



United Nations Committee of Experts on
Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM)

Expanded Bureau of UN-GGIM

Strengthening Institutional Arrangements on Geospatial Information Management

DRAFT Briefing Note @ 17 June 2021

Background

At the most recent meeting of the UN-GGIM Expanded Bureau¹ (convened 11 March 2021), the Expanded Bureau discussed the preparations to report back to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on the implementation of resolution 2016/27 ‘Strengthening institutional arrangements on geospatial information management’, with a view to report back to the Council in 2021. The timing for the preparation and submission of the report to ECOSOC, including what elements it may contain, was discussed. It was acknowledged that it should be carefully considered, given that it is a significant undertaking. There was an immediate understanding that the Member States on the Expanded Bureau should provide leadership and that the UN-GGIM geospatial professionals from capitals will need to engage with their diplomats much more than they did in 2016. This will be critical.

Additionally, the Chairs of each of the five Regional Committees of UN-GGIM observed that they have a role to play in this important process and stand ready to reach out to Member States in their regions and rally the needed political support. To begin immediately to rally the needed support from their respective regions, it was agreed that this communication/information Briefing Note be developed and provided to the Chairs of the Regional Committees for consistent and informed messaging. The Briefing Note provides context for the ECOSOC – UN-GGIM interface and journey over the past decade.

The First 5 Years

The global importance of geospatial information was recognized by the United Nations in July 2011. At its 47th plenary meeting on 27 July 2011, ECOSOC, recognizing the urgent need to take concrete action to strengthen international cooperation in the area of global geospatial information management, established the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) in accordance with the terms of reference contained in the annex to resolution 2011/24.² In making its decision, the Council stipulated that the Committee of Experts be (at least initially) “established and administered within existing resources and organized accordingly” and requested it to submit to the Council in 2016 “a comprehensive review of all aspects of its work and operations, in order to allow Member States to assess its effectiveness”.

In August 2015, at its fifth session, the Committee of Experts considered a detailed draft of the comprehensive review of the work of the Committee during the period 2011-2015, and noted the considerable achievements and progress made as well as the challenges that remain. At that time, with very limited resources but, importantly, with strong engagement and commitment by national Governments and the international geospatial community, the Committee of Experts had established and organized itself quickly and delivered concrete results towards achieving its mandate. The Committee

¹ Summary Report of the Expanded Bureau:

https://ggim.un.org/meetings/Bureau_Meetings/11March2021/Final_Summary_Report_Expanded_Bureau_Meeting_11Mar2021.pdf

² https://ggim.un.org/documents/E_Res_2011.24_en.pdf



gained universal recognition as the global mechanism for deliberating on the major issues in geospatial information management. Member State participation in each successive Committee meeting since 2011 increased, and the momentum generated from the establishment of the five UN-GGIM regional committees provided a positive reflection of the importance given by Member States to unifying the global geospatial information community.

In adopting decision 5/113 at its fifth session, UN-GGIM agreed that a call for strengthening the mandate of the Committee was appropriate and needed, in order for it to be at the same level as other subsidiary bodies of the Council, in particular the Statistical Commission, in order to strengthen its interaction with them. UN-GGIM also agreed that its role, as an assembly of authoritative national government institutions in the field of geospatial information, was increasingly important in effectively coordinating the field of geospatial information management in the broader United Nations system. Critically, the Committee of Experts stressed that sustainable funding for its operations was needed to ensure its continued effectiveness, including conference support, substantive, and technical Secretariat support, and in particular the funding of the participation of national delegates from developing countries, in order to ensure a broad and balanced representation at the sessions of the Committee. In adopting decision 5/113 the Committee also approved the process for finalizing the comprehensive programme review, inclusive of convening a global consultation process with Member States and relevant international organizations in October/November 2015.

The Second 5 Years

In January 2016, the Secretariat submitted to the 2016 session of ECOSOC for consideration, the report 'Programme review of the work of the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management'³ on behalf of UN-GGIM. Prepared in response to the request by ECOSOC (to report back in 2016) when it established the Committee of Experts in July 2011, the report provided a brief account of the establishment of the Committee of Experts, reviewed the considerable achievements and progress made from 2011 to 2015, and presented a set of recommendations for consideration by the Council on the future modalities and programme of work of the Committee.

Over the next several months, and led by the Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations (Mexico was co-Chair of UN-GGIM at the time), a draft resolution was negotiated and prepared in consultation with Permanent Missions to the United Nations in New York, and submitted to ECOSOC on 21 July 2016.⁴ The original ambition of the draft resolution was to seek recognition and endorsement of the work of UN-GGIM, with commensurate mandate and sustainable funding for the operations of the Committee to ensure its continued effectiveness, including conference support, substantive and technical Secretariat support, and in particular the funding of the participation of national delegates from developing countries. However, it became clear very early in the negotiations that the perceived budget implications of such sustainable funding, especially occurring soon after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by Member States, would prove to be a bridge too far. Permanent Missions were agreeable to support a resolution that recognized the increasing role and relevance of the Committee of Experts and its acknowledged efforts in streamlining the subsidiary bodies of the Council on geospatial information management matters, but they would not in any way support the sustainable funding for the operations of the Committee of Experts.

This was underscored when, in the session that the draft resolution was considered by ECOSOC, the Programme Planning and Budgeting Division of the United Nations, tabled an oral statement of

³ https://ggim.un.org/documents/E_2016_47_E.pdf

⁴ <http://undocs.org/E/2016/L.28>



programme budget implications to be read out and distributed prior to the adoption of the resolution by the Council. The statement emphasized that the decision to broaden and strengthen the mandate of the Committee of Experts must be in a 'cost-neutral' manner, and that the Committee of Experts does not have any meeting entitlements. However, the Committee is able to meet annually and can hold its annual session in New York only during the 'low activity' periods (either early January or August) with full interpretation services. Separately, it is worth noting that this does not include formal editing and translation, into each of the six official UN languages, the technical reports for each of the annual sessions of UN-GGIM.

Therefore, at its 48th plenary meeting, on 27 July 2016, the mandate of UN-GGIM was considerably strengthened by the adoption of ECOSOC resolution 2016/27 'Strengthening institutional arrangements on geospatial information management'.⁵ The resolution recognized: the considerable achievements and progress made by the Committee of Experts; its contribution to the strengthening of geospatial information management capacities and utilization in developing countries; the efforts to streamline the work of the four current subsidiary bodies of ECOSOC in the field of geospatial information management; that the Committee is well placed to continue to contribute to the work of the United Nations; the need to strengthen the coordination and coherence of global geospatial information management, in capacity-building, norm-setting, data collection, data dissemination and data sharing, among others; and the importance of strengthening capacity-building in the area of geospatial information management and relevant statistical integration, especially in developing countries.

Resolution 2016/27 anchored UN-GGIM firmly as a subsidiary body of ECOSOC, and noted that sustainable funding and support, particularly for the operations of the Committee of Experts that focus on the SDGs is needed to strengthen and ensure the continued effectiveness of the Committee. However, with increased mandate, and seeking more opportunity for the Committee to contribute to the work of the United Nations, no additional resources were provided. As a compromise and noting the increasing role and relevance of the Committee of Experts, ECOSOC requested that UN-GGIM report back to the Council, no later than in five years' time, on the implementation of the resolution, and to examine the strengthening of the institutional arrangements of the Committee.

Taking Proactive Steps

With the experience of the 2016 resolution process to reflect on, with a view towards the future, and with strong support from the UN-GGIM Expanded Bureau, the Secretariat has reported to the Committee of Experts on an annual basis since August 2017 under the standing agenda item 'Strengthening geospatial information management'. This reporting has emphasized the continuing efforts to take practical and strategic action to strengthen geospatial information management and related interlinkages for Member States, in line with the broadened mandate of the Committee pursuant to ECOSOC resolution 2016/27. Through this engagement and process, the UN-GGIM Secretariat has been uniquely positioned to support Member States in a most constructive and pro-active manner to sustain and advance the United Nations agenda and the increasingly growing programme of work on global geospatial information management.

Now 2021, it is upon UN-GGIM once again to report back to ECOSOC, and to examine the strengthening of the institutional arrangements of the Committee of Experts. As it celebrates its tenth anniversary, UN-GGIM is now well recognized by the global geospatial information community as a very effective, productive, and successful intergovernmental mechanism of the United Nations. Such recognition also extends into key geospatial areas of academia, industry, the private sector, and international societies. This reflects the considerable efforts and ownership that Member States, at the expert and technical level,

⁵ https://ggim.un.org/documents/E_Res_2016-27_en.pdf



have invested into the activities and ongoing programme of work of the Committee of Experts. Why have they done this? Because they have recognized the importance, benefits, and value of this work, and the very effective and efficient forum for coordination and dialogue among Member States and between Member States and relevant international organizations.⁶

However, to ensure the continued relevance, effectiveness, and success of UN-GGIM going forward, it is now also being recognized by some delegates that Member States themselves need to provide stronger strategic leadership and support to sustain the Committee's activities, including for the Secretariat to have access to additional budgetary resources. The strengthened mandates provided to UN-GGIM by ECOSOC in 2016 are compelling but have been provided with no additional resources to implement the mandates. Now at the 10-year mark, and with a rapidly growing programme of work and engagement by Member States, this has resulted in some commensurately growing vulnerability within the Secretariat due to the very limited staff resources. Despite all its benefits and successes, UN-GGIM presently has a weak and vulnerable structure if it is expected to be sustainable in the future. The Committee's work is important, but it is under-resourced. The lack of resources and pace of development of the United Nations Integrated Geospatial Information Framework (IGIF)⁷, a major element of the Committee's work, is such an example.

In addressing this vulnerability, and the request from ECOSOC to "examine the strengthening of the institutional arrangements of the Committee", a more strategic view and vision of where UN-GGIM stands now and where it should be in the future, and focusing on the value proposition and necessary resources, is now needed. There is no question that UN-GGIM is effective and delivering, through its regional and international stakeholders, architecture, and partnerships, as well as through several in-country initiatives. However, providing a report that is technical and demonstrates 'what UN-GGIM has achieved' may not be the solution to solve the problem, as this was the approach taken in 2016 – and did not achieve the desired outcome.

ECOSOC knows well what UN-GGIM has achieved – it is a matter of record – and that these achievements have been delivered with limited resources. Further, the report presented to ECOSOC in 2016, and the subsequent resolution, was limited by: not having appropriate engagement and communication with Permanent Missions; not having specific Member States as 'allies' guiding their Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Permanent Missions; and by the realization that funding was not going to be made available. The report to ECOSOC in 2021 must be more strategic and be driven and supported by champions from Member States (as the real beneficiaries) that can influence the political process.

Recognizing the workload within the UN-GGIM Secretariat, over the past 2-3 years in particular, there is now a growing group of Member States, including from the UN-GGIM Expanded Bureau, that understand and have discussed the vulnerability of UN-GGIM, and the need to strengthen its institutional arrangements for global geospatial information management. This was initiated by Sweden and other Nordic countries on the margins of the ninth session of UN-GGIM in 2019 but has been expanded more recently by Germany as part of its efforts to establish the United Nations Global Geodetic Centre of Excellence at the UN Campus in Bonn, Germany. By way of further example, and to progress important UN-GGIM initiatives, virtual secondments are now being provided to the Secretariat on a part-time basis

⁶ https://ggim.un.org/documents/E_2016_47_E.pdf

⁷ UN-GGIM at its tenth session in its decision 10/103 (d), "Noted the global significance of the Framework, which served as a key umbrella for the many activities under the purview of the Committee of Experts, including the United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management regional committees and thematic groups"; http://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/10th-Session/documents/GGIM10_report_e.pdf



from Kadaster in the Netherlands, to support the work of the IGIF, the HLG-IGIF⁸, and the FELA⁹; and Lantmateriet in Sweden to support the Secretariat as it works towards strengthening the institutional arrangements of UN-GGIM, including the report of the Committee of Experts to ECOSOC.

Considerations for Reporting to ECOSOC

Drawing upon the experience of the 2016 ECOSOC resolution process, a proactive ambition for the UN-GGIM Expanded Bureau is to gather and grow more support from a key group of Member States for elaborating the key points to consider in the reporting process for ECOSOC. It is proposed that such a group of Member States will determine and agree upon general ideas/goals/objectives that could jointly develop the key points for a ‘battle plan’ and the main messages of the Committee’s value proposition in the report. The below points reflect some of the initial thinking to date.

When does UN-GGIM report back to ECOSOC?

ECOSOC has requested that the Committee of Experts report back to the Council “no later than in five years’ time”. Generally, this means 2021. However, ECOSOC operates on a July-to-July calendar, with the 2021 session of ECOSOC concluding at the end of July 2021. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and many virtual meetings taking place, the Expanded Bureau and the Secretariat are of the view that there is no immediate urgency or pressure from the Council for UN-GGIM to have submitted its report by this time. Another dimension to consider is that in its current 2021 session, ECOSOC is very pre-occupied, as is expected, with focussing on the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.

Therefore, it is feasible that an initial report and considerations be prepared for the eleventh session of UN-GGIM for discussion and inputs (in a similar manner to the 2016 report – provided to the fifth session of UN-GGIM in August 2015) and thereafter, work on submitting a final report to the 2022 session of ECOSOC in early 2022. This would ideally be a two-step process: 1) Submit a detailed report to ECOSOC by the Secretariat in February 2022 in response to resolution 2016/27 for consideration; and 2) Separately have a sponsored resolution (led by a Member State through their Permanent Mission and with multiple co-sponsors) drafted to follow-up in July 2022 – owned and driven by the Member States. This would allow sufficient time for our Member State delegations to socialize and communicate key messages with their Permanent Missions.

A key element will be to have as many ECOSOC members (Permanent Missions) as possible involved in the process. This will require the gathering of more UN-GGIM ‘allies’ to accept a strategic leadership role, including to elaborate key points, and engage and coordinate further with other Member States and/or Permanent Missions. A group of motivated countries to co-sponsor a resolution will be ‘mission-critical’. As was learned in 2016, in the current United Nations climate, any resolution that may have budget implications arising from the Secretariat is simply not going to be acceptable from a Member State perspective.

What does UN-GGIM report back to ECOSOC?

There will be a need to consider the desired ‘institutional arrangements’ that will take UN-GGIM forward. Topics such as the following will need to be captured:

⁸ High-Level Group of the Integrated Geospatial Information Framework; <http://ggim.un.org/UNGGIM-HLG-IGIF/>

⁹ Framework for Effective Land Administration adopted by UN-GGIM at its tenth session (decision 10/107(c); http://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/10th-Session/documents/E-C.20-2020-29-Add_2-Framework-for-Effective-Land-Administration.pdf



- What is the message, the value proposition? UN-GGIM’s technical audience is very different to the ECOSOC diplomatic audience. There is a disconnect and lack of understanding from their perspective. We need to speak in the language of the diplomats, not of our technical community
- What is the structure, the institutional arrangements, to have in the future that is sustainable and resourced? A Commission? A UN program dedicated to the topic of geospatial information. What is our level of ambition?
- What is that arrangement, what is the rationale, how to develop and rally support, etc.?
- A clear idea of what UN-GGIM really needs to keep pace, deliver better and adapt to global challenges. To work and progress this.
- This item will also need to be high on UN-GGIM’s agenda for its eleventh session.

The structure of the report could comprise a 3-part process: Review of Achievements; the Value Proposition; and Institutional Arrangements. The Why, What and How. Reviewing achievements should not be difficult, as much has been achieved over the past 5 years by UN-GGIM. However, reviewing these achievements should also not be the main emphasis/priority of the report. As mentioned earlier, and as was the case in 2016, ECOSOC knows well what UN-GGIM has achieved – and that these achievements have been delivered with very limited resources. Overstating the Committee’s achievements could actually be detrimental, as ECOSOC could legitimately suggest that if UN-GGIM has delivered so much in the past 5 years, and with such limited resources, the Committee of Experts can just continue doing so ad infinitum. Therefore, attention should be given to addressing the gaps, the needs which the Committee of Experts have not yet been able to address – greater geospatial-statistical integration, building capacity in key areas of our work, fundamental data needs, integrating more across the UN system, including the statistical and geographic names communities, emerging technologies, closing the geospatial digital divide, greater Member State engagement, etc. All these are framed by the urgent needs of the SDGs and the Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs, the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Declaration on the Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations.¹⁰

The value proposition, Member States’ views on the value of UN-GGIM today and in the future, including addressing ‘opportunities’, will be a key pillar to the report. Rather than focussing on what UN-GGIM has achieved, looking at opportunities that are important to the needs of ECOSOC will be of more value. For example, ‘if UN-GGIM had these resources, it could do this’. The value proposition of what could be done into the future if the resources were available. The starting point is resolution 2016/27. It acknowledges the need for UN-GGIM “to strengthen the coordination and coherence of global geospatial information management, in capacity-building, norm-setting, data collection, data dissemination and data sharing, among others; and the importance of strengthening capacity-building in the area of geospatial information management and relevant statistical integration, especially in developing countries”.

Addressing key issues around climate, the environment, oceans, and cities, etc. This could possibly be demonstrated using a case study ‘narrative’ of why geospatial is important for certain outcomes. Perhaps a ten-year vision for UN-GGIM. Is there a good strategy for what the global IGIF environment will look like for countries? What should it be? Can such an approach be mandated. What are the expectations from Member States, and what are the most valuable contributions that UN-GGIM can make to benefit the geospatial community?

What are the possible ‘institutional arrangements’ for UN-GGIM?

As was specifically mentioned in resolution 2016/27, examining the strengthening of the institutional arrangements of the Committee, and what these arrangements will look like, will need to be carefully

¹⁰ <https://undocs.org/A/RES/75/1>



articulated. What are the options and scenarios to explore? From a budget perspective, these include: no budget resources; regular budget resources; and extra-budgetary resources.¹¹ Therefore, in considering all possible scenarios, likely or not, example options could be as follow:

Option 1: No Budget Resources: The UN-GGIM modalities continue as they do today; remain as a Committee of Experts but with no change and no regular budget resources. This would mean a status quo, including no resources for conference management and services.

Option 2: Regular Budget Resources: UN-GGIM to remain as a Committee of Experts, but with regular budget resources. What these resources would entail, and at what cost, would have to be determined. For example, the budget resources could incrementally include (or omit):

- a. Resources for DGACM¹², including for conference management and services, interpretation of meetings, and documents editing and translation.
- b. Dedicated Secretariat staff resources, numbers of which would need to be justified and negotiated.
- c. Resources to fund experts from developing countries to attend the annual sessions of UN-GGIM.
- d. Resources to fund experts from developing countries to participate in key calendared technical meetings of UN-GGIM.

Option 3: Regular Budget Resources: UN-GGIM to be elevated to a functional Commission under ECOSOC (in a similar manner as the Statistical Commission). Such an elevation would assume that all the options contained in Option 2 above, would apply.

Option 4: Extra-Budgetary Resources: UN-GGIM Secretariat transitions into an Office within the United Nations Secretariat (in a similar manner to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)¹³), essentially a United Nations Office for Global Geospatial Information Management, and with the responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the work of UN-GGIM. This modality would require voluntary (extra-budgetary) financial contributions from Member States through a dedicated United Nations Trust Fund for Global Geospatial Information Management, and a physical office, not necessarily in New York. For example, UNDRR is hosted in the UN Campus in Bonn, Germany.

Option 5: Extra-Budgetary Resources: The UN-GGIM modalities, including Secretariat, transitions into a UN Fund, Programme, or Specialized Agency. The UN system comprises many funds, programmes, and specialized agencies, each of which have their own area of work, leadership, and budget. The programmes and funds are financed through voluntary, rather than assessed, contributions. The specialized agencies are independent international organizations funded by both voluntary and assessed contributions. The UN coordinates its work with these separate UN system entities, which cooperate with the Organization to help it achieve its goals.¹⁴

¹¹ An example (from UNODC) of Regular Budget and Extra-Budgetary Resources:

https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/FINGOV/Background_Documentation_2009-2011/Agenda_Item_1/Regular-Budget-and-Extra-Budgetary-Resources.pdf

¹² Department of General Assembly and Conference Management: <https://www.un.org/dgacm/en>

¹³ <https://www.undrr.org/about-undrr>

¹⁴ <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-system>



Next Steps

It is proposed, initially, that a small group of Member States, potentially as ‘friends of the co-Chairs of UN-GGIM’ come together and, over a series of short meetings (1 hour in length), to discuss and elaborate the key points to consider in the reporting process for ECOSOC. This small group will determine the main messages of the Committee’s value proposition, agree upon general ideas/goals/objectives, and jointly assist in building consensus to develop the ‘battle plan’ in the reporting process.

The friends of the co-Chairs could contribute to review and refine the report on the implementation of ECOSOC Resolution 2016/27 to the eleventh session of UN-GGIM. Following the deliberation and guidance by UN-GGIM at its eleventh session, they could then assist in refining and finalizing the report of UN-GGIM to ECOSOC.

Given the proactive ambition for the UN-GGIM Expanded Bureau to gather and grow more support for the needed strategic leadership, this small group of Member States, as friends of the co-Chairs, could coordinate further with other Member States and encourage engagement with Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Permanent Missions to the United Nations in New York to ensure success in the reporting process and agreement on the resolution on strengthening the institutional arrangements of the Committee of Experts.

This group of motivated Member States, with their Permanent Missions, can be reasonably expected to be actively involved in the preparation, negotiation, and to co-sponsor the resolution, raise awareness and promote the report and draft resolution to fellow Member States, especially those who are members of ECOSOC. A key element will be to have as many ECOSOC members (Permanent Missions) as possible involved in the process. This will require professionals at capitals to engage, explain and coordinate with their respective Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Permanent Missions to the United Nations in New York to ensure the smooth passage and adoption of UN-GGIM’s report to ECOSOC including the subsequent anticipated resolution on strengthening the institutional arrangements of the Committee of Experts.

UN-GGIM Secretariat
New York
17 June 2021

