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Contribution of the Committee to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and implications of the outcomes of the Conference

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Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present paper contains the report summarizing the Committee's contribution to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20).¹ The report describes the discussions on the item held at the first session of the Committee, in which Member States stressed the need for an appropriate geospatial information infrastructure at all levels (local, national, regional, global) as a basis for accurate description, sound analysis and monitoring, and evidence-based decision-making on the state of the environment and ecosystems. Member States also stressed that the Committee was in a unique position to act as a coordinating body to ensure that all Member States benefited from the value of geospatial information in the assessment and monitoring of sustainable development and other global challenges. In respect of the two side events sponsored by the Committee at the Conference, the report describes the vital role that authoritative geospatial information is playing in supporting sustainable development across the globe and in providing financial benefits to users. The Committee is invited to take note of the geospatial information-related outcomes of the Conference and express its views on the follow-up activities to the Conference.

* E/C.20/2012/1.

¹ The full report is available in the language of submission only from http://ggim.un.org/ggim_committee.html.

I. Introduction

1. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)², held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012, constituted a new milestone, where countries took stock of the progress in implementing Agenda 21 since 1992 and set directions for the world for integrated economic, social and environmental policymaking for the future. More specifically, this landmark event, attended by world leaders, debated and made decisions on how we can reduce poverty, advance social equity and ensure environmental protection for an increasing populated and interconnected world.

2. The United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM), at its inaugural session in Seoul (October 2011) had discussed the important linkage between geospatial information and sustainable development. The Committee recognized that location-based policies and the effective use of geospatial information are powerful drivers for sustainable development. The Committee “stressed the need for an appropriate geospatial information infrastructure at all levels (local, national, regional, global) that can provide a geospatial integrative framework necessary to build a solid information base for accurate description, sound analysis and evidence-based decision making on the state of the environment and ecosystems”. It furthermore “highlighted the recent developments in geospatial information management, in terms of tools and methodologies, and the support they can provide to countries for the monitoring of goals and targets on sustainable development”³.

3. More specifically, the Committee discussed the possible contribution of the geospatial professional community to the forthcoming UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and encouraged contributions both at the global and national level, in order to raise awareness about the importance of geospatial information. The Committee also recommended preparing a written contribution. There was consensus that UN-GGIM is in a unique position to act as a coordinating mechanism to ensure all Member States benefit from the value of geospatial information applied to both sustainable development and to other areas of human and global challenges.

4. In the following this report describes some of the preparatory work undertaken before the Conference. It then provides information on the presence of UN-GGIM during Rio+20 in the form of two official side events. Finally, relevant excerpts of the outcome document of the Conference are presented, in order for the Committee to deliberate on the question how it can contribute to the follow-up process of Rio+20.

II. Preparatory Activities for Rio+20

5. In line with the request of the Committee a background paper entitled “Monitoring Sustainable Development: Contribution of Geospatial Information to the Rio+20 Processes”⁴ was prepared and is provided. It elaborates on the advancement of geospatial policies, practices, and technologies since Rio+10, and suggested a central role for UN-GGIM in the implementation of the follow-up action plan, which would most certainly be determined by the conference. Within this context, the paper made several specific recommendations which include: (i) Continued consideration and development of geography as an integrative framework for sustainable development applications,

² For further background information on the Conference refer to <http://www.uncsd2012.org/>

³ See Report on the first session of the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management, Economic and Social Council, Official Records 2011, Supplement No.26, Decision 1/103.

⁴ See http://ggim.un.org/ggim_committee.html

decision support, and policy development; (ii) Identification of new and emerging technologies and how these technologies can enhance our ability to better respond to sustainable development issues; (iii) Consideration of legal and ethical issues such as privacy, security, intellectual property and liability; (iv) Engagement with the scientific and research community in the development of sustainability science; (v) Providing guidance and a discussion framework for how the numerous regional and global remote sensing portals and dissemination networks can be integrated to create a network of networks; (vi) Providing guidance on geospatial standards best practice; and (vii) Facilitating cooperation among the major players involved with geospatial information at the global level.

6. In addition to the preparation of this technical document numerous informal consultations among Member States took place in the lead up to the Conference in order to discuss strategies on how to highlight the support geospatial information tools and methodologies can provide to assess progress in the cross-sectoral areas impacting sustainable development. As a result of these informal consultations many experts expressed their commitment to reach out to their respective country representatives in Rio in order to sensitize them to the important role that geospatial information can and must play in the follow-up phase to the Conference decisions. In this context, it should be particularly noted, that the following words were included in the UK Deputy Prime Minister's speech to the Rio+20 Plenary: "I am also pleased to see that the importance of reliable, trusted geographic information is now recognized. The United Nations has now established a Committee of Experts of Member States, which the UK co-chairs, to move this agenda forward".⁵

III GGIM Side Events at Rio+20

7. During the main Rio+20 Conference (20-22 June 2012) UN-GGIM had a presence at two side events⁶ to demonstrate the importance of geospatial information in monitoring sustainable development and to help deliver on the outcomes of Rio+20.

8. The UN-GGIM Secretariat, in partnership with the Ordnance Survey of Great Britain and the United Kingdom Government, and with the support from Australia and Brazil, organized a side event entitled: "Monitoring Sustainable Development: Why Location Matters", which took place on 20 June from 17:00-18:30 at RioCentro.

9. The purpose of the side event was to demonstrate the vital role accurate, maintained and reliable geospatial information can play in helping to deliver and monitor sustainable development across the globe and in providing financial benefits to users, and why UN-GGIM is an important forum to facilitate this. In other words, why an understanding of location is essential to the successful delivery of the Rio+20 agenda and to the economies of nations.

10. The key speakers included the Chief Scientific Adviser of the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; the Co-Chair of the UN Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management and Director General and Chief Executive, Ordnance Survey, Great Britain; the Chair of the UN Permanent Committee on Spatial Data Infrastructure for the Americas (PC-IDEA) from IBGE, Brazil; and a representative of the Permanent Committee on GIS Infrastructure for Asia and the Pacific (PCGIAP)

⁵ See <http://www.dpm.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/news/nick-cleggs-rio20-plenary-speech>

⁶ For more detail see also <http://ggim.un.org/rio20.html>

from Australia. Moreover, the UK Government's Chief Scientific Adviser was able to join the panel discussion.

11. The presentations were based on real-country experiences, graphically illustrated, non-technical in nature, and tailored to match the audience. Indeed, the main participating audience was senior government officials with decision-making responsibility on monitoring systems for sustainable development. During the presentations a wide range of examples was discussed, from both the developed and developing world, that graphically illustrated why Member States should develop and leverage accurate and reliable geospatial information in order to deliver successfully on the outcomes of Rio+20 and to monitor the implementation of sustainable development outcomes effectively. The discussion among the over 70 high level conference participants was very lively and went well beyond the foreseen timeframe.

12. The second side event, entitled: "Global Map for Sustainable Development", was organized by the Geospatial Information Authority (GSI) of Japan, and took place on Friday 22 June, from 11:15-12:15, in the Multi-purpose space of Japan Pavilion in Athletes' Park. The side event was supported by the International Steering Committee for Global Mapping (ISCGM), the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA), the Secretariat of UN-GGIM, and the government of Brazil.

13. GSI of Japan led the presentations by introducing the Global Mapping activities since the 1992 Rio Summit, providing examples of use of Global Map for sustainable development and the way forward. This was followed by presentations by the Co-Chair of UN-GGIM, the IBGE of Brazil, and JAXA. The side event was well attended and demonstrated the need for consistent global-scale data, developed under international cooperation, to monitor sustainable development, disasters, and environmental indicators.

IV. Outcomes of Rio+20

14. At the conclusion of the Conference a comprehensive outcome document entitled "The future we want"⁷ was adopted. It codifies a common vision in the first paragraph stating that "We, the Heads of State and Government and high-level representatives, having met at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 20 to 22 June 2012, with the full participation of civil society, renew our commitment to sustainable development and to ensuring the promotion of an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future for our planet and for present and future generations".

15. Subsequently, the document makes several references in general terms with respect to the need to enhance evidence-based decision making at all levels, and to strengthen ongoing efforts of capacity building for data collection and analysis in developing countries (para. 85); or the importance of integrated social, economic and environmental data and information (para. 98). Specifically, the document contains two explicit references to geospatial information, which are immediately relevant for the future work of the Committee of Experts on GGIM. They are reflected below:

16. In the section on 'disaster risk reduction', Para 187 states: "We recognize the importance of early warning systems as part of effective disaster risk reduction at all levels in order to reduce economic and social damages, including the loss

⁷ See A/CONF.216/L.1

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

17. In the section on ‘means of implementation – technology’, Para 274 states: “We recognize the importance of space-technology-based data, in situ monitoring and reliable geospatial information for sustainable development policymaking, programming and project operations. In this context, we note the relevance of global mapping and recognize the efforts in developing global environmental observing systems, including by the Eye on Earth Network and through the Global Earth Observation System of Systems. We recognize the need to support developing countries in their efforts to collect environmental data.”

18. These paragraphs provide a clear mandate for the future work of the UN Committee of Experts on GGIM. This high-level consensus constitutes a powerful tool to make the case for a work programme to strengthen geospatial information both at the national as well as at the global level. Specifically, it provides a useful background for the subsequent discussions at this second session of the UN Committee of Experts on GGIM on the Inventory of Issues and the proposed Development of a Global Map for Sustainable Development.⁸

V. Points for discussion

19. The Committee is invited to discuss the significance of the Rio+20 outcome document for the future work of the Committee and to provide guidance on concrete steps on how the geospatial community can play an important role in the implementation of the Rio+20 consensus, both at the national as well as at the global level.

⁸ See E/C.20/2012/5 and E/C.20/2012/10