

# Gaining Speed and Direction - UN-GGIM 2017



Durk Haarsma reports that UN Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) has made great progress in taking both practical and strategic action to implement and strengthen geospatial information management for the member states.

This summer at the UN headquarters in New York, USA, 400 delegates from 90 countries met for the Seventh Session of UN-GGIM. The agenda included the development of frameworks, guidelines, norms, standards and capacities, all with a particular focus on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Following the adoption by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the resolution on 'Strengthening institutional arrangements on geospatial information management' in 2016, this year's session showed

that the adoption of that resolution has also strengthened the speed and direction for the process of UN-GGIM itself. Land administration, management and the development of effective land & property markets were also discussed.

The Committee started off by electing its co-chairs: Tim Trainor of the US Census Bureau for UN-GGIM Americas, Li Pengde of the Chinese National Mapping Agency for UN-GGIM Asia-Pacific, and Dorine Burmanje, CEO of the Dutch Cadastre for UN-GGIM Europe. They all took their turn in leading the meeting in an orderly, and often upbeat, manner.

## New Working Groups

The meeting welcomed and applauded the establishment of a new Working Group on Marine Geospatial Information, as proposed by the USA's NOAA and supported by the International Hydrographic Organization. It was subtly mentioned that two-thirds of the globe is covered by water, and such a large area of the world definitely deserves a group of experts devoted to it. The new Working Group will work on linking geospatial information in the important coastal areas where land and sea meet and where the majority of the world's citizens are living. Another new Working Group on Legal and Policy Frameworks was established. The Committee also adopted the Strategic Framework on Geospatial Information and Services for Disasters and endorsed an overarching framework for national institutional arrangements on geospatial information.

## World Bank

The World Bank's Director of Strategy and Operations Anna Wellenstein held a presentation for the Committee in which she announced that the World Bank is partnering with UN-GGIM to assist low-income countries in developing their national geospatial information systems by helping with resources for the implementation of spatial data infrastructures (SDIs). This newly established collaboration was accompanied by loud applause by the delegates; obviously, funds are often the bottleneck in developing countries and the World Bank has not been investing in SDIs until now. When asked for their reactions, the delegates overwhelmingly described this development as "significant", "positive" and "very important".

## Where is the Data?

Numerous side events are a traditional feature of the conference. One notable event this year was the Special Forum on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: 'Where is the Data?' More than 200 delegates attended this one-day forum that explored how the geospatial community will measure, monitor and report on the progress of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their associated targets and indicators with geospatial information using both new and already available data. One of the keynote speakers at this forum was Google's Ed Parsons, who can always be relied on to share some new insights. This year, he cautioned the geospatial community that SDIs are the problem, not the solution. According to Parsons, an SDI is aimed at "our little industry" and not for the greater good. Food for thought: "We are not the red tulip in the field of yellow ones".

## Mexico City

The Committee looked ahead to the Fifth High Level Forum on UN-GGIM, which will be hosted by INEGI in Mexico City in November of this year. The Forum will be based on the theme of 'Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: The Role of Geospatial Technology and Innovation'. The Eighth Session of the UN-GGIM Committee of Experts will be held at the UN headquarters in the first week of August 2018.

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