

Report of the Programme Board

This document is submitted to the Executive Committee for discussion.

1 INTRODUCTION

This document provides a summary of the key activities undertaken by the GEO Programme Board during the period of 1 March to 30 June 2019. This period includes two Programme Board meetings: the 13th meeting on 21-22 March and the 14th meeting on 12-13 June, both of which were held at the Secretariat offices in Geneva. It also includes the work of Programme Board members during the periods between meetings through the multiple review teams and Programme Board subgroups.

2 DEVELOPMENT OF THE 2020-2022 GEO WORK PROGRAMME

The development of the next GEO Work Programme has been the major focus for the Programme Board since the GEO-XV Plenary. This activity has multiple components that will be addressed separately below.

2.1 Review of Candidate Flagships and Initiatives

As was noted in the report to the 47th Executive Committee meeting, the review of Implementation Plans from candidate GEO Flagships and Initiatives is being led by 10 review teams composed of Programme Board members with the support of the Secretariat. Some general observations from the reviews include the following:

- Many of the plans were submitted after the originally-requested date of 15 February. This has impacted the ability of the Programme Board to complete two reviews of each of the plans prior to the final version of the Work Programme that will go to the GEO-XVI Plenary for approval. A few additional plans from activities in the current GEO Work Programme have not yet been received, but are expected soon for Programme Board review;
- The implementation plans often did not provide all of the information requested in the guidance or did not provide it in the appropriate section of the plan. While review teams mentioned these issues in their responses to the activities, these gaps have meant that the review teams have not had sufficient information to review the substance of the proposal rather than the weaknesses of the plan;
- Programme Board members saw value in continuing the relationships between the review teams and the groups of Flagships and Initiatives with which they have interacted. They agreed that this interaction should continue after the Work Programme is approved to provide ongoing support and engagement with the

activities. A key area of focus in these future interactions will be to facilitate active interconnections among Initiatives and Flagships;

- Many activities still need to do more to define the unique value that they offer, particularly in relation to similar work that may be ongoing within various UN and other international organizations;
- Newly proposed activities, including activities that have been in the GEO Work Programme for a short period of time, should be encouraged to join as Community Activities until they have clarified their plans and have demonstrated results, at least on a pilot scale;
- Review teams noted a growing number of activities (many of them Community Activities) in certain domains (for example, water) and see potential for encouraging some of these activities with similar interests to collaborate or even join together;
- The Programme noted that some activities are not using GEO branding on their websites, documents and services. This impacts GEO's ability to gain recognition for its role and thus limits its ability to attract resources and grow.

The Programme Board also discussed the status of the GEO Flagships, particularly in light of its decision (at its 13th meeting) to clarify the requirement regarding a policy mandate. Programme Board now regards a policy mandate to be “evidence of a decision or request to the candidate Flagship or to GEO from an international treaty, convention, programme, organization, etc. to provide EO products or services”. According to this definition, GEOGLAM and GEO BON are both considered to have a policy mandate; however, GFOI and GOS4M do not yet have a policy mandate, although both are actively seeking to obtain one and believe that this is imminent. As a result, the Programme Board decided to retain all four existing Flagships in this category in the 2020-2022 Work Programme, though with the understanding that GFOI and GOS4M would be given a reasonable period of time in which to obtain evidence of their policy mandate. This was in part due to the fact that the Programme Board has only recently defined the requirement in this way and thus it would not be fair to apply the standard retroactively.

The review process will continue through July and into August, culminating in the 15th Programme Board meeting where the version for recommendation to the GEO Plenary will be reviewed and final revisions determined.

2.2 Foundational Tasks

Following the Programme Board's approval, at its 12th meeting, of the new model for the Foundational Tasks proposed by the Secretariat, the Programme Board focused its efforts mainly on the GEOSS Infrastructure Development and GEO Engagement Priorities Coordination Foundational Tasks. Programme Board action regarding the former was primarily through the Foundational Task subgroup which was created at the 12th meeting. This subgroup, with the assistance of the Secretariat, was successful in gaining agreement of the various teams involved in development and implementation of the GEOSS infrastructure to come together within the context of a single Foundational Task and to agree on a terms of reference for a task team which would facilitate integration and collaboration among the components. Many of the key players were also engaged in the Expert Advisory Group process, which also became closely linked with

these efforts. By the time of the 14th meeting, it appeared that consensus had been reached on the major issues, though work remains to be done on the development of specific plans in each of the components of the Foundational Task.

Much of the attention of Programme Board at its 14th meeting was directed to the GEO Engagement Priorities Coordination Foundational Task and the plans to reconstitute the existing Paris Agreement and Sendai subgroups of Programme Board as new working groups within this Foundational Task. The Programme Board reviewed draft terms of reference prepared by the Paris Agreement subgroup, although similar terms of reference from the Sendai subgroup were not quite ready for consideration at that meeting. Programme Board agreed with the general concept of using the new working groups as means to expand membership beyond Programme Board members and to ensure a more stable home for these efforts. It noted as well the importance of dedicated Secretariat staff to support each of the Engagement Priorities, as is now the case only for the Sendai subgroup. Finally, the Programme Board recommended that the names of the new working groups be framed in terms of the issue being addressed (e.g. “climate” and “disaster resilience”) rather than in terms of the current political frameworks (Paris Agreement and Sendai Framework).

2.3 Other Elements of the GEO Work Programme

The Programme Board discussed how the review team looking at the Regional GEO implementation plans should approach their work, especially in the context of the changes approved at the GEO-XV Plenary. It was agreed that it was important that the Programme Board review the plans, in part to understand the linkages each Regional GEO has with the other Work Programme activities. They also were of the view that these reviews should take a light touch, providing comments intended to improve the plans but not with an aim to approve or direct them in what they do. The key focus would be on ensuring that the plans were consistent with the core principles of GEO.

Regarding the Community Activities, the Programme Board encouraged the Secretariat to work with the proposers to consolidate similar or related activities and to recommend in some cases that Community Activities join existing Flagships or Initiatives that are already working in their areas of interest. The Programme Board also raised concerns about inconsistencies in the use of “GEO” in the names of Community Activities, as well as the use of names that may imply a level of endorsement by GEO that is not warranted. The Programme Board requested the Secretariat to prepare (and begin to implement) stronger guidelines regarding naming and branding of GEO Work Programme activities.

The Programme Board also provided feedback on the first version of the Summary Document distributed in May. Some key proposed changes included:

- Addition of a summary of key changes from the 2017-2019 GEO Work Programme;
- Use of diagrams rather than indexes for showing the alignment of Work Programme activities with the Engagement Priorities;
- Addition of information about the relationships with other Work Programme activities in each activity summary;
- Addition of an index of acronyms; and

- Improvement in the consistency of level of detail across the activities, to the extent possible.

3 UPDATE TO THE PROGRAMME BOARD SECTION OF THE GEO RULES OF PROCEDURE

On several recent occasions, the Programme Board had noted differences between its mandate as recorded in the GEO Rules of Procedure and the actual practices that had evolved over the first three and a half years of its operation. While individually these differences were not significant, there was a growing sense that the transition to a new GEO Work Programme offered an opportunity to review and update the rules that govern Programme Board, based on the lessons learned over its first few years.

A separate document has been prepared to explain the details and the rationale for the proposed changes. In this report, Programme Board would like to highlight the key updates that are being sought. These include:

- Inclusion in the Programme Board duties: review of all Work Programme activities (not just Flagships and Initiatives), a role in the improvement of the Work Programme and not just its development, and a role in the organization of the GEO Symposium and other events, in collaboration with the Secretariat;
- Clarification of the distinction between Programme Board members and their representatives, including the ability of Programme Board members to change their representatives;
- Definition of the role of Programme Board co-chairs, including in the review of documents prior to distribution to Programme Board members;
- Description of the process for selection of Participating Organization Observers to Executive Committee;
- Codifying practices around use of subgroups; and
- Revising the voting procedure for Programme Board co-chairs (and Participating Organization Observers) to recognize electronic voting as the default procedure.

The proposed revisions were discussed at the 14th Programme Board and were agreed by consensus following amendments.

4 GEO SYMPOSIUM 2019

The Programme Board worked closely with the GEO Secretariat to design the agenda and objectives of the 2019 Symposium, which was the 10th Symposium convened by GEO (previously known as the GEO Work Plan or Work Programme Symposium). The focus for the Symposium this year was on the development of the 2020-2022 GEO Work Programme, which gave it a more inward-looking character than in the past two years. This focus was also reflected in the decision to invite all GEO Flagships, Initiatives and Regional GEOs to present at the Symposium, if they were available.

There were 93 attendees at the Symposium (not including GEO Secretariat staff), which is about average in comparison to previous Symposia, but less than in 2018 which was the best attended over the 10 years. Commercial sector involvement was very low, though there was considerably more at the Data Technology Workshop the month prior.

There were also few representatives from international institutional stakeholders such as UN agencies and regional development banks. The three “interactive” sessions, in which Symposium participants were divided into smaller groups to encourage discussion, worked well based on feedback from participants and on the observations of Programme Board members. Engagement and discussion in the regular sessions, however, was less than anticipated.

Other observations from Programme Board members included:

- GEO should consider how to use future Symposia to engage a broader range of stakeholders, particularly at the director (mid- to senior management) level;
- While the 2019 Symposium was appropriately inward-looking, the next Symposia should be more outward-looking (to users, decision makers, and other stakeholders);
- Time should be provided in the next Symposium for a detailed discussion on the role of essential variables in GEO Work Programme activities, including whether coordination of GEO's efforts in this area should be based within a Foundational Task;
- There was clear interest among the Regional GEOs to interact with one another and with GEO Work Programme activities; and
- Programme Board needs to consider how to create opportunities for “win-win” relationships between commercial sector organizations and GEO Work Programme activities. At a future meeting, the Programme Board will consider whether to establish a subgroup to focus on identifying practical contributions to the GEO Work Programme by the commercial sector.

5 GEO AWARDS

A Programme Board subgroup presented a proposal to create a GEO awards process to recognize exceptional individual contributions and personal commitment to the GEO Mission that has produced tangible impact. This proposal was accepted by the Programme Board at its 14th meeting and the call for nominations was launched on 20 June.

The intent is to present the first set of these annual awards during GEO Week 2019, in conjunction with a separate set of awards that have been developed by the Earth Observation for Sustainable Development Goals (EO4SDG) Initiative. Recipients of the awards would be determined based on review by an Awards Committee of submitted nominations. The Awards Committee is drawn from Programme Board members and, for 2019, includes Earth Science Information Partners (ESIP), Ghana, Geoscience and Remote Sensing Society (GRSS), Mountain Research Initiative (MRI), and the United Kingdom. Representatives serving on the Programme Board, the Executive Committee, and staff of the GEO Secretariat are excluded from receiving an award for the duration they are serving on these bodies. Award recipients will receive a certificate and, subject to the approval of the Budget Working Group, travel costs to the Plenary to receive the award in person.

Based on the experience with the process this year, an award for groups may be added in the future.

6 REQUESTS FROM INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

As Executive Committee members are aware, the GEO Secretariat received a letter from UN Habitat on 5 June 2019, requesting GEO's assistance in the development of indicators for reporting on several indicators for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable". This request was an outcome of a process of dialogue and collaboration with UN Habitat on the part of the GEO Secretariat and several GEO Work Programme activities. The recognition of GEO as an important framework for collaboration the letter embodied represents a key milestone for GEO.

The Programme Board believes that it is important that GEO offer a robust response to this request and intends to work closely with the GEO Secretariat to assess the best approach to this and to other similar requests that may arise in future.

7 ATTENDANCE AT PROGRAMME BOARD MEETINGS

7.1 13th Programme Board Meeting

7.1.1 *Present (including by teleconference)*

GEO Members

Australia, Canada, China, European Commission, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, Norway, South Africa, United Kingdom, United States.

Participating Organizations

CEOS, COSPAR, ESA, ESIP, GODAN, GRSS, IAG, IEEE, IUGG, MRI, OGC, POGO, SWF, UN Environment, WMO.

7.1.2 *Absent*

GEO Members

Cambodia, Ghana.

Participating Organizations

IOC.

7.2 14th Programme Board Meeting

7.2.1 *Present (including by teleconference)*

GEO Members

Australia, Canada, China, European Commission, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Italy, Japan, South Africa, United Kingdom, United States.

Participating Organizations

CEOS, COSPAR, ESA, ESIP, GODAN, GRSS, IAG, IEEE, IUGG, MRI, OGC, POGO.

7.2.2 *Absent*

GEO Members

Cambodia, Norway.

Participating Organizations

IOC, SWF, UN Environment, WMO.