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Activities related to sustainable development and the post-2015 development agenda

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Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The present paper contains the report of the Secretariat on the activities related to sustainable development and the post-2015 development agenda.

At its fourth session, held in New York from 6 to 8 August 2014, the Committee of Experts adopted decision 4/102, in which it expressed its appreciation for efforts promoting the importance of reliable geospatial information in measuring and monitoring the goals of the post-2015 development agenda. It also noted that the current debate on a new United Nations development agenda provided a unique opportunity for the Committee of Experts to raise the visibility and awareness of the importance of geospatial information as an enabler of sustainable development. The Committee of Experts agreed that the understanding and use of geographic and geospatial information in sustainable development, particularly at the policy and decision-making levels, needed to be enhanced, encouraged Member States to ensure that the initiatives and activities related to sustainable development included geospatial information in their national frameworks, and took note of their commitment towards the ongoing discussion on disaster risk reduction.

The report describes the increase in multiple advocacy initiatives that demonstrate the role of geospatial information in sustainable development and the efforts to consolidate the mission of the working group on a global map for sustainable development and mainstream it in the sustainable development context. It also highlights particular efforts in that regard that were undertaken at key global events, including the third High-level Forum on Global Geospatial Information Management on the theme “Sustainable development with geospatial Information”, held in Beijing from 22 to 24 October 2014; the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, held in Sendai, Japan, from 14 to 18 March 2015, at which innovations in the application of earth observations, satellite imagery, geographic and geospatial information, robotics and information communications technology were shown to support the implementation of the post-

* E/C.20/2015/1.

2015 framework for disaster risk reduction; and a side event on the theme "Unleashing the power of where to make the world a better place: how geographic information contributes to achieving the sustainable development goals", which was held on the margins of the intergovernmental negotiations on sustainable development conducted at United Nations Headquarters in April 2015. In parallel, the global geospatial community has also contributed to the 2015 edition of the United Nations Global Sustainable Development Report, with a special focus on new data approaches for monitoring sustainable development progress in Africa.

I. Introduction

1. In recognition of the growing importance of geospatial information globally, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) established the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) in July 2011[1] as an intergovernmental mechanism for addressing global challenges regarding the use of geospatial policy making in the field of geospatial information management. In this regard, the Committee of Experts has been monitoring the dialogue surrounding the sustainable development and post-2015 development agenda from a geospatial perspective.

2. At its second session, held in New York in August 2012, the Committee of Experts 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, particularly in the areas of national disaster risk reduction strategies and plans (including comprehensive hazard and risk assessments), and for sustainable development, policymaking, programming and project operations.

3. At its third session, held in July 2013, the Committee of Experts expressed its appreciation for the active efforts of the Secretariat to reach out to decision makers on the importance of the use of reliable geospatial information for sustainable development, and to encourage national geospatial information authorities to actively contribute to sustainable development discussions and activities.

4. At its fourth session, held in August 2014, the Committee of Experts noted that the debates surrounding the United Nations development agenda provides a unique opportunity to raise the visibility and importance of geospatial information as an enabler for sustainable development, but the level of understanding and use at the policy and decision-making levels, remains somewhat limited. During the session, the Committee invited the Bureau to consult with existing Working Groups to make best use of the available resources and to increase its synergy and streamline those which had common interest. In this regard, the Bureau decided, in December 2014, to discontinue the Working Group on a Global Map for Sustainable Development[2] (see Annex 1) and identified its agenda item as an area which could fortify the United Nations development agenda debate under the framework of sustainable development and the post-2015 agenda.

5. This report provides information on efforts carried out by the Secretariat and the Committee in the context of increasing awareness of the role geospatial information can play in evidence-based decision making in the context of the emerging sustainable development goals (SDGs) and post-2015 development agenda, as the international community prepares for a new era of sustainable development. The Committee of Experts is invited to take note of the report and to express its views on the way forward for the international community, under the coordination of the United Nations, to work with all stakeholders to ensure geospatial information is a recognised and enduring capability in the post-2015 development agenda. Points for discussion and decision are provided in paragraph 32.

[1] E/2011/24 Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management

[2] E/C.20/2014/6/Add.1 Global map for sustainable development

II. Third High Level Forum on UN-GGIM

6. The UN-GGIM High Level Forums are convened as a mandate from ECOSOC to convene global forums to promote comprehensive dialogue on global geospatial information management with all relevant governments, non-governmental organizations and the private sector. Hosted by the National Administration of Surveying, Mapping and Geoinformation (NASG) of China, the Third High Level Forum on UN Global Geospatial Information Management was convened in Beijing, China, from 22-24 October 2014. Under the overarching theme of "Sustainable Development with Geospatial Information", the 261 participants from 44 countries, international organisations and industry discussed the critical roles of geospatial information science, technology and innovation, as tools that are able to integrate the three pillars (economic, social, environmental) of sustainable development, and as important geographic elements of the post-2015 development agenda.

7. During the Forum's Ministerial Segment, participating Ministers indicated that there is a growing understanding of the social and economic benefits of geospatial information, as government's which do not embrace and leverage Information Communications Technologies (ICT) will lose out on their development and mission delivery opportunities. They also recognised the need for coordination across ministries and agencies domestically, but also the importance of working together across borders.

8. The Forum noted the reality that no country has yet achieved a complete sustainable development phase and, given this sobering reality, that the Committee of Experts should consider elements including: the need for geospatial indicators to better monitor and measure sustainable development; the importance of integrating land and water related information; and the urgency of translating geospatial information into targets and indicators under a monitoring framework, where data needs are recognised as an integral part of the development agenda. The Forum also recognised the reality that if the geospatial community was not able to provide the appropriate information in a timely manner, decision-makers will look for alternate sources, and hence, the imperative to increase advocacy efforts across the global geospatial community that we are at the crossroads of opportunity or missed opportunity – or it is "now or never".

9. Recognizing the importance of geospatial information in national and global development, participants issued the Beijing Declaration at the conclusion of the Third High Level Forum[3]. They resolved to "urgently deploy their collective competencies and capacities to advance the critical role of geospatial information in the ongoing debate on sustainable development and the post-2015 development agenda, particularly with regard to measuring and monitoring SDG targets and indicators consistently over space and time, and in doing so invite all national geospatial experts to work closely with their governments leading up to September 2015 to demonstrate the vital role of geospatial information for sustainable development."

[3] Beijing Declaration on Sustainable Development with Geospatial Information
http://ggim.un.org/docs/meetings/3rd%20HLF/Beijing%20Declaration%2024Oct2014%20FINAL.pdf

III. Global geospatial information management for sustainable development – contributions to the 2015 edition of the Global Sustainable Development Report

10. The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), created at the Rio+20 Conference, is the main United Nations platform dealing with sustainable development. It provides political leadership and guidance; follows up and reviews progress in implementing sustainable development commitments; addresses new and emerging sustainable development challenges; and enhances the integration of economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

11. Under its auspices, the Prototype Global Sustainable Development Report was released on 1 July 2014 as a first step of a dialogue between the different actors, especially those by the scientific community, to support decision-making by policy makers. Whilst geospatial information was referred to in the 2014 edition, the Committee was encouraged to consider providing inputs in its future editions with the support of the Secretariat.

12. The Secretariat was invited to participate in the drafting process of the 2015 edition of the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR), which is to be the publication aiming to strengthen the science-policy interface and released at the HLPF. The main contribution by the Secretariat was contained in a special focus chapter "Chapter 8: New Data Approaches for Monitoring Sustainable Development Progress: The Case of Africa" where geospatial tools such as geographic information systems (GIS) were seen as an effective platform to integrate multiple data sources including "big" and "small" data to provide evidence-based information for policy makers. With emphasis being provided by a number of exemplar African case studies, the chapter reflected on a number of key messages.

13. Firstly, without accurate geodetic information, data location and integration, particularly from multiple sources, is not fruitful. Hence, the adoption of the Global Geodetic Reference Frame for Sustainable Development[4] (GGRF) by the United Nations General Assembly could benefit the region of Africa further by having a global framework to improve the positional accuracy of data in Africa, through the regional initiatives of the African Geodetic Reference Frame (AFREF) project[5].

14. Secondly, there is an increasing tendency to now make use of multiple data sources: official statistics, geospatial and satellite data, big data, scientific data, data produced by NGOs and research foundations, data from the media, from the crowd and from the business sector. To explore the full potential of these data sources, the data needs to be easily accessible, interoperable and standardised – so that users are able to integrate difference sources and types of information. Data, and its metadata, needs to be open access (i.e. free and accessible).

15. Thirdly, geospatial information is increasingly being used in Africa, but more capacity building will be needed to scale up existing initiatives and to bring innovative applications from other parts of the world to Africa. The lack of consistent up-to-date base mapping – fundamental geographic datasets such as

[4] A/RES/69/266 A global geodetic reference frame for sustainable development http://ggim.un.org/docs/A_RES_69_266_E.pdf
[5] E/ECA/CODIST/1/6 http://repository.uneca.org/bitstream/handle/10855/3432/bib.%2027815_I.pdf?sequence=1

geodetic control, elevation, drainage, transport, land cover, geographic names, land tenure, etc. – across Africa remains a challenge, although individual countries are making progress.

16. The continued contribution to the GSDR can be seen as a useful mechanism to continue increase awareness of the policy makers on the possible application of geospatial technologies for effective evidence-based policy making, especially in light of the increasingly changing and disruptive technology advances that are happening in our industry.

IV. World Bank Land and Poverty Conference

17. In March 2014, the co-chair of the Committee of Experts was invited to prepare and deliver a paper on the "United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management: Its Role in Land Governance" during the Annual World Bank Land and Poverty Conference under the framework of "Integrating Land Governance into the Post-2015 Agenda: Harnessing Synergies for Implementation and Monitoring Impact".

18. Following the common interest by the World Bank and the geospatial community involved in land administration and management issues, the UN-GGIM was again represented during the World Bank Conference on Land and Poverty in March 2015. The co-chair of the Committee of Experts presented on "Geospatial Information: Making a difference to national, regional and global prosperity", showcasing the aims and the work of the Committee. Additionally, the Secretariat participated in the Global Land Indicators Expert Group Meeting as part of a collaborative and inclusive process for the development of the Global Land Indicators. Participants comprised more than 45 institutions representing United Nations agencies, inter-governmental organisations, international non-governmental organisations, local community organisations and academia from around the world. The successful meeting illustrates that the land management community are forging partnerships in order to ensure that enduring land indicators are incorporated in a structural context in the sustainable development goals. This coordinated approach is a model that the geospatial community can learn from and leverage.

V. World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction and the Sendai Framework

19. The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) serves as the focal point in the United Nations system for the coordination of disaster reduction to ensure synergies among the disaster reduction activities of the United Nations system and regional organizations, and activities in socio-economic and humanitarian fields. In accordance with the United Nations General Assembly resolution (A/RES/67/209), UNISDR, as the Secretariat, convened the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR) in Sendai, Japan on 14-18 March 2015. The Conference was attended by more than 6,500 participants including delegates from 187 countries.

20. The Sendai Declaration recognised the important role played by the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and

Communities to Disasters and identified the continued need to build such experiences. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030[6] was adopted at the conclusion of the Conference, and was later endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly. The Sendai Framework is the first major agreement of the post-2015 development agenda, with seven targets and four priorities for action.

21. The Framework specifically recognised the importance of developing, updating and disseminating location-based disaster risk information, including risk maps, to decision makers by using geospatial technology in understanding disaster risk at global, national and local levels, and how geospatial technology such as geographic information systems (GIS) can be useful to measure, collect, analyse, and disseminate relevant data. In this connection, the global geospatial community now needs to apply significant effort to demonstrate that the use of geospatial technology provides a fundamental and indispensable platform for evidence-based decision making for the policy makers in disaster risk reduction.

22. The geospatial community provided its contribution during the WCDDR together with the earth observation, information communications technology and robotics communities under the Working Session on "Earth Observation and High Technology to Reduce Risks" on 15 March 2015[7]. The contribution provided by Japan and the International Steering Committee for Global Mapping (ISCGM) on behalf of the geospatial community, emphasised the importance of taking full advantage of geospatial technology at every phase of disaster management, making special reference to the conclusions of the Chengdu Forum which was convened by UN-GGIM in Chengdu, China in October 2013.

23. On the margins of the WCDDR, the Geospatial Information Authority of Japan (GSI) and ISCGM organised a symposium entitled "Application of Geospatial Technology in Urban Disaster Management" to emphasise the above messages of how and why geospatial technology is critical at every phase of the disaster cycle, especially in urban environments where rapid population growth is increasing the vulnerabilities against hazards. ISCGM also submitted its voluntary commitment on its web portal for urban hazard maps[8] to monitor the progress of disaster risk reduction.

24. The continued disasters around the world since the fourth session of the Committee of Experts, such as the Vanuatu cyclone and Nepal earthquake, again illustrate the critical need for coordination at local, national, regional and global levels. Through the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction the global geospatial community has been encouraged to "promote real-time access to reliable data, make use of space and in situ information, including geographic information systems (GIS), and use information and communications technology innovations to enhance measurement tools and the collection, analysis and dissemination of data' in order to effectively provide timely evidence-based data and information for sustainable decision making and policy making for the future.

[6] A/69/L.67 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 http://www.preventionweb.net/files/resolutions/N1514318.pdf

[7] Multi-Stakeholder Segment, Working Session – Commitments to Implementation: Earth Observation and High Technology to reduce Risks http://www.wcdrr.org/conference/events/877

[8] ISCGM Urban Hazard Maps Web Platform: http://iscgm.org/uhm/hazardmaps.html

VI. Role of geospatial information for the goals and targets of the post-2015 development agenda

25. 2015 is a watershed year for the international community, as the United Nations is in the process of facilitating the Member States in defining a post-2015 development agenda. The agenda will be adopted and launched at a Summit, 25-27 September 2015, and will be convened as a high-level plenary meeting of the United Nations General Assembly. The adoption of the post-2015 development agenda will frame the United Nations development agenda, and hence, the global development agenda in the period to 2030. In preparation, a global consultation process has been ongoing since January 2015, including the launch of the zero draft of the outcome document for the UN Summit to adopt the Post-2015 Development Agenda[9]. At the time this report was prepared, the zero draft of the outcome document contained references to geospatial information in providing the evidence-base and supporting and tracking progress, but a number of Member States agreed that these references needed to be elaborated.

26. In the context of the post-2015 development agenda discussion, the statistical community, under the auspices of the Statistical Commission, has been considering its contribution on how to monitor and measure progress. In this regard, during the 46th session of the Statistical Commission, held in New York on 3-6 March 2015, the Commission endorsed a roadmap for the development and implementation of a global indicator framework, and the formation of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) consisting of 28 representatives of national statistical offices and, as observers, representatives of regional commissions and regional and international organizations and agencies, that will be tasked with developing a proposal for the indicator framework for the monitoring of the goals and targets of the post-2015 development agenda at the global level.

27. The first meeting of the IAEG-SDGs was held in New York 1-2 June 2015 to set up the process for the development of the indicator framework; develop a work plan and agree on the way forward; establish the methods of work of the group; and discuss technical issues, including the interlinkages across targets and data disaggregation. Whilst these interlinkages are essential, many of the targets are thematic based, which therefore provides an opportunity for the global geospatial community to ensure to communicate that geospatial information can provide the baseline to their respective indicator development, as they occur in a location-based environment. According to the proposed timeline for the indicator framework, which was released during this meeting, the intent is to report the finalised indicator framework during the 47th session of the Statistical Commission in March 2016[10]. In view of this, it is essential for the Committee of Experts to communicate to the statistical community the value proposition of geospatial information, as a fundamental baseline for the global indicator framework, and for the measuring and monitoring of the SDGs.

28. Parallel to the above ongoing debate the Secretariat, in partnership with UN-GGIM: Europe and the Group on Earth Observations (GEO), organised a very successful side event on the margins of the post-2015 intergovernmental

[9] Zero draft of the outcome document for the UN Summit to adopt the Post-2015 Development Agenda: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/7261Post-2015%20Summit%20-%202%20June%202015.pdf

[10] First Meeting of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on the Sustainable Development Goal Indicators: Way forward – possible timeline and process: https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B8n3WhOaTbGVRTYzRnJNbExwbDg/view?pli=1

negotiations (Means of implementation and global partnership for sustainable development) in New York, 21-24 April 2015. The side event entitled "Unleashing the Power of 'Where' to Make the World a Better Place: How Geographic Information Contributes to Achieving the SDGs" [11] and hosted by the Permanent Mission of Denmark, provided powerful messages that geospatial and earth observation information, combined with other information, will help countries to measure and monitor the implementation of the SDGs, including targets and indicators, in a consistent manner over time. In his introduction the Deputy Permanent Representative of Denmark to the United Nations stated that "many of the challenges we face in our discussions on sustainable development are crosscutting in nature and characterized by complex interlinkages – thus they are challenges which can benefit from unleashing the power of location (the 'where') – as the thing they have in common. In order to effectively measure, monitor and mitigate challenges we need to link demographic, statistical and environmental data together with the one thing they have in common – geographic location".

29. A promotional video "Everything that happens, happens somewhere"[12] was prepared by the Secretariat and presented at the start of the side event with the objective of demonstrating, in simple language, what geographic information is and how it can be used in sustainable development, and to increase the awareness of the importance of geospatial information to the UN diplomats. This video was well received and provided a considerable level of understanding.

30. A number of case study presentations from Member States described that significant opportunities exist in attaining the future we want by bringing together information about people and places from a variety of sources into national monitoring and evaluation systems. To achieve the SDGs, location information - collected at local, national and global levels, and supported by the best science, tools and technologies - is critical in monitoring targets and indicators. This will enable all nations to analyse and model data, create maps and detect and monitor change over time in a consistent and standardised manner. All this information is linked together by a common thread - geographic location.

31. The focus on the messaging that the post-2015 development debate provides a convergence moment for seizing the power of geospatial data and information, has had a positive increase of awareness within the diplomatic community. The increased inferences where the geospatial community has been working in tandem with the earth observation community has been positive, and must be seen as a model that should be replicated to other communities such as the disaster response community and the statistical community. The reality of different professional communities having the same intent on contributing to the United Nations development agenda provides the Committee of Experts the need to continue its awareness raising and education efforts at local, national, regional and global levels.

[11] Unleashing the power of "Where" to make the world a better place: How geographic information contributes to achieving the SDGs http://ggim.un.org/docs/SideEvent%20Post2015%2022Apr2015.pdf

[12] Everything that happens, happens somewhere: http://ggim.un.org/

VII. Points for discussion

32. **The Committee is invited to:**

(a) Take note of the report by the Secretariat and express its view on the way forward in addressing the activities related to sustainable development and the post-2015 development agenda;

(b) Take note of the observations that the global geospatial information community has considerable opportunity to provide appropriate information, in a timely manner, to policy and decision-makers in the overall context of sustainable development, and particularly with the increased interest in land administration and management, environmental data, disaster risk reduction, and integration within the statistical and earth observation communities;

(c) Consider its continued efforts to provide substantive input into the annual edition of the Global Sustainable Development Report as the science-policy contribution to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, providing an opportunity to continue illustrating and demonstrating the applicability of geospatial technology in evidence-based decision and policy making;

(d) Consider nominating 1-2 Member State representatives to represent the global geospatial community on the IAEG-SDGs, and to provide the geospatial inputs into the global indicator framework; and

(e) Consider establishing a small task team to support the IAEG-SDGs process with the formulation of geospatial data inputs into the global indicator framework for the monitoring of the goals and targets of the post-2015 development agenda.

Annex 1: Letter from Secretariat to Working Group on Global Map for Sustainable Development of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM)

United Nations Nations Unies

SECRETARIAT OF UN COMMITTEE ON
GLOBAL GEOSPATIAL INFORMATION MANAGEMENT
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STAT 421 (4-31) 18 December 2014

Dear Mr. Murakami,

Working Group on Global Map for Sustainable Development of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM)

I am following up on the outcomes of the fourth session of the Committee of Experts on UN-GGIM, convened in New York, 6-8 August 2014, and a subsequent meeting of the UN-GGIM Bureau convened in Beijing, China immediately prior to the Third High Level Forum on UN-GGIM. You will recall that during the fourth session, although not specifically under any one particular agenda item, the Committee debated the need to consider reviewing and possibly consolidating the different working groups and associated activities.

This became more obvious by the time the agenda item regarding the determination of global fundamental geospatial data themes was deliberated. In making its decision on this item, the Committee "invited the Bureau to consult with existing Working Groups, as to whether this work could be integrated into their work, before creating a separate working group." As you will recall, the clear message from the Committee was for the UN-GGIM Bureau and Secretariat to review the composition of the Working Groups in order to best use the available resources from Member States and avoid any duplication of valuable effort.

Following a meeting convened by the UN-GGIM Bureau on 21 October 2014 in Beijing, and in considering the concerns of the Committee, the Bureau and the Secretariat discussed extensively the future activities of the different working groups, inclusive of their roles and responsibilities. In this regard, the Bureau unanimously agreed that the objectives of the Working Group on Global Map for Sustainable Development (GM4SD) had been achieved in raising the awareness and bringing the importance of geospatial information into the discussions regarding the sustainable development agenda.

Mr. Hiroshi Murakami
Director-General of Planning Department
Geospatial Information Authority (GSI)
Japan
Email: murakamih@gsi.go.jp

Through your leadership and events such as: (1) the Chengdu Forum on UN-GGIM; (2) United Nations Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals; (3) High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development; and (4) collaboration with the International Steering Committee on Global Mapping, Member States are now much more aware of and prepared for the contribution that geospatial information is able to make to the post-2015 development agenda and Sustainable Development Goals.

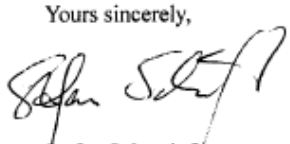
We are grateful for your considerable leadership and efforts to bring the Member States together to discuss how geospatial information can bring more value to the sustainable development debate in the United Nations. Our community has benefitted immensely from your contributions since the second session of the Committee of Experts on UN-GGIM in 2012 when you took up the responsibility in conveying to Member States the GM4SD terms of reference and objectives, and in following-up the activities and debates of the sustainable development community.

As the Committee prepares the way forward for geospatial information contributing more holistically to sustainable development, the Bureau agreed that there is a need for dedicated resources to be available to ensure that the issue is better positioned and leveraged amongst the decision and policy making communities, and is preparing a proposal to this effect presently. In consolidating the work carried out by the Committee, the UN-GGIM Bureau considers that the GM4SD Working Group is able to now conclude its activities. As Chair of the Working Group, we would be grateful if you could communicate the above to the Working Group members. Additionally, we would like to extend the member's continued contribution through their inputs in the above mentioned activities. We also greatly value your leadership and experiences in bringing the Committee forward, and in this regard, we also would be interested in your continued engagement in these discussions.

Should you have questions regarding this decision and communication, please do not hesitate to contact my office, in particular Mr. Greg Scott (Tel: 1-212-963-8578; Fax: 1-212-963-9851; Email: scott12@un.org).

Together with the Bureau, we would like to express our greatest appreciation on your efforts and successful achievements in leading the GM4SD Working Group over the past few years, and we welcome your continued contributions on the sustainable development discussions and other activities through the UN-GGIM as we advance the use of geospatial information in sustainable development.

Yours sincerely,



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