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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 Geospatial Network. The present report contains information on the activities and achievements of the regional committees and thematic groups since the ninth session of the Committee of Experts, held in New York from 7 to 9 August 2019, 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) integration of statistical and geospatial information; (f) legal and policy frameworks; (g) regional and international collaboration and capacity development; (h) global geodetic reference frame; (i) marine geospatial information; (j) geospatial standard-setting; (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.20/2020/20.

I. Introduction

1. At its ninth session, held in New York from 7 to 9 August 2019, the Committee of Experts adopted decision 9/102, in which it commended the work and achievements of the five regional committees and their respective working groups, and noted the convening of the annual plenary meetings of the committees during the intersessional period, as well as the many international thematic technical seminars and workshops held to further the objectives of the Committee, including the integration of statistical and geospatial information. The Committee also expressed its appreciation for the continuing and valuable contributions of the thematic networks to the programme of work of the Committee of Experts, in particular, the efforts of the Academic Network to publish a research book titled *Sustainable Development Goals Connectivity Dilemma*. It also welcomed the continuing efforts made towards ensuring greater coordination among, and in alignment with, the activities of the Committee of Experts, the five regional committees, the thematic networks and the regional commissions, and other regional cooperation initiatives.

2. In its tenth year, the Committee of Experts has an established functional regional to global coordination architecture which has demonstrably strengthened the coordination and coherence of global geospatial information management, in capacity-building, norm-setting, data collection, data dissemination and data sharing, among others, through appropriate coordination mechanisms, including in the broader United Nations system. This present report summarizes the activities and achievements of the five regional committees and four thematic networks of the Committee of Experts, including their regional plenary meetings, accomplishments of their respective working groups, capacity-building initiatives, and actions taken to support Member States in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic over this intersessional period. The reports of the regional committees and thematic groups are presented as background documents to this present report. The Committee is invited to take note of this report.

II. Regional Committees of UN-GGIM

A. Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for Asia and the Pacific (UN-GGIM-AP)

3. UN-GGIM-AP is currently presided by Australia and its secretariat provided by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). UN-GGIM-AP convened its Eighth Plenary Meeting from 3 to 5 November 2019 in Canberra, Australia in conjunction with the Group on Earth Observations (GEO) Week and Ministerial Summit 2019. The Eighth Plenary Meeting resolved to foster closer cooperation among the regional committees and thematic networks of the Committee of Experts. The resolutions also highlighted that technical capability development, human capacity building and knowledge sharing through regional cooperation and project implementation in the sectors where geospatial information, are critical to achieve national and regional goals and agendas. UN-GGIM-AP noted the UNESCAP's plan to establish an Asia-Pacific Geospatial Information Platform to promote the sharing of geospatial information.

4. During this intersessional period, UN-GGIM-AP continued its emphasis in supporting international and regional activities in support of the 2030 Agenda as well as the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework (IGIF), the Global Geodetic Reference Frame (GGRF) and the International Terrestrial Reference System (ITRS), the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework (GSGF), the Addis Ababa Declaration on Geospatial Information Management Towards Good Land Governance, and the Asia-Pacific Plan of Action on Space Applications for Sustainable Development.

5. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, several planned meetings and programmes, such as a regional workshop on operationalizing the IGIF in Bangkok and Working Group meetings in China, had to be postponed. However, the Executive Board Meeting, was convened on 3

July 2020 in a virtual format. The UN-GGIM-AP secretariat also organized a series of webinars focusing on ‘Strengthening regional cooperation in geospatial data sharing for mitigation of COVID-19 pandemic’ and ‘How space technology and GIS applications contribute to combatting COVID-19 pandemic’. The annual report of UN-GGIM-AP is provided as a background document to this present report.

6. The Ninth Plenary Meeting, to be hosted by the National Geospatial Information Agency of Indonesia in Bali, was originally scheduled for November 2020. The Executive Board, at its virtual meeting on 3 July, agreed that the Ninth Plenary Meeting will be held in a virtual format, and that the Tenth Plenary Meeting will be hosted by the National Geospatial Information Agency of Indonesia in 2021.

B. Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for Americas (UN-GGIM: Americas)

7. UN-GGIM: Americas is currently presided by Mexico and its secretariat provided by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), Mexico. UN-GGIM: Americas convened its Sixth Plenary Meeting on 11 October 2019 in Mexico City, Mexico, attended by 75 participants from 29 Member States. The Plenary Meeting included a special workshop on the IGIF, and updates and reports from the UN-GGIM Secretariat, UN-GGIM: Americas, and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC). The meeting discussed the status and progress of its work plans, projects, and activities.

8. UN-GGIM: Americas updated its website which includes an interactive platform on the status of the regional committee’s existing projects and initiatives including: the Statistical and Geospatial Framework for the Americas (MEGA); the SDI Interactive Dashboard; the Integration of Statistical and Geospatial Information for Central America Project, and the newly formulated Caribbean Geospatial Development (CARIGEO) Initiative.

9. The activities during the intersessional period included work accomplished by its four working groups and its regional academic and private sector networks. UN-GGIM: Americas responded to the COVID-19 pandemic with a very well participated virtual summit and seminar convened to encourage and facilitate geospatial information sharing and exchange. The regional committee continue to make good progress with its MEGA Project, regional SDI activities, the Chile-Mexico Project, the Central America Project, and the CARIGEO Initiative. UN-GGIM: Americas has continued its collaborative activities in partnership with UNECLAC and regional bodies that are partners in the Joint Action Plan (PAIGH, GeoSUR and SIRGAS). The report of UN-GGIM: Americas highlights the challenges, perspectives, and plans of the regional committee. The annual report of UN-GGIM: Americas is provided as a background document to this present report.

10. The Seventh Plenary Meeting of UN-GGIM: Americas will be held in a virtual format during AmeriGEO Week 2020, from 7 to 11 September 2020.

C. Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for Africa (UN-GGIM: Africa)

11. UN-GGIM: Africa is currently chaired by Senegal, and its secretariat provided by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). UN-GGIM: Africa held its Fifth Plenary Meeting from 18 to 22 November 2019 in Kigali, Rwanda, back-to-back with the AfricaGIS 2019 event. The meeting was attended by over 80 participants, including delegates from 27 African Member States, as well as observers from international organizations. The meeting called upon UNECA and the African Union Commission (AUC) to work together to ensure that an overarching policy for geospatial information management in Africa is adopted by the Heads of State; and to raise awareness and sensitize them to be a

champion of integrated geospatial information management in the continent. The meeting supported UNECA to host and provide a convening mechanism for the Digital Earth Africa Programme, an operational and user-driven service that will provide data and information from Earth observations to support Member States' decision making and the development of national and continental geospatial infrastructures.

12. UN-GGIM: Africa, during the intersessional period, undertook activities to raise Member States' awareness on the IGIF as the next frontier for global, regional, and national geospatial information management efforts, and as a new paradigm that is complementary with Africa's NSDI initiative. UN-GGIM: Africa and UNECA continue to support Member States to advance their national geospatial policies, augmented with an assessment of the level of maturity and absorption of geospatial information technology in African countries; to progress the principles for the integration of geospatial and statistical information in Africa; and to develop spatial data taxonomy with a matrix identifying the geospatial datasets requirements for the monitoring and implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Africa.

13. UNECA, in its capacity as UN-GGIM: Africa secretariat, undertook an assessment of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the business and operations of National Mapping Agencies/National Geospatial Information Authorities in Africa. The assessment provided valuable insights on the challenges and tensions, including the application of geospatial information, to respond to the pandemic. The outcome report outlines immediate actions and plans to strengthen geospatial information management capacity nationally. The annual report of UN-GGIM: Africa is provided as a background document to this present report.

14. The Sixth Plenary Meeting of UN-GGIM: Africa will be convened in a virtual format on 14, 21 and 28 October 2020.

D. Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for Europe (UN-GGIM: Europe)

15. UN-GGIM: Europe is currently chaired by Slovenia, and its secretariat provided by the Netherlands and EuroGeographics. UN-GGIM: Europe held its Seventh Plenary Meeting virtually on 22 and 23 June 2020 in conjunction with the 68th Plenary Session of the Conference of European Statisticians. The Plenary Meeting was attended by 34 Member States and 11 international organizations as observers. UN-GGIM: Europe noted that the virtual nature of the events during the COVID-19 pandemic attracted increased participation from Member States and stakeholders, and broader participation from the geospatial and statistical communities.

16. During the Seventh Plenary Meeting, Slovenia was re-confirmed as the chair of the regional committee, and together with an Executive Committee, will provide the leadership to UN-GGIM: Europe. The regional committee aims to focus on renewing the collaboration agreement it has with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) beyond 2020, and to support the work programmes and activities of the Committee of Experts in its region.

17. UN-GGIM: Europe, during this intersessional period, made notable progress in its regional activities to raise awareness and promote the operationalizing of the IGIF, and finalized its publication of a report calling for political action in Europe to stress the value of the integration of statistical and geospatial information. The regional committee's working groups continue with their activities and tasks that included international collaborative and capacity development initiatives and activities. The annual report of UN-GGIM: Europe is provided as a background document to this present report.

18. In light of the current COVID-19 pandemic, UN-GGIM: Europe is considering suitable dates and modality regarding its Eighth Plenary Meeting. The dates and working modality

for its next plenary meeting will be determined in due course after further consultation with its Member States.

E. Regional Committee of United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management for the Arab States (UN-GGIM: Arab States)

19. UN-GGIM: Arab States is currently chaired by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and its secretariat provided by the General Commission for Survey, Saudi Arabia. On the margins of the ninth session of the Committee of Experts in August 2019, UN-GGIM: Arab States convened a meeting for its Member States that reviewed and revised its activities as appropriate, and prepared for its Seventh Plenary Meeting. The regional committee convened its Seventh Plenary Meeting from 17 to 19 February 2020 in Algiers, hosted by the government of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria. Fifty-two representatives from 14 of its Member States attended the meeting.

20. At its Seventh Plenary Meeting, the regional committee followed up and reviewed its progress, including that of its technical working groups, and discussed in plenary their future strategic objectives. Each of the four working groups convened workshops during the Seventh Plenary, which were supported by invited subject matter experts. On the margins of its Plenary Meeting, UN-GGIM: Arab States hosted an international workshop on "Operationalizing the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework" from 15 to 16 February 2020, that was participated by all participants. The workshop, delivered by the UN-GGIM Secretariat, introduced and provided guidance on the implementation approach to operationalize the IGIF according to national circumstances. The Seventh Plenary Meeting urged all its Member States to implement the IGIF through a country-level Action Plan.

21. All the working groups of the regional committee, during the intersessional period, actively worked on delivering their respective mandates and decisions of the Sixth Plenary Meeting. Their activities continue to strengthen regional cooperation and development of geospatial information management. The annual report of UN-GGIM: Arab States is provided as a background document to this present report.

22. Considering the current COVID-19 pandemic, UN-GGIM: Arab States had to consider a suitable modality for convening its Eighth Plenary Meeting in February 2021. The dates and working modality for its next plenary meeting will be determined in consultation with its Member States.

III. Thematic Groups of UN-GGIM

F. UN-GGIM: Geospatial Societies

23. The UN-GGIM: Geospatial Societies is currently chaired by the International Cartographic Association (ICA). In its report to the Committee of Experts, pertinent activities of its member organizations were provided. It should be noted that, considering the COVID-19 pandemic, major conferences, symposia, and events of its member organizations have been significantly impacted, with these events and activities either canceled or postponed.

24. Member organizations of UN-GGIM: Geospatial Societies are delivering events and activities virtually. UN-GGIM: Geospatial Societies, in the past years, have convened its annual meetings on the margins of the annual sessions of the Committee of Experts. This year's annual meeting will, similarly, be held in a virtual format. The annual report of UN-GGIM: Geospatial Societies is provided as a background document to this present report.

G. UN-GGIM: Academic Network

25. The UN-GGIM: Academic Network is currently chaired by the University of Melbourne, Australia. At the ninth session of the Committee of Experts in August 2019 in New York, the Network launched its open access book “Sustainable Development Goals Connectivity Dilemma”. In the past year, the Academic Network has expanded its membership to over 47 universities and research centers.

26. During the intersessional period, the UN-GGIM: Academic Network actively pursued its objectives and goals in accordance with its work plan for 2019 to 2021. Some of the main achievements include: i) the continued development of an online training platform to assist Member States. The online training platform is expected to be implemented in the second half of 2020; ii) a project to publish an open access book titled “COVID-19: Geospatial Information and Community Resilience” to be launched in November 2020; iii) the convening of an emergency meeting in April 2020 to address concerns and provide support to UN-GGIM: Academic Network’s members during the current COVID-19 pandemic; and iv) met with the United Nations Geospatial Network and discussed collaboration opportunities and joint development programs and projects. The annual report of UN-GGIM: Academic Network is provided as a background document to this present report.

27. For the June 2020 to July 2021 period, the Network will focus on: fostering publications and knowledge around the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly related to strategies to improve community resilience using geospatial information; the administrative steps to implement the online training platform and explore funding opportunities to support this initiative; and developing parallel and joint forums during UN-GGIM events, including during virtual events. The Network is considering conducting a technical workshop on geospatial technologies for pandemics and public health during the 2020 FIG Commission 7 online annual meeting in September 2020; and continue its work on Cadastral Template 2.0. The Network is also continuing its efforts on the role of geospatial research and innovation in implementing the SDGs and participate actively in the subcommittee, expert and working groups, and regional committees of the Committee of Experts.

H. UN-GGIM: Private Sector Network

28. The UN-GGIM: Private Sector Network (PSN) is currently chaired by Oracle Corporation. The members of the PSN support setting the agenda for the development of global geospatial information management, technologies and processes to promote its applications to address key global challenges, enable people-centric services and support the work programmes and activities of the Committee of Experts, particularly the 2030 Agenda.

29. The PSN can report that they have helped the global society deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. Large numbers of PSN members are supporting the ongoing and evolving hot spot and contact tracing activities. These depend fundamentally on location, our core and primal capability. Geospatial analysis of the first arrived cases, the geographic spread, and the combination of patient demographics, medical histories and key service locations (hospitals, clinics, transportation hubs, etc.) have provided enormous value to government agencies charged with managing COVID-19 with limited resources. The logistical production capabilities and distribution workflows for personal protective equipment, such as masks, and ventilators, have all been optimized using geospatial knowledge.

30. The PSN facilitates direct connection and communication with Member States towards achieving success in global geospatial initiatives, including the 2030 Agenda. In these unprecedented times the PSN is determined to remain flexible and relevant to the most important global concerns. It is with great enthusiasm that the PSN members can step back from the current emergency activities of the COVID-19 pandemic and look forward to the tenth session of the Committee of Experts. The PSN will continue to look at the “big picture” and to offer and apply “lessons learned” from operating in crisis mode for several months.

The annual report of UN-GGIM: Private Sector Network is provided as a background document to this present report.

I. United Nations Geospatial Network

31. The United Nations Geospatial Network is currently chaired by the United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment). Since the establishment of its Steering Group at the ninth session of the Committee of Experts in August 2019, the Network and its Steering Group has met monthly to implement its agreed work programme. During the period, the membership of the Network grew steadily to 34 entities. A communication tool was prepared to reach out and develop potential synergies, collaboration, and partnerships with other networks of the Committee of Experts. Starting in 2020, the Network met with the leadership of the three other thematic groups (Academic Network, Geospatial Societies, and Private Sector Network), as well as other groups, including the Coordination Committee on Statistical Activities (CCSA), the World Geospatial Industry Council (WGIC) and the Digital Technology Network (DTN) of the United Nations. The annual report of the United Nations Geospatial Network is provided as a background document to this present report.

32. In the intersessional period, the Network completed its priority activities related to the “Blueprint, Geospatial for a Better World: Transforming the Lives of People, Places and Planet” document, which aims to provide strategic orientations, guide and further organize geospatial activities of the Network. The Network also prepared a comprehensive report of current geospatial activities, governance arrangements and list of representatives of members of the Network, as a companion document. This companion document, which is an integral part of the Blueprint, is referred to as “Blueprint: Geospatial Landscape in the United Nations system”. At its Second Plenary Meeting, convened virtually on 23 July 2020, the Network members endorsed both the Blueprint and its Geospatial Landscape. Both documents are included as background documents to this present report for noting by the Committee of Experts.

33. The Blueprint presents a review of the current status of the geospatial landscape in the United Nations system, builds upon an analysis of current geospatial activities, presents its strategic design towards its future and details its proposed implementation through seven transformation pathways and 50 proposed activities that will guide its work and activities. The intent is to use these documents as instruments for outreach, to communicate and leverage the work and value of geospatial to the broader United Nations system and the entities within the UN-GGIM architecture. The landscape component of the Blueprint was prepared in conjunction with the efforts of the Network to reach out to all entities of the United Nations system.

IV. Summary

34. A common thread throughout the reports of the regional committees and thematic groups has been the increase in collaborative activities among groups of the Committee of Experts. This is evidenced particularly in the period after February 2020, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the staging of several regional COVID-19 related webinars with the support of governments, United Nations system, academia, geospatial societies, and the private sector. A notable outcome from these COVID-19 related webinars was the fundamental importance of partnership and collaboration to locate and share geospatial data and other information required to respond to and manage the pandemic. Other examples of increased collaboration included the UN Geospatial Network engagement with the thematic groups to identify synergies, collaborative opportunities and joint development programs; and the joint meetings between the regional committees and related groups including the Group on Earth Observations (GEO) Week and Ministerial Summit, the AfricaGIS 2019, the AmeriCEO Week 2020, and regional statistical conferences.

35. The regional committees are to be commended for their consistent and strong efforts in aligning their regional work programmes with those of the Committee, contributing to and participating in events and activities of the Committee of Experts. This is also evidenced through the work and support provided by various regional working groups of the regional committees covering key work programmes of the Committee of Experts, such as: the global geodetic reference frame; the integration of geospatial information and statistics; cadastre and land management; geospatial information and services for disasters; and fundamental geospatial data and themes. Opportunities remain for regional committees and thematic groups of the Committee towards better sharing and exchange of real-world practices and solutions.

V. Recommended for noting by the Committee of Experts

36. The Committee of Experts is invited to take note of the present report and background documents provided by the five regional committees and four thematic groups. The Committee is also invited to note the upcoming plenary meetings of UN-GGIM: Americas and UN-GGIM: Africa. Additionally, the Committee is invited to note the progress made by the United Nations Geospatial Network in developing its ‘Blueprint, Geospatial for a Better World: Transforming the Lives of People, Places and Planet’, including its “Blueprint: Geospatial Landscape in the United Nations system”.