

**Draft Report**  
**60<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee Meeting**  
**Hybrid Conference, 22 & 23 March 2023**

*This document is submitted to the Executive Committee for decision.*

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Chair:

Dr Mmboneni Muofhe, South Africa

**1 SESSION 1: GENERAL BUSINESS**

**1.1 Welcome from Lead Co-Chair and Co-Chairs, Secretariat Director**

The Co-Chairs and the GEO Secretariat Director opened and welcomed the members to the 60<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Executive Committee.

**1.2 Adoption of Agenda**

The Executive Committee adopted the agenda (revision 1) as distributed, with comments that item 4.2 and 5.4 may be for information only.

**1.3 Draft Report of the 59<sup>th</sup> Session**

The following document was approved without discussion:

- ExCom-60.2 (Rev1): Draft Report of the 59<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee Meeting.

**1.4 Review of Action Items from Previous Meetings**

- The Lead Co-Chair noted pending actions 59.1 and 59.2 had been completed;
- The following document was approved without discussion:
  - ExCom-60.3: Review of Action Items from Previous Meetings.

**1.5 Secretariat Operations Report**

- The GEO Secretariat Director presented highlights from the Secretariat Operations Report;
- The Executive Committee welcomed the thorough report and noted the value of GEO Secretariat in bringing connections and increasing collaboration with UN bodies;
- The Executive Committee provided suggestions on strengthening GEO Secretariat's efforts, particularly on capacity development in developing countries leveraging the vast available technology in GEO;

- To this effect, the Executive Committee noted that existing indicators under objective 4.2 only reported progress on engagement, and suggested GEO Secretariat to focus on measuring capacity development.

#### **1.6 Review of GEO Week 2022**

- The GEO Secretariat presented statistics on GEO Week 2022, as well as lessons learned and considered for GEO Week 2023 and Ministerial Summit planning;
- The Executive Committee welcomed the report and provided suggestions on GEO Week 2023, particularly noting the need to ensure equal opportunities for visibility across GEO regions and programmes including in Plenary, and multi-lingual capacity;
- The Executive Committee tasked the GEO Secretariat to issue guidance with clear roles, responsibilities and resources for GEO Week host countries;
- **Action 1.6:** GEO Sec to develop initial "Standard Operating Procedures" document for GEO Week host countries. **Due: ExCom-61.**

## **2 SESSION 2: GEO STRATEGY**

### **2.1 Executive Committee Priority Themes for 2023**

- The Lead Co-Chair presented the Priority Themes for 2023, noting that they will require full commitment by GEO Members and be based on lessons learnt;
- The Executive Committee welcomed the priority themes;
- The Executive Committee suggested that key GEO WGs (Post-2025, Ministerial, Work Programme WGs) consider the priority themes in their work;
- The Executive Committee suggested specifying "open and free" in Themes 3 and 4 to ensure that equality and equity on observations and data access is fully understood;
- The Executive Committee members were invited to provide comments by 31 March 2023;
- The following document was adopted with minor edits to be implemented:
  - ExCom-60.6 (Rev1): Executive Committee Priority Themes for 2023.

### **2.2 GEO Secretariat Recommendations for next steps on the Expert Advisory Group Report**

- The GEO Secretariat presented summary of comments received by Members and POs, technical analysis of EAG, and requested endorsement on the way forward by the Executive Committee;
- The Executive Committee commended GEO Secretariat's work and provided feedback on technical and governance aspects;
- The Executive Committee inquired about the feasibility of engaging with very high resolution (VHR) satellite data providers, cloud providers, and scaling up GEOSS Infrastructure Development Task Team (GIDTT) membership within short timeline;

- The Executive Committee requested GEO Secretariat to emphasise regional cooperation in GEO infrastructure;
- The Executive Committee recognised the importance of co-developing GEO infrastructure with users and GEO Work Programme activities;
- The Executive Committee recommended to ensure appropriate technical expertise in GEO Secretariat to engage with technical partners on GEO infrastructure;
- The Executive Committee endorsed the proposed direction and tasked GEO Secretariat to proceed with the next steps;
  - **Action 2.2:** GEO Secretariat to prepare formal requests for open access to critical in situ data providers on behalf of the GEO community, based on identified needs from the GEO Work Programme. **Due: TBD**

### 2.3 Update on GEO Post 2025

- The Post-2025 WG Co-Chair presented the draft GEO Post-2025 strategy;
- The next steps for the development of the strategy are:
  - 31 March: online WG meeting;
  - April: consultations with the GEO community;
  - 3-5 May: in-person WG meeting;
  - June: formal consultations.
- The Executive Committee supported the general direction of the draft GEO Post-2025 strategy;
- The Executive Committee emphasized the intergovernmental nature of GEO and the importance of the GEO data sharing principles;
- The Executive Committee requested the Post-2025 WG when continuing its work to reflect its comments regarding the formulation of the vision, references to global agendas, the implication of introducing new terminologies, and the length and format of the strategy document;
  - **Action 2.3:** the Executive Committee members are invited to provide specific written comments on the draft strategy before the next WG meeting. **Due: 30 March 2023.**

### 2.4 GEO Week 2023 and Ministerial Summit Update

- South Africa, as GEO Week 2023 host country, introduced the Ministerial WG's work;
- The GEO Secretariat presented the current status on ministerial engagement and the GEO Week and Ministerial Summit concept and draft programme, including involvement of global personalities to improve GEO's visibility and targeted sponsorship opportunities;
- The Executive Committee took note of the dependencies of the Ministerial WG and Post-2025 WG's work and expressed concern about the slow progress on engaging Ministries and putting forward the draft declaration;

- There was no consensus in the Executive Committee to support the concept, costs, sustainability or suitability of the outreach campaign as presented, including the engagement of global personalities;
- The Executive Committee endorsed the GEO Week 2023 and Ministerial Summit concept and programme, and outreach activities targeting GEO's audience, including youth and national Ministers;
- The involvement and, if required, resourcing of global personalities should be further explored as a pilot by the Local Organizing Committee in collaboration with GEO Secretariat;
- South Africa proposed a joint GEO stand to showcase GEO flagships; the United States and the European Commission made pledges to support GEO Week with additional funds.

## **2.5 GEO's Global Campaign Concept**

- The GEO Secretariat presented the initial concept of the "Eight Billion Hugs" Global Campaign aimed to increase GEO's financial resources by at least 50M USD, through increased visibility, improved narrative, and new visual identity;
- To develop the full campaign plan and national coverage, GEO Secretariat estimated 5M USD over 5 years;
- The Lead Co-Chair suggested providing feedback on this agenda item in the context of items 4.1 and 4.2.

## **3 SESSION 3: GEO WORK PROGRAMME**

### **3.1 Report of the 25<sup>th</sup> Programme Board**

- The Programme Board Co-Chair reported progress from the 25th Programme Board meeting, noting recommendations on the incubators approach, communication and resource mobilisation priorities and reported on the Programme Board's endorsement of data licensing guidance;
- The Executive Committee inquired about the current status of the endorsed data licenses applied across the GEO Work Programme, and asked to consider other licenses that apply to data with restricted access;
- The Executive Committee noted that the Foundational Task development work is still ongoing and will need to clarify the rationale for removing or adjusting elements in the existing Foundational Tasks;
- The Executive Committee requested that the new categories of the GEO Awards be accompanied with revised evaluation criteria that are reviewed by the Programme Board.

### **3.2 Update on Work Programme Integration and Post-2025 Incubators**

- The GEO Secretariat presented the overall approach of integrating GEO Work Programme activities across nexus areas and along the EO value chain through Post-2025 Incubators, showing linkages to, inter-alia, GEO's Engagement Strategy, Mid-term Evaluation, Symposia and directions from the Executive Committee and Programme Board;

- Two incubators were presented: the Global Ecosystems Atlas, and the Integrated Heat and Health Service;
- The Executive Committee broadly welcomed the proposed approach as an appropriate way to expand GEO's influence, and as part of GEO's ongoing direction;
- The Executive Committee flagged pressing challenges to be considered in the context of the incubators, notably air quality and food security;
- The Executive Committee recommended to strive for transparency in the selection of, and participation to, the incubators, as well as scientific soundness;
- The GEO Secretariat provided clarification on required seed funding and methodology, including plans to enhance processes;
- The European Commission indicated the intention to support the Global Ecosystems Atlas, provided it builds on previous European investments. China also indicated intention to support the Atlas.

## **4 SESSION 4: GEO COMMUNICATIONS AND RESOURCE MOBILIZATION**

### **4.1 Communication and Resource Mobilization update**

- The GEO Secretariat informed the Executive Committee on activities since October 2022, key priorities for 2023 for communications and resource mobilization, and forthcoming actions in 2024. Encouraged the Executive Committee to support these efforts;
- The Executive Committee welcomed communications efforts and suggested prioritising the communications package for the Ministerial Summit in 2023;
- There was no consensus in the Executive Committee to support the concept, costs, sustainability or suitability of the outreach campaign as presented, including the engagement of global personalities;
- The Executive Committee raised concerns about possible reputational risk linked with fundraising and cautioned against fundraising activities aimed at the general public or other donors before appropriate due diligence is put in place;
- The Executive Committee suggested revising the Global Campaign; South Africa reiterated the offer to explore the "visibility" elements of the Global Campaign, especially for the youth, as a pilot for the Ministerial Summit led by the Local Organizing Committee in collaboration with GEO Secretariat.

### **4.2 The GEO Resource Mobilization Strategy 2023-2025**

- The GEO Secretariat presented the resource mobilization strategy, grounded on Rules of Procedure and guided by Mid-Term Evaluation: a set of objectives and activities to support income growth and diversification, to be implemented by GEO Secretariat with and for the GEO community for the period 2023-2025;
- The Executive Committee supported the efforts to increase GEO's visibility, while recalling the intergovernmental and scientific nature of GEO;
- The Executive Committee agreed to prioritize resource mobilization efforts around incubators, GEOglows and GEO-LDN; production of resource

mobilization Toolkit; production of policy on due diligence and partnering with private sector;

- The Executive Committee asked GEO Secretariat to make fundraising proposition more attractive to GEO members to secure contributions to Trust Fund and GEO Work Programme, by focusing on solutions and services for policymaking;
  - **Action 4.2:** GEO Secretariat to proceed with the agreed elements of the Resource Mobilization strategy in accordance with the Activity Plan (Annex 1 of Document 60.14).

## **5 SESSION 5: SECRETARIAT PLANNING FINANCE AND BUDGET**

### **5.1 Report from the Budget Working Group**

- The Budget WG Co-Chair presented 2022 top-level summary of GEO Trust Fund income and expenditures as of 31 Dec 2022, noting a decline in number of members contributing (13 in 2022). In 2022, GEO Secretariat spent less on staffing and more on GEO events and meetings than planned.

### **5.2 Interim Report on Income and Expenditures**

- The GEO Secretariat presented the ExCom members' contribution against UN indicative scale.

### **5.3 GEO Secretariat Draft Annual Operating Plan**

- The GEO Secretariat presented a template for a new annual operating plan connecting budget planning and expenditures to programmatic outcomes and GEO Sec's priority activities, for consideration by the Executive Committee;
- The Executive Committee appreciated the progress and proposed template.

### **5.4 GEO Secretariat Concept of Operations 2023-2025**

- The GEO Secretariat presented the proposed Secretariat's organization chart;
- The Executive Committee particularly appreciated the new functional unit for Member Services;
- The Executive Committee recalled that personnel selection of the GEO secretariat is the responsibility of the Executive Director;
- The Executive Committee inquired about the prioritization of new hires, job descriptions, and fit-for-purpose nature of the proposed Secretariat's structure with respect to post-2025 GEO;
- The following document was approved:
  - ExCom-60.8 (Rev1): GEO Secretariat Concept of Operations 2023-2025.

## **6 SESSION 6: PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS AND OTHER BUSINESS**

### **6.1 National Coordination Mechanism**

- The GEO Secretariat presented updated guidance on strengthening National GEOs, as a key component of engagement with GEO Members;
- The Executive Committee appreciated GEO Sec's analysis and welcomed further work.

### **6.2 Review of Requests to join GEO as Participating Organizations**

- The GEO Secretariat presented 5 applications as contained in ExCom-60.16;
- The Executive Committee approved the proposed applications.

### **6.3 Any Other Business**

- The Lead Co-Chair proposed moving the ExCom-61 dates from 12-13 July to 17-18 July 2023.

### **6.4 Review of Action Items**

- The GEO Secretariat presented outcomes and actions from the meeting.

### **6.5 Closing Remarks**

- The Lead Co-Chair and Co-Chairs provided closing remarks.

## Draft Report

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

### Hybrid Conference, 22 & 23 March 2023

#### FULL REPORT

#### 1 SESSION 1: GENERAL BUSINESS

##### 1.1 Welcome from Lead Co-Chair and Co-Chairs, Secretariat Director

Dr Mmboneni Muofhe (South Africa), Meeting Chair and 2023 GEO Lead Co-Chair, welcomed members to the 60<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Executive Committee and opened the meeting. Dr Muofhe highlighted the existence of transitional hurdles, such as challenges in Earth observations during disasters and the swift pace of technological progress. Dr Muofhe emphasized the significance of understanding how to incorporate emerging technologies like AI in GEO work and urged active participation from attendees to reach a consensus while robustly addressing critical issues.

Dr Stephen Volz (United States), acknowledged the exceptional quality of the documentation and preparations accomplished by the GEO Secretariat. The United States is pleased with the future envisioned through the post-2025 direction, the resource mobilization strategy, the focus on incubator projects, and the upcoming ministerial. Finally, Dr Volz emphasized the need to maintain a human-centred approach in solving problems for communities, even with emerging technologies like ChatGPT and AI.

Mr LIU Zhichun (China), thanked the South African GEO lead Co-Chair and the Secretariat staff for their efforts in organizing the 60<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee meeting. Mr Zhichun stressed the importance of space technology in minimizing the impact of disasters and the continued necessity for capacity building within the GEO framework. Additionally, Mr Zhichun confirmed that the AOGEO initiative will persist in promoting regional development through Earth observation activities.

Dr Joanna Drake (European Commission), thanked Dr Muofhe for chairing the 60<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee, which is considered critical in leading the way beyond 2025. The European Commission recognizes GEO's significance and views it as instrumental in achieving EU policy objectives on sustainable development, climate change, and biodiversity crisis. Dr Drake underscored the need for GEO to prioritize "impact" and "relevance" and build upon its accomplishments and investments. Dr Drake also raised concerns about the roles and responsibilities of each GEO governance, GEO's value proposition, and the need for GEO to remain an intergovernmental body steered by the committee.

Ms Yana Gevorgyan (GEO Secretariat Director) warmly welcomed the attendees. Ms Gevorgyan specifically requested input on the post-2025 strategy, emphasizing the need to align it with members' vision for the future. Ms Gevorgyan also sought direction on planning and resourcing the upcoming ministerial summit.



**Outcomes:**

- South Africa as the Lead Co-Chair, the Co-Chairs and the GEO Secretariat Director opened and welcomed the members to the 60<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Executive Committee;
- All recalled the importance of the Post-2025 Strategy.

**1.2 Adoption of Agenda**

The Chair asked if there were any comments or interventions to adjust the agenda.

France proposed that item 4.2, which is the GEO Resource Mobilization Strategy 2023-2025, be classified as an information item. France suggested adopting a (*n.b. post 2025?*) strategy before reviewing the needs for a new resource mobilization strategy plan.

The United States asked for this item to be revisited the next morning before agreeing to it.

The Chair announced that items 4.2 and 5.4 will be thoroughly examined at the start of the next day.

**Outcomes:**

- The Executive Committee adopted the agenda (revision 1) as distributed, with comments that item 4.2 and 5.4 may be for information only.

**1.3 Draft Report of the 59<sup>th</sup> Session****Outcomes:**

- The Executive Committee thanked the GEO Secretariat for the report;
- The following document was approved without discussion:
  - ExCom-60.2 (Rev1): Draft Report of the 59<sup>th</sup> Executive Committee Meeting.

**1.4 Review of Action Items from Previous Meetings****Outcomes:**

- The Lead Co-Chair noted pending actions 59.1 and 59.2 had been completed;
- The following document was approved without discussion:
  - ExCom-60.3: Review of Action Items from Previous Meetings.

**1.5 Secretariat Operations Report: 1 Oct 2022 through 28 Feb 2023**

Ms Yana Gevorgyan (GEO Secretariat Director) presented a summary of the Secretariat operations report, highlighting key achievements. Since October 2022, the Secretariat organized the GEO Week in Accra, participated in global events (such as the Climate Conference of the parties in Egypt, Biodiversity Conference of the parties in Montreal, Oceania Geospatial Symposium, and the World Government Summit held by the United Arab Emirates), engaged with ministers and prospective members, and developed incubator projects. The Global Ecosystems Atlas project has been supported by the three Rio Conventions and Ramsar Convention on Wetlands Secretariat, and GEO has been included as a supporting partner in the implementation of Early Warning for All Pillar 2:

Observations and Forecasting. The Secretariat has delivered the draft of the GEO post-2025 strategy and conceptualized plans for GEO Week 2023 and the Ministerial Summit. The Secretariat has also added new knowledge packages to the GEO Knowledge Hub and concluded 11 cloud credit projects. Finally, Ms Gevorgyan welcomed new personnel and announced the departure of others.

The United States thanked the Secretariat for the detailed report and recognized the progress made in different areas. The United States welcomed the new members and appreciated their unique perspectives and innovative ideas. Finally, the United States acknowledged the growing engagement with UN Bodies and further emphasized the importance of creating new connections with other UN committees.

The European Commission thanked the Secretariat for presenting the report and recognized the numerous ongoing activities in diverse areas. The European Commission stressed the importance of reactivating the GEOSS Infrastructure Development task team (GIDTT) and ensuring that all infrastructure components are developed in full synergy, building on past efforts and engagements from the GEO community, especially European Commission and European Space Agency investments.

China welcomed the new members and emphasized the significance of knowledge transfer between experienced and new staff to ensure smooth operation of the GEO Secretariat. Furthermore, China highlighted the need for more indicators to measure the focus on capacity building in developing countries.

South Africa recognized and supported the partnership between GEO LDN and AfriGEO, highlighting the importance of building capacity in Africa through targeted focus on use cases and collaboration with regional help desks.

Ms Gevorgyan acknowledged the European Commission's suggestion to reactivate the GEOSS Infrastructure Development task team (GIDTT), noting that the proposed follow-up to the EAG report includes this concept. Ms Gevorgyan also addressed China's comments on the indicators presented in the report, stating that a significant portion of the activities aim to enhance capacity development through knowledge exchange and collaboration with partner organizations. However, Ms. Gevorgyan noted that there is currently no comprehensive approach to capture all these efforts.

**Outcomes:**

- The GEO Secretariat Director presented highlights from the Secretariat Operations Report;
- The Executive Committee welcomed the thorough report and noted the value of the GEO Secretariat in bringing connections and increasing collaboration with UN bodies;
- The Executive Committee provided suggestions on strengthening GEO Secretariat's efforts, particularly on capacity development in developing countries leveraging the vast available technology in GEO;
- To this effect, the Executive Committee noted that existing indicators under objective 4.2 only reported progress on engagement, and suggested GEO Secretariat to focus on measuring capacity development.

## **1.6 Review of ,GEO Week 2022**

Ms Erika Alex (GEO Secretariat Chief of Staff) presented the review of GEO Week 2022, highlighting the positive outcomes and gaps in geographical representation. Ms Alex provided statistics on panel representation with respect to gender and geographical diversity. The review identified lessons learned, such as the need for closer collaboration between the GEO Secretariat and the Local Organizing Committee (LOC), the limitation of side events, and additional support for staff during preparation. The feedback received through a survey was taken into account for future planning, and Ms Alex expressed gratitude to Ghana for hosting a successful plenary.

The Chair thanked the Secretariat for the presentation and recognized the importance of lessons learned and the collaboration with the event organizers.

Costa Rica thanked the Secretariat for the report and acknowledged the significance of effective communication to enhance impact and engagement and recognized GEO's critical role in this area.

China thanked Ghana, the Secretariat team, and the members. During planning of the Ministerial week's activities, China highlighted the importance of preserving GEO's two main key features, specifically being an intergovernmental and a specialized organization.

The European Commission thanked the Secretariat for the review and presentation of GEO Week. The European Commission highlighted the importance of multilingual capability; allowing more time for member statements; increasing the visibility of GEO Flagship initiatives, European activities, and Copernicus; and enhancing the impact and sustainability of initiatives and reports. The European Commission also proposed better promotion of GEO initiatives and important thematic reporting sessions, and potentially granting plenary access to attendees.

Japan acknowledged the importance of the lessons learned and suggested the possibility of more states joining the GEO community after 2025. In response to this, Japan proposed that the GEO Secretariat create a document for GEO Week that clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of both the Secretariat and host countries. The aim of this document would be to assist host countries in developing financial plans and participating in national discussions.

Italy thanked the Secretariat for providing an overview of the Accra meeting and stressed the significance of the forthcoming ministerial meeting. Italy recommended balancing the agenda and plenary sessions to ensure participation from diverse regions and activities, opposed eliminating side events but suggested discussing their structure, and urged the organizing committee to ensure visibility of all significant activities, including European initiatives as previously emphasized by the European Commission.

France thanked Ghana for hosting the GEO Week 2022 meeting and the Secretariat for the report. France supported Italy and the European Commission's position to have fair representation of continents, countries, and languages. France emphasized the need for inclusivity and involvement of all regions, noting that some regions were previously underrepresented. Finally, France acknowledged the previous conference's gender balance and aimed for a 50-50 gender balance in the next GEO Week.

Senegal views GEO as a useful initiative that enables low and middle-income countries to obtain Earth observation services and products to address issues like climate change and biodiversity. Senegal was especially pleased with the presentation's emphasis on gender equality, diversity, and social inclusion. Senegal suggested a more thorough examination of participation from francophone regions and countries, especially in Africa, to ensure linguistic diversity.

South Africa reminded attendees that, after the event in Accra and in preparation for the plenary, the Executive Committee was tasked with producing a standard operating procedure to serve as a guiding document for hosting requirements. South Africa stated that the Secretariat should lead this work with guidance from the Executive Committee.

**Outcomes:**

- The GEO Secretariat presented statistics on GEO Week 2022, as well as lessons learned and considered for GEO Week 2023 and Ministerial Summit planning;
- The Executive Committee welcomed the report and provided suggestions on GEO Week 2023, particularly noting the need to ensure equal opportunities for visibility across GEO regions and programmes including in Plenary, and multi-lingual capacity;
- The Executive Committee tasked the GEO Secretariat to issue guidance with clear roles, responsibilities and resources for GEO Week host countries;
- **Action 1.6:** GEO Secretariat to develop initial "Standard Operating Procedures" document for GEO Week host countries. **Due: ExCom-61.**

## 2 SESSION 2: GEO STRATEGY

### 2.1 Executive Committee Priority Themes for 2023

Dr Mmboneni Muofhe (South Africa), Meeting Chair and 2023 GEO Lead Co-Chair, introduced the four Executive Committee's priority themes for 2023:

1. Priority Theme 1: ensuring that the priorities established by the GEO Executive Committee are met and the development of the 2023-2025 GEO Work Programme and the vision for GEO post-2025;
2. Priority Theme 2: applying lessons from the Mid Term Evaluation and tracking response actions to the MTE as agreed to during the GEO XVII Plenary;
3. Priority Theme 3: GEOSS Evolution and the GEO Knowledge Hub;
4. Priority Theme 4: supporting further enhancement of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) across GEO.

The United States thanked the Chair for presenting the priorities and highlighted the importance of tracking progress on EDI at the upcoming ministerial meeting.

The European Committee proposed monitoring progress towards high-level objectives and establishing a methodology to monitor such progress.

China highlighted the importance of identifying high-priority tasks for the year and hoped that all relevant working groups, including the ministerial working group and work programme working groups, could concentrate on these activities. Additionally, China

suggested that the identified priority themes could be helpful in developing the second round of the post-2025 strategy.

France recommended adding the terms "open and free" before "data and products" in points 3 and 4. The addition of these terms would ensure that equity and equality are well-understood, and the data can be shared with a broader audience.

**Outcomes:**

- The Lead Co-Chair presented the Priority Themes for 2023, noting that they will require full commitment by GEO Members and be based on lessons learnt;
- The Executive Committee welcomed the priority themes;
- The Executive Committee suggested that key GEO WGs (Post-2025, Ministerial, Work Programme WGs) consider the priority themes in their work;
- The Executive Committee suggested specifying "open and free" in Themes 3 and 4 to ensure that equality and equity on observations and data access is fully understood;
- The Executive Committee members were invited to provide comments by 31 March 2023;
- The following document was adopted with minor edits to be implemented:
  - ExCom-60.6 (Rev1): Executive Committee Priority Themes for 2023.

**2.2 GEO Secretariat Recommendations for next steps on the Expert Advisory Group Report**

Ms. Paola De Salvo (GEO Secretariat Information Technology Officer) presented the Secretariat recommendations for next steps in the Expert Advisory Group Report. Based on 17 comments received from members and Participating Organizations, Ms. De Salvo proposed suggestions, focusing on the technical infrastructure and governance. Regarding the technical infrastructure, there was no support for option 1 proposed by the Expert Advisory Group, which was dismantling and discontinuing GEOSS. Instead, the recommendations were to integrate options 2 and 3, strengthen links with the Earth observation community, systems and the GEO Work Programme activities, and focus on regional needs. On the governance side, the recommendations were to renew the mandate of the GEOSS Infrastructure Development Task Team (GIDTT) and to increase engagement of national GEOs. Ms. De Salvo emphasized the need to modernize and reconfigure the GEO infrastructure, including interoperability with cloud providers, data cubes, and in-situ data.

France thanked the Secretariat for the presentation and acknowledged the significance of interoperability within the architecture, as well as the requirement for high-resolution satellite data without excessive costs. France stressed that standardization and interpretation of in-situ data are essential and encouraged openness of such data among all member countries. France suggested including the European Open Science Cloud as an associate partner of the GEO DAB and API. Additionally, France emphasized the significance of incorporating regional GEOs, Copernicus, Landsat, and AmeriGEO in the governance analysis.

Japan thanked the Secretariat for their efforts and acknowledged the importance of enhancing in-situ data support. Japan recommended the creation of mechanisms for curation and quality control of current space-based data and services on the GEOSS platform and urged the Secretariat to engage more comprehensively with Participating Organizations to co-design the system architecture. Japan agreed with the proposal to expand GIDTT membership but had concerns about the feasibility of the proposed timeline and suggested a more realistic timeframe.

China thanked the Secretariat for the presentation and stressed the importance of establishing specific objectives to enhance engagement and advancement in Earth observation. China recommended interconnecting and elaborating GEOSS not only at the international level but also at regional and national levels. China proposed collaborating closely between the GEO infrastructure and the development of the Work Programme, leveraging GIDTT expertise, engaging stronger technology staff, and inviting expressions of interest from members willing to operate and maintain the infrastructure.

The European Commission appreciated the Secretariat's recommendations. It was agreed upon by consensus that option one should be disregarded and instead, merging the GEO portal and the GEO Knowledge Hub should be considered. The European Commission commended the Secretariat's evaluation of various implications, including financial, technical, and organizational aspects. The European Commission welcomed the recommendations for supporting the data working group's work, obtaining more in-situ data, offering guidance on data licensing, implementing GEO data sharing and management principles, expanding the use of standards, and leveraging existing infrastructures. However, the European Commission noted that the document did not adequately address integrating Earth observation data with modeling and socio-economic data and developing a strategy incorporating recent advances like digital twins and artificial intelligence. Lastly, the European Commission emphasized the importance of collaborating with users and GEO Initiatives to co-develop the GEO Infrastructure.

The United States agreed with China on two points. Firstly, the need for integrating and interoperability with the GEO Work Programme. Secondly, the system should be adaptable to the increasing use of high-resolution and hyperspectral commercial data to avoid becoming obsolete. Lastly, the United States recommended treating cloud providers as tools rather than partners and using them under specific terms of engagement.

Senegal thanked the Secretariat's for the presentation and acknowledged the challenge of integrating different platforms such as Google Earth engine and Digital Earth Africa, which are developed and used in Senegal with different technologies. Senegal expressed the hope that the upcoming ODOK workshop in June will provide a roadmap for integrating the GEOSS platform and GEO knowledge hub to create a well-integrated GEO portal.

Costa Rica expressed their satisfaction with the report and their eagerness to participate in the technology aspect of GEO. Costa Rica stressed that GEO should serve as a model for sharing spatial data and helping other organizations and countries comply with the same standards, thus adding value to the platform. Costa Rica highlighted that the aim of the platform is not just the platform itself but also how users can benefit from it. Costa Rica also emphasized the importance of sharing high-resolution data and the need to evaluate and improve in-situ data in a way that benefits all members and organizations.

Italy thanked the Secretariat for the thorough technical analysis and concurred with previous statements made by other members. Italy highlighted the significance of data sharing and open access, especially for countries with limited access to national-scale data, which can hinder their ability to assess policy implementation and evaluate environmental policies. Italy proposed the concept of "equal access" and suggested conducting a landscape analysis to assess whether GEO members have equitable access to national and regional data. Italy believes that this will enable GEO to take policy action and suggested that the Secretariat make it a medium-term objective to conduct such an analysis.

South Africa thanked the Secretariat for their work and supported the renewal of GIDTT with equal representation. South Africa agreed that access to high-resolution data is crucial, especially for fundamental datasets required to address global challenges. South Africa also expressed support for the next chapter of GEO, which aims to ensure equity in access to these datasets.

Ms. De Salvo expressed her gratitude for the valuable feedback received and recognized the collaborative effort involved. Ms. De Salvo recommended that approaching private companies for high-resolution satellite data deals should be done collectively as GEO instead of individually. Ms. De Salvo emphasized the need to standardize existing in-situ data repositories to ensure data interoperability and stressed the importance of involving cloud providers in GEO governance or participation. Ms. De Salvo also highlighted the need to establish quality control curation of non-space-based data and services in the future GEO infrastructure. Furthermore, Ms. De Salvo suggested overhauling GIDTT and making the GEO infrastructure relevant to the GEO Work Programme activities and end-users benefiting from Earth observation. Lastly, Ms. De Salvo discussed their work in the GEO knowledge hub towards developing models.

#### **Outcomes:**

- The GEO Secretariat presented summary of comments received by Members and POs, technical analysis of EAG, and requested endorsement on the way forward by the Executive Committee;
- The Executive Committee commended GEO Secretariat's work and provided feedback on technical and governance aspects;
- The Executive Committee inquired about the feasibility of engaging with VHR satellite data providers, cloud providers, scaling up GIDTT membership within short timeline;
- The Executive Committee requested GEO Secretariat to emphasise regional cooperation in GEO infrastructure;
- The Executive Committee recognised the importance of co-developing GEO infrastructure with users and GEO Work Programme activities;
- The Executive Committee recommended to ensure appropriate technical expertise in GEO Secretariat to engage with technical partners on GEO infrastructure;
- The Executive Committee endorsed the proposed direction and tasked GEO Secretariat to proceed with the next steps;
- **Action 2.2:** GEO Secretariat to prepare formal requests for open access to critical in situ data providers on behalf of the GEO community, based on identified needs from the GEO Work Programme. **Due: TBD.**

### 2.3 Update on GEO Post 2025

Dr Alejandro Román (Post-2025 Working Group Co-chair) introduced the draft GEO Post-2025 strategy document including the value proposition and a renewed mission and vision statement. During his presentation, Dr Román also explained the focus on transformative programs, the concept of Earth intelligence, and the promotion of equity. The working group proposes action to strengthen global partnerships and take advantage of the current data landscape to establish integrated activities that support sustainable solutions to societal challenges. The aim is to enhance inclusivity, adaptability, and equity within the GEO community. Dr Román concluded the presentation by reflecting on the process leading to the Ministerial conference and shared some questions for discussion.

Japan thanked the post-2025 working group for their exceptional efforts. Japan suggested that the three options for the GEO vision presented in the document would better be reflected in GEO Mission. Japan recommended keeping the current GEO vision as defined in the 2016-2025 GEO strategic plan.

France thanked the working group for the clear presentation. France highlighted the significance of having a clear vision for GEO, with strong reference to global agendas and multilateral agreements and a focus on trusted, integrative, and user-oriented agents based on solid scientific foundations. France underscored the importance of ethical and intergovernmental governance and emphasized the need to keep data and products free and open. France suggested that the GEO mission could be expanded beyond its current brief description and proposed to postpone providing detailed feedback on the text. For the vision, France expressed a preference for option one with announcements for options two and three. Lastly, France recommended the inclusion of a reference to Copernicus in the text.

Australia expressed their support for the post-2025 paper and the idea of Earth Intelligence as a unifying concept for GEO. Although some vision statements were considered lacking, Australia preferred option two out of the three choices. Australia suggested creating a shorter version of the paper to be shared with ministers.

The United States appreciated the paper but pointed out that the vision statements needed improvement. The United States proposed to strengthen the notion of scalability from global, regional, national to subnational and vice-versa for GEO, and to have accountability of the Work Programme against this vision. Finally, the United States cautioned for distinguishing more clearly between data and modelling/forecasting.

The European Commission welcomed the progress achieved on the post-2025 document. The European Commission emphasised on the significance of GEO's intergovernmental aspect and adherence to the GEO Data sharing principles. The European Commission recognized the need for further work on the vision and mission statements. The European Commission highlighted GEO's primary objective of tackling global challenges and adhering to multilateral environmental agreements, while remaining open to other areas like biodiversity and the requirements for the recently adopted agreement on biodiversity on the high seas. The strategy needs to be based on a convincing methodology that can translate policy needs into requirements for Earth intelligence and be delivered through impactful and global initiatives. Finally, the scientific community should play a critical role in realizing these undertakings and achieving their objectives.



South Africa thanked the working group for their efforts in formulating the GEO strategy and endorsed the focus on equity as a fundamental element. However, South Africa was of the view that equity has always been at the core of GEO and recommended that the strategy should prioritize actionable aspects over reiterating the principle of equity. South Africa also cautioned against the use of the term "intelligence" as it has varied interpretations in different regions, and suggested reconsidering its use in the context of GEO. In addition, South Africa proposed enhancing the strategy document by incorporating more emphasis on challenges such as interoperability and the critical role of regional GEOs. Lastly, South Africa agreed that the vision of the structure needs strengthening.

China appreciated the team's diligent efforts in developing the post-2025 concept. China acknowledged the recommendations proposed by the GEO Secretariat for the next steps on the EAG report and proposed to reflect them in the upcoming post-2025 strategy documents. China proposed a new approach to showcase achievements beyond data and services. Furthermore, China shared South Africa's concern regarding the notions of equity and intelligence and cautioned against using undefined concepts such as sub-regional, which may create confusion among the audience.

Costa Rica commended the team for their excellent presentation and emphasized the significance of cooperation and involvement from diverse regions in accomplishing the objectives of the GEO community. Costa Rica also asked about the level of engagement with different parts of the GEO community and the feedback received. Furthermore, Costa Rica stressed the necessity of a robust strategy that can inspire political action at the local, national, regional, and global levels to accomplish GEO's objectives.

Italy thanked the working group for creating a crucial document to shape GEO's future strategy. Italy supported the retention of the organization's intergovernmental character and preferred the first option for the vision, with the key element of the third option. Italy highlighted the significance of Earth intelligence, which they defined as the objective of enhancing GEO's impact on the external world, and recommended that decision-making be based on scientific evidence and data-driven solutions. Italy suggested modifying the value proposition to include "innovative data-based solutions." Additionally, Italy underscored the importance of validating modelling outputs with evidence and monitoring data observations. Overall, Italy believed that GEO should transition towards a more intelligent approach and reduce its reliance solely on Earth observation data.

#### **Outcomes:**

- The Post-2025 WG Co-Chair presented the draft GEO Post-2025 strategy;
- The next steps for the development of the strategy are:
  - 31 March: online WG meeting;
  - April: consultations with the GEO community;
  - 3-5 May: in-person WG meeting;
  - June: formal consultations.
- The Executive Committee supported the general direction of the draft GEO Post-2025 strategy;
- The Executive Committee emphasized the intergovernmental nature of GEO and the importance of the GEO data sharing principles;

- The Executive Committee requested the Post-2025 WG when continuing its work to reflect its comments regarding the formulation of the vision, references to global agendas, the implication of introducing new terminologies, and the length and format of the strategy document;
- Action 2.3: ExCom members are invited to provide specific written comments on the draft strategy before the next WG meeting. Due: 30 March 2023.

#### **2.4 GEO Week 2023 and Ministerial Summit Update**

Mr Humbulani Mudau (Ministerial Working Group main representative) provided an overview of the progress made towards the GEO week 2023 and the Ministerial summit. Mr Mudau emphasized the importance of aligning the post-2025 strategy with the forthcoming declaration and the significance of having a well-represented working group. Mr Mudau also sought guidance on the proposed theme and GEO Week, which he deemed critical to the ministerial summit's success. Mr Mudau acknowledged that the value proposition must be strong to ensure a return on investment and gain support from political leaders. Additionally, Mr Mudau mentioned that the declaration would be brief, concise, and informed by previous analyses.

Mr Samuel Nuttall (GEO Secretariat Strategic Communications Officer) provided an update on GEO Week 2023 and the upcoming ministerial summit. The ministerial working group had agreed on four objectives for the summit, which included increasing visibility, obtaining ministerial validation for the GEO post-2025 strategy, securing commitments, and showcasing GEO community's work. The proposed theme for the summit, "The Earth Talks," speaks to GEO's unique ability to listen to the changing nature of our earth and translate data into solutions and action. It is designed to attract the interest of people who are not familiar with GEO. Mr Nuttall described creative applications deriving from the theme such as talking planet mascot, nature and planet images projected on walls, and art installations. Mr Nuttall proposed reducing parallel events, such as regional symposia and bringing industry and young people into core sessions and bringing back the Gala dinner and awards ceremony as responses to feedback on previous GEO Weeks. Mr Nuttall provided a draft agenda for each day of the event, including an official opening ceremony, flash talks, technical meetings, workshops and plenary sessions. The initial agenda for the Ministerial Summit included opportunities for external speakers and Ministerial interventions, and follows the current structure of the post 2025 strategy.

A call for expressions of interest in hosting sessions, exhibition space and supporting communications activities will be issued to the GEO community in April.

Mr Nuttall also informed the group that 21 responses were received in response to a call for Ministerial Nomination from principals, with 11 ministers named and 9 countries committed to providing a minister's name later.

Ms Nicoleta Panta (GEO Secretariat Chief of Partnerships and Communication) discussed the potential benefits of inviting Rupi Kaur and Trevor Noah, two well-known personalities, to the ministerial summit. The benefits included increased visibility, social media reach, engagement with global media and incentives for attendance. Ms Panta acknowledged concerns about working with personalities and the need to carefully

manage such engagements but reported positive feedback from the ministerial working group.

The Chair thanked the team and stressed the importance of coordination for upcoming meetings, such as those of the post 2025 working group, to avoid any potential delays caused by interdependencies. The Chair emphasized the importance of exhibitions and suggested exploring creative ways to showcase various flagships to attract attention. The Chair was also pleased with the clear timelines that have been provided.

The United States concurred with the significance of harmonizing the meetings. The United States expressed interest in GEO Exhibit idea, offering to provide extra funds to support it.

China thanked the working group for their efforts and raised some concerns about appointing a goodwill ambassador due to limited resources. China suggested a more sustainable approach by appointing a long-term ambassador instead. Additionally, China recommended establishing a dedicated fund to reward individuals who join the GEO community or support member states.

The European Commission thanked the GEO Secretariat and Ministerial Working Group for making the conference more inclusive. The European Commission recommended enhancing the conference narrative to make it more attractive and suggested that ministers could play a role beyond delivering a keynote. The European Commission supported the idea of an exhibition space and youth involvement and suggested giving delegations the chance to share their opinions in the plenary. Additionally, the European Commission expressed willingness to invest in the event if European actors are given the opportunity to showcase and share their Earth observation products with international partners.

South Africa expressed concerns about delayed responses from Principals on nominations and aimed to hasten their contributions. South Africa also outlined plans to work with embassies and the South African Mission to facilitate minister engagement. South Africa encouraged the Executive Committee members to assist in obtaining nominations and expressed eagerness to welcome everyone in Cape Town.

Italy acknowledged the draft letter for the ministerial summit as a good starting point but suggested making it more appealing for ministers. Italy emphasized the importance of highlighting major activities from all regions and proposed having the agenda ready by the end of May or beginning of June to give sufficient time to approach the ministers. Italy agreed with the idea of increased visibility but did not endorse using celebrities for outreach. Instead, Italy proposed having ambassadors who are experts in GEO's core business represent the organization.

France supported the European Commission's point of providing a suitable time slot and organized activities for ministers during the event. France agreed with Italy and China's recommendation to avoid spending money on celebrities.

The Chair suggested evaluating the effectiveness and appropriateness of involving celebrities in the ministerial summit and recommended piloting these concepts with the local organizing committee.

Ms Panta clarified that becoming a goodwill ambassador is a time-consuming process and does not involve any expenses and acknowledged that ideally the declaration should be ready by the end of April. Ms Panta highlighted that the Ministerial Working Group prioritized an action-oriented declaration that includes new priorities and commitments.

**Outcomes:**

- South Africa, as GEO Week host country, introduced the Ministerial WG's work;
- The GEO Secretariat presented the current status on ministerial engagement and the GEO Week and Ministerial Summit concept and draft programme, including involvement of global personalities to improve GEO's visibility and targeted sponsorship opportunities;
- The Executive Committee took note of the dependencies of the Ministerial WG and Post-2025 WG's work and expressed concern about the slow progress on engaging Ministries and putting forward the draft declaration;
- There was no consensus in the Executive Committee to support the concept, costs, sustainability or suitability of the outreach campaign as presented, including the engagement of global personalities;
- The Executive Committee endorsed the GEO Week 2023 and Ministerial Summit concept and programme, and outreach activities targeting GEO's audience, including youth and national Ministers;
- The involvement and, if required, resourcing of global personalities should be further explored as a pilot by the Local Organizing Committee in collaboration with GEO Secretariat;
- South Africa proposed a joint GEO stand to showcase GEO flagships; US and EC made pledges to support GEO Week with additional funds.

## 2.5 GEO's Global Campaign Concept

Ms Nicoleta Panta (GEO Secretariat Chief of Partnerships and Communication) introduced the "8 billion hugs for the planet" global campaign concept designed to address key barriers identified in GEO's midterm evaluation report. The campaign's objectives include increasing GEO's global visibility, mobilizing political and financial resources, and raising funds for GEO's Work Programmes from the general public and private sectors. The campaign's strategy aims to avoid political and competition risks by triggering positive emotions to drive long-term donations. The campaign's target is to raise \$8 billion, with each hug representing \$1 and a "follow" on GEO's social media accounts. Developing and executing the campaign would require five years and five million dollars of investment from campaign partners. Ms Panta concluded that the launch of the campaign would take place on Earth Day in 2025, which aligns with GEO's new mandate. Funding would be sought in 2023 and 2024 for planning and production.

**Outcomes:**

- The GEO Secretariat presented the initial concept of the "Eight Billion Hugs" Global Campaign aimed to increase GEO's financial resources by at least 50M USD, through increased visibility, improved narrative, and new visual identity;
- To develop the full campaign plan and national coverage, GEO Sec estimated 5M USD over 5 years;

- The Lead Co-Chair suggested providing feedback on this agenda item in the context of items 4.1 and 4.2.

### **3 SESSION 3: GEO WORK PROGRAMME**

#### **3.1 Report of the 25<sup>th</sup> Programme Board**

Dr Evangelos Gerasopoulos (Programme Board Co-chair) presented the report of the 25th Programme Board, highlighting key updates. These updates included the addition of new members to the Programme Board: the African Climate Change Research Center (ACCREC), Cambodia, and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD). The report also presented new support mechanisms for the GEO Work Programme such as coordination workshops and toolkits, proposed structure of Foundational Tasks for 2023-2025, evaluation of GEO Working Groups, approved Data Licensing Guidance, inputs to GEO strategies, and the symposium and ODOK concept notes, and backing of the 2023 GEO Awards.

The United States commended for the set of endorsed open data licenses and inquired about to what extent these data licenses have been applied in the GEO Work Programme activities.

China asked about the licensing approaches in a broader context, e.g., datasets with high value and restricted access, and non-data products such as models and algorithms. They suggested considering other data licenses that apply to data with restricted access.

France clarified that the Foundational Task development work is still ongoing, with recommendation on presenting a comparison between the proposed and the existing Foundational Tasks to reflect the changes and provide clear rationale for removing or adjusting elements in the existing Foundational Tasks.

**\* There was no recording of the exchange.\***

#### **Outcomes:**

- The Programme Board Co-Chair reported progress from the 25th Programme Board meeting, noting recommendations on the incubators approach, communication and resource mobilisation priorities and reported on the Programme Board's endorsement of data licensing guidance;
- The Executive Committee inquired about the current status of the endorsed data licenses applied across the GEO Work Programme, and asked to consider other licenses that apply to data with restricted access;
- The Executive Committee noted that the Foundational Task development work is still ongoing and will need to clarify the rationale for removing or adjusting elements in the existing Foundational Tasks;
- The Executive Committee requested that the new categories of the GEO Awards be accompanied with revised evaluation criteria that are reviewed by the Programme Board.

### 3.2 Update on Work Programme Integration and Post-2025 Incubators

Ms Madeeha Bajwa (GEO Secretariat Chief Work Programme Coordinator) presented the background and context of the Post-2025 Incubators, reminding that this is an effort that responds to key GEO processes and governance directions, including the 2016 Engagement Strategy, 2021, Mid-term Evaluation, Plenary discussions in 2021 and 2022, Symposium 2022 discussions and is in response to the objectives of the 2023-25 GEO Work Programme on user-orientation, operationalization and integration, as were set by the Programme Board. In addition, it responds to the guidance received by the Executive Committee and the Programme Board, and in alignment with the Post-2025 GEO Work Programme Strategy. She explained that incubators for 2024 were being explored, including through coordination workshops with GEO Work Programme activities, Programme Board's engagement teams, discussions with activities at Symposium and GEO Week. Ms Yana Gevorgyan (GEO Secretariat Director) presented the Global Ecosystems Atlas incubator, which will be an open online resource to monitor and report on the condition and change of ecosystems extent. The ultimate goal of the Atlas is to stimulate timely efforts to preserve biodiversity and support nature-based solutions. The incubator aligns with GEO's engagement priorities and consists of three developmental phases: ideation, initiation, and implementation. Future steps for this incubator include hosting a convening meeting in May 2023, presenting the Atlas at GEO Week 2023, and releasing a Beta version of the Atlas by December 2023.

Mr Martyn Clark (GEO Secretariat Urban Resilience Coordinator) introduced the Global Integrated Heat and Health Service which incorporates seasonal forecasting, vulnerability mapping, and service development. The incubator is aimed at serving a wide range of potential users, including public and private sectors, communities, and academia. Mr Clark also shared a timeline of key next steps for the incubator, leading up to its presentation at GEO Week 2023.

Armenia thanked the Secretariat for their efforts and stressed the role and importance of earth observations when assessing and monitoring the impact and effectiveness of nature based-solutions to improve the urban resilience reducing heat stress and risks. Additionally, Armenia expressed gratitude to the organizers of the GEO Symposium and Open Data & Open Knowledge Workshop for providing an opportunity to discuss and disseminate scientific findings.

The United States commended the GEO Work Programme community, Programme Board, and Secretariat for developing the incubator idea and adhering to GEO engagement strategies. The United States requested clarification on the scientific foundation for the incubator and suggested adding a scientific steering committee to oversee programmatic implementation. Additionally, the United States requested further information on the seed funding needed for the project.

France expressed support for the Global Ecosystem Atlas incubator, highlighting the importance of scientific references and inquired about the validation that has been received for the content. Additionally, France recommended collaborating with the Copernicus Climate Change Service (CS<sub>3</sub>) to enhance the heat and health incubator. Overall, France found the presentation to be excellent and appreciated the innovative ideas presented.

Italy thanked the Secretariat for the presentation and emphasized the urgency of developing an early warning system for air quality in urban areas due to the significant impact of air pollution on premature death globally. Italy suggested that an incubator focused on this issue should be given priority since it would aid decision-making on both urban and global levels.

South Africa thanked the Secretariat for their work and requested clarification on the seed funding amount. South Africa emphasized the importance of integrating incubators and aligning them with the GEO Work Programme, as well as the need to demonstrate impact. South Africa highlighted the critical needs of energy and food security in the Horn of Africa and emphasized the significance of early warning networks for urgent challenges such as drought and hunger.

The European Commission expressed support for efforts to make GEO activities more user-focused and emphasized the importance of finding synergies. The Commission acknowledged the appeal of the heat and health incubator but reinforced the desire expressed by Italy to include an incubator on air pollution given its impact on premature deaths. The European Commission also welcomed the Global Ecosystems Atlas and indicated a willingness to invest if it builds on previous European investments and aligns with current priorities. Although there was overall support for the incubators, the European Commission suggested that there should be a process for selecting and reviewing incubators and defining the concept.

Costa Rica conveyed the importance of biodiversity and ecosystems and considered the Global Ecosystems Atlas as a means to highlight their efforts and showcase them to other countries. Costa Rica suggested utilizing the next AmeriGEO week to align objectives with the Global Cool Cities Alliance. Costa Rica indicated broad support for the incubators in spirit and in-kind.

China emphasized the significance of incubators in engaging members and facilitating GEO's role as a convener. China expressed interest in taking part in incubators, particularly the Global Ecosystems Atlas, where Global Ecosystems and Environment Observation Analysis Research Cooperation (GEO ARC) has important contributions to make. China stressed that the success of these incubators hinges on topic selection, open access, and participation mechanisms especially by developing countries, supported by scientific and technology-driven solutions. China recommended that incubators remain separate from GEO's Flagships and expressed a desire to discuss terms of reference for incubators in the future.

Ms Bajwa thanked the Executive Committee for their useful input and recommendations. She shared that the requested seed funding budget for the Global Ecosystems Atlas was \$2 million for 18 months, which would encompass project management, technical expertise and coordination support. She explained that the process to identify incubators was going to be presented to the Programme Board and that the additional ideas raised by the Executive Committee members on drought monitoring and air quality would be explored with the GEO Work Programme activities and key partners. She also explained that the incubators would not automatically be incorporated into the GEO Work Programme but would instead follow the process set by the Programme Board to become a flagship or initiative of the GEO Work Programme.

Ms Gevorgyan elaborated on the importance of science in the development and implementation of the incubators, elaborating that the forthcoming convening meeting of the Global Ecosystems Atlas will unite diverse organizations to deliberate on the required scientific and technical approach. Ms Gevorgyan emphasized the importance of involving users and expressed appreciation for the European Commission's offer of support to the Global Ecosystems Atlas.

**Outcomes:**

- The GEO Secretariat presented the overall approach of integrating GEO Work Programme activities across nexus areas and along the EO value chain through Post-2025 Incubators, showing linkages to, inter-alia, GEO's Engagement Strategy, Mid-term Evaluation, Symposia and directions from the Executive Committee and Programme Board;
- Two incubators were presented: the Global Ecosystems Atlas, and the Integrated Heat and Health Service;
- The Executive Committee broadly welcomed the proposed approach as an appropriate way to expand GEO's influence, and as part of GEO's ongoing direction;
- The Executive Committee flagged pressing challenges to be considered in the context of the incubators, notably air quality and food security;
- The Executive Committee recommended to strive for transparency in the selection of, and participation to, the incubators, as well as scientific soundness;
- The GEO Secretariat provided clarification on required seed funding and methodology, including plans to enhance processes;
- The European Commission indicated the intention to support the Global Ecosystems Atlas, provided it builds on previous European investments. China also indicated intention to support the Atlas.

## **4 SESSION 4: GEO COMMUNICATIONS AND RESOURCE MOBILIZATION**

### **4.1 Communication and Resource Mobilization Update**

Ms Nicoletta Panta (GEO Secretariat Chief of Partnerships and Communication) presented the GEO communication and resource mobilization update. The recommendations from the midterm evaluation have guided the team's priorities for 2023 and 2024, which include enhancing internal communication and coordination, engaging with GEO members and organizations, increasing GEO's visibility, building targeted partnerships, and executing campaigns to showcase GEO's value proposition. The communication team is preparing a draft of a pitch deck to communicate GEO's value proposition to different target audiences and is developing a new external-facing website expected to be completed this year. Ms Panta stressed that GEO Week and the ministerial summit are receiving significant attention from the team. The global campaign is under development, and the team aims to re-establish the GEO communications network to increase coordination and visibility. Additionally, the team will be working on a resource mobilization strategy, including the development of a toolkit to assist Work Programmes activities in fundraising for themselves. They will prioritize the development of an intranet



for the GEO community and a brand book in 2024. Ms Panta requested assistance in identifying communication focal points within the GEO community for the communications network, ensuring high-level participation in the ministerial summit, and obtaining captivating images for wall projections.

**Outcomes:**

- The GEO Secretariat informed the Executive Committee on activities since October 2022, key priorities for 2023 for communications and resource mobilization, and forthcoming actions in 2024. The GEO Secretariat encouraged the Executive Committee to support these efforts;
- The Executive Committee welcomed communications efforts and suggested prioritizing communications package for the Ministerial Summit in 2023;
- There was no consensus in the Executive Committee to support the concept, costs, sustainability or suitability of the outreach campaign as presented, including the engagement of global personalities;
- The Executive Committee raised concerns about possible reputational risk linked with fundraising and cautioned against fundraising activities aimed at the general public or other donors before appropriate due diligence is put in place;
- The Executive Committee suggested revising the Global Campaign; South Africa reiterated the offer to explore the "visibility" elements of the Global Campaign, especially for the youth, as a pilot for the Ministerial Summit led by the Local Organizing Committee in collaboration with GEO Sec.

#### **4.2 The GEO Resource Mobilization Strategy 2023-2025**

Ms Olivia Simmons (GEO Secretariat Resource Mobilization Consultant) presented an overview of the resource mobilization strategy 2023-2025. The strategy builds on the previous fundraising efforts of the GEO community and is informed by the midterm evaluation. The main aim of the strategy is to increase and diversify the funding base. Ms Simmons outlined four key questions that guided the development of the strategy, including how to attract funding and in-kind support, what tools and support are required to unlock additional resources, how to diversify the funding base, and what enablers are necessary for success. Ms Simmons emphasized the importance of leveraging existing relationships with donors, collaborating with the private sector, and investing time to cultivate relationships, trust, and reputation with new donors.

The United States thanked the GEO Secretariat for their efforts and acknowledged the funding challenges faced by GEO. The United States emphasized the importance of focusing on resource mobilization to secure sustained funding for GEO's activities beyond 2025. While the innovative global campaign was appreciated, the United States would like to see further exploration.

Japan thanked the GEO Secretariat for identifying opportunities and objectives but raised three points for further consideration. Firstly, Japan requested a clear separation of content between the Trust Fund and GEO Work Programme, with emphasis on the importance of clarifying operation, project design, impact, partnerships, and communication mentioned in Section six. Secondly, Japan suggested that the GEO Secretariat set a specific goal for the resource mobilization strategy by analyzing the

precise needs of the GEO Work Programme. Thirdly, Japan reminded the GEO Secretariat of the organization's unique character and urged caution not to let specific donors or entities affect GEO governance.

The European Commission appreciated GEO's communication campaign and resource mobilisation but cautioned against diverting too many resources from GEO's mandate and priorities. The European Commission suggested focusing on a campaign to increase visibility and promote GEO's value, with emphasis on making GEO's work understandable to the public and encouraging more contributions to GEO's Work Programme and trust fund. The European Commission emphasized the need for prioritization, a convincing communication package for the upcoming ministerial being the immediate priority and maintaining GEO's reputation as a reputable organization.

France reminded attendees that they had requested the reclassification of item 4.2 as an information item. Member states' contributions should be maximized and valued to encourage greater contributions. The details of a global campaign must be examined carefully to avoid compromising governance. Ethical considerations must be addressed to maintain GEO's principles. Finally, France suggested adding "value and encourage in-kind contributions" to priority 5.1.

China thanked the Secretariat for the detailed plan presented. China emphasized the importance of considering the actual needs of GEO members while mobilizing resources. China believed that providing quality service to members was vital for securing future contributions. China supported Japan and the EU's perspective on GEO as an intergovernmental organization and suggested mobilizing funds and contributions in compliance with the organization's mandate and rules of procedures.

Italy expressed appreciation for the Secretariat's presentation and highlighted the need to increase GEO's visibility and usefulness for decision-makers in environmental crises. Italy emphasized the importance of maintaining GEO's intergovernmental status and choosing effective donors. Italy recommended revising the global campaign's strategy and content to increase GEO's impact on the decision-making process by demonstrating the benefits of investing in its services.

Costa Rica expressed their commitment to promoting Earth observations through projects and initiatives and acknowledged the importance of gathering resources for global development and policy action. Costa Rica appreciated the Secretariat's presentation on resource mobilization and communication strategies and offered to participate in the communication initiative.

The Chair ended the previous session by specifying three areas that needed feedback: supporting resource mobilization efforts for the Global Atlas, heat and health, GEO GLoWS and GEO-LDN, the need for a resource mobilization toolkit for the Work Programme, and a policy on due diligence in partnership with the private sector.

**Outcomes:**

- The GEO Secretariat presented the resource mobilization strategy, grounded on Rules of Procedure and guided by Mid-Term Evaluation: a set of objectives and activities to support income growth and diversification, to be implemented by the GEO Secretariat with and for the GEO community for the period 2023-2025;

- The Executive Committee supported the efforts to increase GEO's visibility, while recalling the intergovernmental and scientific nature of GEO;
- The Executive Committee agreed to prioritize resource mobilization efforts around incubators, GEOglOWS and GEO-LDN; production of resource mobilization Toolkit; production of policy on due diligence and partnering with private sector;
- The Executive Committee tasked the GEO Secretariat to make fundraising proposition more attractive to GEO members to secure contributions to Trust Fund and GEO Work Programme, by focusing on solutions and services for policymaking;
- **Action 4.2:** the GEO Secretariat to proceed with the agreed elements of the Resource Mobilization strategy in accordance with the Activity Plan (Annex 1 of Document 60.14).

## **5 SESSION 5: SECRETARIAT PLANNING FINANCE AND BUDGET**

### **5.1 Report from the Budget Working Group**

Mr Lawrence Friedl (Budget Working Group Co-Chair) presented the report from the budget working group. Mr Friedl outlined the funding received (GEO Trust Fund as of 2022: 3,551,887 CHF) and donations from 13 countries, with the United States and South Africa contributing after January 1. Mr Friedl then separated the budget into categories such as salaries, travel, and supplies, and expressed the group's intention to approach it in a more systematic way in the future.

#### **Outcomes:**

- Budget WG Co-Chair presented 2022 top-level summary of GEO Trust Fund income and expenditures as of 31 December 2022, noting a decline in number of members contributing (13 in 2022). In 2022 the GEO Secretariat spent less on staffing and more on GEO events and meetings than planned.

### **5.2 Interim Report on Income and Expenditures**

Ms Erika Alex (GEO Secretariat Chief of Staff) presented the Interim Report on Income and Expenditures. Ms Alex provided a table showing the contribution rates for the Executive Committee and the UN's suggested donation scale for the GEO Trust Fund in 2022.

#### **Outcomes:**

- The GEO Secretariat presented the Executive Committee members' contribution against UN indicative scale.

### **5.3 GEO Secretariat Draft Annual Operating Plan**

Ms Erika Alex (GEO Secretariat Chief of Staff) presented the GEO Secretariat Draft Annual Operating Plan, which aims to:

- provide a methodology and template to communicate GEO's execution plan for the approved budget;
- increase transparency for differences between planned and actual expenses; and
- link GEO's programmatic and support priorities with funding requirements.

Ms Alex asked for feedback from the Executive Committee to enhance the template and meet their planning and expenditure needs.

Australia thanked the Secretariat for the work done and emphasized the importance of demonstrating the value of their contribution. Australia offered to nominate a member for the budget working group.

The United States thanked the Secretariat and made two comments. Firstly, the United States will increase their contribution to GEO this year. The United States also raised concerns regarding the funding provided for the plenary last year and plans to reimburse the GEO Trust Fund \$100,000 of the amount used to support GEO Week 2022.

South Africa thanked the budget team and raised two issues. Firstly, South Africa expressed confusion about the accounting of transfers to the GEO Trust Fund made by South Africa and the US, as well as concern about the accounting of funding for the AfriGEO Secretariat in Accra, which they directly fund. South Africa emphasized the importance of considering all contributions when accounting for the GEO's Work Programme.

Armenia hoped to be able to provide a minimum amount of cash contribution but could not guarantee its fulfilment at this time.

Mr Friedl explained that the United States' support for the 2022 plenary is reflected in document ExCom-60.15 in table two. However, the document only accounts for trust fund donations, and there are other ways of monitoring extra-budgetary activities. Multiple countries are funding items that are not included in the document.

#### **Outcomes:**

- The GEO Secretariat presented a template for a new annual operating plan connecting budget planning and expenditures to programmatic outcomes and GEO Secretariat's priority activities, for consideration by the Executive Committee;
- The Executive Committee appreciated the progress and proposed template.

#### **5.4 GEO Secretariat Concept of Operations 2023-2025**

Ms Yana Gevorgyan (GEO Secretariat Director) presented the Concept of Operations 2023-2025, explaining the Secretariat's role in supporting the governance of GEO and outlining various activities in the rules of procedure. Ms Gevorgyan summarized the midterm evaluation's findings and recommendations, proposing a revamped GEO Secretariat organization with new positions to address these issues. The proposed organization includes operations, communications and partnerships, engagement, and Work Program teams.

Peru concurred with the Secretariat's proposal that includes Member Services, as it is perceived as an effective approach to establish connections with new members.

The United States appreciated the focus on member services in the proposal. The United States asked if the current short-term staff would change categories or be funded differently, and if there was a prioritization plan for funding staff based on their importance in the "white" category.

China acknowledged the difficulties faced by the GEO Secretariat staff in assisting member countries and suggested that the Secretariat prioritize future positions, maintain team stability while recruiting more staff, and consider secondment from GEO members to provide direct support. China also emphasized the need to take into account the challenges posed by the turnover of short-term staff.

Australia expressed support for the proposed changes, especially the addition of Member Services, but acknowledged the challenge of meeting the diverse needs of members. Australia raised concerns about the timing of the changes in relation to the post-2025 strategy but emphasized the importance of not delaying and requested the team's thoughts on how to guide the organization post-2025 based on the current strategy.

Japan noted that none of the GEO Work Programme coordinators are explicitly mandated to support the engagement priority working groups. Japan recommended that the GEO Secretariat provide clarity on its support for these working groups and on the size of the member service team.

France requested additional information on how the proposed organization would handle support requests from members.

South Africa raised concerns about the post-2025 GEO strategy and requested clarification on the transition process during that period. South Africa also asked about the impact of expiring staff contracts on work delivery, the job descriptions for the chief Member Services position, and the grading system for proposed positions.

Ms Gevorgyan clarified that position descriptions and grades have not been included at this point, as the aim is to establish the rational and basis for the functions first. Ms Gevorgyan distinguished between Member Services and Partnerships, stating that Member Services is focused on countries while Partnerships include broader partnership opportunities. Ms Gevorgyan outlined the priorities and secondment opportunities for the future, which include Resource Mobilization Officer, Digital Content and Social Media Officer, Partnership Officer, Indigenous People, and Regional GEO Coordinator. Ms Gevorgyan noted that the proposed number of officers reflects the various national contexts and priorities of different countries. Ms Gevorgyan also suggested that the plan is aligned with the post-2025 goals of GEO to function as a convener for partnerships from the science community and other sectors, to coordinate and communicate with members and a broader audience, and to leverage existing activities.

Ms Bajwa clarified to Japan that the working groups are mentioned in the descriptions of individual coordinators, and their abbreviations are present in the document. She added that the working groups are also included in the annex of the document.

**Outcomes:**

- The GEO Secretariat presented the proposed Secretariat's organization chart;

- The Executive Committee particularly appreciated the new functional unit for Member Services;
- The Executive Committee recalled that the personnel selection of the GEO Secretariat is the responsibility of the Executive Director;
- The Executive Committee inquired about the prioritization of new hires, job descriptions, and fit-for-purpose nature of the proposed Secretariat's structure with respect to post-2025 GEO;
- The following document was approved:
  - ExCom-6o.8 (Rev 1): GEO Secretariat Concept of Operations 2023-2025.

## **6 SESSION 6: PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS AND OTHER BUSINESS**

### **6.1 National Coordination Mechanism**

Mr Ernest Acheampong (GEO Secretariat Capacity Development Coordinator) presented the national coordination mechanism. Mr Acheampong identified five critical elements for coordination mechanisms: institutional coordination, data-driven and impact-oriented, multi-stakeholder engagement, collaborative space, and multi-sector approach. More national engagements and capacity building sessions will be organized, and the GEO Secretariat will continue to support and guide countries keen to establish national coordination mechanism for EO.

The United States thanked the Secretariat for the work and acknowledged the value of the analysis provided, assuring their continued support.

South Africa agreed with the US that it is important to invest in national coordination mechanisms to implement the 2025 strategy successfully. South Africa highlighted their own positive experience with EO value chain due to better coordination and committed to supporting such efforts. South Africa mentioned that other countries in AfriGEO, like Uganda, Nigeria, Namibia, Senegal, and Kenya, have expressed interest in receiving help to establish their national GEOs.

China expressed gratitude to the GEO secretariat and community for acknowledging and recommending the establishment of a national GEO in China. China is willing to share their expertise and knowledge on this matter with other GEO member states.

Japan thanked the GEO Secretariat for creating essential documents for enhancing membership and national coherence. Japan highlighted the open Data Management Principles as an integral component of the national coordination mechanism.

Costa Rica thanked the GEO Secretariat for their presentation and work on developing strategic paths for GEO. Costa Rica emphasized the need to collaborate with more countries in their region. Additionally, Costa Rica found the analysis of other national GEOs useful as a benchmark for improvement and suggested sharing this information with other interested GEO member countries.

#### **Outcomes:**

- The GEO Secretariat presented updated guidance on strengthening National GEOs, as a key component of engagement with GEO Members;

- The Executive Committee appreciated GEO Secretariat's analysis and welcomed further work.

## **6.2 Review of Requests to join GEO as Participating Organizations**

Ms Erika Alex presented the review of requests to join GEO as Participating Organizations. The GEO Secretariat evaluated the applications submitted by five participating organizations and has proposed approval in accordance with the guidelines.

### **Outcomes:**

- The GEO Secretariat presented 5 applications as contained in ExCom-60.16;
- The Executive Committee approved the proposed applications.

## **6.3 Any Other Business**

### **Outcomes:**

- The Lead Co-Chair proposed moving the ExCom-61 dates from 12-13 July to 17-18 July 2023.

## **6.4 Review of Action Items**

### **Outcomes:**

- The GEO Secretariat presented outcomes and actions from the meeting.

## **6.5 Closing Remarks**

The United States expressed gratitude to attendees from Costa Rica, Japan, and China for joining the meeting remotely and acknowledged the importance of the discussed topics and varying perspectives. The United States thanked the Secretariat team for their hard work in explaining the organization's operations and progress.

China thanked the participants for their active involvement and discussions around priority themes for 2023, post-2025 strategy, and the needs of GEO members. China called for further empowerment of developing countries, bridging the information gap, and promoting Earth observation technology for the benefit of society.

The European Commission thanked the Secretariat for organizing the intense meeting and acknowledged the significance of GEO's role on the world stage. The European Commission emphasized the need to make progress beyond the next ministerial, particularly towards the 2025 goals, and highlighted the importance of showcasing successful results. Finally, the Commission encouraged regular communication and collaboration to enhance GEO's global recognition.

GEO Lead Co- Chair expressed gratitude to all those who contributed to the preparation and success of the meeting, with special appreciation for the Secretariat team and the Co-Chair representatives. The Chair acknowledged the active participation of the Executive Committee and emphasized the significance of their involvement for a robust organization.

### **Outcomes:**

- The Lead Co-Chair and Co-Chairs provided closing remarks.