Agreement”) for inclusion in the update to the Rules of Procedure. A revised version, based on modifications proposed by Executive Committee Members, is to be circulated to the Committee for approval prior to submission to Plenary for approval.

**Action 40.4:** Executive Committee Members to communicate any desired modifications to Annex C to the Secretariat. **Due: 14 July 2017.**

**Action 40.5:** Secretariat to circulate a revised version of Annex C to the Executive Committee for approval. **Due: 24 July 2017.**

### **8 SECRETARIAT OPERATIONS**

#### **8.1 Secretariat Operations Report (Document 16 – for information)**

- The Executive Committee noted the report and expressed its appreciation for the continuing efforts of the Secretariat to improve its reporting, particularly in describing the outcomes of the Secretariat’s work and in streamlining activities related to the Sustainable Development Goals. The Committee further called on Members to consider the Secretariat forward travel plan in terms of opportunities where Members might represent GEO and continue to build the GEO community while allowing the Secretariat to reduce its travel costs. The

Secretariat also welcomed Member and Participating Organization representation in additional events and recommended contacting the Secretariat to obtain toolkit materials.

**Action 40.6:** Secretariat to include materials in the toolkit for use by Members and Participating Organizations when representing GEO at GEO-related events. **Due: 31 August 2017.**

**Action 40.7:** Members and Participating Organizations are asked to notify the Secretariat regarding events on the forward travel plan (or other events) for which they can represent GEO. **Due: 1 September 2017.**

**Action 40.8:** Members and Participating Organizations agree to report back to the Secretariat regarding outcomes of their participation in GEO-related events. **Due: Ongoing.**

## **8.2 Review of Applications for Participating Organizations and Observers (Document 17 – for decision)**

The Executive Committee approved applications for the following five Participating Organizations:

1. AGRHYMET Regional Centre;
2. COMIFAC, Central African Forest Commission / Commission des Forêts d’Afrique Centrale;
3. CRCSI, Cooperative Research Centre for Spatial Information;
4. ECLAC, United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean; and
5. The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation.

The Executive Committee conditionally approved the following four organizations, pending modifications to their websites. The modifications would be endorsed by the Lead Co-Chair in consultation with China:

1. CSDMS, Community Surface Dynamics Modeling System;
2. EuroGeographics;
3. ISESTEL; and
4. WRI, World Resources Institute.

## **9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- The Executive Committee recognized departing members: CEOS representative, Mr Stephen Briggs and the Japan representative, Mr Shinichi Higuchi, as well as departing Secretariat staff, Mr Michel Deshayes, the GEOGLAM Coordinator, and Ms Andiswa Mlisa, the AfriGEOSS Coordinator.

## **10 SUMMARY OF ACTION ITEMS**

- The Executive Committee reviewed and approved the list of meeting outcomes and action items.

## Report

### 40<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee Meeting

### Geneva, Switzerland, 11-12 July 2017

#### FULL REPORT

Tuesday 11 July 2017

*Meeting convened at 10:00*

Chair: Robert-Jan Smits, European Commission

#### 1 GENERAL BUSINESS

##### 1.1 Welcome from Lead Co-Chair and Co-Chairs

**Mr Robert-Jan Smits, European Commission, Lead Co-Chair**, welcomed fellow Co-Chairs and Executive Committee Members, especially those individuals attending for the first time: Mr Li Jiahon from the National Institute for Remote Sensing in China and Mr Lee Jong Man of the Korean Ministry of Science, ICT and Future Planning. He also thanked the Secretariat for preparing the meeting and for the quality of papers distributed to Executive Committee Members. He went on to reiterate that the top three priorities for 2017 as Lead Co-Chair, supported by the other Co-Chairs, are 1) focusing on impacts and end users, to show how GEO makes a difference serving citizens and policy makers; 2) streamlining GEO governance, roles and responsibilities, and clarifying who does what; and 3) the selection of the new Secretariat Director.

**Mr Li Pengde, on behalf of China Co-Chair Hejun YIN**, briefed the Executive Committee on some activities that China is doing in relation to GEO. China has begun implementation of the Strategic Plan for 2016 to 2025 for GEO in China. It also recently put in place new legislation regarding Earth observation and remote sensing that will form the legal basis for GEO in China. He pointed to the innovation cooperation underway in Asia-Oceania GEOSS and encouraged other Member countries to participate in this initiative and in the Silk Road initiative. GEO activities are part of the Silk Road Initiative, including sharing access to satellite data with other countries.

**Mr Philemon Mjwara, South Africa Co-Chair**, welcomed the new Executive Committee Members to the meeting and thanked the Secretariat Director and staff for improvements to the meeting documents, in particular, referencing the Engagement Strategy and the Commercial Sector Strategy. He also introduced the South African Principal Alternate, Mr Mmboneni Muofthe, who will be participating in Executive Committee meetings from time to time.

**Mr Stephen Volz U.S. Co-Chair**, remarked on the high quality of materials provided by the Secretariat. He stated that the US is looking forward to GEO Week 2017 in Washington, D.C. and emphasized their aim of communicating the importance of GEO demonstrating the value of Earth observations to end users and, to this end, expressed hope that this will prove useful to GEO Members.

Ms Barbara Ryan, Secretariat Director, thanked Executive Committee Members for their discussion at the last meeting, particularly on the refinement of outcomes and measures in the Operations Report. As this is the last full Executive Committee meeting before the Plenary documents need to be sent out, it would be helpful if any differences among the Executive Committee Members could be resolved at this meeting.

**Outcome:** New representatives from China, South Africa and South Korea were welcomed.

## **1.2 Adoption of Agenda (Document 1 – for decision)**

**Outcome:** The 40<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee agenda was adopted with the addition of a presentation by Mexico under agenda item 2.3.

## **1.3 Draft Report of the 39th Executive Committee Meeting (Document 2 – for decision)**

**Outcome:** The report of the 39th Executive Committee Meeting (Geneva, Switzerland, 9-10 March 2017) was approved as distributed.

## **1.4 Review of Actions from Previous Meetings (Document 3 – for decision)**

The Secretariat Director reviewed the responses to each of the Actions from the previous meeting. All Actions except for 39.4, 39.6, 39.9, 39.11 and 39.13 were addressed by documents distributed for this meeting and would be dealt with during other items on the Agenda. Action 39.4 was an administrative detail that was completed with the posting of a vacancy notice on 15 May. For Action 39.6, the Secretariat contacted the Chair of the UN-GGIM Public Sector Network (PSN) to discuss potential collaboration; this proposal was positively received. As further steps would be considered in relation to the discussion on the Commercial Sector, this item should be considered to be closed. On Action 39.9, the Secretariat reached out to the suggested organizations and a teleconference was held in June to discuss options for a Side Event. This item should thus also be closed. On Action 39.11, the Budget Working Group made the requested changes shortly after the previous Executive Committee meeting and so the Action should be closed. For Action 39.12, Conservation International was accepted as a Participating Organization in April, closing this Action.

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee approved the closing of all Actions from the 39<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee meeting, pending discussion of referenced documents.

## **1.5 Update on Secretariat Activities (Presentation – for information)**

The Secretariat Director began with a presentation of activities that have taken place under the three Engagement Priorities that were adopted by the Plenary in St. Petersburg.

On Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Work Programme Symposium highlighted this area with several speakers, a panel discussion, and an address by the South African Principal to UN-GGIM. A webinar was held on 6 July with representatives of eight or nine GEO Flagships and Initiatives to increase visibility of the priority and to help align efforts within GEO.

GEO was designated to be the lead for two indicators, these being for land degradation and aquatic ecosystems. While it is not final, the Secretariat of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is expected to include in documents going to its next Conference of the Parties (COP) language encouraging its Members to work with GEO.

Through the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD), there is work underway with several countries, Columbia and Senegal in particular. With a considerable amount of help from WMO, GEO obtained credentials to attend the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) taking place in New York during the same week as the Executive Committee meeting. Bill Sonntag from the Secretariat was in attendance.

On the Paris Agreement, the GEO Work Programme Symposium also highlighted this area with speakers and a panel. GEO was invited by the UNFCCC to contribute to the 8<sup>th</sup> Research Dialogue at the SBSTA, including a Statement, poster and Information notes. The Formal Statement was read by Germany on behalf of GEO. While GEO still has not been given credentials due to questions about its legal status, GEO and its partners are still being heard. UNFCCC authored a blog post on the GEO website which increased visibility of GEO efforts on climate.

On Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), there is a close partnership with the UNISDR on this issue. Members and Participating Organizations took part in the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (GPDRR) in Cancun. These efforts resulted in Earth observations and GEO being referenced in the UN follow-up documentation, the Data Readiness Review. GEO will also be partnering with NASA, who will host a DRR Workshop 3-8 September in Buenos Aires, Argentina. More engagement from GEO Members in the Americas Caucus was encouraged.

In other work, the Secretariat organized and attended the Work Programme Symposium in Pretoria, South Africa, which realized over 70 attendees. The Symposium increased the visibility of GEO with participants at the International Symposium for Remote Sensing of Environment (ISRSE) and shone a spotlight on GEO activities related to the SDGs, Paris Agreement, Blue Planet and AfriGEOSS. Further information is contained in documents concerning the Symposium that were distributed for this meeting.

The Secretariat also made progress on several Executive Committee priorities, including the Engagement Strategy Implementation Plan, the Commercial Sector Strategy, and on indicators of GEOSS implementation. These topics will also be discussed later in the meeting.

Highlights of regional engagement include the AfriGEOSS Symposium in Sunyani, Ghana 5-12 June, which was attended by over 160 participants, including concrete engagement with regional and national policy makers. Planning for the next AOGEOSS / Asia-Pacific GEOSS Symposium is well underway. There will also be an AmeriGEOSS meeting combined with Disaster Workshop planning in Costa Rica on 31 July.

In programmatic developments, the 11<sup>th</sup> Session of the Global Food Market Group of the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) provided much visibility for GEOGLAM, for example, through information included in the AMIS Market Monitor. Germany has also agreed to provide financial support for the hiring of the next GEOGLAM Project Coordinator.

A proposal by GEO Cold Regions for a Side Event on Sustained Observations at the next Arctic Circle Assembly has been accepted. A GEO Cold Regions website has also been developed and launched.

In GEO GLOWS, an Advisory Committee has been established, with the United States and WaterLex serving as co-chairs. Four Working Groups have also been set up in GEO GLOWS on: Science, Socio-economic issues, Essential Water Variables, and Data Management. Discussions are continuing concerning development of a Secretariat for this Initiative.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> GEO Data Providers Workshop was held in Florence, Italy on 20-21 April with more than 100 participants. Highlights included the degree of community engagement obtained, and strong statements of support from Development Seed and UNICEF.

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee:

- Welcomed the work of the Secretariat and reiterated the need to focus activities on the three Engagement Priorities;
- Noted that GEO is addressing the “Paris Agreement”, which includes climate mitigation and adaptation; and
- Recalled that a key aspect of the added value of GEO is in its convening power, collaborating with organizations bridging the gap between geospatial and socio-economic information, and finding global solutions with local applications.

## 2 ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

### 2.1 GEO Engagement Strategy Implementation Plan 2017–2019 – Revision (Document 4 – for decision)

Mr Steven Ramage, Senior External Relations Manager in the Secretariat, began by introducing the new Communications Advisor in the Secretariat, Ms Madeline West, who is leading the development of communications toolkits for GEO as a whole and for each of the three Engagement Priorities. The focus will be on telling more stories and reducing the amount of scientific jargon in communications materials. There will also be an emphasis on social media engagement; there are many media channels available, but GEO is not yet using them effectively. Ms West has considerable experience in providing similar support for REDD and will apply this experience to the GEO context. Better use of imagery in communications materials is also planned. GEO is already making good use of blog posts, some of which are on external blogs (e.g. on the Amazon blog, which has 1.5 million followers).

Mr Ramage then presented revisions to the Engagement Strategy Implementation Plan, which were in response to comments received at the previous Executive Committee meeting. In particular, the number of Engagement Actions were consolidated from 23 to 14 and an overview matrix was added which outlines the Engagement Actions under each of the three Priorities, cross-referenced to the Engagement Objectives. As well, the information on each of the Engagement Activities was re-organized and presented in a tabular format, with sections on: expected outcomes, description of the action, communications materials, target stakeholders, GEO engaging actors, timelines/milestones, and results achieved. The content in these tables was significantly updated and expanded from the previous version.

The engagement campaign around the GPDRR is a good example for how the campaign model is expected to work. The GEO Secretariat applied for a booth, which was accepted. The Secretariat worked with AmeriGEOSS and the disasters resilience community to seek collaboration. Mr Ramage was available the week before the event via an external website, answering questions about GEO's role and contributions. A memory stick with all GEO disaster-related documents was prepared for distribution. Great support was received from GEO participants and partners at the booth in Mexico, who also had the opportunity to talk about their interests during that time. GEO participated in a multi-hazard early warning event and provided an "IGNITE" talk at the GPDRR which attracted an audience of about 500. Results achieved from the campaign included language in the follow-up document recognizing GEO and Earth observations, as well as interest from potential new Members and Participating Organizations. GEO has also developed a strong relationship with UNISDR and has been invited to participate in World Tsunami Day and to lead discussion on geospatial information at a working group meeting on statistics in relation to disasters.

On SDGs, GEO is building strong relationships with custodial agencies, such as UN Environment, UN Habitat and UNCCD. GEO is also working closely with four countries to pilot indicator methods and with UN-GGIM, where GEO has several senior members involved. The Secretariat Director participates on a UN committee chaired by the UN Assistant Secretary General; this is a big achievement for GEO and an excellent opportunity to further highlight Earth observations. Generally, there is much action and momentum; the next challenge is to bring in more developed countries, for example, Germany which has expressed interest.

Regarding the Paris Agreement, GEO is working to put together a Side Event for the next United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP). While the engagement priority was originally framed as GHG monitoring and the carbon cycle, there is more interest now in moving into adaptation. There is very good work happening on adaptation in Africa that isn't well known, for example, the Prime Minister's Office in Uganda is using GEOGLAM information in its early warning systems. There are many similar examples from across Africa where Earth observations are already being used to support climate adaptation.

Among other events, Mr Ramage pointed to the recent kick-off meeting of the GEO Carbon and GHG Initiative in Rome. A potential role was identified at the meeting for GEO to help bridge an existing gap between the emissions inventory community and the Earth observation community. There is also a clear and tangible role for GEO Carbon in supporting the refinement of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Inventories. GEO will also participate in an international carbon dioxide conference next month.

Regarding next steps, the UNISDR has asked if GEO could contribute to its global risk assessment and is looking for examples of countries that may be using Earth observations in this context. UNISDR is also interested in how the SDGs align to the Sendai Framework; GEO may be able to provide concrete examples of such connections. Further on SDGs, it is expected that there will be additional actions coming out of the High Level Political Forum (HLPF), as well as more promotion of the GPSDD case studies, in particular, showing the impacts of these activities. On The Paris Agreement, GEO will continue to build the relationship with the UNFCCC and prepare for COP-23, which will likely be as significant an event for GEO on climate as the GPDRR was on disasters.

In response to questions from Executive Committee Members, Mr Ramage stated that Blue Planet is involved actively in the SDG activity and to a lesser extent on Climate. One focus is on making Earth observations more available to Small Island Developing States (SIDS). An event on this is planned for GEO Plenary. Regarding the communications activities, traffic on GEO websites and blogs has not been systematically tracked regularly in the past, but will be going forward. On the seemingly exclusive focus on the Engagement Priorities, this was the direction from Plenary and Executive Committee at the time the Strategy was developed, although it is possible that this could be reviewed going forward. As for lessons learned thus far in implementing the Engagement Strategy, some aspects have already been revised from earlier versions.

The Chair identified a need to clearly articulate that which makes GEO special and unique, its added value and impact on society. He encouraged the Secretariat Director to provide a presentation to Plenary to educate the audience on this.

CEOS noted that the Global Forest Observation Initiative (GFOI) provides a good example of GEO's value. There is no other forum in which the five lead partners in GFOI would sit around the table on an equal basis. REDD, which addresses non-anthropogenic elements of greenhouse gas (GHG) mitigation, uses GFOI as a mechanism to implement and monitor \$5 billion worth of investments. The GEO Work Programme should be reviewed to see which activities support the three Priorities and also which activities are outside the priorities. This will allow GEO to identify gaps, things that GEO could be doing but isn't. The Work Programme is the best description of what GEO is and does; these activities are a demonstration of the powerful combination of organizations and Members.

The United States commended the Secretariat for doing what was asked by Executive Committee. There is good focus on the three Priorities. The United States urged the Executive Committee to now think about how the outcomes of this strategic focus will be reported to Plenary. This doesn't prevent us from also talking about other topics. Some quantification of results is also needed, lessons learned. We will need to review whether sufficient progress was made in one year, whether more time is needed, or if it is time to branch out into other areas.

China stated that it aims to have more focus on the Engagement Priorities within China. The launch of the new satellite will help support this. There is also increased focus on new types of land-based sensors, including use of mobile phones. Creating a better description of the Earth should also be a GEO focus. Other organizations, including UN organizations, should also work on these Priorities.

Japan noted that the key issue is how science can react to global issues, of which the SDGs, Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework are three. The focus on these Priorities shows how GEO can contribute to major world issues, which are interlinked. Japan also stated that the Priorities are also important domestically and tabled a document highlighting Japanese actions. GEO shouldn't be worried that some activities might be left out. Japan also agreed that it is important to show outcomes.

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee:

- Extended its appreciation to the Secretariat for revising the document;
- Acknowledged that GEO involvement in the Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction (GPDRR) was a good example of a successful engagement process that should serve as a model for future engagement campaigns;
- Recalled that while the Working Group identified five engagement strategies (which also included Ecosystem Accounting and Urban Resilience), Plenary assigned initial priority status to three;
- Stressed the importance of having the appropriate tools to measure the delivery and impacts of the Engagement Actions and to respond to lessons learned;
- Noted that the Implementation Plan is a living document;
- Recognized that specific elements of the plan may be impacted by the availability of resources and requisite skills;
- Requested that the Secretariat report to Plenary on progress in implementing the Engagement Strategy;
- Recalled that engagement is the job of everyone in GEO and not just the Secretariat; and
- Approved the revised Engagement Strategy Implementation Plan 2017–2019.

## **2.2 Commercial Sector Engagement – Revision (Document 5 – for decision)**

The Chair began by reminding Executive Committee Members that Plenary will be asked for its endorsement of the approach for engaging the Commercial Sector and that it would be important to have clarity on the document to be presented.

Mr Steven Ramage presented the revised paper, noting the specific changes requested by the Executive Committee in its Actions 39.5, 39.6 and 39.7. The Commercial Sector Strategy is intended to be open and transparent and to drive economic growth. It was recognized that not every Member or public sector organization has the capacity to engage with the full range of the Earth observations Commercial Sector themselves. GEO works broadly across the value chain, with a particular focus on end-users and on small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This includes the broader “ecosystems” of partner organizations that are linked to larger multi-national firms. Some of these firms have approached GEO, while others have been approached by GEO.

Mr Ramage drew attention to several options for engaging Commercial Sector organizations that are listed in the document. Two key options are: a senior-level forum to talk with Executive Committee, which has been requested by a number of firms, and the UN-GGIM Private Sector Network (PSN), for which GEO has been asked to lead the Earth observations elements. UN-GGIM has conditions on participation that are similar to the proposed GEO principles; the PSN is not a lobbying body, but a platform for exchange of knowledge and ideas. Regarding the review of GEO experience with Appathons, which was requested by Executive Committee, the key findings were that it is possible to accomplish significant results with a relatively small amount of money, that it is important to have contacts in GEO who can respond to technical questions from Appathon participants; and that offering prize money is essential.

The United States thanked Mr Ramage and his team for their work on the strategy. However, they expressed a reservation about using an advisory group to represent the breadth of the Commercial Sector. Engagement should be through many different mechanisms and not attempt to use an advisory group as an intermediary between GEO and the Commercial Sector.

South Africa noted that the strategy may favour larger firms and that there is a need to look specifically at how to engage smaller enterprises.

The IEEE observed that the presentation was at a high level and noted that Copernicus is developing approaches to engage with smaller firms and that ESA is developing business innovation centres which also talk with smaller companies. There is little awareness of Earth observations among many

SMEs. Also, GEO processes are too slow for most firms; they don't need to go through GEO to access data. There is a lack of clear arguments why firms should use GEOSS.

The Secretariat Director responded that it will be very difficult to select an advisory group that represents different parts of the world. Since the UN-GGIM PSN has already gone through an extensive process to identify a representative membership, GEO could use the PSN as a basis for initial engagement.

Australia agreed that an advisory group is not likely to be fully representative, but there is a desire among larger firms to be able to engage directly with the Executive Committee. Commercial Sector firms often have influence on national governments, which is in itself a reason to engage them. GEO should commit to high-level engagement with the commercial sector, as these firms are unlikely to participate if there is no senior engagement from GEO.

Finland supported Australia's position, and suggested that it is more important at this stage to try some mechanisms than to continue to refine the paper.

Japan noted that the Commercial Sector is a large part of society and it is important to involve it. GEO should act where there is commonality of aims between the Commercial Sector and GEO, representing the public interest. While contributions to the GEO Trust Fund should be welcomed, money may create problems, so there is a need to ensure an absence of conflict of interest and to maintain GEO's integrity.

The Chair asked for clarification on the UN-GGIM proposal, whether it would be possible for the PSN to send a delegation to a GEO Executive Committee meeting. This might avoid the need to create a new group. Mr Ramage responded that he would ask the PSN steering committee about this. The Chair agreed with earlier comments that it was important that Executive Committee meets with Commercial Sector representatives in a formal way. A concrete proposal is needed so that it is clear who can participate and how.

The United States cautioned that there is also interest from a number of medium-sized firms, such as those looking to move into other regional markets. GEO could also build opportunities for dialogue with such firms on the side of existing meetings, for example, the AfriGEOSS Symposium. Doing so could create more equal opportunity for engagement, as compared to using the PSN exclusively. For the 42<sup>nd</sup> Executive Committee, the engagement should focus on those organizations that will be engaged at the Plenary.

France concurred that an advisory group cannot be representative and so should not be permanent. Participation should be based on the theme of the specific meeting. Another approach could be to start with those GEO Participating Organizations that are groupings of Commercial Sector firms.

Mexico stated that it is one of the co-chairs of the UN-GGIM and in that capacity approved the PSN last year. The co-chairs of the PSN could be invited to meet with the GEO Executive Committee.

The United Kingdom agreed with bringing Commercial Sector representatives to meet with Executive Committee. It also noted that there is not enough information currently in the document concerning existing links with the Sector. The United Kingdom also advocated for diversity in engagement with the Sector and agreed with France that there should not be a permanent advisory group; it should be expected to change as issues evolve. There is also a question of how to deal with organizations that are not invited to Executive Committee but who would like to have similar access.

CEOS questioned why not-for-profit organizations are excluded from the definition of the Commercial Sector. It also noted that the document contains no reference to intellectual property rights, which may be the only thing that is of concern to the Sector. CEOS encouraged GEO to take an "organic" approach to Commercial Sector engagement, encouraging participation in Work Programme activities, much of which is already taking place. Participation at Plenary, perhaps during one day that is open to observers, could be an important opportunity. There is no need to create formalities of process.

France asked whether there was consensus on the document. In response, the United States stated that the main product for Plenary would be the changes to the GEO Rules of Procedure. It added that there should also be explicit reference that national delegations to Plenary can include private sector members.

The Secretariat Director responded to the question from CEOS that non-governmental organizations can participate in GEO as Participating Organizations; the outstanding issue is with the Commercial Sector.

The Chair concluded by noting that, instead of approving the document in its current form for endorsement by Plenary, the Committee agreed that the focus for Plenary should rather be on approval of the proposed changes to the Rules of Procedure with respect to the Commercial Sector, excluding the Appendix of the current document. A revised version of the proposed changes should be circulated to Executive Committee Members before the end of the summer.

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee:

- Extended its appreciation to the Commercial Sector subgroup for its additional work on this document;
- Confirmed its commitment to engage with the Commercial Sector, building on the successful engagement at the GEO-XIII Plenary;
- Recognized that engagement is already happening through many ongoing activities across the Work Programme;
- Acknowledged that strategic engagement with the Commercial Sector should be two-way and, to start this process, expressed interest in meeting with representatives of the Commercial Sector in Washington, DC at its 42nd Session; this initial engagement will leverage the UN-GGIM Private Sector Network and others, while acknowledging the need for additional diversity in future engagements; and
- Noted that GEO-XIV will contain opportunities (such as an Exhibition, sponsorship, and Side-Events) to further engage with the Commercial Sector.

**Action 40.1:** Co-Chairs to develop points for discussion with the Commercial Sector at the 42<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Executive Committee, including items such as, but not limited to, how the Commercial Sector views GEO, the Work Programme, the GEOSS Portal and the website, as well as what the Commercial Sector can offer to GEO. **Due: 11 July 2017.**

### **2.3 GEO at the Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction (Presentation from Mexico – for information)**

Mexico presented on both SDGs and on Disaster Risk Reduction. On SDGs, it was recalled that the Working Group on Geospatial Information (WGGI) was formed to provide analysis, recommendations and advice on using geospatial data and Earth observations to support a subset of SDG indicators. At the second WGGI meeting in Mexico, three task teams were identified related to specific indicators, two of which are led by GEO. Three other task teams deal with cross-cutting issues. At the 3<sup>rd</sup> WGGI meeting in Kunming, China, agreement was reached on a short-list of 24 indicators that would be examined at national, regional and global levels. For 15 of these indicators, geospatial information was expected to contribute directly to indicator production, while for the other 9, geospatial information could support production. There will be a presentation on the results of the work on these indicators at the next meeting in Luxembourg.

Regarding the GPDRR Mexico reported that there was good participation in GEO-sponsored events, especially in the GEO Side Event on “Geospatial Information and Earth Observations for Disaster Risk Reduction, Prevention and Management”, the GEO booth, the IGNITE talk by Mr Steven Ramage, and a panel on Land Use and Spatial Planning.

Mexico ended by inviting participation by GEO Members in the Fifth High Level Forum of the UN GGIM, to be held in Mexico City in November 2017. The theme for the meeting will be the role of geospatial technology in the context of the SDGs. This will involve more than 50 or 60 countries, as well as significant involvement from the private sector. Mexico hopes that GEO will be well represented at this meeting.

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee expressed its appreciation for Mexico’s presentation.

### 3 STRATEGIC OUTLOOK

#### 3.1 Sustainable funding for the GEO Trust Fund (Document 6 – for decision)

The Secretariat Director introduced the item. She explained that the document had been assembled since the previous Executive Committee meeting. Three approaches for mobilizing resources for GEO are outlined in the document: proposing suggested amounts of contributions to the Trust Fund from Members based on an indicative scale; seeking targeted contributions for both Secretariat operations and for the Work Programme activities; and creating a position within the Secretariat to focus on resource mobilization, including from the Commercial Sector.

On the indicative scale, the Director explained that it was necessary to develop a “minimum sustainable budget” (MSB) for the Secretariat that could be used as the basis for calculating suggested Member contributions. This budget reflects the core work of the Secretariat, as driven by the Strategic Plan, Engagement Priorities, and Executive Committee priorities. Most of the costs are due to staff salaries. Other work beyond that identified as within the MSB could be undertaken by the Secretariat if Members provide secondments for such purposes. However, such secondments or other earmarked contributions would not count towards the MSB. However, secondments to the Secretariat for positions identified in the MSB would count towards the assessed amount under the scale. The Director also emphasized that the scale only includes contributions toward the Trust Fund and not contributions to the Work Programme, which are separate.

The United States remarked that they had come to similar conclusions as the Secretariat. Contributions to the Trust Fund were not currently being spread broadly enough across GEO Members. The fact that the United States is unable to fully meet its pledged amount in 2017 shows GEO’s vulnerability to changes in funding from a small number of Members. An indicative scale is one mechanism to obtain broader contributions, although fundraising and approaching the private sector should also be considered. Whichever mechanism is used, a different approach for realizing sustainable funding is advisable.

China commented that Members should give proper contributions to the Trust Fund. In consideration of the current circumstances, China pledge to increase its contribution by CHF 100,000, beginning in 2017. China will also provide in-kind support and will increase its support to capacity building within developing countries. China also expressed their wish that other countries will increase their contributions also.

Australia noted that the document was essentially the Secretariat seeking permission from the Executive Committee to approach Members a bit harder in seeking contributions. The answer to this request should be ‘yes’, including to the use of an indicative scale. Australia is hoping to reach its suggested contribution according to the scale by the time of Plenary, but this is not certain. Australia also stated that the Secretariat can play a useful role in helping Principals approach other organizations within countries; until now, this task has been left entirely to the Principals. If even a few more countries can step up with increased contributions, as have China and Australia, this will have a good result for sustainability.

France stated that they are very much in favour of sending an “invoice” to Members, based on an indicative scale, to seek increased contributions. Members should have the tables showing the scale

contributions of all Members, and even past contributions, for use with their home organizations. Even if this shows that many Members are not contributing at all, this should help spur more contributions. There should also be more contributions from Executive Committee Members, including Co-chairs. It was asked whether contributions should also be requested from Participating Organizations. Some associations, not United Nations bodies, could be asked, perhaps setting a basic level. Also, it would be useful to prepare a table that combines direct contributions from European countries with those coming through the European Commission.

The Chair commented that Executive Committee recognizes the need to address the sustainability of the GEO Trust Fund. Not all Members are currently contributing to the Trust Fund. The tables used to derive the proposed contribution amounts must be transparent and available to all Members. However, this should not go as far as sending invoices. It will be important to proceed step-by-step. First, the indicative scales should be circulated so that Members understand what is expected. Also, approach the private sector and explore other ways to obtain funds.

The Secretariat Director responded to a question regarding contributions by Participating Organizations by noting that two (IEEE and UCAR) are making voluntary contributions to the Trust Fund this year.

CEOS asked why Members do not contribute, as the suggested amounts are, for most Members, relatively small.

The Chair responded that many organizations do not have a dedicated budget line that could be applied to GEO. Also, if it is easy for Members not to contribute, many will not do so.

Australia commented that GEO has not yet actively engaged countries to directly seek contributions. Co-Chairs should send letters, drafted by the Secretariat, to individual countries noting the scale and the need for more contributions. The letters should also recognize countries that have contributed above the scale amount and should thus be written based on individual Member circumstances, whether they are above or below the scale amount.

The United States suggested that there could be recognition of exceptional contributors, for example, by referring to them as “gold contributors”. However, the United States would prefer to circulate the tables to Members but not to publish them.

The Chair advised that the European Commission is also seeking to increase its contribution by CHF 200,000 but will need to confirm this at a later date.

The United States asked whether Executive Committee is also empowering the Secretariat to approach the private sector for contributions, to which the Chair responded in the affirmative.

**Outcomes:** The Executive Committee:

- Expressed concern about the long-term financial stability of the GEO Trust Fund;
- Noted that there are many Members who are not contributing to the Trust Fund;
- Recommended creating awareness of this issue by circulating an indicative scale of equitable contributions; and
- Suggested the Secretariat consider alternative means of soliciting funds through resource mobilization, including with the Commercial Sector.

**Action 40.2:** Secretariat to draft a letter from the Co-Chairs to Members regarding suggested contributions to the GEO Trust Fund, referencing the indicative scale. **Due: 31 July 2017.**

### **3.2 GEO Secretariat 2017 Programme of Work – Revision (Document 7 – for information)**

The Secretariat Director presented the document, describing it as a revision to the version presented at the previous Executive Committee meeting. This version addresses Executive Committee direction to clarify outcomes and to align to Executive Committee priorities where the Secretariat has a role to play. In addition, there are additional priorities that are consistent with the core tasks as presented in

the minimum sustainable budget as described in the previous agenda item. The Director asked for feedback from Executive Committee Members on the format and nomenclature, as the intent would be to present a document similar to this at the beginning of each year, outlining the priorities for that year. The process this year is off-cycle as we find a format that meets Executive Committee needs.

The United States asked whether the Secretariat work programme for 2017 is based on a 5 million or 3 million CHF budget. The Director responded that it was based on a CHF 3 million budget for 2017; the CHF 5 million budget is for years beyond 2017.

The Chair recognized that this was an unusual time to discuss such an item, however, the intent is to regularize the process in which GEO moves from its 10-year Strategic Plan, to a 3-year GEO Work Programme, to an annual Secretariat work programme.

**Outcomes:** The Executive Committee expressed its appreciation to the Secretariat for revising its 2017 Programme of Work to show a stronger alignment with the Executive Committee's 2017 priorities and for articulating clearer outcome statements. It also reiterated the importance of maintaining synchronization of Secretariat activities with the priorities of the Executive Committee and Chair, with the Programme Board, and with the Engagement Priorities.

### 3.3 Executive Committee meetings 2018 – Proposal from the Subgroup

Ms Yana Gevorgyan provided an update on behalf of the Subgroup. She reminded the Executive Committee that the document that was presented at the previous Executive Committee meeting highlighted the differences in the roles and temporal perspectives between the Executive Committee, the Programme Board and the Secretariat. Based on this analysis, the proposal had been to reduce the number of Executive Committee meetings each year to two: one in conjunction with the Plenary (although split between a meeting prior to Plenary and a meeting following Plenary) and one at mid-year. Given further consideration, the Subgroup believes that this new schedule would not be ideal for the upcoming year due to the change in the Secretariat Director. The Subgroup therefore recommends that the Executive Committee continues to hold meetings in March and July in 2018 and then to revisit this issue once the new Director is established. The plan for the Executive Committee to meet just after the Plenary will still continue as previously proposed. The focus for the post-Plenary meeting will be to reflect on Plenary outcomes and to plan for the following year. Regional caucuses should thus hold their meetings sufficiently in advance of Plenary so that new Executive Committee Members will be prepared to stay in Washington for the post-Plenary meeting. This post-Plenary meeting would also include the direct engagement with representatives of the Commercial Sector.

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee accepted the recommendation to continue the current practice of three Executive Committee meetings in 2018 due to the upcoming change of Secretariat Director and the need to establish a sound working relationship between the Executive Committee and the new Director.

**Action 40.3:** Regional caucuses are requested to nominate representatives to the 2018 Executive Committee well in advance of Plenary so that these representatives may be invited to the 42<sup>nd</sup> Executive Committee meeting which is scheduled for the day following the Plenary. **Due: 31 August 2017.**

## 4 GEO WEEK 2017 UPDATE FROM THE SUBGROUP (DOCUMENT 9 – FOR DISCUSSION)

The United States briefed the Executive Committee on the status of planning for the Plenary. A preview of the Plenary week agenda, branded as “GEOweek2017”, had been distributed earlier for comments. It is planned to have three days of Earth observations exhibition, two days of Executive Committee meetings, and two days of Plenary meeting. The objectives of the Plenary were outlined, in particular, the intent to report on progress on the Engagement Priorities and in GEO generally. This

will not be just a single report, but will also occur through panel discussions and in multiple presentations. The Commercial Sector session will focus mainly on downstream users that use Earth observations in making decisions. Sessions will also include and integrate speakers from various Work Programme activities. The fourth session will involve representatives from international development banks, where the intent is to build better connections with national finance ministries and with developing countries. The Secretariat is building a communications plan to support the lead-up to Plenary. The use of live audience interaction platforms was also discussed. It was emphasized that many visitors will require visas to enter the United States and thus delegate lists should be identified as early as possible to allow for time to process visa applications. It was also mentioned that details of the costs and configuration options for the exhibition space will be made available soon.

South Africa asked, if one of the lessons from St. Petersburg was that there were too many panels, why is the Plenary having four panel discussions? Also, are we including in the focus on users those who are using Earth observations, but not necessarily from GEO? It was also pointed out that the regional GEOSS's are one type of activity that exhibits the Plenary theme of "Insight for a Changing World", yet the focus is on national GEOs.

Australia commented that they were supportive of some of South Africa's interventions. Perhaps some of the administrative items from the second day could be interspersed across both days. Australia disagreed, however, with making a distinction about users obtaining their information through GEO; it is a good outcome if Earth observations are being used, even if the data are obtained directly from the providers, including the private sector. It was stated that GEO should look at opportunities for future uses, not just how information is being used now.

CEOS expressed the view that the panels on the first day are good. The European Space Agency has been working with the international development banks for many years, providing technical advice to program managers so they may take best advantage of Earth observations information. This has been very effective. ESA invested 10 million euros into demonstration projects with the World Bank; the Bank continued this work after the ESA projects ended at ten times the funding because they saw value in this information. This is an example of how GEO can aim to show a better way for users to accomplish their own objectives.

Steven Ramage added that representatives of the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank have been advising GEO on the design of the Plenary program.

China remarked that the Plenary should give an opportunity for regional and national bodies to tell their stories about how they are using Earth observations information. The number of panels should be reduced to allow for more, shorter sessions. China also asked if it would be possible to have cooperation between the UN-GGIM and GEO on a Side Event.

The United States responded that the message from the discussion on the Engagement Strategy was to make part of the Plenary meeting open to those we wish to engage; the first day is intended to do this. The focus should not be on the number of panels, but on how the panels are conducted. This year, there will be opportunity for the audience to engage from the floor. Members can raise their examples during the discussion and should feel free to speak about their experiences even if they are not on the panels. The case for working with the international development banks has been made by others. The key gap is that many organizations know that there are data out there that could help them, but don't know how to use it. It is expected that much will come out of this discussion. Regarding the national GEOs, the intention was to give examples of how countries can build engagement domestically and to identify best practices. This is aimed primarily at smaller countries that may currently have lower involvement in GEO.

France commented that the panels in St. Petersburg worked well and that there was quite a bit of discussion from the floor. The aim this year should be to use modern methods, such as having the ability to send questions to the panel via mobile phones.

Japan announced their intention to host the 2018 Plenary in Kyoto, Japan. Executive Committee Members were asked to include this in their schedule.

The Chair asked about the total number of external attendees that are expected. The United States responded that the meeting itself will not be publicly advertised, although the exhibition will be open to other traffic. Large numbers of external attendees are not expected, but having the first day open will allow for attendance by representatives from other organizations, such as the development banks.

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee expressed its appreciation to the Subgroup on its work.

## 5 WORK PROGRAMME 2017–2019

### 5.1 Report from the Programme Board (Presentation – for information)

Mr Albert Fischer (IOC) presented the report on behalf of the other Programme Board co-chairs, although he reminded the Committee that he had been unable to attend the previous Programme Board meeting. He began by reminding the Executive Committee of the responsibilities of the Programme Board under its terms of reference; in particular he drew attention to the breadth of responsibilities expected for what is a relatively small group. The transition to the 2017–2019 Work Programme is being completed; the task now is to build greater consistency and coherence within what was mostly built from the bottom up. Thanks to the dedication of Programme Board members, the Board has now met with the leads for most of the Work Programme activities. There is, however, limited capacity within the Board to address the Engagement Priorities.

Mr Fischer thanked Greece for hosting the Programme Board's seventh meeting in Athens, Greece. There were five key items on the agenda at this meeting. Discussion of the Work Programme Symposium was not addressed in this report because it appears as a separate item on the agenda. For the second item, Foundational Tasks, the Board believes that there has been good progress on most of them, especially the GEOSS Common Infrastructure. A need was identified to improve connections between Work Programme activities, for example, sharing methods, working on essential variables, and engaging users. GEO also needs to make the Engagement Priorities more visible; to do this, it may be necessary to reorganize the Work Programme to reflect these priorities. There was a recommendation on user needs to move away from an approach centred on SBAs and toward an approach building on mapping activities going on within Work Programme activities. A Subgroup is working on communications products related to the Engagement Priorities. A process has also been determined for revising the Work Programme. Among the changes anticipated, Aquawatch is interested in becoming an Initiative, while two new Initiatives are applying to be added and one is making a revision to its Implementation Plan. For Monitoring and Evaluation, the Programme Board largely endorsed the Secretariat proposal, noting the need to ensure that GEO is measuring what is important and requesting that qualitative information be added to the indicator process.

South Africa asked whether the changes to the user needs approach meant that the SBAs are no longer relevant.

The Chair commented that the SBAs have been superseded, to some extent, by the Engagement Priorities.

Mr Fischer responded that there is much overlap among the Engagement Priorities. The Board's focus is mostly on the SDGs; they have found the Engagement Priorities to be a useful construct. However, it was cautioned that Work Programme activities do not necessarily fit neatly within a particular Priority. The Priorities are mostly useful as a way of talking about what is happening within GEO.

CEOS observed that the approach of defining user needs by SBA was tried in the past but didn't work. The Engagement Priorities are now the primary way that GEO is engaging users, although it could return to an SBA approach at a later date, if it were important to do so.

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee extended its appreciation to the three Programme Board co-chairs and to the Programme Board members for their excellent work.

## **5.2 GEO Secretariat Review of the 2017 Work Programme Symposium (Document 10 – for information)**

Mr Douglas Cripe, Work Programme Coordinator, presented the document. He noted that the 2017 Work Programme Symposium was the first time that the Symposium agenda had been developed in conjunction with the Programme Board and not just by the Secretariat. It was also the first time that a Symposium had been connected to another meeting, in this case the ISRSE, which had been hoped would attract greater visibility and engagement for the Work Programme Symposium. Mr Cripe reviewed the structure of the Symposium agenda and the focus of each of the sessions. Key messages emerging from the Symposium include: the Commercial Sector has a key role, especially in downstream services; the value proposition for Commercial Sector engagement in GEO should be better explained in reference to the needs of each perspective; GEO can play a role as an “honest broker” between the Commercial Sector and public agencies; GEO could do more to support essential variables in various domains; there is a need to strengthen connections between UN custodial agencies for SDG indicators and national statistical offices; and there is a need to step up engagement with Participating Organizations.

In terms of whether the 2017 Work Programme Symposium was a success, the positives include a better understanding among many GEO participants about the SDGs and the role of GEO and of the contributions from the GEO Flagships and Initiatives (for example, GEOGLAM) to the SDG process. Less positive aspects include feedback from participants that the objectives of the Symposium were too ambitious (for example, the breakout session on gaps) and a lack of actionable recommendations from some breakout sessions. The response to co-location with the ISRSE met with a mixed response: it provided visibility to a larger audience and there was opportunity within the ISRSE agenda to address GEO topics; on the other hand, coming at the end of a full week of events, participation in the Work Programme Symposium may have suffered. Regarding the Programme Board proposal under the next agenda item, there is concern within the Secretariat that a reduction from an annual schedule may not provide sufficient support for maintaining momentum and offering opportunities for the GEO community to come together. It is the view of the Secretariat that the Work Programme Symposium should support the needs of both Programme Board and the GEO community at large. As for future co-location of the Symposium with other events, it was recommended that such decisions be based on the needs of GEO at the time.

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee noted the Secretariat’s analysis, views on future events, report and survey results of the 2017 Work Programme Symposium. The Committee acknowledged that there are different reasons and perspectives for holding Work Programme Symposia, particularly given the respective roles and responsibilities of the Secretariat and the Programme Board. The Committee expressed its appreciation to the Secretariat and the Programme Board for organizing the 2017 Work Programme Symposium and to the government of South Africa for hosting the event.

## **5.3 Work Programme Symposium – Future Orientation (Document 11 – for information)**

Mr Albert Fischer presented the document on behalf of the Programme Board Co-chairs. Mr Fischer recalled that Work Programme Symposia have typically been opportunities for the GEO community to share what was happening across the Work Programme. The 2017 Symposium was recognized as being well-organized by the South African hosts. It provided a useful occasion for discussion of the Engagement Priorities and GEOs role. However, attendance this year was a little lower than usual, the combined meeting (including the ISRSE) was too long, and there were not enough task leads present. Mr Fischer referred to the document that highlighted the Symposium should reflect the boundary between science and policy. In this regard, there is potential for further connections to other scientific conferences, for example, the American Geophysical Union (AGU) Fall Meeting. The document lists several objectives for Work Programme Symposia, but the question is how best to inform the co-

design of future Symposia with the GEO community. The document proposes two distinct types of Symposia: one for Work Programme planning, the other for community building. The document proposes that GEO would not in the future hold a Symposium every year. In years where there would not be a GEO Symposium, it is proposed that regional fora, such as the GEOSS Asia-Pacific Symposium, or scientific conferences could serve the community-building function. Symposia for Work Programme development should be held every second year, well in advance of approval of the Work Programme. Mr Fischer drew attention to a proposed multiannual meeting cycle in the document. The Programme Board is looking for more discussion of these ideas within the Board and with the Executive Committee and Secretariat and so the document is only presented for information at this stage.

The United States asked whether future co-location with ISRSE had been agreed to by them. Mr Fischer responded that since GEO would need to carve out space within the ISRSE agenda under this proposal, this would need to be negotiated with the organizers.

Japan commented that GEO should take a more strategic view of the Work Programme Symposium, focusing more on outreach. There is a concern that GEO could lose the convening power of the Symposium if it takes too narrow a focus. There is no objection from Japan regarding the proposed name change, although it is important to recognize the power of branding.

The United Kingdom reported that some internal consultation was conducted with United Kingdom attendees on their experiences with the 2017 Symposium; there was no clear consensus. An increased role for the Programme Board in determining the pattern of meetings was welcomed, though. It was noted that the proposed schedule of future Symposia did not include reference to the timing of input from the GEO community into the Work Programme. The three-year cycle of Work Programme development might suggest a three-year cycle of kinds of Symposia. It was also remarked that the Symposia outcomes identified in the paper seemed input-focused and need more work.

Australia reminded the Committee that the role of the Programme Board was always to make the whole of the Work Programme greater than the sum of its parts. It is common for discussions in GEO to become very technical; the Programme Board is needed to move GEO beyond the technical discussions and toward moving GEO as a community toward defining the products and services needed globally for end users. For example, starting with essential variables has the potential to bog down GEO for many years. A better approach is to start with the product and then look at the Work Programme to see how GEO could meet that need. The Programme Board should help move the discussion away from technical considerations of variables toward a more strategic perspective.

The IEEE commented that the proposed schedule in the document is too closely tied to the ISRSE. There are many other conferences that might be of interest. On essential variables, attention was directed to the project “Atlantis”, of which GEO is a part. It is not necessary to start bottom up, GEO can also bring a top-down perspective.

CEOS stated a concern with essential variables. The Essential Climate Variables are very tightly defined, but this took ten years to achieve. Essential variables are emerging from many directions, but many of these may not be truly essential. Regarding an earlier comment about GEO potentially having a representative at the World Bank, it was asked what this means. GEO is just the Members and Participating Organizations, thus it already has a representative there via ESA. GEO should be looking at using each other’s resources in an organic way.

Mr Fischer agreed that the focus should be on end user products. Essential variables are most useful in an inward-looking context, in how GEO would deliver observations. The work of the Programme Board was different this year from last year; last year was more focused on the review of the Work Programme activities. Now, there is a need to think about how the Board’s work changes over the three-year cycle.

The Secretariat Director reminded Executive Committee Members that there are people who come to the Work Programme Symposium that do not come to Plenary. Their participation may not further the

objectives of the Programme Board per se, but there is still benefit to the GEO community of coming together on a regular basis.

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

#### **5.4 GEOSS Implementation – Status of GEO Indicators and Report on Progress (Document 12 – for discussion)**

Mr Craig Larlee, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer in the Secretariat, gave a presentation summarizing the key points from the document. The presentation emphasized that 2017 represents the first phase of a longer term process which will need to be adjusted and refined based on experience in implementation. While the ultimate direction of GEO monitoring is to support the demonstration of the added value of GEO, this must be approached in a step-by-step process. GEO currently lacks basic data on the status of Work Programme activities, the users targeted by these activities, and the products and services being developed to meet identified user needs. This information will be required before it will be possible to systematically assess the extent to which user needs are being met and the impacts that result. In the meantime, however, the collection of the data to support the indicators will also support other essential functions within GEO, including the Programme Board's role in identifying gaps and opportunities across the Work Programme and the implementation of the Foundational Tasks. Data collection for the first phase of indicators is currently underway, mostly through direct interaction between the Secretariat and the leads of GEO Flagships and Initiatives. Data collection tools have been developed, and refined through testing, which will be used by the leads to input key data concerning their activities. Based on the results of this first phase, a second phase of indicators will be implemented in 2018. Mr Larlee also described plans for the Report on Progress to be presented at the 2017 Plenary. This year's report will be shorter and based on a set of cross-cutting themes, rather than reporting the details for each Work Programme activity individually. There will also be an intent to make better use of illustrations, graphs, user testimonials, and examples of the impact of Earth observations in real decision contexts.

The Chair thanked Mr Larlee for his efforts on moving this topic forward and emphasized the importance of continuing to move in the direction of benefits and impacts, while recognizing the complexity of the task.

Finland commented that GEO now has a plan for how to implement a set of indicators, so we will need to observe how it goes. However, the proposed approach seems to create more burden on the Secretariat. It was suggested that web analytics could be used to measure performance, including from websites of the GEO Flagships.

Japan asked about the target audience of the report. A report based on data and evidence could be useful to convince others that GEO is worth the investment, but also narratives are also needed to show examples of achievements. Evidence-based stories will provide ammunition for financial officers.

South Africa appreciated the effort thus far and encouraged consideration of who the indicators are intended for, including thinking of the indicators in terms of levels from activity to output to outcome; different levels may be appropriate for different audiences. Also, it was suggested to consider use of the "SMART" concept for indicators, for example, the aspect of indicators being time-bound.

Mr Larlee agreed that many of the Phase 1 indicators are measures of activities, but this is a necessary first step. There is little information currently available on who the intended end users are for the Work Programme activities; this information is required if we are to assess outcomes and impacts. With regard to use of web analytics, this approach will be applied for the GEOSS Portal this year and assessed for potential application to the Flagships and Initiatives. In many instances, the websites are

not the primary delivery mechanism for end user products and services and so website analytics may not provide as much useful information about outcomes and impacts.

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee acknowledged the complexity of monitoring in the GEO context and encouraged the addition of tools to support automation of data collection. The Committee endorsed the proposed directions for monitoring and reporting, recognizing the need to begin the process, while noting that the challenge will be to focus on the results achieved.

*Meeting adjourned at 17:30*

**Wednesday 12 July 2017**

*Meeting convened at 09:00*

## **6 REPORT OF THE BUDGET WORKING GROUP**

### **6.1 2016 Financial Statements and Audit Report (Document 13 – for decision)**

Mr Stuart Minchin presented the document on behalf of the Budget Working Group. He thanked the Secretariat for preparing the Financial Statements and noted that Executive Committee had already reviewed previous versions of the Statements, but this is the final set. The Statements have now been audited and there was a clean report. Revenues exceeded expenditures by CHF 146,000, which was applied to the Working Capital Fund. This is especially important given the likely need to draw against the Fund in the current year. Mr Minchin stated that the Secretariat managed its expenditures within the budgeted amount.

**Outcome:** The Executive Committee acknowledged the 2016 Financial Statements and Audit Report and recommended submission to Plenary for approval.

### **6.2 Interim Report on Income and Expenditure as of 31 May 2017 and Staffing Plan (Document 14 – for information)**

Mr Minchin presented the report of the Budget Working Group, drawing attention to a few items. Of particular note was the reduction of the United States pledge by \$500,000 compared to past years. As a consequence, the Budget Working Group proposed that immediate steps be taken to reduce expenditures. Since the change to the pledge occurred halfway through the fiscal year, it is untimely at best. The Secretariat has made major adjustments for the remainder of 2017, but it will still likely be necessary to draw on the Working Capital Fund. New pledges announced at this meeting will reduce the draw on the Fund this year, but a more proactive approach to seeking contributions is needed going forward. The agreement the previous day to send a letter referencing an indicative scale will be an important step in this regard. Planning for the remainder of 2017 continues to assume that Member pledges (other than that of the United States) will arrive. If other pledges also don't arrive, this will have a further negative impact on Secretariat operations. On expenditures, there was a projected deficit of approximately CHF 218,000, prior to the new contribution announced by China. There will be significant reduction by the Secretariat in some areas, including: staff travel, travel support to developing countries, costs associated with WMO support, and a few other items. These measures have saved a significant proportion of the 500,000 shortfall, but not all.

The Chair asked whether the WMO rules require that a minimum of CHF 2 million be kept in the Trust Fund.

Mr Minchin responded that WMO requires that GEO retain CHF 2 million as a buffer to meet staff costs such as vacation provisions, repatriation requirements, and so on. This is separate from the Working Capital Fund, which is extra capital to deal with ups and downs of contributions. This latter Fund had a balance of about CHF 500,000 at the beginning of this year. There is currently a CHF 1 million cap on this fund. The projected deficit this year would draw this amount down by about two-fifths, but with the new contribution by China it will only draw it down by about one-fifth.

The Chair suggested that Members should consider giving presentations to events happening in their countries to reduce the need for the Secretariat to travel.

The United States commented that it would be useful if the Secretariat would identify which missions will not be funded so that Members might be able to identify other funds to support Secretariat travel.

The Secretariat Director responded that all Secretariat travel identified in the forward travel plan is at risk, except for Plenary and a few selected missions related to the Engagement Priorities.

**Outcomes:** The Executive Committee extended its appreciation to the Budget Working Group for its leadership and also to the Secretariat for doing their best to manage expenditures within available income, notably by reducing travel expenditures for the remainder of 2017. The Committee further called on Members to represent GEO at events held within their Region, as indicated in the forward travel plan included within the Secretariat Operations Report. The Committee also noted that the Working Capital Fund is intended to serve as a buffer for managing fluctuations in cash flow due to unforeseen changes in the receipt or timing of contributions, but should not be used to achieve a budgetary balance.

## 7 UPDATE OF RULES OF PROCEDURE (DOCUMENT 15 – FOR DECISION)

The Secretariat Director reminded Executive Committee Members that there was an additional change on page 18 of the document that was decided at the previous Committee meeting. The change is still shown in red because changes to the Rules of Procedure can only be made by Plenary. The changes decided the previous day are on pages 20 and 21, although a few additional adjustments to terms, such as changing “modalities” to “mechanisms”, were still needed to improve understanding. The appendix dealing with the agreement template would not be included.

France recommended that the order of the mechanisms be revised to reflect their order of importance, for example, the third item should appear first.

The Chair suggested that additional changes could be made during the break.

The United States proposed adding a point about firms being encouraged to participate on national delegations to Plenary. It was also suggested to increase the cap on the Working Capital Fund in the event that funds are received from the private sector.

Ms Patricia Geddes clarified that there are, in fact, several different reserve funds reported in the financial statements, including a reserve for salaries, a reserve for long-term liabilities, and a reserve for the Working Capital Fund. She recommended that the cap on the Working Capital Reserve be removed.

CEOS stated that many firms are already participating in the Work Programme. Engagement with the Commercial Sector should start from what is already happening. In general, the language of the document should be tightened up.

France responded to the proposal from the United States that it is the Members who should be encouraged to include the private sector to participate in their delegations.

**Outcomes:** The Executive Committee approved in principle the proposed Annex C (less the Appendix containing the “Template Agreement”) for inclusion in the update to the Rules of Procedure. A revised version, based on modifications proposed by Executive Committee Members, is to be circulated to the Committee for approval prior to submission to Plenary for approval.

**Action 40.4:** Executive Committee Members to communicate any desired modifications to Annex C to the Secretariat. **Due: 14 July 2017.**

**Action 40.5:** Secretariat to circulate a revised version of Annex C to the Executive Committee for approval. **Due: 24 July 2017.**

## 8 SECRETARIAT OPERATIONS

### 8.1 Secretariat Operations Report (Document 16 – for information)

The Secretariat reminded Executive Committee that the information in the document was presented under item 1.5 on the previous day. As such, there would be no additional presentation and the floor would be opened for comments. Responses from Members were especially encouraged regarding the

cuts to travel. Feedback was also requested concerning the presentation of the travel reports and whether the information provided on results (both forward and back) met the needs of the Committee.

The Chair remarked that the travel report was improved. Committee members were encouraged to consider events where they could be present as a way to reduce the necessity for Secretariat travel and thereby address the financial situation.

The United Kingdom asked if the Secretariat could prepare a toolkit to help ensure consistent messaging, to which Mr Ramage responded that the Secretariat will connect with the communications units in Member organizations to provide tools for communicating about GEO.

The Chair agreed that it is the role of the Secretariat to provide the tools to support Members in communicating GEO messages.

Japan stated that it is difficult in the context of high-level UN meetings to insert GEO messages into official Member statements. It is possible, however, to provide comments from the floor. In this way, it is often possible to insert references to the importance of data or Earth observations, though not to GEO. Japan aims to insert such references wherever possible.

Finland commented that another problem with Members representing GEO is with reporting back. Often, multiple organizations or interests are being represented in meetings. There needs to be a way to report back to the Secretariat, for example, a list of key questions.

Australia observed that there was an agreement around the table that there is a shared responsibility for representing GEO. There is also an expectation that the Secretariat prioritizes the highest value meetings that they need to engage with. While there may be comfort in advocating for GEO in meetings like the UN-GGIM, there is also value in having a GEO placard on the table as a distinct organization; it must be visible that GEO is present and being represented. Sitting in a country seat is not the same as sitting in the GEO seat.

The Secretariat Director agreed that it is important to have advocates from Member countries around the table and that tools are needed to support them. The issue, however, is not just about having the placard on the table, but also who and what is going on behind the placard. Attending meetings is not only about the meeting itself, but also in working the crowd, engaging others as potential Members, Participating Organizations and participants in the GEO Work Programme, etc.. Members need to understand what they are signing up for if they agree to represent GEO. Also, this won't likely reduce the Secretariat workload due to the support required by Members to play this role.

**Outcomes:** The Executive Committee noted the report and expressed its appreciation for the continuing efforts of the Secretariat to improve its reporting, particularly in describing the outcomes of the Secretariat's work and in streamlining activities related to the Sustainable Development Goals. The Committee further called on Members to consider the Secretariat forward travel plan in terms of opportunities where Members might represent GEO and continue to build the GEO community while allowing the Secretariat to reduce its travel costs. The Secretariat also welcomed Member and Participating Organization representation in additional events and recommended contacting the Secretariat to obtain toolkit materials.

**Action 40.6:** Secretariat to include materials in the toolkit for use by Members and Participating Organizations when representing GEO at events. **Due: 31 August 2017.**

**Action 40.7:** Members and Participating Organizations are asked to notify the Secretariat regarding events on the forward travel plan (or other events) for which they can represent GEO. **Due: 1 September 2017.**

**Action 40.8:** Members and Participating Organizations agree to report back to the Secretariat regarding outcomes of their participation in these events. **Due: Ongoing.**

## **8.2 Review of Applications for Participating Organizations and Observers (Document 17 – for decision)**

The Secretariat Director drew attention to a revised version of the document that was circulated to Executive Committee Members at the end of the previous day. Nine applications for Participating Organization status were to be considered. It was suggested to treat the applicants by exception, as all required information had been provided in the document. The Director reminded the Committee that the discussion at the previous meeting centred on interventions by China regarding whether applicants have a One-China policy. The World Resources Institute (WRI) was initially removed from the list as there had not been confirmation that requested changes had been made to their website, but they had since confirmed these changes and thus their application is back for consideration. China later came back with a second set of requested changes related to associates or members of WRI. Following discussion with the Co-Chairs, it was recommended that the relationship with GEO is with the applicant organization only and not with any other organizations affiliated with the applicant organization. Committee members were also reminded that searches of the websites of the existing 105 GEO Members has also not been performed.

The Chair stated that there is an important principle at stake here. There are many sub-organizations and partners of many applicants. GEO cannot go into all the levels of partner organizations. Many of these partner organizations may not have a One-China policy because they are not involved with China.

China commented that there are still some mistakes on some of the main websites. Applications should not be discussed if there are still mistakes. China cannot agree on accepting applications until these mistakes are corrected.

The Chair suggested that the same approach be taken as with Conservation International. That said, GEO should stick to the principle that reviews for consistency will not be applied beyond the applicant organization.

The United States agreed with the principle to only review the applicant organization, but requested that China confirm their agreement with this principle also.

South Africa agreed with the United States position.

Australia stated that they are keen to ensure that GEO Members are comfortable with the organizations that are applying to become Participating Organizations. However, it is important that this not be taken too far. Australia worked with the Cooperative Research Centre for Spatial Information (CRCSI) to ensure that the PDF documents on its website were corrected and to clean up other items on the website itself. The remaining issue seems to be on a map that is a private sector product. The labels appearing on the map do not define whether the objects referred to are countries or simply islands, for example, Tasmania. The map on the CRCSI website is presented as zoomed in on Australia and New Zealand and would therefore take a deliberate effort to look outside that region. GEO would be setting a dangerous precedent if it accepted a veto power on this issue.

Japan commented that although GEO is a somewhat independent body, it is under the WMO and thus should follow United Nations policy. Non-governmental organizations are not part of the United Nations and so GEO needs to consider how this applies.

China agreed to only look at the applicant organization websites, but these websites must be perfect with respect to compliance with the One-China policy. Further, applications should be provided to Executive Committee Members more in advance of the meeting. Some applications this time were only received during the meeting.

**Outcomes:** The Executive Committee approved applications for the following five Participating Organizations:

1. AGRHYMET Regional Centre;

2. COMIFAC, Central African Forest Commission / Commission des Forêts d’Afrique Centrale;
3. CRCSI, Cooperative Research Centre for Spatial Information;
4. ECLAC, United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean; and
5. The Paul G. Allen Family Foundation.

The Executive Committee conditionally approved the following four organizations, pending modifications to their websites. The modifications would be endorsed by the Lead Co-Chair in consultation with China in accordance with the procedure previously followed for the Conservation International case:

5. CSDMS, Community Surface Dynamics Modeling System;
6. EuroGeographics;
7. ISESTEL; and
8. WRI, World Resources Institute.

## **9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chair thanked Executive Committee Members for their constructive participation and noted that this would be the last meeting attended by the CEOS representative, Mr Stephen Briggs and the Japan representative, Mr Shinichi Higuchi. The Secretariat Director added that it would also be the last meeting attended by Mr Michel Deshayes, the GEOGLAM Coordinator, and Ms Andiswa Mlisa, the AfriGEOSS Coordinator. Executive Committee Members expressed their thanks to all.

The Secretariat Director also thanked Ms Sofia Rodriguez, Ms Chloé Tiberghien and Ms Sachiko Matsuura for their efforts in supporting the meeting preparations and to Ms Wenbo Chu for her work on data sharing.

## **10 SUMMARY OF ACTION ITEMS**

The Executive Committee reviewed and approved the list of meeting outcomes and new action items.

*Meeting adjourned at 12:00*

## 40<sup>th</sup> GEO Executive Committee

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