

Regional SDIs Advance as UN-GGIM Moves Ahead



The sixth session of the UN-GGIM was held in New York last August. Greg Scott, inter-regional advisor to the committee, reports with additional material by Santiago Borrero, coordinator of the GeoSUR programme, a regional initiative led by spatial data producers in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Writing in the latest edition of GIM (October 2016) editor Durk Haarsma says that "It's time for a round of applause for professionals working in geomatics. There are many reasons why our sector deserves a pat on the back but the main one I am referring to is the success achieved by the UN Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) this summer, and the long-term consequences it will have for geomatics."

Haarsma was not only endorsing the work of the committee but its influence in getting the UN to push the importance of GI up the global agenda through other UN bodies like the Statistics Division and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which has passed a resolution acknowledging the fundamental role that GI plays in global sustainability and development. The move comes after five years of continuous effort by a group of enthusiastic specialists and professionals. They do indeed deserve praise.

12 substantive decisions

The significance of geospatial information's contribution towards managing and sustaining our world, reports Greg Scott, was once again reaffirmed at the meeting. The 12 substantive decisions taken by national government delegations demonstrated this relevance and significance in sustainable development globally, regionally and nationally. The session was attended by over 310 participants representing 93 Member States and a host of intergovernmental and international organisations, the academic and private sectors, as well as civil societies.

In its short history the Committee of Experts, with the support of many national to global geospatial partners, has sought to raise awareness and understanding that geospatial data, information technologies, platforms and services have become critical tools to support national development, economic growth, improved evidence-based decision-making and policy formulation. These new capabilities have enhanced the ability for governments, international organisations and researchers to analyse, model, monitor and report on challenges related to humanitarian, peace and security, sustainable development, climate change, disaster and other development issues, at scales ranging from local to global.

Workshops herald SDI plans for Americas

The event was preceded by several related workshops, writes Santiago Borrero. The Americas contributed with a workshop on the Caribbean SDI and a new UN-GGIM:Americas meeting at which a second edition of the Joint Plan for the Development of Spatial Data Infrastructure (SDI) of the Americas was adopted, now scoping the period 2016-2020. With this tool, the key regional SDI leaders (PAIGH, SIRGAS, UN-GGIM:Americas and GeoSUR) are harmonising their respective action plans to avoid duplication and to promote further SDI development. Also, this Joint Plan gives attention to new regional initiatives, consistent with UN-GGIM aims, as in the cases of the Geospatial Statistical Framework of the Americas (MEGA) and the proposed 'Atlas of Gender' in the Americas.

Also in New York reports Borrero, an ECOSOC resolution was approved to empower the GGIM Group of Experts and to provide the necessary institutional arrangements on geospatial information management to accomplish UN-GGIM objectives. The resolution, includes a final verdict on regional cartographic conferences to concentrate the efforts of the UN's Statistics Division (UNSD), among other key activities, in support of the regional committees and their technical and substantive activities.

The old instrument was clearly exhausted, he observed, and time will demonstrate the benefits of such an adjustment. Written in streamlining mode, the Resolution also dictates a change to the item on the ECOSOC agenda, from 'Cartography' to 'Geospatial Information'. 'Mapping' is safe, for the moment.

After a hiatus in UN-type meetings, adds Borrero, "I have witnessed the impressive work advanced by UNSD and the Expert Group. With more than 300 participants from 95 countries and the participation of international organisations, NGOs, and representatives from the private and academic sectors, UN-GGIM is advancing notably to properly locate the role of spatial information in the context of overall UN objectives for sustainable development."

However he sounds a note of caution: "I still do not see clearly how UN-GGIM goals will be attained with the same limited geographic institutions operating in a vast number of UN member countries, but recognition has to be given to its key role in progressing a global geodetic reference frame, the set of global fundamental geospatial data themes, the integration of statistical and spatial information, a legal and policy framework and the application of spatial information to optimise territorial administration, among other purposes. These activities will take a lot of time and – to reach consensus, as is the nature of the UN – considerable effort."

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