47th Session of the Statistical Commission

Morning Seminar

**Geospatial Information and Earth Observations:**

**Supporting Official Statistics in Monitoring the SDGs**

10:00am – 1:00pm, Monday 7 March 2016

**Context**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development specifically demands the need for new data acquisition and integration approaches to improve the availability, quality, timeliness and disaggregation of data to support the implementation of the new development agenda at all levels – including to exploit the contribution to be made by a wide range of data, including **earth observations and geospatial information**, while ensuring national ownership in supporting and tracking progress. This need has a goal, target and date associated with it, as described in Goal 17 in the area of data, monitoring and accountability: “By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing States, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, **geographic location** and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.”

A global indicator framework will be determined by the Inter-agency Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), in the coming months and presented to the Statistical Commission in March 2016. The indicator framework will guide how national governments in Member States measure, monitor and report on the SDGs and related targets in the years to come, based on individual national circumstances. But what does ‘geographic location’ mean in the context of high-quality, timely and reliable data? What does this mean in determining how geospatial information, earth observations and other Big Data can be implemented and integrated into official statistics and the indicator framework, as an enabling methodology, especially at local and national levels – and what is the role of the national geospatial information and earth observation agencies? In practical terms, is it possible to measure and monitor the targets and indicators of the SDGs not only within a statistical framework, but also supported by a geospatial framework?

**Background**

At its fifth session, convened in New York in August 2015, UN-GGIM committed to working closely with the statistical community; both at a national and global level, by providing inputs into the processes to develop the global indicator framework under the auspices of the IAEG-SDGs, as many goals have a geospatial dimension. As a means to do so, UN-GGIM supported the nomination of a limited number of Member State geospatial experts to the IAEG-SDGs in order to provide inputs into the development of the indicator framework, and agreed to the proposal of setting up a small task team to assist in developing the inputs, building on existing work and ongoing working mechanisms. Represented by Denmark, UN-GGIM provided a presentation on the importance and relevance of geospatial data sources and analyses for monitoring and managing the SDGs at the second meeting of the IAEG-SDGs in Bangkok in October 2015.

At its Twelfth Group on Earth Observations (GEO) Plenary and Ministerial Summit, convened in Mexico City in November 2015, the Mexico City Declaration, issued 13 November, affirmed that GEO and its earth observations and information will support the implementation of, inter alia, the 2030 Global Goals for Sustainable Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, the United Nations System of Environmental and Economic Accounts, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The declaration called on GEO to launch an initiative to leverage earth observations to support the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the 2030 Global Goals for Sustainable Development, building on the recent success of GEO’s engagement with the United Nations (UN-GGIM) on this issue. Within its agreed work plan, GEO will “expand its partnership with the UN Statistics Division and the UN Initiative on Global Geospatial Information (UN-GGIM), other relevant UN agencies (WHO, UNEP, UNOOSA, etc.), selected Member States (in particular, developing countries) and other partners (CEOS, SDSN, The World Bank, etc.) to help build processes, mechanisms and human capacity to integrate Earth observations with national statistical accounts to improve the measuring, monitoring and achievement of the SDGs.”

**Side Event**

While there is a general and growing appreciation of the value of and need for geospatial information, earth observations, and associated analyses by the IAEG-SDGs, it is not yet widely understood within the statistical community as to how such contributions can support official statistics, particularly as input data sources into the global indicator framework. Commensurately, the statistical community is looking for guidance as to how these rich datasets could be integrated with official statistics for cost effective SDG monitoring over time.

The UN-GGIM task team and GEO consider the convening of a high-level side event on geospatial/statistical information at the 47th meeting of the UN Statistical Commission will provide concrete examples of the need for disaggregating relevant SDG indicators by geographic location as stated in the 2030 Agenda and referenced by the IAEG-SDGs. This side event will also provide an opportunity for an open dialogue with the National Statisticians at the Statistical Commission, and will be an ideal means to demonstrate real and practical examples of geospatial and earth observation data inputs into targets and indicators and to highlight good practices and success stories that can lead us in the right direction for a coordinated and integrated approach over the coming 15 years.

The 3 hour side event will be convened by UN-GGIM in collaboration with GEO, and will have the high-level support of a number of Member States, including Mexico and Denmark. We are anticipating that the side event will be opened by the Permanent Representative of one of these Member States, and that a number of strategic presentations will be delivered by well qualified and respected global actors within the geospatial and earth observations communities.