

Engagement of GEO Flagships and Initiatives

This document is submitted by the Secretariat to the Programme Board for decision.

1 INTRODUCTION

A new process was introduced in 2020 centred on a set of “Engagement Teams” (ETs) comprised of Programme Board (PB) members, supported by the Secretariat. This process had several objectives:

- Address weaknesses or gaps identified during the 2019 review of the implementation plans;
- Provide assistance to the GEO Work Programme (GWP) activities on such matters as resource mobilization, communications, etc.;
- Facilitate connections with policy contacts, experts, user communities, and so on;
- Strengthen linkages to engagement priorities or with other GWP activities;
- Assist with the sharing of data, services, tools, methods, etc. with the broader community, including via the GEO Knowledge Hub, the GEOSS Platform, or other means.

This document reviews the experience in 2020 during the first year of implementation of the ETs, with the aim of identifying lessons learned and adjustments to the process for 2021.

2 BACKGROUND

Among the key duties of the PB are the following¹:

- Review the scope and substance of GWP activities proposed for the multi-annual GWP;
- Review the progress of all GWP activities;
- Examine proposed Implementation Plans for GEO Initiatives and Flagships and take decisions to accept new ones; and
- Collaborate with and assist GWP activities and candidate activities to maximize the quality and sustainability of the GWP.
- Responding to these requirements and building on the experience during the development of the 2017-2019 GWP, in 2019 the PB created a set of “Review Teams” to review the implementation plans of existing and candidate Flagships and Initiatives.

In 2017 and 2018, the Secretariat provided reports on the status of GWP activities based on information collected through requests to the activity leads. While attempts were made to structure the requests to reduce the time and effort required to report, the response rate to the requests was about 50% in each year. The rate was similar for Flagships and Initiatives as for Community Activities, despite the former being expected to have a more active relationship with GEO.

¹ GEO Rules of Procedure (version of 7 November 2019).

In late 2018/early 2019, the Secretariat experimented with another approach, which was based on teleconferences with the leads of each of the Flagships and Initiatives, following a standard template. The findings from the calls were then compiled into a summary document which was distributed to the PB. This approach met with greater support from the Work Programme activities and from PB members.

In 2019, the PB focused on the development of the 2020-2022 GWP. Following a similar process to that used three years earlier with the previous Work Programme, PB members worked in small “Review Teams” that read the full implementation plans from a set of GEO Flagships, Initiatives or Regional GEOs and provided comments for improvement. The Review Teams then discussed their comments with the leads of those activities. A key part of the process was to recommend the category (that is Flagship, Initiative, or Community Activity) in which the activity would be accepted.

During the 2019 process, the PB and the Secretariat observed that:

- Many GWP activity leads have generally sought a closer connection with the PB and the Secretariat and have been responsive to recommendations and comments;
- Many PB members wanted a more detailed understanding of GWP activities and their status;
- PB members of review teams were able to act as interlocutors between the activities and the full PB; and
- Issues identified in the implementation plan reviews were not fully resolved by the end of the GWP development process, some of which may require assistance and follow-up over an extended period.

The approach that was implemented in 2020 had two key components:

1. A small set of key objectives for each GEO Flagship and Initiative, developed collaboratively with the activity leads, Engagement Team members, and the GEO Secretariat. These objectives could address any of items listed in Section 1 of this document, tailored to the specific context and needs of the Flagship or Initiative.
2. Implementation through small teams of PB members, with Secretariat staff, who would serve as the primary contact points between the GWP activity and the PB.

A similar process was anticipated with the Community Activities, though only involving the GEO Secretariat.

3 ENGAGEMENT TEAMS

3.1 Engagement Team Structure

The ETs largely followed the structure of the Review Teams in 2019. The number of teams was decreased from ten to eight and the number of Flagships and Initiatives per team was kept relatively small (three or four) to minimize the number of calls that team members would be expected to attend. Some PB members chose to join more than one team. ET membership was open to both principal and alternate PB representatives, though not to non-PB members since the ETs were intended as a means to implement core responsibilities of the PB.

The list of ETs, the GWP activities assigned to each team, and the PB members participating in the teams is described in Table 1 below.

Table 1: 2020 Engagement Teams

Team	GWP Activities ²	PB Members ³
Biodiversity / Ecosystems	GEO BON, GEO-WETLANDS, EO4EA	Finland, Italy, Japan, CEOS, GRSS, POGO
Climate Change	GFOI, GEO-CRADLE, GEO-MOUNTAINS, GEO-VENER	Canada, Pakistan, COSPAR, ESA, IAG
Disaster Risk Reduction	DIAS, GEO-DARMA, GSNL, GWIS	Ghana, Italy, Kenya, Norway, Pakistan, UK, CEOS, IAG, OGC, SWF
Health	GOS4M, GOS4POPS, EO4HEALTH	Canada, Greece, Japan, South Africa, USA, ESIP
Land / Agriculture	GEOGLAM, GDIS, GEO-LDN	Germany, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, CEOS, ESIP, GODAN
Urban Resilience	EO4SDG, GUOI, HUMAN-PLANET	China, Ghana, Greece, Kenya, Pakistan, USA, ESA, GODAN, IEEE
Water	AQUAWATCH, BLUE-PLANET, GEOGLOWS	Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, USA, COSPAR, IEEE, IUGG
Regional	AFRIGEO, AMERIGEO, AOGEO, EUROGEO	China, European Commission, Finland, Ghana, South Africa, USA, GRSS, SWF

The members of two of the ETs (Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction) were cross appointed to the Foundational Task Working Groups of the same names to strengthen the linkages between the PB and the Working Groups. The Urban Resilience ET was composed of the PB members of the Urban Resilience subgroup, thus serving a dual function.

3.2 Expectations of Engagement Team Members

As described in the original document proposing the ET process, PB members were expected to:

- Participate in periodic teleconferences with GWP activity leads and the Secretariat. The aim would be to hold at least two teleconferences per year with the leads of each GWP activity. Given challenges of time zones and the need to accommodate the schedules of the GWP activity leads, it was assumed that not all engagement team members will be able to attend all calls.
- Participate in teleconferences of the Engagement Team, as needed, likely not more than two or three per year per team.
- Review emailed documents related to the objectives identified for the activities covered by the team.
- Assist in furthering the objectives of the GWP activities as identified in the strategy, where the PB member has relevant expertise, contacts, etc.
- Assist in the preparation of status reports to PB meetings.

4 ENGAGEMENT TEAM ACTIVITIES IN 2020

As with many other activities in 2020, both within GEO and externally, the implementation of the ETs process was delayed due to the impacts of COVID-19. In particular, the need to shift the

² For the full names and details of the Flagships and Initiatives, please visit the [GEO Work Programme webpage](#).

³ For the full names of GEO Participating Organizations, please visit the [GEO Participating Organizations webpage](#).

planning for the 2020 GEO Symposium to an online format, for the first time ever, drew Secretariat and PB resources away from the engagement process.

4.1 Identification of Key Objectives

The first step was identification of key objectives for each activity by the Secretariat, based on the results of the PB / Secretariat reviews in 2019. Each set of objectives were then circulated to the leads of the respective activities, asking for confirmation or revision. The process was started in the first half of 2020, following the approval of the strategy at the 16th PB meeting.

The status of the identification of key objectives is summarized in Table 2 below. The list of key objectives for all Flagships and Initiatives is provided in Annex A to this document.

Table 2: Status of Key Objectives by GEO Work Programme Category

Category	Confirmed	In Consultation	In Development	Total
Flagships	4	0	0	4
Initiatives	8	5	6	19
Community Activities	15	16	3	34
Regional GEOs	0	0	4	4
Total	27	21	13	61

4.2 Video Conferences with Flagships and Initiatives

The second step was to organize a video conference with the leads of each Flagship and Initiative and the members of the corresponding Engagement Team. The calls would also include Secretariat staff, the Work Programme support team on all calls, plus other Secretariat staff depending on the specific activity. The video conferences followed a common template (see Annex B), though the amount of time devoted to each item would vary considerably from activity to activity.

A total of 20 video conferences were held in the last half of 2020. Table 3 shows the dates of the video conferences, the Flagships and Initiatives addressed, and the ETs involved.

Table 3: List of Engagement Team Video Conferences in 2020

Date	Flagship / Initiative	Engagement Team
30 July	EO4EA	Biodiversity / Ecosystems
31 July	GEOGLAM	Land / Agriculture
24 August	GEO-DARMA	Disaster Risk Reduction
25 August	GEO-BON	Biodiversity / Ecosystems
26 August	GWIS	Disaster Risk Reduction
4 September	HUMAN-PLANET	Urban Resilience
8 September	GOS4M	Health
11 September	GEOGLOWS	Water
15 September	GUOI	Urban Resilience
15 September	GEO-WETLANDS	Biodiversity / Ecosystems
18 September	GEO-MOUNTAINS	Climate Change
21 September	GSNL	Disaster Risk Reduction

Date	Flagship / Initiative	Engagement Team
29 September	GEO-CRADLE	Climate Change
5 October	GOS4POPS	Health
9 October	DIAS	Disaster Risk Reduction
12 October	BLUE-PLANET	Water
12 October	GEO-LDN	Land / Agriculture
14 October	GEO-VENER	Climate Change
29 October	EO4HEALTH	Health
17 November	GDIS	Land / Agriculture

Video conferences with three Flagships / Initiatives have not yet been scheduled: AQUAWATCH, EO4SDG, and GFOI. This was due to difficulties in finding suitable times for a minimum number of participants.

It was planned to distribute a record of each meeting to all participants. This has been done for several of the earlier video conferences, but the Secretariat is delayed in the completing the rest due to COVID-related staff shortages.

5 OBSERVATIONS FROM THE 2020 PROCESS

The 16th PB meeting was the last time that the PB met in person. While the COVID-19 virus was already in the news and had been spreading for several months, the implications for GEO and the world generally were not fully appreciated at that time. The PB set an ambitious work plan for the year, not only for the ETs, but also the GEO Symposium, the subgroups, the Foundational Task Working Groups, and other elements. Progress was realized on many of these actions, as described in the set of documents for the 19th meeting. However, across the board, the progress which was realized was less than originally planned.

On the positive side, 20 Engagement Team calls were organized and held with Flagship and Initiative leads and involving many PB members. The feedback during and after the calls was, to the knowledge of the Secretariat, uniformly positive. The most frequent comment heard from activity leads was that they wanted the calls to happen more frequently, at least twice per year. Many PB members who participated in the calls said that they better understood what the activities were doing, what progress they had achieved, the challenges they faced, and how the PB could help. PB members offered valuable advice during the calls and were able in some cases to offer specific assistance or contacts. In the view of the Secretariat, the concept of the Engagement Team process was validated.

As expected, however, there were also some aspects of the process which require improvement or adjustment. From the perspective of the Secretariat, these include the following:

- Scheduling of calls was very time consuming. The Secretariat used a rule of thumb that a call would be scheduled if at least two PB members indicated their availability at the time in the poll, though this was often difficult to achieve. Many ET members did not consistently respond to the polls.
- The number of PB members on the ETs varied from 5 to 11, with a mean of 7.6. Some team members did not participate on any calls, while other members were on all the

calls of their team. On average, the PB member participation was around three members per call.

- The application of the process to the Regional GEOs was ultimately not sorted out. This reflects a deeper uncertainty regarding the relationship between the Regional GEOs, which are now accountable to the GEO Caucus, and the PB. There would seem to still be value in PB members understanding the plans of each of the Regional GEOs and how the PB might assist them, for example, by fostering linkages with other GEO Work Programme activities, but it is not clear whether this should happen in the context of the ETs, through the PB as a whole, or through some other structure.
- Records of the first calls were provided to the ETs and the activity leads who participated, but due to staffing issues in the Secretariat and other demands, this process slowed over time and then came to a virtual halt. The initial reports, while providing a detailed record of the conversation, were perhaps too ambitious to be sustained.
- While it had been intended to bring together the ET members to discuss what they heard on the calls, this did not happen. Given the difficulties in scheduling the calls with the activity leads, this step may not be feasible.
- Most calls were chaired by the Secretariat, although there were a couple of calls led by a PB member.
- The common set of topics that were circulated in advance of the calls helped to guide the discussion and enabled GWP activities to prepare for the calls. Some activities provided presentations on their work, which were helpful although sometimes this meant that some intended topics were not covered on the calls.
- Most calls used the full scheduled time of two hours, which seemed appropriate. In a couple of instances, less time was required, and the calls ended early. In the large majority of calls, the discussion flowed smoothly, with good participation.
- The application of the process to Community Activities was begun with the development of key objectives proceeding reasonably well, but no calls were scheduled in 2020 with Community Activity leads due to lack of time and capacity.

PB members are invited to provide their own perspectives and comments on the process.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The first recommendation, prior to discussing specific changes to the process, is that the PB have an open exchange of views regarding the process, hearing from as many of the participants in the ET calls as possible. It would also be useful to hear the perspective of those who agreed to join an ET but did not participate on the calls and from those who did not volunteer to serve on an ET. While the ET process seemed to be positively viewed by those who participated, it is time-consuming for both PB members and the Secretariat and thus it is important that, should the process be continued, the benefits obtained are seen to clearly outweigh the time invested.

If the PB decides to continue the ET process in 2021, the Secretariat proposes the following specific recommendations:

1. The number of ETs and their assigned GWP activities should be retained. While a smaller number of teams would increase the likelihood of obtaining a quorum of PB members for the calls, it would also increase the number of calls for each ET member. Having a larger number of teams with the possibility of joining more than one team provides a reasonable compromise between these objectives.

2. There should be a new call for ET members, both to confirm whether existing members are interested in continuing with the teams and to add new members to replace those who have left the PB and to increase the numbers per team to closer to 12.
3. The meeting reports should follow a simplified standard template. Recordings of the meetings should be made available to PB members unable to attend the calls.
4. The value of the linkages between the Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction ETs and the corresponding Working Groups should be assessed from both sides. While the value of this arrangement was not immediately apparent, this could be due to the fact that the Working Groups were mostly focused on their own formation and planning and not yet far enough advanced to engage closely with GWP activities. This is expected to change in 2021.
5. Improvements to scheduling should be considered, including scheduling ET calls further in advance and/or scheduling calls within certain windows that avoid conflicts with GEO meetings and other key events.

Annex A

Key Objectives for GEO Flagships and Initiatives

Short Name	Full Name	Category	Key Objectives	Status
GEO-BON	GEO Biodiversity Observation Network	Flagship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sustainable funding of the GEO BON Secretariat - Pilot demonstration of modelled datasets and cloud computing services for EBVs 	Confirmed
GEOGLAM	GEO Global Agricultural Monitoring	Flagship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Funding obtained from G20 GEO Members to support sustainability of GEOGLAM services - Progress on use of the GEO Knowledge Hub and technical services to support analytical processes. - Completion of 3 white papers describing GEOGLAM linkages to the GEO engagement priorities. - GEOGLAM communications strategy harmonized with GEO comms. 	Confirmed
GFOI	Global Forest Observation Initiative	Flagship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confirmation of a policy mandate. - Inclusion of GFOI results in the GEO Knowledge Hub. - GFOI's connections strengthened to other land-based GEO activities, including GEOGLAM, GEOBON and potentially others. - GFOI's participation in the GEO Climate Change and Capacity Building working groups. - Shared communications activities with GEO furthered - GFOI's membership from other GEO partners working on forest monitoring and associated GHG accounting issues. 	Confirmed
GOS4M	Global Observation System for Mercury	Flagship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confirmation of a policy mandate. - Consolidation of partnerships and data sharing 	Confirmed
AQUAWATCH	Aquawatch	Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to construct the 'Water Quality Information Service' by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cataloguing a Library of Algorithms for inclusion in GEO Knowledge Hub - Collaborating with CEOS on the development of an Aquatic Analysis Ready Data (ARD) product through community consensus - Advancing the development of a global validation network - Developing end-to-end demonstration projects 	Confirmed

Short Name	Full Name	Category	Key Objectives	Status
BLUE-PLANET	Oceans and Society: Blue Planet	Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Progress on implementation of the planned decision-support tools; - Identification of potential funding sources to support project implementation; 	In Development
DIAS	Data Integration and Analysis System	Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Linkage to GEO work with UNDRR / Sendai Framework - Increased visibility and service coverage at the global level 	Sent for comment
EO4EA	Earth Observations for Ecosystem Accounting	Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Policy mandate from UNSD-SEEA. - Tools, guidelines, etc included in GEO Knowledge Hub (if suitable) 	Sent for comment
EO4HEALTH	Earth Observations for Health	Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Funding for EO4Health Secretariat - Engagement of public health agencies [specific countries?] 	Confirmed
EO4SDG	Earth Observations in Service of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clarification of 'federated approach' on SDGs and role of EO4SDG in relation to other GEO entities. - Clarification of the process for vetting proposed methods developed in GEO to support the SDGs. - Monitor impact of the open call for the SDG Toolkit 	Confirmed
GDIS	Global Drought Information System	Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clarification of the governance structure. - Clarification of the planned deliverables for 2020-2022, taking account of available resources. 	Sent for comment
GEO-CRADLE	GEO Capacity Building in the North Africa, Middle East, Balkans, and Black Sea Region	Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confirmation of funding post-2020. - Strategy for engagement of policy decision makers and other targeted users. - Clarification of planned services. 	Confirmed
GEO-DARMA	Data Access for Risk Management	Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resolution of the issues causing delays in the 2017-2019 period. - Strategy for funding projects beyond the pilot phase (sustainability). - Strategy for how the lessons from the pilots can be replicated and scaled by countries. 	Confirmed
GEOGLOWS	GEO Global Water Sustainability	Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased coordination with other streamflow and flood activities. - Results included in the GEO Knowledge Hub. - Results on resource mobilization 	Sent for comment
GEO-GNOME	GEO Global Network for Observation and Information in Mountain Environments	Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identification of key expected users and a strategy for engaging them in co-design of products and services; - Further definition of the process for development of the essential mountain variables. 	In Development

Short Name	Full Name	Category	Key Objectives	Status
GEO-LDN	GEO Land Degradation Neutrality Initiative	Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategy for obtaining additional financial and in-kind contributions; - Identification of potential specific opportunities for commercial sector involvement; 	In Development
GEO-VENER	GEO Vision for Energy	Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support the achievement of targets under SDG 7 - Connections with energy sectors in key GEO Member countries. - Link GEO VENER activities with the Climate Working Group and increase their visibility within GEO's climate portfolio. 	Confirmed
GEO-WETLANDS	GEO Wetlands Initiative	Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resource mobilization strategy; - Integration of new mangrove activities (US, Japan) into the initiative; - Strategy for expansion beyond Europe and Africa looking for partners; 	In Development
GOS4POPS	Global Observation System for Persistent Organic Pollutants	Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased visibility of GEO and GOS4POPS brands with the Stockholm Convention (leading to potential confirmation of a policy mandate) 	In Development
GSNL	GEO Geohazard Supersites and Natural Laboratories	Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implementation of supersites in additional countries [specify?] - Funding support for supersites in developing countries. - Link established with the DRR Working Group. 	Confirmed
GUOI	Global Urban Observation and Information	Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordinated response to UN-Habitat with other urban-related GWP activities. - Identification of targeted services to be developed. 	Sent for comment
GWIS	Global Wildfire Information System	Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing GWIS services to additional countries - Examples of how GWIS complementing and harmonized with the existing national wildfire information systems - Contribution of GWIS methods and tools to the GEO Knowledge Hub 	In Development
HUMAN-PLANET	GEO Human Planet Initiative: Spatial Modeling of Impact, Exposure and Access to Resources	Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordinated response to UN-Habitat with other urban-related GWP activities. - Results included in the GEO Knowledge Hub. 	Confirmed

Annex B

Standard Discussion Topics on Engagement Team Calls

The following is the list of topics used in the ET calls with all Flagships and Initiatives.

1. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your activity? Has the pandemic led you to change plans or directions for the activity in future, including to pursue new opportunities?
2. What key achievements or areas of progress have been realized over the last year?
3. Are the proposed objectives still relevant? Would you like to make any additions or modifications to these objectives? What progress, if any, has been realized toward these objectives (if relevant)?
4. Have you established any new connections with other GEO Flagships, Initiatives, Community Activities, Foundational Tasks or Regional GEOs? Are there other activities with which you would like to collaborate and would like help in doing so?
5. Do you have any key data needs which have been difficult to fill? To what extent do you currently use non-EO data (e.g., statistics, mobile phone, etc.)? What benefits might be realized by advancing the integration of non-EO data in your activities?
6. Do you require assistance from the GEO Secretariat and/or the Programme Board in any of the following areas?
 - Alignment of activities with the GEO Engagement Priorities
 - Connection with UN agencies or other policy organizations
 - Contribution to the GEO Knowledge Hub
 - Access to technical resources such as cloud computing
 - Resource mobilization
 - Co-design of capacity development activities
 - Others (please specify)