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Geographical Names  
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**Item 8 of the agenda \***

**Social and economic benefits, supporting sustainable development, measures taken and proposed for the implementation of resolutions and evaluation of the work of the Group of Experts (Working Group on Evaluation and Implementation)**

## **Opportunities of geographical names data files and gazetteers to support the 2030 Agenda**

Submitted by Germany\*\*

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\* GEGN2/2019/1

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## Summary

This Working Paper wants to open up a discussion about the opportunities for UNGEGN to contribute to the Agenda 2030/Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) indicator discussions and monitoring.

This UNGEGN Plenary meeting from 29 April to 3 May 2019 should address the issue of whether geographical names data can play a specific role in the SDG monitoring.

The involvement of naming experts within national SDG activities should be another opportunity given that the coordination bodies recognize the geographical names topic as worth being considered.

## Introduction

The importance of geospatial data in the overall UN/DESA<sup>1</sup> - ECOSOC<sup>2</sup> work program - 2030 Agenda – leaving no one behind – and particularly for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>3</sup> is a known and recognized topic within the UN Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM).

UNGEGN knows that geographical names standardization is a key element of the communication needed to enable the UN to become the world's most effective voice for international cooperation on behalf of peace, development, migration, refugee resettlement, human rights and the environment. Governments and all sectors of society's operations depend on authoritative naming of locations, for example: regional and local authorities, legal institutions, statistical bureaus, tourism authorities, public works departments, transportation companies – on air, land and sea, national security agencies, disaster management authorities, users of the internet, businesses and the public in general.

UNGEGN knows that geographical names is a core theme in any geospatial data set. The geographical names theme has a direct relationship with all other data layers (perhaps with the exception of imagery) that constitute fundamental themes. However, its value is often not well recognized, probably because the accuracy and validity of geographical names are easily taken for granted, being frequently used in daily conversation when referring to where an event occurred or in searching for a destination. It is therefore desirable that geographical names receive heightened recognition as a common and standardized reference framework essential for all fundamental geospatial data theme layers, used in the same way throughout the global community and contributing to national development by improving the exchange of information.

The need for a set of fundamental geospatial data themes to underpin and support geospatial information – and thereby the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) monitoring – has been acknowledged and reiterated by UN-GGIM since 2014. Indeed, work to identify these themes has taken place in all regions of the world, and UN-GGIM directed that this widespread activity should form the base of the current task [1].

Within the Millennium Development Goals Report it was highlighted that 'Knowing where people and things are and their relationship to each other is essential for informed decision-making' [2]. The SDGs are even more wide-ranging, and most, if not all, will require geospatial information to support policy decision-making, implementation of actions, and measuring and monitoring.

In 2015 the Statistical Commission created the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), composed of Member States including regional and international agencies as observers. The IAEG-SDGs

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<sup>1</sup> UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs - DESA

<sup>2</sup> Economic and Social Council -ECOSOC

<sup>3</sup> UN website on the SDGs: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

was tasked to develop and implement the global indicator framework for the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda. To meet the ambitions and demands of the 2030 Agenda, it is necessary for the global indicator framework to adequately and systematically address the issue of (authoritative and alternative) data sources and methodologies, including geospatial information and Earth observations in the context of geographic location. The Statistical Commission noted in March 2016 that the integration of statistical data and geospatial information will be the key for the production of a number of indicators [3]. As a means to address these issues, and to address specific areas relevant to SDG indicator implementation, the IAEG-SDGs set up the Working Group on Geospatial Information.

According to UN Resolution VIII/6 of the 8th UN Conference on Standardization of Geographical Names in 2002 geographical names data has to be integrated into national, regional and international spatial data infrastructures (SDIs). SDIs shall constitute the centrepiece and main geospatial data and services' platform to be used for monitoring the SDG indicator framework under the geospatial lens as well.

This introduction is identical for two Working Papers submitted to this UNGEGN session. One refers to the contribution of UNGEGN to UN-GGIM activities and has been submitted under agenda item 6(b) and the other one refers to UNGEGN's contribution to the SDG monitoring and has been submitted under agenda item 8.

This Working Paper wants to open up a discussion about

- What is the Agenda 2030 / Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?
- What are the opportunities for UNGEGN to contribute to the Agenda 2030/SDG indicator discussions and monitoring?

### **Examples for the relevance of geographical names data in the SDG indicator monitoring**

In 2015, countries adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice.




Figure 1 –Overview on SDGs: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>  
 [UNGEKN supports the SDGs]

To facilitate the implementation of the global SDG indicator framework, all indicators are classified by the IAEG-SDGs into three tiers on the basis of their level of methodological development and the availability of data at the global level, as follows [4]:

- Tier 1: Indicator is conceptually clear, has an internationally established methodology and standards are available, and data (including geospatial data) are regularly produced by countries [...].
- Tier 2: Indicator is conceptually clear, has an internationally established methodology and standards are available, but data (including geospatial data) are not regularly produced by countries.
- Tier 3: No internationally established methodology or standards are yet available for the indicator, but methodology/standards are being (or will be) developed or tested.


The Working Group on Geospatial Information established by the IAEG SDGs published a list of SDG indicators which shall be analyzed under a “geospatial lens” [5].

Two examples for SDG indicators of this list with a direct contribution of geospatial data are described within its goal and targets:

 <p><b>6</b> CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION</p> <p>[UNGEKN supports the SDGs]</p>	<p><b>Goal 6:</b>  <b>Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all</b></p> <p><u>Targets:</u>                  6.1: By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all                  [...]                  6.6: By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes                  One proposed indicator is 6.6.1: „Percentage of change in the extent of water-related ecosystems over time“.</p>
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This indicator 6.6.1 is categorized under Tier 1, meaning that internationally established methodology or standards are available for the indicator as well as (global, regional and national) data to calculate the indicator.

It is obvious that this indicator needs geospatial data for its calculation. The identification of catchment areas, lakes, rivers, basins, and water bodies, transboundary water resources and the proximity to urban settlements is needed. Data with standardized geographical names is an essential part of the unambiguous identification in order to analyze and monitor the changes in the regions.

 <p>[UNGEGN supports the SDGs]</p>	<p><b>Goal 11:</b>  <b>Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable</b></p> <p><u>Targets:</u>  11.2: By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons  [...]  11.7: By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities  One proposed indicator is 11.7.1: Average share of the built-up area of cities that is open space for public use for all, by sex, age and persons with disabilities.</p>
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This indicator 11.7.1 is categorized under Tier 3, meaning that internationally established methodology or standards are not yet available for the indicator, but methodology/standards are being (or will be) developed or tested.

The scope of the indicator is a bit ambiguous. There are two different types of objects to measure (according to the name of the indicator): the open space on one hand and the people that have access to the open space on the other hand. The current methodology does not address people as an object; hence, it does not permit disaggregation of accessibility by sex, age and persons with disabilities.

This indicator is an example for social issues which have to be addressed and monitored as well. Apart from the importance of standardized geographical names for the identification of the features ‘open spaces’, the cultural aspects and the language issues related to geographical names become crucial here.

### **Opportunities for UNGEGN to contribute to the SDG indicator discussions and monitoring**

The question is now: how can UNGEGN contribute to the discussions related to the SDG indicator framework and its national, regional and international SDG monitoring?

Unfortunately, there is not one “recipe” which can be considered the best. However, UNGEGN can be involved in the discussions through different channels.

*Contributions to the Online Discussion Forum of the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers of UNGEGN as one platform to discuss issues and contributions*

At the 11th Conference on the Standardization on Geographical Names in August 2017 in New York a panel discussion was arranged in order to stimulate and start discussions and elaborations on the geographical names related issues concerning the collaboration of UNGEGN with UN-GGIM and the 2030 Agenda. The panel discussed what the current involvement of naming institutions was, with regard to UN-GGIM activities and particularly on the national SDG monitoring.

It was identified that most naming experts weren’t aware of the international tasks related to the SDGs nor yet of the national SDG monitoring framework. Furthermore, there hadn’t been any coordination effort, explicitly requesting the use of geographical names data/gazetteers in the countries.

In Germany, the discussion has started to identify the SDG indicators with a geospatial dimensions for national monitoring, but the geographical names data has not yet been explicitly mentioned and no additional requirements have yet been set.

As an outcome of the panel discussion the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers of UNGEGN has established an Online Discussion Forum on the SDG and 2030 Agenda issues related to geographical names. Through this forum the Working Group is facilitating one platform for UNGEGN experts to commence investigations and discussions on the following questions [7]:

- How do geographical names data and gazetteers fit within the big picture of the SDGs? Are the issues related to production or accessibility?
- Is toponymic information like language, status of a name/language, etc. needed for all SDG indicators where geospatial data is needed?
- What is UNGEGN's contribution to this overall UN/DESA - ECOSOC work program - 2030 Agenda – leaving no one behind?



Figure 2 - Screenshot of Forum 4 on UNGEGN-UN-GGIM relationship and on Forum 5 on the SDG issues, <https://wiki.gdi-de.org/display/wgtdfg/Forum+5+-+Support+of+UNGEGN+to+the+Sustainable+Development+Goals+%28SDG%29+indicator+framework>

## The way forward

This UNGEGN Plenary meeting from 29 April to 3 May 2019 should address the issue of whether geographical names data plays a specific role in the SDG monitoring.

The involvement of naming experts within the national SDG activities should be another opportunity given that the coordination bodies recognize the geographical names topic as being worth of consideration.

The Online Discussion Forum is undoubtedly not the only way to gain knowledge and experiences on the SDG indicator discussions and the monitoring, but it provides a platform for UNGEGN experts to contribute, ask questions and receive answers. It can be a first step towards a common understanding of the geographical names related issues concerning the SDGs.

The exchange of ideas through the forum could also become the starting point for SDG-related issues to be considered within this UNGEGN Plenary meeting as well as further elaborated for the next UNGEGN Plenary meeting in 2021.

A side event about the objectives and functionalities of the Online Discussion Forum is going to be arranged within the UNGEGN Session.

## Points for discussion

The Group of Experts is invited to:

- (a) Take note of the report and progress made by UNGEGN towards contributions to the 2030 Agenda;
- (b) Express its views on the way forward concerning concepts, the developments as well as the opportunities to support the use of geographical names data within the SDG indicator monitoring

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- [5] Working Group on Geospatial Information established by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators emphasizing which SDGs have to be analysed under a “geospatial lens”: <http://ggim.un.org/docs/meetings/GGIM7/E-C20-2017-11%20Geospatial%20Information%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20Report.pdf>
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