

Information Regarding Regional Groups on Earth Observations (Regional GEOs)

Introduction

GEO Members, at the GEO-XV Plenary in Kyoto, Japan, approved changes to the GEO Rules of Procedure which have implications for the role of the GEO Work Programme activities formerly known as Regional GEOSS Initiatives (RGIs). This note summarizes the key implications of the changes and their implications for the development of the 2020-2022 GEO Work Programme.

Summary of the Changes

- The changes are intended to recognize, clarify and give additional prominence to the unique and valuable role of the RGIs within GEO.
- The changes apply only to the four existing RGIs that are based on the GEO caucus regions: AfriGEOSS, AmeriGEOSS, Asia-Oceania GEOSS, and EuroGEOSS, as well as to any similar activity that may be organized in future under the CIS Caucus. The changes do not apply to other GEO Work Programme activities that may focus on a particular geographic region.
- The RGIs will henceforth be collectively referred to as “Regional Groups on Earth Observations” or “Regional GEOs”.
- The individual Regional GEOs are not required to immediately change their existing individual names or branding, but are encouraged to do so at an appropriate time in consultation with the GEO Secretariat communications team.
- The primary function of the Regional GEOs is to engage regional stakeholders in GEO activities and coordinate implementation of GEO activities within the region. They may also:
 - Engage national agencies, regional intergovernmental organizations and other users and potential users of Earth observations, including those having responsibility for the implementation of global and regional policy priorities;
 - Identify regional needs for Earth observation applications and conveying these to global GEO activities;
 - Facilitate regional Earth observation activities collaboration with global activities in the GEO Work Programme;
 - Promote communications among regional GEO Members and other participants, as well as with other Regional GEOs; and
 - Identify funding opportunities to support regional GEO activities and projects.
- Participation in Regional GEOs is open to all countries and multinational organizations interested in advancing the collection, management and use of Earth observations within the region, including countries and organizations that are not currently GEO Members, Observers, Participating Organizations or GEO Associates¹.
- Activities of each Regional GEO are overseen by the respective Caucus. Matters involving the scope of Regional GEO functions and other issues affecting more than one Regional GEO will be referred to Executive Committee for decision.
- Regional GEOs will continue to be included in the GEO Work Programme, but will not be subject to oversight by the GEO Programme Board.

¹ The new category of GEO Associate was approved in principle by the GEO-XV Plenary but has not yet been implemented pending finalization of the related Rules of Procedure by the GEO Executive Committee.

Implications of the Changes for the 2020-2022 GEO Work Programme

- Regional GEOs are expected to prepare and submit Implementation Plans as part of the 2020-2022 GEO Work Programme development process. These Plans will follow a separate track from those for GEO Flagships, Initiatives and Community Activities and have their own guidance document.
- Regional implementation activities such as development of Earth observations information services or infrastructures that go beyond coordination, networking, engagement, etc. are expected to be included in the GEO Work Programme either as part of an existing Flagship, Initiative or Community Activity or as a new Work Programme activity in their own right. Implementation activities should not be part of the Regional GEO itself, although regular interaction between the Regional GEOs and Work Programme activities is expected.
- Programme Board will no longer have a role in accepting Regional GEOs into the Work Programme or in monitoring their progress. Programme Board will continue to take note of the Implementation Plans of the Regional GEOs, and may continue to make recommendations, for example, regarding their interactions with other Work Programme activities.

Background

- The *GEO Strategic Plan 2016-2025* did not identify a specific role or implementation mechanism for regional activities, although it did highlight several areas where regional activities were needed, including: stakeholder engagement, identifying user needs, capacity building, fostering partnerships, and implementing regional services.
- RGIs were included in the 2016 transitional GEO Work Programme as GEO Initiatives as a temporary arrangement, which has continued until now.
- Programme Board observed in 2016 and 2017 that the RGIs played a unique and valuable role within GEO, and the nature of this role was a topic of discussion at the 2017 GEO Work Programme Symposium.
- A subgroup of Programme Board was established to examine the role of the RGIs in more detail. A session at the 2018 GEO Symposium was held as part of this process. The subgroup noted that the RGIs have a strong coordination role which is unique among GEO Work Programme activities. This role is enhanced through their linkages with the GEO Caucuses.
- The GEO Executive Committee was briefed by Programme Board on the matter at its 44th meeting in July 2018. The Executive Committee tasked the Programme Board to prepare recommendations for the GEO-XV Plenary to recognize the distinct role of the RGIs. Programme Board presented their recommendations to the GEO Plenary in November 2018, which resulted in the decision to adopt the changes described above.