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**Review of United Nations activities in geospatial
information management**

Review of United Nations activities in geospatial information management

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The present paper contains the report of the Secretariat on the review of United Nations activities related to geospatial information management for consideration by the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management.

At its seventh session, held in New York from 2 to 4 August 2017, the Committee of Experts adopted decision 7/115, in which it welcomed the report of the Secretariat on the review of United Nations activities in geospatial information management and agreed that efforts should be made to consider a more structured and sustainable coordination approach for geospatial information management activities within the United Nations system. The Committee emphasized the need for the Secretariat to continue its consultations concerning the questionnaire that had been circulated in order to provide a systematic overview of the existing geospatial resources, activities and governance arrangements of the United Nations system, to continue to seek clarification and expand on responses received, and to reach out to United Nations entities[1] that had not yet responded, with a view to maintaining a list of points of contact within the United Nations system. As a starting point, the Committee agreed to establish a United Nations system network within its global architecture, which, once established, could then review and possibly implement further options at an appropriate time in the future, with the guidance and support of the Committee. In this report, the Secretariat provides information on the continued efforts and progress made to seek clarification on United Nations activities in geospatial information management, including the maintenance of a list of points of contact. The Secretariat also presents the preparatory consultations undertaken with the various offices, agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system for the establishment of the United Nations system network, including the preparation of draft terms of reference for consideration by the Committee of Experts.

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* E/C.20/2018/1

1 The term "entity" or "entities" hereinafter refers to offices, departments, regional commissions, agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system

I. Introduction

1. At its seventh session in August 2017, the Committee of Experts adopted decision 7/115, in which it welcomed the report of the Secretariat on the review of United Nations activities in geospatial information management, including the overview it provided of existing geospatial resources, activities and governance arrangements within the United Nations system. The Committee agreed that efforts should be made to consider a more structured and sustainable coordination approach for geospatial information management activities within the United Nations system.

2. In making decision 7/115, the Committee of Experts agreed to establish a United Nations system network within its global architecture, which, once established, could then review and possibly implement further options at an appropriate time in the future, with the guidance and support of the Committee. In this regard, the Committee emphasized the need for the Secretariat to continue to reach out to United Nations entities that had not yet responded to prior consultations on existing geospatial resources.

3. The present report provides information on the continued efforts and progress made by the Secretariat to seek clarification on United Nations activities in geospatial information management, including the maintenance of a list of points of contact. The report also presents the preparatory consultations undertaken by the Secretariat with the various offices, agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system toward the establishment of the United Nations system network, including the preparation of draft terms of reference for consideration by the Committee of Experts. The Committee of Experts is invited to take note of the report and to express its views on the review of United Nations activities related to geospatial information management. Points for discussion and decision are provided in paragraph 19.

II. Clarifying United Nations activities in geospatial information management

4. At its fifth session in August 2015, the Committee of Experts, in making its decision 5/110, noted the many valuable geospatial information initiatives undertaken throughout the United Nations system, while expressing some concern that they should be sustainable and not appear to be fragmented. The Committee called for a report documenting the existing geospatial resources, activities and governance arrangements of the United Nations system in a systematic manner, and invited the Secretariat to work closely with the United Nations Geographic Information Working Group (UNGIWG).[2]

5. The Programme Review of the Committee of Experts[3], prepared in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) to present to the Council in 2016 a comprehensive review of all aspects of its work and operations, noted that although there is continued expectation for United Nations activities on geospatial information management to increase, many of the collaborative geospatial activities occurring within the United Nations have for many years been carried out on a "best efforts" basis by the geospatial practitioners who have been engaged through UNGIWG. The 15th annual plenary meeting of UNGIWG was convened in August 2015 on the margins of the fifth session of the Committee of Experts, but has not convened a meeting since.

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[2] UNGIWG was created in 2000 as a voluntary network of geospatial practitioners of the United Nations system working in the fields of cartography and geographic information science, and supporting the work of United Nations organizations and Member States.

[3] E/2016/47: http://undocs.org/E/2016/47

6. At its sixth session in August 2016, the Committee of Experts adopted decision 6/112, in which it welcomed the report of the Secretariat on the review of United Nations activities in geospatial information, and requested the Secretariat to continue its analysis of the United Nations system wide consultation. In this regard, the Secretariat circulated a questionnaire to provide an overview of the existing geospatial resources, activities and governance arrangements of the United Nations system in a systematic manner, with the view to enable the Secretariat to report to the Committee based on specific responses from the questionnaire and results of the analysis.

7. Since the seventh session, the Secretariat has continued its consultations to further clarify United Nations activities in geospatial information management, noting that "geospatial practitioners and related capabilities" and "geospatial activities" may not be consistently understood across the United Nations system. This makes definitive understanding of geospatial capabilities and activities in the United Nations system challenging and difficult, including seeking additional responses to continue the analysis and to provide a good overview of existing geospatial resources, activities and governance arrangements from entities within the United Nations system.

8. During this intersessional period, no additional responses to the questionnaire were received. As for entities within the United Nations system that have yet to respond, this can be inferred as: (i) an absence of geospatial capabilities; (ii) senior managers are not aware of the geospatial capabilities within their entity; or (iii) fragmentation of geospatial capabilities within the entity, making its identification difficult. The Secretariat will address these challenges, noting that the establishment of the United Nations system network will contribute considerably to further clarifying United Nations activities in geospatial information management.

III. Establishment of the United Nations System Network

9. In order to provide a more structured and sustainable coordination approach for geospatial information management activities within the United Nations system, and the establishment of a United Nations System Network (Network) within the Committee of Experts global architecture, the Secretariat contacted entities in the United Nations system, initially based on the list of contacts from the 2016 questionnaire exercise, as well as other known focal points on geospatial activities within entities of the United Nations system, to discuss the establishment of the Network.

10. A first preparatory meeting of the Network was organized by the Secretariat on 19 April 2018 to discuss the modalities for the establishment of the Network, inclusive of the consolidation of the functions of UNGIWG and the Network. Representatives from ECA, ECE, ECLAC, ICAO, ITU, OCHA, OLA, OOSA, UNDP, UNEP, UNICEF, UNODC and UN-Habitat participated in this preparatory meeting. Some participants were also existing focal points and members of UNGIWG. Participants welcomed the creation of the Network as an institutional mechanism to coordinate and report on geospatial activities in the United Nations system.

11. Participants identified opportunities provided through the establishment of the Network, including: (i) better understanding of challenges experienced by geospatial practitioners in the United Nations system which may assist Member States in discussing, coordinating and prioritising work undertaken in the context of geospatial activities in the United Nations; (ii) contribution to and collaboration with the relevant expert and working groups of the Committee; and (iii) access to an intergovernmental mechanism that is a subsidiary body of ECOSOC. Opportunities identified may further support the mandates of entities within the United Nations

system, allow for coordination and the efficient use of resources, adequate prioritisation of entities' programmes, and capacity building for the entities.

12. A number of challenges were also expressed, including: (i) contributions and participation is on the basis of "best efforts"; (ii) there are institutional mechanisms to address, including the investment of time and resources; and (iii) the leadership and resources required for an effective coordination mechanism for the Network.

13. Participants also agreed to establish an editorial group to draft the terms of reference for the Network, and to reconvene for the review and endorsement of the draft terms of reference. Participants recommended that the editorial group incorporate a review of good practices from UNGIWG, and to build on its main achievements. The editorial group consisted of a balanced composition of entities from the United Nations system, including ECA, OLA, OOSA, UNDP and UNICEF; worked through an initial draft prepared by OLA; and met twice on 3 May 2018, and 6 June 2018, to review and consult on the draft terms of reference for the Network. On 12 June 2018, a final version of the terms of reference was agreed by the editorial group, and was circulated by the Secretariat to the list of contacts from the 2016 questionnaire exercise, as well as other known focal points on geospatial activities within entities of the United Nations system.

14. A second preparatory meeting of the Network was organized by the Secretariat on 18 June 2018 where the editorial group presented the draft terms of reference of the Network. There were nine participants from ECA, ITU, OCHA, OLA, UNDP, UNFPA, and UNITAR. ECE sent its regrets but indicated its endorsement of the draft terms of reference. Participants welcomed the draft and agreed that it be submitted to the Committee of Experts at its eighth session for endorsement.

15. The meeting was also informed of the upcoming informal meeting of the Network on the margins of this eighth session of the Committee in New York. It is expected that this informal meeting will discuss matters related to the establishment of the Network including that of the Chair and Vice-Chairs, the composition of the Network Steering Group, and to begin outlining a work programme for the Network.

16. The terms of reference of the United Nations System Network are attached as Annex 1 to this report for endorsement by the Committee of Experts.

IV. Consolidation of points of contacts

17. Since the seventh session, the Secretariat has endeavoured to continue its consultations concerning the 2016 questionnaire to include broad responses from the United Nations system, particularly entities that have not previously responded. This also supports efforts to maintain a current listing of points of contact for geospatial information management for the United Nations system.

18. The draft terms of reference for the Network call upon the United Nations system entities that wish to participate as a member of the Network, to designate their most senior professional working in the field of geospatial information management as their designated representative. An alternate representative should also be nominated in addition to the designated representative. In this regard, an initial activity of the Network is to develop a communication plan to reach out to, and identify the most senior professional working in the field of geospatial information management within an entity, clarify the point of contact(s) for geospatial information management, with a view to maintaining a list of points of contact within the United Nations system, as decided by the Committee at its seventh session.

V.   Points for discussion

19. The Committee of Experts is invited to:

(a) Take note of the present report and express its views on the efforts to establish the United Nations System Network;

(b) Express its views and provide guidance on the consolidation of the functions of UNGIWG and the United Nations System Network; and

(c) Express its views on the draft terms of reference as presented in Annex I, with a view towards their endorsement.

ANNEX 1

Terms of Reference for the
United Nations System[1] Network

1. Mandate

The establishment of the United Nations System Network (Network) was agreed by the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) at its seventh session in August 2017.[2]

2. Aim and Objectives

The aim of the Network is to strengthen the coordination and coherence of geospatial information management[3] within the United Nations system.

The objectives of the Network are to:

2.1 Strengthen coordination, collaboration and sharing mechanisms on geospatial information within the United Nations system, including relevant policies, capacity building, delivery infrastructures and systems, as well as geospatial information management, collection, dissemination, usage and sharing;

2.2 Increase communication and awareness to senior management of the relevance of geospatial information and its management, including the collection, creation, production, dissemination and use of geospatial data, aiming at effective cooperation and collaboration of geospatial activities, in relation to the mandates of the United Nations system;

2.3 Ensure the availability and accessibility of coordinated geospatial information and related systems to create quality, timely and reliable products and effective services to support Member States and United Nations mandates on local, national, regional and global issues, including the Sustainable Development Goals;

2.4 Promote the use and relevance of geospatial information for Member States and the United Nations for better decision-making through increased collaboration and coordination of geospatial information resources, data, skills, technology and policies within the United Nations; and

2.5 Support the aims and objectives of UN-GGIM, including in the development of norms, frameworks, principles and guides, and capacity development initiatives, as appropriate.

3. Key functions and activities

3.1 Foster collaboration among United Nations system entities, including identifying and addressing overarching trends, shared interests and common topics;

3.2 Provide a platform within the United Nations system through which geospatial knowledge, education and training, technology, practices, data, needs, partnerships and collaborative arrangements with external entities can be shared, so as to avoid duplication and create synergies;

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[1] United Nations system refers to departments, regional commissions, agencies, funds and programmes hereinafter grouped under the term "entity" or "entities", acronyms of entities are provided in the attachment

[2] Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management, Report of the seventh session (2017), Decision 7/115
http://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/7th-Session/documents/GGIM-7_Report_e.pdf

[3] ECOSOC 2016/27: Strengthening institutional arrangements on geospatial information management, paragraph 5
http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/RES/2016/27

3.3   Consider and recommend an overarching governance model on geospatial information management within the United Nations system, in accordance with existing mandates;

3.4   Identify and engage UN-GGIM concerning challenges that may arise while fulfilling various United Nations mandates in relation to the availability and management of geospatial information, and propose initiatives and activities, as appropriate, to address such challenges; and

3.5   Develop biennial work programs, informed by broad consultation within the Network, to create synergies and address the objectives of the Network while ensuring that there are no overlaps or duplication of initiatives.

4.   **Membership and Composition**

4.1   United Nations system entities that wish to participate as a member of the Network will designate their most senior professional working in the field of geospatial information management as their designated representative. An alternate representative should also be nominated in addition to the designated representative. A member may replace its designated or alternate representatives by informing the Chair and the Secretariat.

4.2   Any geospatial practitioners of the United Nations system are able to participate and contribute actively to the proceedings and work of the Network, in close coordination with their entity's designated representative.

4.3   Membership in the Network places no obligations on the participating entities. A member may withdraw from the Network at any time upon informing the Chair and the Secretariat.

4.4   Participation in the work of the Network is solely on a 'best effort' basis and within existing resources. The Network has no access to any budgets and cannot therefore provide any type of funding for its membership and activities. However, the Network can be funded by voluntary contributions from external agencies that may wish to support the activities of the Network.

4.5   A list of members, designated representatives and alternate representatives will be maintained by the Secretariat and reviewed annually. The list will be made available to the Chair, Network Steering Group and members of the Network.

5.   **Governance, Term of Office and Procedural**

5.1   A Network Steering Group (Steering Group) will have oversight of the Network. The Steering Group will comprise a Chair, two Vice-Chairs, the Secretariat and two representatives from each of the following groups: a) UN Secretariat; b) UN Regional Commissions; c) UN funds, programmes, research and others; and d) UN specialized agencies and-related Organizations (refer to Attachment), if they are not already represented by the Chair and Vice-Chairs.

5.2   The Steering Group will consider matters brought to the attention of the Network by members and/or UN-GGIM, and discuss and propose or otherwise plans of action for consideration by the Network.

5.3   The Chair of the Network will call for and preside over meetings of the Network and the Steering Group. The Chair may speak on behalf of the Network on matters previously discussed and agreed upon by members of the Network, and will represent the Network on the Expanded Bureau of UN-GGIM.

5.4   The two Vice-Chairs of the Network will actively support the Chair to advance the aim, objectives and functions of the Network.

5.5   Members of the Network Steering Group will be selected at the Network's Plenary Meeting for a term of two years. Members of the Network Steering Group may serve for no more than two consecutive terms.

5.6   The Network Steering Group will oversee and assess the activities of the Network, including that of any of the Network's sub-groups or task teams, and make recommendations for future work programmes.

5.7   The Secretariat will preside over the selection process for the members of the Network Steering Group, the Chair and Vice-Chairs. Candidates must be from members that have the support of two other members, one of whom shall be from another group (Attachment). The selection will be by simple majority decision of all members present and participating in the selection process. There will be no more than one representative from each member participating in the selection process, either as a candidate or in the decision.

5.8   The Network may set up time-bound ad-hoc Task Groups consisting of members of the Network. These Task Groups, voluntary in nature, will be disbanded after completion of their tasks, reporting its outcomes and agreement by the Network.

5.9   Members will contribute to the deliverables of the Network, and will generally adopt action plans, reports, statements, and other deliverables by consensus. If consensus cannot be achieved at any given time the Chair, or in their absence the Vice-Chair, may call for individual comments and opinions regarding the deliverables, and will be considered adopted when not less than two thirds of the members present comment in favor.

5.10   The Network will review its terms of reference every two years during a plenary meeting.

6.   Frequency of Meetings

6.1   The Network is expected to convene annual plenary meetings coinciding with the annual sessions of UN-GGIM.

6.2   The Network will hold special meetings upon request and as required from its members or from UN-GGIM.

6.3   The Network will operate virtually and meet when the opportunity arises, normally in concurrence with related UN-GGIM events.

7.   Reporting Procedure

7.1   The Network will report to UN-GGIM at its annual session, and will include the preparation of written reports and background documents as appropriate. The preparation of an annual report to UN-GGIM will be coordinated by the Network Steering Group in consultation with the members.

8.   Secretariat

8.1   The UN-GGIM Secretariat[4] will serve as the Secretariat of the Network.

8.2   In cooperation with the Chair, the Secretariat will coordinate and assist with the organization and preparation of the agenda for the meetings of the Network, prepare the annual report, issue notices, assist with the selection of the Steering Group and perform any other support activities deemed appropriate and necessary.

9.   Direction

9.1   The UN-GGIM Bureau can periodically review and evaluate the progress of the Network. It may propose revision of the terms of reference based on the accomplishments of the Network and any new items that UN-GGIM would like the Network to consider and address.

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[4]   Comprised of the Geospatial Information Section (DFS) and the Statistics Division (DESA). Resolution 2011/24: Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management, para 7. http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/docs/2011/res%202011.24.pdf

Attachment
United Nations System Network
Listing of entities, acronyms and groupings

Groupings	Acronyms	Entities
SECRETARIAT	EOSG	Executive Office of the Secretary-General
	DESA	Department for Economic and Social Affairs
	DFS	Department of Field Support
	DGACM	Department of General Assembly & Conference Management
	DM	Department of Management
	DPA	Department of Political Affairs
	DPI	Department of Public Information
	DPKO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations
	OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
	DSS	Department of Safety and Security
	OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights
	OIOS	Office of Internal Oversight Services
	OLA	Office of Legal Affairs
	OSAA	Office of the Special Adviser on Africa
	PBSO	Peacebuilding Support Office
	SRSG/CAAC	Office of the SRSG for Children in Armed Conflict
	SRSG/SVC	Office of the SRSG on Sexual Violence in Conflict
	ODA	Office of Disarmament Affairs

	ODC	Office on Drugs and Crime
	OHRLLS	Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States
	OOSA	Office for Outer Space Affairs
REGIONAL COMMISSIONS	**ECA**	Economic Commission for Africa
	ECE	Economic Commission for Europe
	ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America & the Caribbean
	ESCAP	Economic & Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
	ESCWA	Economic & Social Commission for Western Asia
FUNDS, PROGRAMMES, RESEARCH & OTHERS	**UNDP**	United Nations Development Programme
	UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
	UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
	UN-HABITAT	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
	UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
	WFP	World Food Programme
	UNIDIR	United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research
	UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training and Research
	UNSSC	United Nations System Staff College
	UNU	United Nations University
	ITC	International Trade Centre
	UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

	UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
	UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
	UNRWA	United Nations Relief & Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
	UN-Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality & the Empowerment of Women
SPECIALIZED AGENCIES	**FAO**	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
	ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
	IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
	ILO	International Labour Organization
	IMF	International Monetary Fund
	IMO	International Maritime Organization
	ITU	International Telecommunication Union
	UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
	UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
	WTO	World Tourism Organization
	UPU	Universal Postal Union
	WHO	World Health Organization
	WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization
	WMO	World Meteorological Organization
	World Bank	World Bank Group

RELATED ORGANIZATIONS		
	CBD	Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity
	CCD	Secretariat of the Convention to Combat Desertification
	UNFCCC	Secretariat of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
	GEF	Global Environment Facility
	IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
	UNISDR	UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
	UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
	UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
	UNV	United Nations Volunteers
	WTO	World Trade Organization