

## Preliminary Outline of a Discussion Paper for the Post-2025 GEO Work Programme and Incubators

*This document is submitted to the Programme Board for discussion.*

This is the preliminary outline for a Summary Discussion Paper that has been developed by the Programme Board Co-Chairs and received some feedback from Board members. A revision to this document may be issued following the first meeting of the Programme Board volunteers on 28 September.

### Section 1. Introduction and Task Objective

Incubators are experimental integration efforts between GEO Work Programme activities and other partners, under specific thematic areas and across the Earth observation value chain. The incubation goal is to co-design demand-driven, integrated solutions to pressing and complex global challenges.

The overall objective of the Incubators is to feed into the design of the GEO Post-2025 Strategy and Work Programme and facilitate the transition to a modern Work Programme that is more focused on delivering value against major policy priorities and innovative operational services. The transition is perceived in two dimensions, one with the proposed incubators where the incubation process is going to be tested and refined, between 2023 and 2025, and the other within the Work Programme as Incubators are expected to catalyse the maturation of existing initiatives into stronger initiatives and more flagships that meet the aforementioned goals. Successful incubators, among other criteria, will have attracted donor funding and become part of the GEO Work Programme, following the Programme Board's process of review.

The incubator approach is directly responding to the draft of the GEO Post-2025 Strategy that identifies the GEO mission as leveraging its unique position as an established intergovernmental organization to co-produce user-driven solutions that inform decisions and accelerate action on global societal and environmental challenges. The first of the five Goals that are identified in the Strategy is: "Co-produce transformative programmes that provide trusted Earth Intelligence: GEO will deliver a portfolio of programmes that provide the Earth intelligence needed to unlock transformational change in the way that societies interact with the planet. These programmes will be co-produced with inputs from multiple disciplines, including social sciences, and produce tools for coherent environmental and societal policy decisions, aiming to unlock social innovation and sustainable economic growth. They will be characterized by efficiency, effectiveness, impact and additionality." (PB 25-05 Document, 15-16 June, 2023)

At the PB Meeting in June 2023, it was stressed that clarity and transparency to initiate an incubator is of paramount importance, while in this context definition of key terms related to incubators and projects deems imperative. Specifically, the PB suggested the distinction between the process (incubation) and the projects (incubated projects) should be clarified, and

the GEO Secretariat function and the technical implementation carried out by other stakeholders in the incubation process should be differentiated. They also highlighted the emerging need for more efficient and earlier engagement of stakeholders in the process so that the incubators can be effectively achieved through co-design, co-ownership, and integration of external expertise within the GEO community.

**Action 26.1:** Led by the PB Co-Chairs, a group of volunteered PB members will work on the Post-2025 Incubator terminology, concept and development process with a view towards creating a work plan to implement the Post-2025 Strategy. The first update by the group will be made at PB-27.

**Task Objective** - Clearly the task of the group involves the conceptualisation and documentation of the process and the principles to operate existing and initiate new Incubators. This should include a GEO designed synergistic paradigm or model that incorporates; EO data and analytics related to GEO focus areas and user needs requiring geospatial related solutions; clearly defined stakeholder roles and commitments; adequate human, capacity building and financial support, and the inclusion of opportunities for innovative problem-solving strategies that can be used to address topics at local, regional and global scales.

**Comments Revisions and Additions:**

*GEO Secretariat: The task objective and the action 26.1 from the PB-26 is focused on the development of the Incubators. This will need to be broadened to the development of the Post-2025 Work Programme at large, which will be part of the Implementation Plan for the Post-2025 Strategy. As agreed at the 61st meeting of the ExCom in July 2023, future GEO Weeks will shift to Earth Day (April 22) as soon as 2025, skipping the autumn GEO Week in 2024, thus providing adequate time to plan the 2025 event to deliver the Post-2025 Implementation Plan.*

*The task objective will need to be reoriented to this broader objective and a workplan with milestones constructed accordingly.*

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**Section 1. Creating an overall plan for the transition from the current Work Programme requirements and activities to Post-2025 Strategy's Implementation Plan and ensure the successful incorporation of GEO Incubator Model concept into the Post 2025 GEO Work Programme.**

- definition of the functionalities and benefits that the incubation process brings into GEO Work Programme
- revision of all current practice requirements and regulations
- formulation of requirements and regulations for Post 2025 Strategy introductions
- ensure that resource mobilisation information and initiatives including Toolkits, Capacity Building and Engagement Teams are built into any new structures

- determine best procedures for communicating incubator related changes to the broader GEO community involved in the current Work Programme and welcoming their continued involvement in the Post 2025 GEO Programme.

**Comments Revisions and Additions:**

*GEO Secretariat: This is the first priority for the Programme Board and will need to be broken down into a few sections. Elements to consider sequentially include:*

- *Review of existing GWP activities and determine which have resulted in impact, or research results that have been validated in operational environments and are therefore fit for R2O (research to operations). It will include identification of activities (and reasons for) where progress has stalled over a continuous period of time, where duplications or synergies may exist, those which have been responsive to communications and coordination efforts from GEO.*
- *Discuss whether the Post-2026 GWP should or should not have “focus areas” and if yes, what they should be. There may be need for consultations and/or conducting a policy/market landscape analysis and identify ‘niche’ opportunities for GEO.*
- *Then, there will be a basis for identifying process and into incubators and convening of forums and events to ideate and develop those.*
- *A work plan with milestones, deadlines, and leads/responsibilities will need to be developed for each of these workstreams.*

*J. Nicinska: ‘Creating an overall plan for the transition’ - This will require redesign of the current implementation plans to focus more on integrative efforts, and to align activities that have thematic alignment and possible projects for joint collaboration. We may also need to rethink the current categories of WP activities that we are using.*

*J. Nicinska: ‘determine best procedures for communicating...’ - This will need to be a balance between “incubator”, nexus efforts and existing activities. 2- tiers of projects with varying requirements and goals may help in transition*

*A. Kabo-Bah, I am more interested to see the transition criteria concept included maybe in another section 6. For instance, what at stage does an incubator becomes an initiative? Or can an incubator move straight to a flagship based on the set criteria by us. What the timelines for incubation? How long does an incubator needs to be mentored by an Initiative or flagship to determine its next status?*

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**Section 2. Definitions and Terminology of Incubators and Incubated Projects**

- formulate suitable definitions

*Example: “Incubators bring together stakeholders such as researchers, government organizations, private sector, users, policy holders and funding organisations convened around a specific topic of interest to devise and plan a programme of investigation that will lead to defined products and applications becoming available for securing improved environmental and societal benefit outcomes”.*

- other definitions?

- meaning of the term incubated projects? how should they be defined and incorporated into a methodology statement?

**Comments Revisions and Additions:**

*J. Nicinska: ‘incubated projects’ - I wonder if calling them nexus area pilot projects would not be more straight forward*

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### **Section 3. Components of a Potential GEO Incubator Applications Model**

To include:

- clear statement of problem or research issue to be addressed and process of urgency or prioritization assessment within GEO context (i.e. relevance, maturity, perspectives)
- expected outcomes to be achieved
- adoption of an end-to-end approach in evaluating resolution pathways and likely outcomes
- co-design accepted as an integral function of all incubator evolution
- identification of all possible key stakeholders, their recruitment, interest and secure commitment
- involvement of competent research and technical staff within incubator partners, stakeholders and GEO Sec
- development of managerial and administrative support structures to oversee incubated project operations (physical or virtual premises)
- seek adequate financial support before any project initiation
- include capacity building and mentoring opportunities as important
- appoint a regulatory board or advisory group to oversee schedule, progress and to ensure project outcomes quality

**Comments Revisions and Additions:**

*J. Nicinska: ‘involvement of competent research and technical staff’ - suggest phrasing this as with relevant expertise to the execution of the project. This will include technical staff, but may also involve other skillsets, such as communication, etc.*

*J. Nicinska: ‘regulatory board’ – this does not seem applicable here.*

*A. Kabo-Bah, who initiates an incubator, is it an organisation, individuals or group of individuals? Do they need to GEO members? Would a subgroup within the PB be required for the approval for such incubators or it would be the GEO Sec?*

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**Section 4. Determine an overall framework depicting the respective roles of both the GEO Secretariat and the GEO Programme Board in the implementation of GEO Incubator and Incubation Projects into the Post 2025 Strategy**

- what administrative and support responsibilities will the GEO Secretariat have and need to perform as Incubator Projects are proposed, selected and integrated into the Work Programme?
- what role should the GEO Programme Board play as Incubator Projects are proposed, selected and integrated into the Work Programme? The management of Incubator Projects as they become part of the Work Programme?
- what organisation framework needs to be in place to ensure that collaboration and sharing of competencies and expertise that exist within the GEO Secretariat and Programme Board are successfully integrated and efficiently implemented in a seamless fashion?
- how can experiences from outside programs and organisations be incorporated to achieve 'best practice' alternatives?

**Comments Revisions and Additions:**

*E. Gerasopoulos: I don't see why the PB should interfere with the management of the Incubators ... they should be independent following similar (or adjusted - tbd) rules as Initiatives and Flagships.*

*A. Kabo-Bah, incubators should be independent from the start, but as they mature into initiatives and flagships, then PB role begins once they reach any of these stages*

*J. Nicinska: The management can be done by a steering committee, but the PB should have oversight as part of WP execution.*

*J. Nicinska: The PB will need to play a more active role and have continuous engagement with the WP activities and/or incubators. Engagement teams are a start, though thematic, in addition to Capacity Development and Resource Mobilization teams will be needed to co-develop these new efforts.*