



Geospatial Data for Good ...but do we have Good Data?

Co-organized by the
World Health Organization (GIS Centre) and United Nations (Geospatial)
Meeting at WHO Headquarters, Geneva (Switzerland), 12 May 2022

Background

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are highly dependent on geospatial information as the primary data for relating people to their location, to their activities, and to measure 'where' progress is being made ([The SDGs Geospatial Roadmap](#), 2020). Geospatial data is key to understand, analyze, integrate, visualize and act on phenomenon such as climate change, global pandemic, population growth, economic trends, and social changes. Geospatial data enables decision-making, establishment of priorities, and targeted action and programmes for [people and planet in the United Nations](#) (UN) system. Governmental agencies are playing a key role through the development, maintenance and sharing of the official geospatial data forming part of a nation's foundation to inform national development and enable evidence-based decision making. In this context, ensuring national ownership for data, as recommended in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ([General Assembly, RES/70/1](#), para 76) is critical in supporting and tracking progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

As Secretary-General's word, how do we foster and *bring reliable geospatial data to bear to measure progress, inform decision-making and ensure effective programs*, including to address priorities highlighted in his Data Strategy, in countries ?

The [United Nations Geospatial Network](#) aims to strengthen the coordination and coherence of geospatial information management within the UN system. As described in its [Blueprint](#), the Network's aim is to foster collaboration among the United Nations system. The Network is a unique position to respond to the Secretary-General's call and bring to bear geospatial data for the priorities and challenges of our time.

Setting the scene

The UN Geospatial Network intends to harmonize activities and to identify strategic orientations and synergies toward a proposed governance model for geospatial activities in the UN system. Guided by UN-GGIM frameworks and working groups, the Network identified [Fundamental Geospatial Data Themes](#) that the UN needs to operate and act on its mandates.

As part of its priorities, the Network decided to investigate the [nexus of geospatial information and health](#) (para 11), prompted by its [work](#) during the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. At local level, in the context of SDG 3 on ensuring healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, geospatial data is critical to monitoring health of communities, assessing access to health



facilities or addressing priorities such as a global pandemic. Indeed, responding to simple questions, for people as “where do I get my vaccine” or for decision-makers as “where should we build a new hospital”, require robust and up-to-date geospatial data. The pandemic has taught us those weaknesses in data and information systems present an added and enormous challenge to decision makers. A global database on health facilities is still not available worldwide to identify infection and death rates.

On data aggregation and disaggregation, informing and deciding priorities requires data and information on common geographies. Indeed, administrative units as common geographies are critical to display, report, and analyze population, socio-economic, and environmental indicators at different levels of disaggregation and from different sources. Further common geographies form the link between data collection and implementation of actions, the archetype of the “Data for Action” concept. Common geographies, such as administrative units, are center to most, if not all SDGs. Using common geographies, one of the guiding principles of the [Global Statistical and Geospatial Framework](#) (GSGF), is a powerful mean to integrate a great variety of data. Despite such an important role, officially curated and standardized administrative units’ data are still missing worldwide.

In general, too often geospatial data collected in haste is often poor quality, lacks institutional ownership, or is of partial coverage. Data on common geographies, such as administrative units collected by the [SALB programme](#), or health access, such as health facilities collected through the [Global Health Facilities Database programme](#), are critical to both monitor and act for the SDGs. Strengthening governmental agencies to maintain and make available this data is required for reaching our common goals.

Meeting objectives

In coordination with the UN Geospatial Network of the United Nations Committee on Global Geospatial Information Management ([UN-GGIM](#)), the meeting is co-organized by WHO, [GIS Centre](#), and UN, [Geospatial Information Section](#), and held in Geneva, Switzerland, on 12 May 2022. The meeting has for objectives to:

- Review existing geospatial frameworks and global programs providing guidance on common geographies for the SDGs, in general, and SDG 3 in particular
- Discuss the challenges related to the availability, quality, and accessibility of fundamental geospatial data (administrative units and health facilities), including unique identifiers
- Consider how the wider UN system can contribute to strengthening capacities of governmental agencies (e.g., Ministry of Health, National Geospatial Information Authority) through a joint and standardized approach
- Consider joint use case that could address the SDGs and priorities from SG Data strategy

The meeting is supported by partners of the WHO and UN including the [Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation](#), the Center for International Earth Science Information Network ([CIESIN](#)) and the Geo-Reference Infrastructure and Demographic Data for Development ([GRID3](#)).