

Preparing the 2010 Ministerial Summit

THE 2010 SUMMIT TASK FORCE

As requested by the 15th Meeting of the Executive Committee, the Secretariat Director sent a letter on 6 July to all GEO Principals requesting that they submit nominations to the 2010 Task Force by 1 September. Nine Members and two Participating Organizations have provided the requested nominations. They are Chile, China, European Commission, Germany, Japan, Romania, the Russian Federation, Switzerland, Ukraine, EUMETSAT and the European Space Agency.

In order to gather inputs from the Task Force before the 6 October deadline for GEO-VI documents, and also to reduce costs, the Secretariat has invited the Task Force to participate in a teleconference during the week of 14 September. The Secretariat will encourage the Task Force to agree on holding a physical meeting in early 2010 or, possibly, during GEO-VI in Washington, and to exchange ideas via e-mail during the rest of 2009. To prepare for these first discussions, the Secretariat is drafting an informal note reflecting ideas from document 21 of the 15th meeting of the Executive Committee as well as additional ideas, including those reflected below. The Secretariat expects to be able to provide an oral summary of the results of the teleconference at the 16th meeting of the Executive Committee.

THREE PROPOSALS

In an effort to facilitate and advance the preparations for the Ministerial Summit, the Secretariat has generated a number of proposals on how to increase the Summit's impact, both on the outside world and on the GEO process itself. The Secretariat would like to present to the Executive Committee the following three brief concepts:

1 ORGANIZE A TASK TEAMS SYMPOSIUM IN JANUARY 2010

The benefits of organizing a Symposium for the GEO Task teams have been highlighted many times by various GEO meetings and participants. The GEO Task teams do the real work of implementing GEOSS, and they generate the bulk of GEO's 'added value' through their collaborative partnerships. The current GEO Work Plan contains some 45 overarching Tasks and 100 sub-Tasks. The number of potential inter-linkages amongst Task teams is correspondingly large. This complexity is both a challenge and an opportunity.

While the Task teams receive support and guidance from the GEO Committees, they do not always have the opportunity to interact directly with one another and exchange information and ideas and thus strengthen the overall cohesion of the GEO Work Plan. We believe that this Symposium would provide the opportunity to identify key achievements in GEOSS implementation that could be highlighted and recognized at the Summit, as well as to identify high-level trends and priority activities which could be subject to further guidance from Ministers during the Summit and featured in the Summit Declaration. If successful, this Symposium could become an annual event.

2 ESTABLISH A "2010 BASELINE" FOR A WIDE RANGE OF EARTH PARAMETERS

The "GEO Baseline Initiative" is inspired by the efforts of the biodiversity community to use a "2010 target" as a tool to promote a reduction in the rate of biodiversity loss. In November 2010, the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) will meet in Nagoya, Japan to assess the 2010 target

and, very possibly, agree to a new target to guide future action. A key challenge, however, is the lack of a credible baseline against which to measure the success (or lack of it) of such targets.

Similarly, initiatives to assess and monitor the state of, and trends in, the world's agricultural land, forest, air quality and water resources, and to use this information to craft effective policies, are hampered by the lack of global baselines for fundamental Earth observation data on land and forest cover, agriculture and ecosystems.

In the same spirit, we propose to establish a GEO 2010 Baseline Initiative that could be highlighted at the Summit. This initiative would develop in two parts. A first group of data sets, such as the Global DEM or agriculture parameters, could be developed (or sufficiently advanced) before the Summit so that they would be as early deliverables of the GEO 2010 Baseline. A second group would require a longer timeframe for production, even if much of the data is already available. For this second group, the Summit Declaration could call for the establishment of such baselines.

As is currently the case with the forest carbon Task, this initiative would not be limited to the one-off production of the data sets needed for setting baselines. Instead, it would establish a process, obtain the commitment of data providers, and identify the necessary tools and models, so that the baseline initiative remains an active component of GEOSS.

A guiding principle of GEO is that a single dataset can serve many Societal Benefit Areas. For example, reliable land cover data are essential for predicting and mitigating disasters, improving ecosystem health and services, protecting human health, conserving biodiversity and managing water and other natural resources sustainably. Just as the success of the CBD in encouraging scientists to develop a sound 2010 baseline on global biodiversity would benefit other GEO Societal Benefit Areas, the success of the GEO membership in spurring scientists to fill the data gaps needed to establish other 2010 Earth observation baselines would have a broad impact across multiple sectors. It would also greatly advance the implementation of GEOSS.

The GEO 2010 Baseline Initiative data sets could include:

- 30m land cover (Landsat data are already being collected for the Global Land Survey 2010 project);
- Phenology and temporal metrics (growing season variables) at 1000m from AVHRR, SPOT-VGT, MODIS and MERIS satellite-borne sensors;
- Forest cover, already collected and being analyzed;
- GEO Ecosystem Mapping (this project is already underway and could be completed by 2010);
- Transportation networks;
- Hydrology;
- Agriculture;
- Soils (a current GEO Task): and
- Digital elevation (the ASTER 30m GDEM has just been released).

3 ESTABLISH A COMMITTEE OF “WISE PERSONS”

A third initiative, which has already been discussed by the Executive Committee, would be to identify a representative group of “wise persons” with knowledge of Earth observations, policy making needs, and GEOSS implementation. This diverse committee of high-level persons would be invited to assess the progress being made by GEO and to provide recommendations for future action. Their deliberations could be summarized in a special paper that would be reviewed over the coming year by the Executive Committee and then presented to the Ministers and heads of delegation at the Summit.