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Activities related to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development

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Report of the Secretariat

Summary

The present paper contains the report on activities stemming from the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 20 to 22 June 2012. At its second session, held in August 2012, the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management expressed its appreciation for the active efforts undertaken at the Conference to highlight the importance of geospatial information to the sustainable development agenda, and noted that one of the successes achieved at the Conference was the recognition, in the Conference outcome document entitled “The future we want”, of the importance of reliable geospatial information in support of sustainable development. In acknowledging that efforts to raise awareness of the role of geospatial information must continue, the Committee of Experts requested the Secretariat to report to it on the related follow-up activities it had undertaken since the Conference. In its report, the Secretariat therefore outlines its efforts to reach out to decision makers on the importance of the use of reliable geospatial information and space-technology-based data for sustainable development and to encourage national geospatial information authorities to actively contribute to sustainable development discussions and activities. It also provides an update on activities carried out in the context of using reliable geospatial information for risk assessment and disaster risk reduction instruments, as well as on the major follow-up activities related to the Conference, including the set of sustainable development goals currently being established by the United Nations. The Committee of Experts is invited to take note of the report.

* E/C.20/2013/1

I. Introduction

1. At its second session, held in New York in August 2012, the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management welcomed the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and the recognition by the Conference of the role of “reliable geospatial information” in sustainable development agenda setting and monitoring. The Committee requested the UN-GGIM Secretariat to reach out to all entities involved in sustainable development and the monitoring of the outcomes of Rio+20, to explain the role of UN-GGIM and the efforts it is undertaking. The Committee also called on the national geospatial information authorities to: (i) actively contribute to sustainable development discussion and activities, and provide coordination related to geospatial information, in the national context; (ii) continue to improve tools and processes; and (iii) provide mechanisms and processes aimed towards capacity development related to geospatial information in a sustainable context (decision 2/102, E/2012/46).

2. In this regard, the Secretariat reached out to decision makers and the national geospatial information authorities and provided them with the Rio+20 outcomes relevant to geospatial information and sustainable development. It has also brought the contribution of geospatial information to the sustainable development agenda as a session topic at the Second High Level Forum on GGIM, held in Doha, Qatar in February 2013. In addition, the Committee of Experts has created a working group on developing a Global Map for Sustainable Development (GM4SD), aiming to be a high quality and authoritative geospatial information platform, contributing data and knowledge to support informed and coordinated decision-making by policy-makers in Member States and international organizations. Furthermore, the Executive Committee of Economic and Social Affairs Plus (ECESA Plus), which is the main inter-agency coordination mechanism in charge of the UN system implementation follow-up to Rio+20, has organized a range of meetings that focus on the approach to conceptualize the Sustainable Development Goals and discussed some of the factors that impact sustainable development, such as clean energy, water, sanitation, etc.

3. This report outlines the follow-up actions carried out since Rio+20, describes the activities carried out by the UN-GGIM Secretariat, particularly those recommended by the Committee of Experts at its second session in August 2012, and by the UN at large. The Committee is requested to take note of the report.

II. Follow-up actions to the second session of UN-GGIM

4. The UN-GGIM Secretariat was tasked to follow-up on all activities related to the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) with regard to geospatial information and report back to the Committee of Experts. The Secretariat has reached out and thanked those that provided inputs to the outcome document submitted to Rio+20, and has brought these outcomes to the attention of the national geospatial information authorities, relevant international organizations and UN bodies. The Secretariat has sent a letter to all entities involved in geospatial information activities to explain the role of the Committee of Experts and elaborate on the efforts it is undertaking to provide a forum for coordination and dialogue among Member States, and between Member States and relevant international organizations on all issues related to geospatial information in support of sustainable development.

5. The Secretariat has particularly notified the addressees of the outcomes of Rio+20 that placed emphasis on the importance and value of reliable and

authoritative geospatial information for sustainable development, humanitarian assistance, and disaster risk reduction. In this regard, the Secretariat has compiled for their reference, excerpts from the Rio+20 outcome document “The future we want” relevant to data and geospatial information, especially in the area of disaster reduction (para.187) and implementation by use of technology (para.274) (see Annex 1 attached). These excerpts represent a strong recognition at the political level of the importance of the work by the Committee of Experts at all levels from national, regional and global, and the potential contributions it could make.

6. The Secretariat has organized the Second High Level Forum on GGIM, held in Doha, Qatar in February 2013, and dedicated a session on the need to use geospatial information to address sustainable development issues. As articulated in the Rio+20 outcome document, the Forum confirmed the key role geospatial information has to play in monitoring and delivering sustainable social, environmental, and economic development goals across the globe. The session presented tangible examples of how geospatial information is being leveraged to support sustainable development objectives, and resolved to promote the greater use of geospatial information in sustainable development by supporting the activities under the programme of the Global Map for Sustainable Development (GM4SD), with an initial focus on managing risks of natural disasters to urban populations and developing effective mitigation strategies.

7. As discussed at the second session of the Committee, the Secretariat has established a working group to deliberate on the creation of the geospatial information portal on a ‘Global Map for Sustainable Development’. The working group initiated a dialogue with the UN-GGIM community via a special session on a global map for sustainable development during the Second High Level Forum on GGIM in Doha, as mentioned earlier. The working group planned to meet on the margins of the Chengdu Forum on UN-GGIM, a technical meeting on the development and applications in urban hazard mapping, which was organized in response to the call for action in paragraph 187 of the Rio+20 outcome document. Unfortunately, the Chengdu Forum, planned to be held in Chengdu, China from 24-26 April 2013, has been postponed until October 2013 due to a devastating earthquake in the region. The working group will now meet on the margins of this third session and its work will be presented to the Committee of Experts (see in E/C.20/2013/6/Add.1).

III. Activities carried out by the UN and others in pursuance of Rio+20

8. The Executive Committee of Economic and Social Affairs Plus (ECESA Plus), bringing together 50 UN entities, constitutes the main inter-agency coordination mechanism for the Rio+20 follow-up actions. It plays a critical role in implementing the Rio+20 outcomes and advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Most of the activities undertaken since Rio+20 have focused particularly on the SDGs and some related specific issues, such as water, oceans, food security, education, energy and clean and environmentally sound technology.

9. Post Rio+20, the major activities carried out by the UN have focused on ways to frame a new approach to sustainable development and conceptualize the sustainable development goals. In this regard, the First Session of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (This intergovernmental Working Group was called for in the Rio+20 outcome document) has convened its first meeting on 14-15 March 2013, in New York. It was addressed by the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly. Two subsequent Sessions were held, and a Fourth Session was planned for 17-19 June 2013.

10. Following up on a key issue that also emerged at Rio+20 – how developing countries can obtain clean, environmentally sound technologies to advance sustainable development – the United Nations General Assembly has convened a series of discussions aimed at identifying options that could be employed to establish a mechanism that facilitates the flow of technologies around the world. Two Workshops on “Development, transfer and dissemination of clean and environmentally sound technologies” were organized on 30 April – 1 May 2013 to focus on the needs, opportunities and constraints/gaps faced by developing countries, in moving from demonstration to widespread diffusion of environmentally sound technologies.

11. Senior United Nations officials, policymakers, civil society representatives and other stakeholders gathered for a special Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) global forum on “Mobilizing science, technology and innovation for sustainable development” in New York, on 13 May 2013. The forum recognized that science, technology and innovation, as tools that are able to integrate the 3 pillars (economic, social, and environmental) of sustainable development, provide an important opportunity to follow up on the Rio +20 outcomes. The forum concluded that science, technology and innovation should be clearly articulated by Governments as important elements of the post-2015 development agenda. For example, science, technology and innovation capacities concerning global climate change and disaster risk reduction must be enhanced, particularly to fill gaps in understanding in order for policy-makers to protect people, livelihoods and ecosystems. Building the resilience of vulnerable communities, while reinforcing local response strategies rooted in traditional knowledge, is essential for climate change adaptation and disaster mitigation.

12. In the context of use of information technologies in the implementation of sustainable development, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), together with the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (OOSA) organized an open informal session on “Space and disaster risk reduction: Planning for resilient human settlements” as part of their initiatives on a Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction on 12 March 2013. As well, the first Eye on Earth User Conference was organized in Dublin, Republic of Ireland, 4-6 March 2013. The outcome Dublin Statement “recognized the need to share timely, credible and relevant information provided by the diversity of knowledge communities and important global initiatives such as the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), the UN Global Geospatial Information Management (GGIM), UNEP-live and others, which will help to deliver global benefits”.

IV. Future actions

13. It is worth noting that, until now, many of the discussions related to sustainable development, post Rio+20, have not explicitly brought geospatial information to the forefront as much as the geospatial community may want it to be addressed. This is partly because the sustainable development agenda is still evolving politically, and not yet delving into the technical and operational means and outcomes of measuring and delivering sustainable development goals. However, these goals will depend on human and physical geography data and geospatial information to measure and monitor change and progress. Indications are that these goals may take some time to evolve, and that the sustainable development community does not yet know what should be measured and how. Regardless, it is certain that there will be a need to create a network of global data and information that is supported by the tools and technology to create maps and detect change over time in a consistent and standardized manner. In this connection, the Committee of Experts will have a substantial role to play, particularly in context of its activity on developing a global map for sustainable development.

14. The recent High Level Report on the Post-2015 Development Agenda ‘A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development’, published 31 May 2013, explicitly mentioned the importance of data and geographic information. The Executive Summary emphasized the need for a ‘data revolution’ for sustainable development, with a new international initiative to improve the quality of statistics and information available to citizens, actively taking advantage of new technology, crowd sourcing, and improved connectivity to empower people with information on the progress towards the targets (page 14). Of the several cross-cutting issues, the management of cities was identified as being even more important in the decades ahead. The post-2015 agenda must be relevant for urban dwellers, and cities will be where the battle for sustainable development will be won and lost. The most pressing issue will be how to foster a local, geographic approach to the post-2015 agenda (Cities, page 31).

15. The Secretariat takes note that the Committee of Experts will be required to take a larger role to promote, to the different potential users from different sectors, how geospatial information technologies and methodologies can contribute to increasing the value of the information collection, analysis, visualization and dissemination, and ultimately their decision making for sustainable development. The Secretariat will continue to develop and assist in the implementation of the UN-GGIM framework to encourage national geospatial information authorities to actively contribute to sustainable development discussion and activities in their national and regional spheres, which will impact at the international level collectively. The Secretariat will particularly continue to support the work of the working group on developing a global map for sustainable development as its flagship in this area.

Annex 1: Rio+20 Outcomes relevant to GGIM work¹

II. Renewing Political Commitment

B. Advancing Integration, Implementation, and Coherence: Assessing the progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development and addressing new and emerging challenges

38. We recognize the need for broader measures of progress to complement GDP in order to better inform policy decisions, and in this regard, we request the UN Statistical Commission in consultation with relevant UN System entities and other relevant organizations to launch a programme of work in this area building on existing initiatives.

III. Green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication

62. We encourage each country to consider the implementation of green economy policies in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, in a manner that endeavours to drive sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth and job creation, particularly for women, youth and the poor. In this respect, we note the importance of ensuring that workers are equipped with the necessary skills, including through education and capacity building, and are provided with the necessary social and health protections. In this regard, we encourage all stakeholders, including business and industry to contribute, as appropriate. We invite governments to improve knowledge and statistical capacity on job trends, developments and constraints and integrate relevant data into national statistics, with the support of relevant UN agencies within their mandates.

63. We recognize the importance of the evaluation of the range of social, environmental and economic factors and encourage, where national circumstances and conditions allow, their integration into decision making. We acknowledge that it will be important to take into account the opportunities and challenges, as well as the costs and benefits of green economy policies in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, using the best available scientific data and analysis. We acknowledge that a mix of measures, including regulatory, voluntary and others applied at the national level and consistent with obligations under international agreements, could promote green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication. We reaffirm that social policies are vital to promoting sustainable development.

IV. Institutional framework for sustainable development

A. Strengthening the three dimensions of sustainable development

76. We recognize that effective governance at local, sub-national, national, regional and global levels representing the voices and interests of all is critical for advancing sustainable development. The strengthening and reform of the institutional framework should not be an end in itself, but a means to achieve sustainable development. We recognize that an improved and more effective institutional framework for sustainable development at the international level should be consistent with Rio Principles, build on Agenda 21, and Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and its objectives on the institutional framework for sustainable development, and contribute to the implementation of our commitments in outcomes of UN conferences and summits in economic, social, environmental and related fields and take into account national priorities and the development strategies and priorities of developing countries. We therefore resolve to strengthen the institutional framework for sustainable development, which will, *inter alia*:

(g) promote the science-policy interface through inclusive, evidence-based and transparent scientific assessments, as well as access to reliable, relevant and timely data in areas related to the three dimensions of sustainable development, building on existing mechanisms, as appropriate; in this regard, strengthen participation of all countries in international sustainable development processes and capacity building especially for developing countries, including in conducting their own monitoring and assessments;

High level political forum

85. The high level forum could:

¹ Excerpts from the Rio+20 final document.

(l) enhance evidence-based decision-making at all levels and contribute to strengthen ongoing efforts of capacity building for data collection and analysis in developing countries.

E. Regional, national, sub-national, local

98. We encourage regional, national, sub-national and local authorities as appropriate to develop and utilize sustainable development strategies as key instruments for guiding decision-making and implementation of sustainable development at all levels, and in this regard we recognize that integrated social, economic, and environmental data and information, as well as effective analysis and assessment of implementation, is important to decision-making processes.

Sustainable cities and human settlements

136. We emphasize the importance of increasing the number of metropolitan regions, cities and towns that are implementing policies for sustainable urban planning and design in order to respond effectively to the expected growth of urban populations in coming decades. We note that sustainable urban planning benefits from the involvement of multiple stakeholders as well as from full use of information and sex-disaggregated data including on demographic trends, income distribution and informal settlements. We recognize the important role of municipal governments in setting a vision for sustainable cities, from the initiation of city planning through to revitalization of older cities and neighborhoods, including by adopting energy efficiency programmes in building management and developing sustainable locally appropriate transport systems. We further recognize the importance of mixed-use planning and of encouraging non-motorized mobility, including by promoting pedestrian and cycling infrastructures.

Promoting full and productive employment, decent work for all, and social protections

154. We recognize that opportunities for decent work for all and job creation can be availed through, *inter alia*, public and private investments in scientific and technological innovation, public works in restoring, regenerating and conserving natural resources and ecosystems, and social and community services. We are encouraged by government initiatives to create jobs for poor people in restoring and managing natural resources and ecosystems, and we encourage the private sector to contribute to decent work for all and job creation for both women and men, and particularly for the youth, including through partnerships with small and medium enterprises as well as cooperatives. In this regard, we acknowledge the importance of efforts to promote the exchange of information and knowledge on decent work for all and job creation, including green jobs initiatives and related skills, and to facilitate the integration of relevant data into national economic and employment policies.

Oceans and seas

163. We note with concern that the health of oceans and marine biodiversity are negatively affected by marine pollution, including marine debris, especially plastic, persistent organic pollutants, heavy metals, and nitrogen-based compounds, from a number of marine and land-based sources, including shipping and land runoff. We commit to take action to reduce the incidence and impacts of such pollution on marine ecosystems, including through the effective implementation of relevant conventions adopted in the framework of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), and the follow up of the relevant initiatives such as the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, as well as the adoption of coordinated strategies to this end. We further commit to take action to, by 2025, based on collected scientific data, achieve significant reductions in marine debris to prevent harm to the coastal and marine environment.

Gender equality and women's empowerment

239. We commit to actively promote the collection, analysis and use of gender sensitive indicators and sex disaggregated data in policy, programme design and monitoring frameworks, in accordance with national circumstances and capacities, in order to deliver on the promise of sustainable development for all.

VI. Means of implementation

258. We recognize that the fulfillment of all ODA commitments is crucial, including the commitments by many developed countries to achieve the target of 0.7 per cent of GNP for ODA to developing countries by 2015, as well as a target of 0.15 to 0.20 per cent of GNP for ODA to least developed countries. To reach their agreed timetables, donor countries should take all necessary and appropriate measures to raise the rate of aid disbursements to meet their existing commitments. We urge those developed countries that have not yet done so to make additional concrete efforts towards the target of 0.7 per cent of GNP for ODA to developing countries, including the specific target of 0.15

to 0.20 per cent of GNP for ODA to least developed countries, in accordance with their commitments. To build on progress achieved in ensuring that ODA is used effectively, we stress the importance of democratic governance, improved transparency and accountability, and managing for results. We strongly encourage all donors to establish, as soon as possible, rolling indicative timetables that illustrate how they aim to reach their goals, in accordance with their respective budget allocation process. We stress the importance of mobilizing greater domestic support in developed countries towards the fulfillment of their commitments, including through raising public awareness, and by providing data on the development impact of aid provided and demonstrating tangible results.

Disaster risk reduction

187. We recognize the importance of early warning systems as part of effective disaster risk reduction at all levels in order to reduce economic and social damages including the loss of human life, and in this regard encourage States to integrate such systems into their national disaster risk reduction strategies and plans. We encourage donors and the international community to enhance international cooperation in support of disaster risk reduction in developing countries as appropriate through technical assistance, technology transfer as mutually agreed, capacity building and training programmes. We further recognize the importance of comprehensive hazard and risk assessments, and knowledge and information sharing, including reliable geospatial information. We commit to undertake and strengthen in a timely manner risk assessment and disaster risk reduction instruments.

VI. Means of implementation

B. Technology

274. We recognize the importance of space-technology-based data, in situ monitoring, and reliable geospatial information for sustainable development policy-making, programming and project operations. In this context, we note the relevance of global mapping and recognize the efforts in developing global environmental observing systems, including by the Eye on Earth network and through the Global Earth Observation System of Systems. We recognize the need to support developing countries in their efforts to collect environmental data.
