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GEO Bulletin

A Daily Report of the Tenth Plenary Session of the Group on Earth Observations (GEO-X) and Geneva Ministerial Summit
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GEO-X AND GENEVA MINISTERIAL SUMMIT HIGHLIGHTS: THURSDAY, 16 JANUARY 2014

The second day of GEO-X opened on Thursday, 16 January 2014 in Geneva, Switzerland. GEO-X approved the proposal for preparation of the next GEOSS Implementation Plan, discussed the draft Geneva Declaration, and considered the 2013 ExCom report, GEO financial reports and the 2014 operations budget, Implementation Board and ExCom membership, and the rules of procedure. The Plenary also heard a series of formal statements from Members and Partnership Organizations (POs) on key events and activities. It was announced that GEO-XI will be held in November 2014 in Gabon.

In the afternoon, Karine Siegwart, Vice Director, Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN), Switzerland, moderated a high-level panel on “Perspectives on the Value of Earth Observations.”

PREPARATION OF THE NEXT GEOSS IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

GEO Co-Chair Sullivan (US) presented the revised document on the preparation of the next GEOSS Implementation Plan (Document 6 Rev1) and it was approved.

DRAFT GENEVA DECLARATION

ITALY, opposed by the EUROPEAN SPACE AGENCY (ESA) and CROATIA, reiterated his request to include the word “information” in the draft Declaration’s subtitle (Document MS6). After a show of flags, Co-Chair Sullivan determined there was consensus to keep the text unchanged.

2013 REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

GEO Co-Chair Mjwara (South Africa) presented the ExCom report for 2013 (Document 12). Apologizing for the absence of an evaluation of the Secretariat, he said the ExCom would send the finalized report to Members upon its completion. The Plenary approved the report pending the evaluation and its subsequent review.

FORMAL STATEMENTS FROM MEMBERS AND PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

AUSTRALIA underscored the capacity building it is providing to Oceania countries. BANGLADESH called for capacity building for developing countries that are accident-prone, food-insecure and affected by climate change. BELGIUM mentioned the PROBA-V global vegetation monitoring mission. BRAZIL highlighted its capacity-building work, especially in Latin America and with regard to oceans via the Blue Planet initiative.

CANADA noted its leadership on a range of biome-related systems and work in the Polar Space Task Group. CHINA provided an overview of important GEOSS-related events held in China and its past and future satellite launches. COLOMBIA highlighted its undertaking on forests, carbon tracking and mining.

The EUROPEAN COMMISSION drew attention to its work on Copernicus. FRANCE discussed the work it has undertaken to broker the first major contribution from the private sector to GEOSS to develop an extensive world heritage archive of

spot images. GERMANY highlighted its support for the GEO Trust Fund. ITALY reminded participants that it was an original funder of GEO. JAPAN announced the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency is providing free and unlimited access to low and medium resolution satellite data.

MADAGASCAR said satellite images are indispensable tools for development. PARAGUAY emphasized the importance of capacity building and region-based approaches. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION highlighted its recent remote sensing work. SOUTH AFRICA noted it hosts the GEO BON Secretariat and its support for AfriGEOSS. SPAIN informed it has created a national-level management structure for GEO, and CHILE said it is setting up a national secretariat.

SWEDEN declared that the Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute is making all its data available from 2014 onwards. SWITZERLAND mentioned its contribution in developing the Global Risk Data Platform. The US suggested GEO should build broader engagements beyond its usual partners.

The AFRICAN ASSOCIATION OF REMOTE SENSING OF THE ENVIRONMENT described its GEO-related capacity building work with African legislators. The COMMITTEE ON SPACE RESEARCH outlined its work on monitoring and evaluation. DIVERSITAS highlighted GEO BON. The EUROPEAN CENTER FOR MEDIUM-RANGE WEATHER FORECASTS stated that it coordinates 40 million observations per day. The EEA highlighted its contributions to, *inter alia*, Copernicus, the GEOSS Data-Core, and access to *in situ* data.

The EUROPEAN PLATE OBSERVING SYSTEM mentioned its work on improving research infrastructure and on the Geohazard Supersites Initiative. The ESA suggested that the Global Forest Observation Initiative (GFOI) “alone justifies GEO.”

The COMMITTEE ON EARTH OBSERVATION SATELLITES described its activities to support GEO in, *inter alia*: disaster management, forest observation, agriculture, climate observation, carbon, data sharing and access, and capacity building. The EUROPEAN UNION SATELLITE CENTRE, INTERNATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE and INTERNATIONAL ASTRONAUTICAL FEDERATION thanked GEO for their acceptance as POs. EUMETSAT said its contribution to GEOSS remains focused on the GEONETCast initiative. FAO said it looked forward to cooperating with African partners, particularly regarding land cover data.

The INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR INTEGRATED MOUNTAIN DEVELOPMENT highlighted that the Himalayas provide ecosystem services to millions of people and that it warrants a “Himalayan GEOSS.”

The INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SCIENCE highlighted the Future Earth initiative. The INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GEODESY discussed a network of new geodesy telescopes. The INSTITUTE OF ELECTRICAL AND ELECTRONICS ENGINEERS set out its work on quantifying the societal benefits of GEOSS. The INTERNATIONAL HYDROGRAPHIC ORGANIZATION detailed its work on the General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans. The INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION highlighted its contribution to better

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understanding coastal and marine environments. The INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR DIGITAL EARTH gave an overview of the recent Asia-based meetings.

FINANCIAL REPORTS

Luckson Ngwira, World Meteorological Organization, and Hakim Hadjeres, Swiss Federal Audit Office, presented the 2012 Financial Statements and the Report of the External Auditor (Document 13), respectively, which the Plenary approved. The Secretariat provided an overview of the Interim Report on Income and Expenditure 2013 (Document 14), which the Plenary noted.

The Secretariat presented the Secretariat Operations Budget for 2014 (Document 15). Co-Chair Sullivan reported that ExCom recommended approving the budget and establishing a working group to develop a programmatic annex to the budget that better illustrates the linkages with GEO's strategy, to be made available at the first 2014 ExCom meeting. GERMANY and ITALY suggested that the working group be open also to Members not in the ExCom as a means to promote transparency. The Plenary approved the budget and the proposal to establish a working group open to all Members to develop a programmatic annex.

Ryan presented on the management of the GEO Trust Fund (Document 16) along with a proposal to establish a Working Capital Fund to assist with budgetary shortfalls that would be capitalized with one million Swiss Francs. The Plenary approved the proposal.

Ryan also presented a proposal for an assessment for special initiatives that is designed to cover the costs associated with support services provided by the Secretariat for special initiatives. The proposal and Document 16 were approved by the Plenary.

RULES OF PROCEDURE UPDATE

The Secretariat introduced the proposed new membership of two Infrastructure Boards (Document 17), which was approved by Plenary.

Ryan listed the changes to the rules of procedure proposed since the last Plenary (Document 18). The EUROPEAN COMMISSION inquired whether the creation of the new Data Management Committee should be reflected in the rules of procedure. GERMANY requested ExCom to explore expanded membership of the ExCom for discussion by GEO-XI. Plenary approved the document, with GEO Co-Chair Sullivan noting that Germany's proposal would be followed up.

PRESENTATION OF THE NOMINEES FOR THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Co-Chair Sullivan presented, and the Plenary approved, the composition of the ExCom as follows: Argentina, Australia, China, Colombia, Estonia, the European Commission, Gabon, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, South Africa and the US. Mexico will replace Argentina in 2015.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF GEO-XI

The Plenary accepted GABON's offer to host GEO-XI. The Secretariat said it would consult with Gabon on possible dates in November 2014.

OTHER BUSINESS

The EUROPEAN COMMISSION, supported by FRANCE, the UK and WMO, expressed concern that the loss of quality of the Sentinel-1 data will affect all GEO Members and urged them to follow these developments in the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), and to educate domestic representatives to ITU about the potential implications for GEO equities. AUSTRALIA and ESA suggested that the Secretariat develop resources for this task, and the Secretariat agreed.

REVIEW OF SESSION OUTCOMES

Ryan reviewed the session outcomes.

CLOSING REMARKS

Ryan thanked Switzerland for its support for GEO-X. The four GEO Co-Chairs congratulated participants on a successful GEO-X.

GEO-X was gavelled to a close at 3:18 pm.

HIGH-LEVEL PANEL ON PERSPECTIVES ON THE VALUE OF EARTH OBSERVATIONS

Opening the discussion, moderator Karine Siegwart, Vice Director, Swiss Federal Office for the Environment, outlined the panel's purpose as providing input to the Ministerial Summit.

Achim Steiner, Executive Director, UN Environment Programme, described translating the growing volume of Earth observation data for policy making and to the global level as a key challenge. He said that the "ability to join the dots of how our planet functions and how resources can or cannot be used" is fundamental for reimagining future economies, and stressed the importance of "not being paralyzed by the inability to have perfect information before acting."

Margareta Wahlström, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), said that many disasters are avoidable, and data will help in the challenge of "dealing with the disaster before the disaster has happened." She suggested that UNISDR is a "transformation point," turning large amounts of data into "options for decision makers." She concluded that "science should be useful and used" and that scientists should be "in the middle of society, not on the side."

Philippe Gillet, Acting President, École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, argued producing "not only more data but better models" is a new paradigm in science. He said satellite data and data from the ground need to be integrated. He suggested that, in order to process all data produced and to be able to make predictions, a visualization model of all Earth observation data is required. He also underscored the importance of education, and proposed GEO launch courses to teach citizens globally how to use data for understanding our planet.

Serge Tröber, Swiss Re, explained that an important part of insurance is assessing the risks and responding to them, and Earth observations can support this aspect of their business. He said that climate change is a good example, particularly in the context of the increasing frequency and severity of floods. He explained that in the 2013 floods in Germany, Swiss Re received real time images of the floods from ESA. Based on that information, it was able to estimate and begin to mitigate its losses.

Answering the moderator's question about whether data can be trusted, Gillet pointed out there is diversity in the ability to predict outcomes, giving sea-level rise as an example of a risk that can be predicted and an asteroid collision as one that cannot. To increase trust in data, Wahlström suggested GEO promote the idea that risk is dynamic and help in "downscaling" data from the global level to individual countries' needs. Steiner suggested that how data is used and what assumptions are made in processing it are important, and emphasized the importance of "trusted institutions," such as the UN and universities.

A range of issues was raised in the subsequent discussion, including: the importance of data for informing and monitoring the post-2015 development agenda and the its implementation; the relevance of the establishment of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services to GEOSS; the need to use data to develop new paradigms, such as increased understanding of the importance of trees to the sequestration of carbon, which has led to the program on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation; the limitations of models and the need for greater engagement between the collection of data and modeling; the need for data to drive development, particularly in infrastructure to ensure that risk is reduced in the long-term; and the requirement for an "insurability test" whereby something should not be built if it cannot be insured.

Closing the meeting, moderator Siegwart said the panel had raised many questions and also provided some interesting answers.