
Economic and Social Council

29 July 2019

Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management

Ninth session

New York, 7-9 August 2019

Item 4 of the provisional agenda*

Contribution of regional committees and thematic groups to the global geospatial information agenda

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Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The present paper contains the report of the contributions of regional committees and thematic groups to the global geospatial information agenda for consideration by the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management.

This present report provides information on the contributions and achievements of the following nine regional committees and thematic groups: Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for Asia and the Pacific; Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for the Americas; Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for Africa; Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for Europe; Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for the Arab States; United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management Geospatial Societies; United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management Academic Network; United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management Private Sector Network; and the United Nations System Network. The present report contains information on the activities and achievements of the regional committees and thematic groups since the eighth session of the Committee of Experts, held in New York from 1 to 3 August 2018, including the regional meetings and workshops held during the intersessional period. The report also provides an overview of their work in the following areas: (a) sustainable development; (b) Integrated Geospatial Information Framework; (c) land administration and management; (d) disaster risk reduction; (e) fundamental geospatial data themes; (f) integration of statistical and geospatial information; (g) legal and policy frameworks; (h) regional and international collaboration and capacity development; (i) global geodetic reference frame; (j) marine geospatial information (k) priority issues and challenges; (l) future plans and events; and (m) efforts towards a more structured and sustainable coordination approach for geospatial information management activities within the United Nations system.

*E/C.20/2020/1.

I. Introduction

A. Evolution of the Committee of Experts coordination architecture

1. The current global-regional coordination architecture of the Committee of Experts, consisting of five regional committees and four networks was born out of the need to create a mechanism that would be able to capture, discuss and address ‘national to regional to global’ geospatial information management issues and challenges.

2. A global-regional coordination architecture enables the Committee of Experts to execute its objectives and functions as per United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) resolution 2011/24.¹ Specifically, section 1(a) of the resolution states, “to provide a forum for coordination and dialogue among Member States, and between Member States and relevant international organizations, including the United Nations regional cartographic conferences and their permanent committees on spatial data infrastructures, on enhanced cooperation in the field of global geospatial information.” Further, a coordination architecture is supported in ECOSOC resolution 2016/27² which stressed the need to strengthen the coordination and coherence of global geospatial information management through appropriate coordination mechanisms, including in the broader United Nations system; that the regional commissions provide relevant support, upon request and as appropriate, to the work of the regional bodies of UN-GGIM; and that the outcomes and benefits of the activities of those bodies be equally disseminated to all Member States in each region.

3. Since 2011, the global-regional architecture of the Committee of Experts has expanded and can now be described as mature given the number and type of stakeholders participating. Initially, the existing convening mechanisms on cartography and geospatial technologies in the regions of Asia-Pacific and the Americas were renamed and aligned to the Committee of Experts. This was then followed by the establishment of regional committees for Europe, the Arab States and Africa. The creation of five regional UN-GGIM committees in Asia and the Pacific, the Americas, the Arab States, Europe and Africa, with each playing a vital role in advocacy efforts, will provides a strong mechanism to promote, discuss and enhance coordination among Member States within the regions on issues of importance to the Committee, and to liaise with the Secretariat on major developments in the intervening periods between sessions of the Committee of Experts.³ The architecture was strengthened and expanded with the addition of four informal Networks, the International Geospatial Societies (a founding member of the Committee of Experts as JB-GIS), Academic, Private Sector and the United Nations System Networks.

4. The engagement of the global geospatial community through the global-regional coordination architecture is in line with the overall directions and aspirations of the United Nations General Assembly and ECOSOC; to be more focused and relevant, to better serve Member States in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to address the most pressing challenges facing the international community. This is supported in General Assembly resolution A/RES/73/17 on the impact of rapid technological change on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets, which recognizes the need for Governments, the private sector, international organizations, civil society, the technical and academic communities and all relevant stakeholders to be aware of the impact of the latest developments in rapid technological change on achieving the SDGs, which continue to require international and multi-stakeholder cooperation in order to benefit from opportunities and address challenges.

¹ http://ggim.un.org/documents/E_Res_2011.24_en.pdf

² E/RES/2016/27

³ E/C.20/2015/14/Add.1 “Programme review of the work of the Committee of Experts during the 2011-2015 period”

B. Mandate and objectives of the Regional Committees

5. Having established the need for a global-regional architecture, this present paper now reviews the mandates and objectives of each of the five Regional Committees of UN-GGIM. The rules of procedure governing the operations of the Committee of Experts is silent on the creation and operations of its subsidiary bodies. This has meant that the Regional Committees and the Networks are, in the main, self-governing and are able to draft, adopt and act on their own rules of procedures. Focusing solely on the Regional Committees, all except Africa have statutes governing their operations, with clauses stating that they operate under the purview of the Secretariat. UN-GGIM Africa has a statute and rules of procedure. The statute and objectives of the Regional Committees, except for Europe, are similar in structure and rules. This is expected, given that the statutes of the other Regional Committees were drafted based on Asia-Pacific's which has the distinction of being the first Regional Committee established within the Committee of Experts architecture. A comparison of the objectives as stated in the statutes for all five Regional Committees again reveals similarities, except for Europe and Africa as shown in Table 1.

Objectives	Asia Pacific	Americas	Arab States	Europe	Africa
Convene annual meetings- coordination and dialogue, share best practices and experiences	X	X	X	X	X
Establish regional reference frame and align to global geodetic reference frame	X	X	X	O	X
Capacity development	X	X	X	X	X
Development of authoritative sources geospatial information	X	X	X	O	O
Establish and promote institutional arrangements and frameworks	X	X	X	X	X
Encourage interoperability, use and exchange of geospatial information	X	X	X	X	X
Development of guidelines for discovery and access, integration and dissemination of geospatial information	X	X	X	O	X
Contribute to UN-GGIM global	X	X	X	X	O
Coordination with other organizations- e.g. UN Regional Commissions	X	X	X	X	X
Implementation of 3D cadastre	X	O	O	O	O

Table 1: Comparative Table of Objectives per UN-GGIM Regional Committee.

Note: X means included in statute; O means not included in statute.

6. This information is being brought to the attention of the Committee of Experts to highlight that Regional Committees can review, amend, strengthen and update their rules of procedures and objectives to ensure that they reflect economic, human, institutional, governance, technological or other changes and challenges that may influence the efficient and successful operation of their Committees. As the Regional Committees evolve and grow, so will the need to re-examine their founding working arrangements, objectives and work programmes.

C. Measures of Success

7. The ten-year anniversary of the establishment of the Committee of Experts is in one year. In this same period of time, the Committee will need to consider and respond to the request from ECOSOC⁴ to report back to the Council on the implementation of the resolution on ‘Strengthening institutional arrangements on geospatial information management’, including on its continued efforts to work with the Statistical Commission; with the entire United Nations system; to integrate geospatial and statistical information systems and, in this context, to examine the strengthening of the institutional arrangements of the Committee. Therefore, it may be an opportune time to examine the operations of the global-regional architecture within the purview of the Committee of Experts, and the activities being undertaken towards strengthening the institutional arrangements of the Committee.

8. For this intersessional period, the Regional Committees for Africa and the Americas have reported on programmes to support spatial data infrastructures (SDIs). UN-GGIM: Africa shared that they are conducting an assessment and gap analysis on the implementation of SDIs for each African country and proposes to identify a set of key indicators to be used for future tracking of national SDI status across Africa. UN-GGIM: Americas reported on their 2018 diagnosis of the current state of the geospatial data infrastructures in their region. This was augmented with another assessment in 2019, which will enable them to do a comparative analysis and to evaluate and monitor SDI development in the Americas.

9. Taking into consideration the maxim ‘what gets measured is what gets done’, the Committee of Experts could consider the applicability of the regional assessment and monitoring programmes developed by the Regional Committees for Africa and the Americas. For example, the degree of harmonization with the global strategic directions and efforts of the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework, and could other Regional Committees benefit from the norms and practices being developed by the Regional Committees of Africa and the Americas to monitor and evaluate SDI’s. Further, could the considerable experiences of UN-GGIM: Europe and the INSPIRE⁵ initiative be translated into practical guidance for other regions? Are we adequately leveraging and/or capturing the benefits of these efforts and are we able to measure success? Further, could consideration be given to a periodic evaluation of the performance of the Regional Committees and, if so, what factors could be used as possible measures of achievement?

D. Regional Committee reporting structure and format

10. Within the global-regional architecture, each of the five Regional Committees and four Networks are invited to report annually to the Committee of Experts on their activities, achievements, challenges, and their future work plans. Given the national and regional variations in geospatial information management evolution, maturity, structures, and operations, the Secretariat has not provided definitive guidelines on the structure and format of this annual reporting, which is provided under this standing agenda item of the Committee of Experts. Geospatial information management is technology driven, and this propels changes in outlook, growth paths and work programmes at the national, regional and global levels, which further influences the content and scope of reports.

⁴ E/RES/2016/27

⁵ The Infrastructure for spatial information in Europe (INSPIRE) directive aims to create a European Union SDI.

11. Over the past eight years, a significant number of regional and national reports with substantial technical, administrative, institutional and operational geospatial information management content have been submitted within the UN-GGIM global-regional architecture. This valuable information is arguably not yet well enough organized and made available and accessible in a coherent manner to add value to the management, monitoring, evaluation and further development and refinement of the operations of our community of global geospatial stakeholders.

12. One of the early work items of the Committee of Experts was the creation of the UN-GGIM knowledge base,⁶ acknowledged as a valuable tool for information sharing and capacity building. In 2016, the Secretariat was requested to continue supporting, maintaining and improving the knowledge base, in close cooperation with the secretariats of the Regional Committees and the international organizations. While this tool has the potential to be a global repository of national and regional reports, guidelines, standards, information and knowledge to support the global geospatial information management community, it is not yet resourced in a sustainable way. The knowledge base has always been “work in progress” and its content needs to be updated and continuously reviewed. However, its management and maintenance require the input of human and financial resources that are not currently available within the Secretariat.

13. Given the breadth and depth of reporting now being made available under this agenda item, the Secretariat has been grappling with the best means by which the reports submitted by the Regional Committees and Networks are effectively presented to the Committee of Experts. The objective is to encourage clear and effective communication among all stakeholders, eliminate the duplication of information presented (summaries, combined reports and individual reports) and minimize the effort to prepare these reports. Currently, a summary report is provided by the Secretariat, which is a combination of the Regional Committee and Network reports, which are all provided in their original form as background documents to this present report.

14. At its fifth session in August 2015, the Committee of Experts requested that this agenda item be elevated from one of the last agenda items of the session to one of the first. This was done on the basis that the establishment of the global-regional architecture was to be completed, and the considerable information provided would inform other areas of the work of the Committee of Experts that followed on the agenda.

15. The Committee of Experts may wish to consider whether the present arrangements and modalities for the preparation and submission of the reports of the Regional Committees and Networks are adequate. From 2012 to 2014, all reports from the Regional Committees and Networks were compiled and presented as one consolidated report. From 2015 to 2018, summaries of the Regional Committees and Networks were compiled and presented as the consolidated report, and the individual reports of the Regional Committees and Networks were provided as background documents. For this current session, an outline of each of the Regional Committee and Network reports was compiled to create this present consolidated report. The individual reports of the Regional Committees and Networks are provided as background documents to this report. The Secretariat wishes to determine which of the options, or alternate options, best suit the Committee of Experts, noting that as per established procedure a summary and supporting report are required documents to be submitted for consideration by the Committee of Experts for each agenda item.

⁶ <http://ggim.un.org/knowledgebase/>

E. Dates of next Regional Committee plenary meetings

16. As per standard operational practices, the UN-GGIM Regional Committees convene annual plenary meetings. The schedule of upcoming Regional Committee meetings for the intersessional period is shown in Table 2 below.

Regional Committees	Date of next Plenary Meeting	Location
Americas	6th 11 October 2019	Mexico City, Mexico
Asia-Pacific	8th 3-5 November 2019	Canberra, Australia
Africa	5th 18-20 November 2019	Kigali, Rwanda
Arab States	7th 17-19 February 2020	Algiers, Algeria
Europe	7th June 2020	Geneva, Switzerland

Table 2: Dates of Regional Committee meetings for the intersessional period.

II. Summaries – Regional Committees

F. UN-GGIM Asia and the Pacific

17. For the reporting period, the UN-GGIM Regional Committee for Asia and the Pacific had the distinction of implementing paragraph 11 of ECOSOC resolution 2016/27⁷, which “requests that the regional commissions provide relevant support, upon request and as appropriate, to the work of the regional bodies ...”. The seventh plenary meeting of UN-GGIM for Asia and the Pacific, convened on 22 November 2018 in Deqing, China, resolved to transfer the secretariat services for the Regional Committee to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) from a Member State. At the meeting a new Executive Board was elected for the 2018-2021 period.

18. The report further details the Regional Committee’s achievements, the activities of its three working groups – (Geodetic Reference Frame, Cadastre and Land Management, and Integrating Geospatial Information and Statistics), its priorities and issues, and future meetings.

19. Two significant achievements which contributed to the implementation of the UN-GGIM regional and global agenda were: (i) two resolutions were adopted at the 75th session of the ESCAP Commission in May 2019 related to geospatial information applications for sustainable development; and (ii) the financial and human resource contribution of donors and Member States to the UN-GGIM Asia Pacific Secretariat geospatial and statistics work programme.

G. UN-GGIM: Americas

20. The annual report of the UN-GGIM Regional Committee for the Americas details its background, objectives, committee structure, work items, special projects, update on the activities of its three working groups, the contributions made by its collaborators such as the Academic Network for the Americas, GeoSUR, SIRGAS, and PAIGH. Further, the report details the capacity-building achievements conducted under the Caribbean Project, which officially ended in November 2018, and also shared progress made in the Chile-Mexico Project. The report also describes the Regional Committee’s collaborative activities being

⁷ E/RES/2016/27

conducted in partnership with the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC).

21. The fifth plenary was held in November 2018 in Mexico City and was attended by 84 participants from 32 countries of which 13 were Caribbean states. Areas of work covered included, the Statistical and Geospatial Framework for the Americas (MEGA) project, a report on the diagnosis conducted by their working group on disasters and also an update on the diagnosis of the current state of geospatial data infrastructures in the region and related interactive dashboard which displays the results, done by the working group on SDI.

22. Included in the report are the approaches and partnerships forged by UN-GGIM Americas to finance the participation of its members in regional and global meetings and workshops and to support its projects.

H. UN-GGIM: Africa

23. UN-GGIM Africa convened its fourth plenary meeting in October 2018 in Addis Ababa, and was attended by over 70 participants, from 18 African countries. The executive Board was renewed with the Chair from Senegal, the Vice Chairs from Botswana and Algeria, and the rapporteurs from Cameroon and Uganda. Ethiopia was elected as an ex-Officio member of the Bureau, without voting rights.

24. UN-GGIM Africa's report details the membership of their five working groups, (African Geodetic Reference Frame, Fundamental Geospatial Datasets and Standards, Institutional Arrangements and Legal Frameworks, Capacity and Capability Development, and Integration of Geospatial and Statistical Information for Sectoral Applications) and provides an update on the work being done by each group.

25. The report also details UN-GGIM Africa's participation and contribution to UN-GGIM's expert groups, working groups, and meetings. The priority issues and challenges being experienced by the Regional Committee are identified, in addition to their future plans.

I. UN-GGIM: Europe

26. UN-GGIM Europe's report provides an overview of its activities during the intersessional period. This included the convening of their sixth plenary meeting in June 2019 in Brussels, Belgium, which was attended by 24 Member States and 11 international and observer organizations. The report also gives an update on the work of its three working groups (Core Data, Data Integration, and Geodetic Reference frame - Europe). It also details the contribution to UN-GGIM global activities, and regional and other international collaborative and capacity development initiatives.

27. Significant achievements were the collaboration agreement reached between UN-GGIM Europe and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), to pursue joint activities in the period 2018-2020, and the knowledge sharing, and capacity development programs being pursued in cooperation with Eurostat and EuroGeographics. Another highlight of the period was the delivery of tasks and input to the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals Indicators Working Group on Geospatial Information by the Working Group on Data Integration.

J. UN-GGIM: Arab States

28. UN-GGIM Arab States convened its sixth plenary meeting in February 2019 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. All four working groups of the Regional Committee also met within the construct of its sixth plenary meeting. The plenary meeting was attended by 57 representatives from 14 Arab countries. A new Executive Board was elected, consisting of:

Chair –Saudi Arabia; and the Vice Chairs – Algeria and Jordan. The four Working Group Chairs were also elected.

29. During the plenary meeting, Working Group 2 – Fundamental Data and Geospatial Standards launched the first version of the Regional Committee’s Geo-Portal. The Regional Committee had a workshop to finalize the technical design and the implementation of the proposed Geo-Portal in Riyadh in December 2018, where the technical details of the Geo-Portal was agreed. The first version of the Regional Committee’s Geo-Portal and the Arabic Data Dictionary are now online.

30. The Regional Committee organized a workshop on legal and policy frameworks for geospatial information management in conjunction with its sixth plenary meeting in February 2019. The workshop raise awareness and understanding in addressing legal and policy considerations in geospatial information management.

III. Summaries – Networks

K. UN-GGIM: Geospatial Societies

31. The UN-GGIM Geospatial Societies annual report provides an update on the activities of its member organizations. Besides the usual (bi)annual conference activities of the individual societies, the Geospatial Societies actively contributed to the organization of the United Nations World Geographic Information Congress (UNWGIC) in Deqing, China, in November 2018. For future Geospatial Societies events it is intended to make UN-GGIM and its activities more visible.

L. UN-GGIM: Academic Network

32. The UN-GGIM Academic Network was established in 2016 and has been actively implementing its work plan (2018-2019). The most significant achievement is the publication of the book entitled “SDGs Connectivity Dilemma: Land and Geospatial Information for Urban and Rural Resilience”, which will be launched at this ninth session of the Committee of Experts. In addition, the Network has continuously contributed and participated in several UN-GGIM events, meetings, and international conferences, including in the development of the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework and its Implementation Guide.

33. In the past year, the Academic Network has expanded its membership to 45 universities and research centres. The Network is represented in all continents and has significant presence in countries known for their research on geospatial and land matters.

34. Through an online open advisory meeting, conducted in April 2019, the Network has determined its Work Plan for the next two years (2019 – 2021). The goals of this plan include: to organize parallel forums, seminars or academic events at key UN-GGIM events and meetings; addressing global major challenges; expand its member base in all regions; and to build and populate an online registry of technical capacities across the members of the Network.

M. UN-GGIM Private Sector Network

35. The objective of the Private Sector Network is to facilitate a direct connection and communication for the private sector to work with Member States towards achieving success in global geospatial initiatives. Recognizing the expertise of the private sector, the Network is able to provide opportunities to assist with the creation of developing policies, processes, practices, capacities and recommendations for geospatial information infrastructure at national, regional, and global levels. The function of the PSN is to provide a private sector view into the Committee of Experts, its 5 Regional Committees, Subcommittee, and Expert and Working Groups.

N. United Nations Systems Network

36. The United Nations System Network is the most recent Network established within the UN-GGIM architecture, established in August 2018 at the eighth session of the Committee of Experts with the adoption of decision 8/115. The Network's report to this ninth session details the activities undertaken to establish its governance and modalities, including the formation of a Steering Group, and the preparation of its initial work plan.

37. The composition of the Network's Steering Group is as follows: Chair – United Nations Environmental Programme; Vice Chairs – United Nations Children's Fund and United Nations Population Fund; and Members – Office of Legal Affairs, Department of Safety and Security, International Telecommunication Union, Food and Agriculture Organization, United Nations Institute for Training and Research, Office of Information and Communications Technology, UN-Habitat, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Economic Commission for Europe, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, and the Secretariat.

38. At its online meeting on 1 July 2019, the Steering Group discussed an initial draft work plan and considered enhancing outreach and promotion within its activities. It was discussed and agreed that for clear and simple branding, messaging and communication, it is preferable for the name of the Network to be identified with geospatial information management and agreed that the Network be known instead as the United Nations Geospatial Network.

39. The Network is requesting that the Committee of Experts note the composition of its Steering Group and consider the endorsement of an improved name for the Network, from 'United Nations Systems Network' to 'United Nations Geospatial Network'; and to take note and provide guidance on its draft work plan.

IV. Points for discussion

40. The Committee of Experts is invited to:

(a) Take note of the present report and background documents of the Regional Committees and Networks, and express its views on their operation and achievements;

(b) Take note of the dates and locations of the next annual plenary meetings of the five Regional Committees

i. UN-GGIM: Americas - Sixth plenary meeting on 11 October 2019 in Mexico City, Mexico, in collaboration with the Latin America Geospatial Forum;

ii. UN-GGIM: Asia Pacific - Eighth plenary meeting from 3-5 November 2019 in Canberra, Australia, in conjunction with the GEO Week and Ministerial Summit from 4-9 November 2019;

iii. UN-GGIM: Africa - Fifth plenary meeting from 18-20 November 2019 in Kigali, Rwanda, in conjunction with the AfricaGIS 2019 Conference;

iv. UN-GGIM: Arab States - Seventh plenary meeting from 17-19 February 2020 in Algiers, Algeria;

v. UN-GGIM: Europe - Seventh plenary meeting in June 2020 in Geneva, Switzerland;

(c) Note the efforts to establish the United Nations Systems Network including its Steering Group as detailed in paragraph 37 above, provide guidance on the draft work plan of the Network as outlined in Annex 1 of their report (provided as a background document), and express its view on the request to rename the Network to the United Nations Geospatial Network; and

(d) Express its views and provide guidance on the contributions provided by the Regional Committees and Networks, including: alignment with global strategic directions; possible evaluation mechanisms; optimal and preferred arrangements for the preparation and submission of reports; and how the UN-GGIM knowledge base may be maintained in the future.