

The Contributions of Earth Observations  
in Achieving the Post-2015 Development Agenda<sup>1</sup>  
*a summary outcome of the  
GEO – UN Roundtable, Geneva - February 18, 2014*

*This summary is the product of a Roundtable convened by the Group on Earth Observations (GEO) that included representatives of several UN Organizations, Specialized Agencies and Programmes who discussed how to strengthen the engagement of GEO with the United Nations, with the overall objective to reaffirm the value and improve the use of Earth observations in UN processes, with a special focus on the post-2015 development agenda.*

The UN Secretary-General's Synthesis Report on the post-2015 development agenda, *The Road to Dignity by 2030*, proposes a "framework to be able to monitor and review implementation (of the agenda), based on enhanced statistical capacities and tapping into the potential of new and non-traditional data sources." The report also acknowledges the efforts of the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) where the "environmental dimension is articulated across the whole sustainable development agenda...[and is] underpinned with a goal on global partnerships for the means of implementation," and underlines that "Mechanisms to review the implementation of the goals will be needed, and the availability of and access to data would need to be improved."

Further, UN Secretary-General's Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development (IEAG) has stressed the importance of data for decision-making and for accountability as key elements of the post-2015 development agenda and the implementation of the SDGs. A data revolution that is tailored to sustainable development will require - more than in the past - the integration of new data, including geospatial information and *in situ* monitoring, with socio-economic and statistical data. Opportunities offered by technological progress should be further harnessed.

As the General Assembly moves forward in the intergovernmental process to develop the post-2015 development agenda, the Secretary-General notes that the agenda should "include concrete goals, together with measurable and achievable targets...and it should include strong, inclusive public mechanisms at all levels for reporting, monitoring progress, learning lessons and ensuring mutual accountability." In addition, he states that in implementing the new agenda, nations must "base (our) analysis on credible data and evidence, enhancing data capacity, availability, disaggregation, literacy and sharing." High quality and accessible data will, therefore, be central in the post-2015 sustainable development agenda.

In addition, one of the six "essential elements" the Secretary General identifies as critical for delivering on the development goals is, *Planet: to protect our ecosystems for all societies and our children*, which includes the need to "address climate change, halt loss of biodiversity, address desertification and unsustainable land use, protect wildlife, safeguard forests and mountains, reduce disaster risk and build resiliencies, protect our oceans, seas, rivers and

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<sup>1</sup> Following the results of Rio+20, and considering that the year 2015 will see the completion of three key and interlinked global negotiations, as well as the convening of the GEO Ministerial Summit, GEO developed this Roundtable to discuss the role and value of Earth observations in UN processes. This summary will be transmitted to the different stakeholders engaged in the definition of the post-2015 development agenda, and it will inform the current planning process for the next decade (2016-2025) of the Group on Earth Observations' actions.

atmosphere, promote sustainable agriculture, fisheries and food systems; foster sustainable management of water resources and of waste and chemicals; foster renewable and more efficient energy; advance resilient infrastructure; and achieve sustainable management of marine and terrestrial ecosystems and land use.”

Consequently, understanding the Earth system as a whole is crucial to supporting economic growth, inclusive development and environmental sustainability, rendering the Sustainable Development Agenda a transformative step from the Millennium Development Goals. Comprehensive, coordinated and sustained observations of the Earth, acquired by satellites, ground or marine-based systems and airborne platforms, are essential for monitoring the state of the planet, increasing understanding of Earth processes, and enhancing predictability of Earth system behavior.

Earth observations deliver timely information, beneficial for all citizens, organizations and governments, to build accountability, help make appropriate decisions, and ultimately improve people’s lives. Advances in technology and capacities across the globe help us monitor global changes that transcend political and geographic boundaries.

The Rio+20 Outcome Document, “The Future we Want” already recognized in 2012 “... the importance of space-technology-based data, in situ monitoring and reliable geospatial information for sustainable development policymaking, programming and project operations” and noted “the efforts in developing global environmental observing systems, including .... the Global Earth Observation System of Systems” (GEOSS)<sup>2</sup>.

The Rio+20 outcome also underscored “...the need to strengthen UN system-wide coherence and coordination, while ensuring appropriate accountability to Member States”.

The above outcomes are clearly addressed by the Group on Earth Observations’ Ministerial Summits, the last in January 2014 and the next scheduled for November 2015, as well as by the international instruments being negotiated within the UN framework in 2015, namely the post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction (March 2015), the sustainable development goals (September 2015), and a new climate Change agreement (December 2015), which offer an unique opportunity “...to enhance coherence across policies, institutions, goals, indicators, and measurement systems for implementation, while respecting their respective mandates, principles and provisions.... Ensuring credible links between these processes will contribute to building resilience and achieving the global goal to eradicate poverty<sup>3</sup>.

Further partnerships and collaborations among different stakeholders will be needed to propose and develop concrete actions to support and sustain the implementation of global agreements.

In this context, coordinated Earth observations contribute to reinforcing coherence among these international instruments and provide the “credible data and evidence”, to enable nations to make decisions in all societal areas and to monitor performance towards achieving the goals and targets of the development agenda. The universal nature of the post-2015 development agenda will require data that are usable at a global level and comparable across

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<sup>2</sup> GEOSS (the Global Earth Observation System of Systems) is being developed by the Group on Earth Observations (GEO)

<sup>3</sup> Draft post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction. Advanced unedited version, 28 January 2015

different countries: sharing Earth observation data sets on a free, full and open basis, as currently supported through GEOSS, can make an important contribution in this respect. Complementarities and synergies between the UN and GEO should be nurtured with the objective of increasing the quality, availability and use of Earth observation data and information for sustainable development.

Progress towards increased access to data and information, combined with coordination of observing systems by intergovernmental, public and private organizations, makes the inclusion of Earth observations in the sustainable development agenda easier and more imperative. Integrating Earth observations with traditional and new data sources will provide decision makers at all levels with a unique, seamless, comprehensive picture of planetary conditions, providing support for national development and for those reporting, monitoring, lesson-sharing and accountability mechanisms referenced above.

The Roundtable participants agree that the emerging post-2015 framework for sustainable development must take full advantage of the potential of Earth observation data and information to support the implementation and monitoring of sustainability-related objectives.

The participants also recognize that, building on the important steps already made, further commitment and increased collaboration is needed to provide quality, timely and accessible data, information and associated resources to assist the global community.

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#### Roundtable participants:

- Government of Switzerland
- United Nations, Organizations, Specialized Agencies, Programmes and Conventions
  - FAO- Food and Agriculture Organization
  - OCHA - Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
  - UNEP - United Nations Environmental Programme
  - UNESCO – United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
  - UN-Habitat - United Nations Human Settlements Programme
  - UNITAR/UNOSAT - United Nations Institute for Training and Research/United Nations Operational Satellite Applications Programme
  - UNISDR - United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
  - UNOOSA - United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs
  - WHO – World Health Organization
  - WMO – World Meteorological Organization
  - Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions Secretariat
  - RAMSAR Convention Secretariat
- European Commission (representing the GEO Co-Chairs)
- Members of the GEO Implementation Plan Working Group (IPWG)
- GEO Secretariat

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