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**United Nations Group of Experts On  
Geographical Names  
2019 session**

New York, 29 April – 3 May 2019

**Item 6 (b) of the provisional agenda \***

**Cooperation and liaison with other organisations**

**(b) Economic Commission for Africa and Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information  
Management**

**Status report on the contribution of UNGEGN to UN-GGIM activities**

Submitted by UNGEGN Bureau\*\*

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\* GEGN.2/2019/1

\*\*Prepared on behalf of the UNGEGN Bureau by Pier-Giorgio Zaccheddu, Convenor of the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers of UNGEGN (Germany) and Catherine Cheetham, Head of the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (PCGN) (United Kingdom)

## Summary”

This Working Paper wants to open up a discussion about the collaboration between UNGEGN and the Committee of Experts of GGIM, e.g. the outcome of the 8th Committee of Experts of GGIM and the opportunities for UNGEGN to contribute to UN-GGIM activities.

This UNGEGN Plenary meeting from 29 April to 3 May 2019 should consider the role UNGEGN can play in UN-GGIM activities.

The contributions to the UN-GGIM Working Group on Global Fundamental Geospatial Data Themes will be and is one opportunity for UNGEGN experts to provide input through the nominated experts.

## 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) is a known and recognized topic within the UN Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM).

UNEGN 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.

UNEGN 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 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.

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

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

According to UN Resolution VIII/6 of the 8<sup>th</sup> 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 has been the collaboration between UNGEGN and the Committee of Experts of GGIM?
- What came out of the 8<sup>th</sup> Committee of Experts of GGIM?
- What is UNGEGN's future role in liaison with UN-GGIM?

### Collaboration activities between UNGEGN and UN-GGIM since 2017

It is worth recalling the relationship document „Building Bridges“ which was submitted as a background document to UNGEGN’s report to 7<sup>th</sup> Committee of Experts of GGIM (August 2017)<sup>3</sup>. The relationship document dealt with the following topics:

- The genesis of UNGEGN and UN-GGIM
- The essence of a relationship
- The common principles
- The proposal for a cooperation model

The first UNGEGN and the Committee’s Bureaux physical meeting was held on Saturday 5th August 2017 at United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD). The meeting was convened as a follow up to the first virtual Bureaux meeting held on 8th February 2017. The commonalities between UNGEGN and the Committee, coordination and communication mechanisms and the possible creation of a liaison group were discussed.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Report of UNGEGN to the 8<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee of Experts on GGIM<sup>4</sup> was submitted in August 2018 under the title “Strengthening collaboration with the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN)”.

Since 2017 the following collaborative activities have been conducted:

- Meetings of the Bureaux in August 2017 and 2018
- Participation at sessions in 2017 and 2018
  - UNGEGN at 7th and 8th Committee of Experts of GGIM
  - GGIM at 30th UNGEGN and 11th UNCSGN
- UNGEGN’s contribution to UN-GGIM’s work on global fundamental data themes since May 2017
- Regional collaboration, geographical names database development for Africa
  - UNGEGN’s contribution and support of UNECA’s GeoNyms application

The following future opportunities and working areas have been identified by UNGEGN and UN-GGIM:

- Continue to support the UN-GGIM Working Group on Fundamental Data Themes
- The creation of a liaison group
  - develop a SMART plan for collaborative engagement
- UNGEGN’s contribution to the Agenda 2030 / SDG indicators<sup>5</sup>
- UN-GGIM experts to contribute to UNGEGN’s WG on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers
- Work jointly to encourage and communicate the benefits of geographical names standardization and the importance of creating names authorities/committees
- Regional collaboration – support UNECA’s Geonyms project to create a web based geographical names gazetteer for African Member States
- Explore with the support of the Academic Network strengthening the infusion of toponymy in GIM university programmes

The interventions at the 8<sup>th</sup> Session of GGIM emphasized “Promoting the collection, standardization and dissemination of geographical names” and that “Geographical names are an essential part of geospatial information management and its fundamental data themes”.

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<sup>3</sup> Relationship document UNGEGN-UN-GGIM: <http://ggim.un.org/docs/meetings/GGIM7/E-C20-2017-17%20Strengthening%20Collaboration%20with%20UNGEGN%20Report.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Report of UNGEGN to the 8th Session GGIM: [http://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/8th-Session/documents/E-C20-2018-17-Add\\_1Strengthening-Collaboration-UNGEGN-27July2018.pdf](http://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/8th-Session/documents/E-C20-2018-17-Add_1Strengthening-Collaboration-UNGEGN-27July2018.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> UNGEGN Bulletin No. 54: "Geographical names supporting sustainable development" published in June 2018: [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/Bulletin/UNGEGN\\_bulletin\\_54\\_finalver.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/Bulletin/UNGEGN_bulletin_54_finalver.pdf)

## Opportunities for UNGEGN to contribute to UN-GGIM activities

The question is now: how can UNGEGN contribute to the discussions related to the geospatial information management coordinated by Committee of Experts of UN-GGIM?

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 UN-GGIM Working Group on Global Fundamental Geospatial Data Themes*

The establishment of a Working Group on Global Fundamental Geospatial Data Themes was requested by the UN-GGIM Committee of Experts at its Fifth Session in August 2015 as per decision 5/103 Determination of global fundamental geospatial data themes. The Working Group has prepared a minimum list of global fundamental geospatial data themes and each data theme is supported by a description and short guidelines. The UN Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management adopted the minimum list of global fundamental geospatial data themes in August 2017. The prioritisation of the data themes and how they link to other data needs within the UN-GGIM programme of work, e.g. for the SDG monitoring, will be considered.

Common work items were identified between UNGEGN and UN-GGIM in 2017: fundamental data themes and geographical names databases [4]. Two experts from UNGEGN have been active members in this Working Group on global fundamental geospatial data themes since May 2017 and have consulted the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers of UNGEGN as well as the UNGEGN (extended) Bureau for contributions to the UN-GGIM Working Group since then.

### *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 11<sup>th</sup> 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 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.

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 relationship UNGEGN-UN-GGIM and 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 [5].

- What is UNGEGN’s contribution to the overall UN/DESA - ECOSOC work program for geospatial information management (UN-GGIM)?



Figure 1 - 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+UNEGN+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 how UNGEGN shall collaborate with and contribute to UN-GGIM.

The contributions to the UN-GGIM Working Group on Global Fundamental Geospatial Data Themes are one opportunity for UNGEGN experts to provide input through the nominated experts.

The Online Discussion Forum is undoubtedly not the only way to gain knowledge and experiences on UN-GGIM activities, but it provides a platform for UNGEGN experts to contribute, ask questions and receive answers.

The exchange of ideas through the forum could also become the starting point for UN-GGIM 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 a collaboration with UN-GGIM;
- (b) Express its views on the way forward concerning concepts, the developments as well as the opportunities to collaborate with UN-GGIM

## **References**

[1] UN-GGIM Fundamental Data Themes Description as a minimum list including geographical names as a theme: E-C20-2017-5 Fundamental Data Themes Report-1, <http://ggim.un.org/docs/meetings/GGIM7/E-C20-2017-5%20Fundamental%20Data%20Themes%20Report.pdf>

[2] The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015, <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/mdg/the-millennium-development-goals-report-2015.html>, [http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015\\_MDG\\_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20%28July%20%29.pdf](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20%28July%20%29.pdf)

[3] Report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators to the 47<sup>th</sup> Session of the Statistical Commission, March 2016: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/47th-session/documents/2016-2-IAEG-SDGs-E.pdf>

[4] Report UNGEGN to UN-GGIM-7, August 2017, Strengthening collaboration with the UN Group of Experts on Geographical Names – E/C.20/2017/17, [http://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/7th-Session/documents/E\\_C.20\\_2017\\_17-1708227E.pdf](http://ggim.un.org/meetings/GGIM-committee/7th-Session/documents/E_C.20_2017_17-1708227E.pdf)

[5] Online Discussion Forum of the Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers of UNGEGN to be utilized to commence investigations on geographical names related issues related to SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, <https://wiki.gdi-de.org/display/wgtdfg/Forum+5+-+Support+of+UNGEGN+to+the+Sustainable+Development+Goals+%28SDG%29+indicator+framework>