



Consultative Meeting

Proposed UN Committee of Experts on Global Geographic Information Management

Bangkok, 25 October 2009

Internal Report

Introduction

The United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) in cooperation with the UN Cartographic Section (UNSC) convened a Consultative Meeting on Global Geographic Information Management in Bangkok, on Sunday 25 October 2009. Experts from 14 countries (Australia, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Canada, China, Finland, Germany, India, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Singapore, Thailand, USA) and 7 Regional and International Organizations (EUROGI, FIG, GSDI, ICA, ISCGM, UNGIWG, ESRI) attended the Meeting (see Annex 1). The meeting was co-chaired by Mr. Paul Cheung (UNSD), Mr. Greg Scott (PCGIAP/Australia) and Mr. Kyong-Soo Eom (UNSC).

Opening remarks were made by the three co-chairs, explaining the motivation for this meeting. In particular Mr. Paul Cheung, Director of UNSD emphasized that given the current policy challenges and the opportunities offered by the rapid IT development the time seemed right to explore synergies at the global level.

Six scoping papers had been prepared and were briefly introduced by the respective authors (see list in Annex 2).

I. Countries

Eight countries made brief remarks on the proposed UNCEGGIM:

- The representative of Australia noted the changes in mapping information management and stated that there is no real coordinating mechanism in the SDI community at the global level nor at the country level. He noted that some of the barriers are legal and institutional rather than substantive. He stressed the need for the professional community to be responsive to policy challenges. For example, within the area of disaster management, the perspective needed to shift to put more efforts in sustainability and

planning than to waste resources during the recovery phase when it will be too late. He supported the idea of a global mechanism to better coordinate geographic information and SDIs.

- The representative of Japan welcomed the UN initiative and was interested in moving it forward. He noted the lack of understanding by decisions makers at national level of the importance of geographic information. He pleaded for a UN mandate for the coordination of the Global Geographic Information Management to better coordinate existing activities. He stressed the importance of making the global GIM sustainable where Member states need to take the leadership role and be positively involved. He suggested that National Mapping Agencies should be the major stakeholders with the proposed UN Committee of Experts on GGIM. The proposed committee should be action-oriented and cope with major issues, such as international boundaries. He also stressed the importance of capacity building.
- The representative of Brazil stressed the global nature of the current emerging issues and the importance of the establishment of a global forum. He considered the scope urgent and timely. He expressed his support for the proposed UNCEGGIM, as it is very much needed to meet the member states expectations and improve regional coordination.
- The Chair of CODIST-Geo (from Burkina Faso, Africa) stated that this initiative is extremely important and timely for the African region, given the relevance of geographical information to support national development policies and expressed his support to the setting up of UNCEGGIM, which will promote global standards. He added that this requires commitment from member states and a global body will ensure that. He stressed that this proposed global forum would help African countries to benefit from the current ongoing UN regional activities.
- Canada representative emphasized the importance of the Obama administration's place-based initiative noting that it didn't come from the GI community but from the budget office. Concerning the proposed UNCEGGIM, several questions were raised: What is it going to do? What is its specific mandate? How can it be carried out? What is the appropriate format? The concept of global coordination is excellent and needed, but proof is in how to

implement it effectively. The main concern is how to cater to the needs of individual nations and to avoid the top-down approach. The GI community is convinced and the issue is to address and convince decision-makers, and not “preaching to the choir”.

- Germany representative argued that we need both top-down and bottom-up approaches. Germany reported on its own national mapping practices and its contribution to regional collaboration, through the formation of EuroGeographics, as examples of the bottom-up approach. As for the “top-down” approach, he gave the example of INSPIRE, the directive coming from the EU. He also highlighted GEOSS initiative, as an other example of the top-down approach, which currently involves 80 countries, and that should be taken seriously. Germany’s representative pleaded that UN should put all this together, emphasizing the importance of coordination to avoid duplication of efforts, the importance of specifications and harmonization, as well as a focus on capacity building at the heart of this proposed initiative.
- Finland and India voiced their support for the initiative and, respectively, stressed the need for a legislative base and for sufficient resources.

II. Observers

- Observers from international and regional organizations, such as ICA, FIG, GSDI, ISCGM, EUROGI, UNGIWG, ESRI, supported the idea of a global mechanism and mentioned that this is very timely to set the agenda for a global coordination by the UN.
- EUROGI representative agreed with countries that a lot of best practices can be analyzed and transferred. He stressed the relationship between private and public sectors on provision of data and solutions, and that GI should be considered as economic resources. Based on the increasing demands, he is convinced that the initiative is urgent, not just needed.
- ISCGM secretary recalled the resolution adopted by UNRCC-AP that emphasizes the strengthening of its relationship with the UN. He stressed that climate change, large-scale

disaster and extinction of biodiversity are the issues that need to be tackled by the global community. To meet these needs efficiently, the role of National Mapping Organizations (NMOs) charged with the development and management of SDI is indispensable. He stressed that Global Map is being developed with the cooperation of NMOs worldwide. He stated that the Proposed UNCEGGIM should take the appropriate measures toward the global issues and coordinate with NMOs, international/regional organizations and academies in an effective manner.

- GSDI representative stressed the importance of the coordination of SDI at a global level and pleaded for a global initiative to be led by UN. He suggested the use of “managing information spatially”, emphasizing that the initiative must be relevant to global agenda. GSDI representative urged that the UN global mechanism should involve all GI entities, and not only mapping agencies.
- ESRI/Joint Board representative suggested that we should learn from the Multinational Geospatial Co-Production Program (MGCP) in identifying resources. GGIM needs to substantiate how it could address global issues, to improve/automate work flow to make it more efficient. It is more cost effective to prevent than to react. UN can provide a place to bring everyone together to avoid duplication. This is doable and everyone needs to work together and UN can bring these people together. Data is fundamental for problem solving. It is difficult to get funding for SDI but will be able to obtain funding for tackling these global issues.
- FIG representative supported the GGIM initiative and was in line with the statement made by Canada. He stated that the initiative must be done very carefully. He noted that social and political areas are not taken care of by the GI community and suggested that the GGIM initiative provide support to national agencies in building that capacity.
- ICA representative emphasized that we must move beyond mapping agencies, from space to places. Some effort should be undertaken to move to non-scientific, non-precise definition of space/place and to involve non-mainstream players. He also emphasized the importance of “selling” GI and SDI to decision-makers.

- UNGIWG representative believed that GGIM could also help improving the collaboration with the UN, and more support from member states could indeed allow UNGIWG to do more.

III. Discussion

- A discussant started by raising two issues not being dealt with effectively by the GI community: (1) access to place-based data, and (2) integration of data sets. There is a need for a structure that can allow such integration to take place. An additional point was (3) interoperability of systems and data. Some participants stated that the new global structure should meet the needs of countries, and must be pragmatic and action-oriented; its model must make both global and regional sense. Some argued that the GI community needs support from the UN and time is ripe to bring geographic information management to the global level. Others pointed out that the GGIM should address the efficiency and sustainability of SDI and GI, and particularly strengthen capacity building of developing countries.
- One country representative asked about the procedure to set up a UN Committee on GGIM and a world conference. Clarification was brought about the following process: a first step is to adopt a UNRCC-AP resolution on GGIM, that would be followed by a resolution by the UN Statistical Commission on the need for GGIM and statistical data integration. Both resolutions would be brought to ECOSOC, who would then ask the SG to present a comprehensive report on the matter, which would lead to a call for a world conference to be hosted by a member state.
- Some participants noted that, while national mapping agencies (NMA) are at the forefront of GI activities, the GI community is very heterogeneous, including the involvement of military and civilian organizations. It was noted that NMAs have been comfortable with local issues and were not equipped to care about global issues. Many questions were raised: how to make NMAs feel that they need to get involved at the global level? What actually is this GGIM going to do? What are the tasks we would like this global body to achieve? The future is to add values – information integration. In other words, as the result

of UNCEGGIM, they would like to see an information system that integrates other information with geographic information. Others stressed that capacity building could not be the only issue addressed by GGIM. The participants agreed that the UNCEGGIM has to (1) coordinate activities and (2) set priorities, which cannot exist in isolation. 192 countries should come together for a global forum, a world conference. This would be facilitated if a country would volunteer to host the first such meeting. The proposed UN committee/expert group on GGIM could then act as a bureau to the global body, which would meet only every several years.

VI. Conclusions-Recommendations

Due to the global nature of policy challenges and the opportunities offered by the fast development of IT capabilities, there was general support for the idea to create a global forum, supported by an expert committee, to discuss Geographical Information Management issues, in order to:

- Play a leadership role in setting the agenda for the further development of geographic information;
- Promote the use of geographical information to address key global challenges (poverty reduction, sustainable development climate change and disaster management) and, thus, raise the professional visibility;
- Propose principles, policies, methods and mechanisms for standardization, interoperability and sharing of geographical data and metadata;
- Collect good practices among member states regarding legal instruments, management models and technical standards for the building of spatial data infrastructures;
- Provide a vehicle for liaison and coordination among UN agencies and other international agencies and among the regions;
- Provide a platform to develop effective strategies on how to build and strengthen capacity for the management of geographic information especially in developing countries.

In order to function as a global governance mechanism, member countries and their GI authorities such as National Mapping Agencies, therein, would have to play the leading role in the global forum. Nonetheless, the forum would have to be inclusive to include relevant professional and academic institutions, as well as private sector representatives and NGOs.

Caution was expressed for the forum not to duplicate current activities and to build upon the achievements of existing initiatives. Suggested priority areas for the initial focus of the

forum included improving access to place based data, integration of geographic information and other data sets, ensuring the interoperability of data sets.

As concrete next steps, it was agreed to table a resolution at the UNRCC-AP to seek the mandate of ECOSOC for such a global forum. Another informal preparatory meeting of the proposed Committee will be held in 2010 to look specifically on the terms of reference for the forum and the Committee.

Annex 1: List of participants

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Annex 2. List of scoping papers

Paper No.	Author	Country	Title/Organization
1	Greg Scott	Australia	Director General, President of PCGIAP
2	Fraser Taylor	Canada	President of ISCGM
3	Kazuo KOMAKI,	Japan	Director General, Geographical Survey Institute, Vice President, PCGIAP
4	Yoshikazu Fukushima	Japan	Secretary General of ISCGM
5	Mauro Salvemini,	Italy	President of EUROGI
6	ESRI	USA	