

# United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management

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## Why it is important for Arab States

24<sup>th</sup> February 2015



This document has been prepared by the UN-GGIM Secretariat

# United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM)

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The United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) is a truly global mechanism. It has quickly established itself as the premier forum for Member States, relevant international organizations and the private sector to discuss, enhance and coordinate global geospatial information management at the highest level.

## Why does UN-GGIM exist?

UN-GGIM was established to address a growing number of issues relating to the management and development of geospatial information from the local to the global levels/tiers. These included:

- The lack of a global consultative and decision-making mechanism among Member States in:
  - setting global norms on geospatial information;
  - developing common tools; and
  - bringing geospatial information to bear on global policy issues;
- The need to develop guidelines, practices and standards for geospatial information management, institutional arrangements and legal frameworks;
- The need to determine the best mechanisms to provide advice, knowledge, education and capacity development to geospatially developing countries and the newest entrants into the national geospatial information arena;
- The need to promote data sharing, accessibility and dissemination;
- Reducing the significant gap in the understanding and management of geospatial information globally; and
- The value and contribution of reliable, credible and authoritative geospatial information in the decision making process is not fully realized by many governments and organisations.

## **Aims and objectives**

The United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) is a formal inter-governmental mechanism to discuss, enhance and coordinate Global Geospatial Information Management activities by involving Member States of the United Nations at the highest level. It plays a leading role in making joint decisions and setting directions on the use of geospatial information within national and global policy frameworks; it works with Governments to improve policy, institutional arrangements and legal frameworks; it addresses global issues and contributes to collective knowledge as a community with shared interests and concerns. UN-GGIM develops effective strategies to build geospatial capacity in developing countries and establish standardised approaches between all nations; it also provides a forum to liaise and coordinate among Member States, and between Member States and international organizations.

## **Genesis of UN-GGIM**

In 2009, the United Nations Statistics Division/DESA (UNSD) convened in New York an informal consultative meeting with geospatial information experts from different regions of the world, and discussed how better to coordinate the various regional and global activities on geospatial information and the related management issues. Subsequent to the consultative meeting, the UNSD, jointly with the United Nations Cartographic Section, convened a series of three preparatory meetings on Global Geospatial Information Management (GGIM), during the following twelve months.

In 2010 the United Nations Secretariat was requested to initiate discussion and prepare a report for the approval of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on global coordination of geospatial information management, including the consideration of the possible creation of a United Nations Forum on GGIM. In July 2010, ECOSOC requested the Secretary-General of the United Nations to submit to the Council at its 2011 substantive session a report on global geospatial information management (see the full text E/2010/240<sup>i</sup>). This decision paved the way for subsequent UN-GGIM preparatory activities.

## **Creation of the Committee of Experts**

In July 2011, ECOSOC considered the report of the Secretary General (E/2011/89<sup>ii</sup>) and adopted a resolution to create the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (2011/24<sup>iii</sup>).

In October 2011, the First High Level Forum on Global Geospatial Information Management and the First Session of the United Nations Committee of Experts were held in Seoul, Republic of Korea. This was the first time that experts from 90 countries met in the context of a United Nations initiative to enhance global cooperation in the field of geospatial information management. The Forum concluded with the acceptance of the Seoul Declaration on Global Geospatial Information Management.

## **Work of the Committee of Experts**

The priorities and work programmes of the Committee of Experts are driven by the Member States. The Sessions of the Committee of Experts are held annually and attended by representatives from Member States, United Nations organisations and inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations. The Committee is mandated, among other tasks, to 'provide a platform for the

development of effective strategies on how to build and strengthen national capacity on geospatial information, as well as disseminating best practices and experiences of national, regional and international bodies on geospatial information related to legal instruments, management models and technical standards' (ggim.un.org 2014a).

The Committee of Experts started by identifying the concerns and opinions of Member States on geospatial information through an Inventory of Issues, a detailed and comprehensive description from Member States of the issues that should be addressed in the coming years of UN-GGIM (UN-GGIM, 2012a). Drawing on this the discussions and decisions to date have centred on several areas of concern which include the future trends for geospatial information, development of a knowledge base, a global geodetic reference system, integration of statistics and geospatial information, geospatial standards, legal and policy frameworks, institutional arrangements, shared principles, the role of geospatial data in the Post-2015 development agenda and developing a global map for sustainable development.

UN-GGIM takes a leading role in helping Governments to improve geospatial policy, institutional arrangements, and legal frameworks; facilitates and advocates the availability and capability of geospatial information; and proposes work-plans and guidelines with a view to promoting common principles, policies, methods, mechanisms and standards for the interoperability of geospatial information. UN-GGIM also works to develop effective strategies to build geospatial capacity in the developing countries; promote its use to meet key global challenges such as sustainable development; and ensure that all Member States and their citizens benefit from geospatial information. This is undertaken through a number of work programmes and packages, as well as by providing a forum for representatives from Member States to meet, discuss and collaborate on important issues of global geospatial information management.

The current list of topics on which UN-GGIM is working includes:

- Creation of a global geodetic reference framework;
- Integration of statistical and geospatial information;
- The role of geospatial information in the Post-2015 sustainable development agenda;
- Legal and policy frameworks for geospatial information;
- Trends in Institutional arrangements for geospatial information;
- Development of a knowledge base for geospatial information management; and
- Determination of fundamental data themes.

### **UN-GGIM Regional Committees**

UN-GGIM Regional Committees, are run by Member States, and play a vital role liaising with the UN-GGIM Secretariat on topics of interest and major developments in the intervening periods between Sessions of the Committee of Experts. Regional Committees facilitate regional development and discussion, and formally report back to the Committee of Experts on regional issues. UN-mandated regional committees are established in Asia-Pacific, the Americas, the Arab

States and Europe. Following a programme of preparatory work during 2014 and 2015, and after consultation with UN-ESCWA, the Regional Committee for Arab States will be ratified during UN-GGIM 5.

### **Why is UN-GGIM important for Arab Member States?**

The formation of UN-GGIM: Arab States will allow the decisions and discussions held by the global Committee of Experts to be continued at a regional level with a specific focus on the issues facing Member States in the region.

There are several examples where the work of the Committee of Experts has helped other Member States overcome issues faced during the development of infrastructures and policies; these include discussions on Legal and Policy Frameworks, and the Implementation and Adoption of Standards for the geospatial information community.

This need was already expressed by Doha Declaration on “Advancing Global Geospatial Information Management”, an outcome document of the Second High-Level Forum on GGIM, held in Qatar February 2013, which resolved to *“encourage regional collaboration in the promotion and development of geospatial information management and the establishment of appropriate regional coordinating mechanisms and implementation strategies (as exemplified by UN-GGIM Asia-Pacific), and which include the contribution and ongoing role played by international NGO’s, academia and the private sector in supporting this important initiative.”*

One of the important aspects of UN-GGIM is its ability to provide a platform for knowledge sharing and best practice. The creation of successful Spatial Data Infrastructures (SDIs) to underpin and coordinate all data held on a country, is known to lead to economic growth and increased stability of a nation and of regions.

Accurate, reliable, maintained location data underpins every aspect of data management from agricultural monitoring, water management and land ownership and management, urban development, transport management and input into the post-2015 agenda of Sustainable Development Goals. The task is not only a technical challenge; more importantly its success depends on the establishment of effective coordination and infrastructure management at political level.

Many countries are developing national policies and practices that formalise the way their geospatial data can be shared, used and disseminated. By using the UN-GGIM Knowledge Base, and by discussing best practice, Member States who are in the process of developing or maturing their SDI’s, can gain insight into different approaches used by countries with established SDI’s. In addition, they can identify and overcome challenges more quickly using knowledge gained from other Member States.

### **References**

UN-GGIM website: <http://ggim.un.org/>

The report '*Future trends in geospatial information management: the five to ten year vision*<sup>iv</sup>' was endorsed by the Committee of Experts at its Third Session in July 2013; the report provides expert opinion on the short- to mid-term developments in geospatial information, and is now seen as a strategic guide for the globally geospatial industry. It has been translated into all the official United Nations languages and can be viewed and downloaded from the UN-GGIM website.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/docs/2010/dec%202010-240.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/docs/adv2011/11%20sg-ggim-report-to-ecosoc-12-may.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/docs/2011/res%202011.24.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://ggim.un.org/docs/Future-trends.pdf>