

UNSDI Governance Framework

1. Background and Objective

The purpose of this document is to outline the Governance framework for the United Nations Spatial Data Infrastructure (UNSDI) initiative. In order to understand the rationale for a Governance framework, it is important that the initiative is understood as being part of an evolutionary process within the UN system to build coherence in the management and application of geo-spatial information, which first started with the formation of UNGIWG (United Nations Geospatial Information Working Group) in 2000.

UNGIWG comprises a network of UN professionals and others, working in the fields of cartography and *geospatial information* management science to address common geospatial issues - maps, boundaries, data exchange, standards, naming conventions, and location. It also works directly with non-governmental organizations, research institutions and industry to develop and maintain common geographic databases and geospatial technologies to enhance guidance and operational capabilities. UNGIWG has reported periodically to the UN Chief Executive Board (CEB).

Since its inception, UNGIWG has been laying the foundations for a UNSDI (United Nations Spatial Data Infrastructure). The accomplishments of its Task Groups in particular indicated that refinement and refocusing of current activities and UNGIWG organization could deliver the components for such a system. During the 7th UNGIWG Plenary meeting held in Santiago in November 2006, it has been recognized that the development of a common vision and understanding on UNSDI was a priority. In order to build on common interests, the UNGIWG Secretariat consulted the UN agencies on the activities carried out within the agency that could benefit from the UNSDI.

Four primary UN business cases drive the need for a UNSDI:

1. Provision of spatial data and information
2. Development of common data services
3. Capacity building
4. Promotion of partnerships and cooperation

33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
61
62
63
64
65

When does a SDI make sense? “A SDI makes sense at the local, national, regional and global level where the overlap and duplication in the production of geographic information is paralleled by insufficient flows of geographic information among different stakeholders due to a lack of standardization and harmonization of spatial data bases”.

The SDI Cookbook, GSDI, 2004

In October 2005, UNGIWG proposed to develop a Spatial Data Infrastructure in the UN context to promote and achieve sustainable development, and improve humanitarian and peacekeeping operations. A UNSDI, like any other successful SDI initiatives, must revolve around the principle of sharing and reciprocity. Operating within a common framework of standards and tools will make it possible to maximize the impact of the total available resources for geo-spatial activities through future co-operation. Without a UNSDI there is the potential for many of the resources that the UN system spends on GIS to go towards duplicating other organizations' data collection and processing efforts. The same geographic data themes for an area are collected again and again, at great expense. Through the sharing of data and technical capacity the full benefits of geospatial data and information to stakeholders around the globe will be optimized.

Effective oversight of the management of geo-spatial information is the single most important predictor for creating value in UNSDI. SDI oversight is an executive management responsibility. No organization that has implemented SDI has created and sustained a successful SDI without substantial executive management oversight. Through the adoption of the governance framework, subscribing entities will not require changing reporting lines or changes to their internal structures. However, they will require a change in focus in the degree of accountability of how they support UNSDI. A governance framework will allow members of UNGIWG to engage in a conversation that spans across the full spectrum of geo-spatial activities within the UN system. This conversation will lead to increased coherence across the entirety of the UN's geo-spatial community and will reveal better and more coherent ways to support key stakeholders.

2. Scope and Principles of the UNSDI Governance Framework

The aim of the governance framework is to improve the use of geo-spatial data within the UN System, as well as between the UN System and its partners. The governance mechanism to be set in place will support UNSDI's effectiveness in both operational terms and executive management. The scope of the

66 framework will be limited to the implementation and coordination of UNSDI at the inter-agency level,
67 as well as informing participating and partner's organizations SDI.

68
69 The governance framework recognizes that partner SDI activities, undertaken in-house using existing
70 resources, may contribute to UNSDI. Although these activities will be governed by internal agency
71 governance structures, members are encouraged to situate these activities within the broader UNSDI
72 framework.

73
74 The UNSDI Governance Framework will be guided by the Principles of Humanitarian Information
75 Management and Exchange that were reviewed and amended at the Global Symposium +5
76 'Information for Humanitarian Action' at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, October 2007. [The
77 principles are to be inserted once Symposium Outcomes are finalized]1

78
79 The governance framework will support the resolution of issues related to the technical governance of
80 UNSDI, through the creation of an environment [UNSDI Technical Advisory Group] that will allow
81 members of UNGIWG to engage conversations of a technical nature and propose solutions for
82 consideration by the UNSDI Board [UNSDI Technical Advisory Group is an initial suggestion that
83 needs further consideration on whether or not to be formally established].

84 85 **3. Components of the UNSDI Governance Structure**

86 The institutional UNSDI Governance structure consists of the following:

- 87 1. UNSDI Board,
- 88 2. UNSDI Partners Group, and
- 89 3. UNSDI Technical Advisory Group.

90
91 The specific roles of each of entity are outlined in the following annexes [detailed annexes to be
92 developed pending outcome of discussions of UNSDI Governance Structure]

- 93 • Terms of Reference of the UNSDI Board
- 94 • Terms of Reference of the UNSDI Partners Group
- 95 • Terms of Reference of the UNSDI Technical Advisory Group [initial suggestion -
96 needs further consideration on whether or not to be formally established – see
97 separate technical governance notes]

- A UNSDI Institutional Organigramme (including project implementation structures)

4. UNSDI Project Modality

The UNSDI initiative will be set-up as a Project with specific and time-bound deliverables (hereafter referred to as the UNSDI Project). The UNSDI governance framework recognizes the possibilities, limits and nature of UN actions. This means the UNSDI Project must be realistic and quantified. It must be based on available resources [or a realistic estimate of future funding], which in turn obliges member agencies to initiate advocacy solutions to support UNSDI implementation, rather than a pure programmatic response. In doing so, UNGIWG recognizes that the implementation of UNSDI is as much about changing how people understand and appreciate geo-spatial information, as it is about project expenditure. This project approach also avoids the creation of expectations by stakeholders the UNSDI Project cannot or will not meet.

Because the UNSDI Project will be implemented through a project approach it will require the administrative and institutional umbrella of an executing agency. Any UN Agency [or UNGIWG member] with the required institutional capacity may nominate itself and offer its services to set-up and sustain the project. In the absence of any volunteer agency, the UNGIWG membership will request an Executing Agency [such as UNOPS] to provide the operational management services for receiving and disbursing funds, contracting, and procurement services.

While in the long-run it cannot be excluded that UNSDI Project will develop into another institutional framework, such as a programme and service provider, the first phase of its implementation (2008-2010) will be based on a project concept using both Sponsoring and Executing Agencies. This will allow the UNSDI Board to focus on coordinating the UNSDI Project, whilst allowing the appointed Sponsoring and Executing Agencies to concentrate on project delivery on behalf of the Board.

[To support accountability within the UN system, it is proposed that the UNGIWG Project be subject to an independent evaluation and audit in 2009; with the Board producing an Annual Report at the end of 2008 and subsequent years].

¹ <http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium/>

130 **5. Deliverables [or Project Outputs]**

131 As a project, UNSDI will be organized around specific time-bound deliverables [or Project Outputs],
132 each of which will be defined by:

- 133 • *Objective* What is the core problem that the deliverable will address? This should be defined in
134 terms of benefits for the target groups.
- 135 • *Result* are “deliverable”, i.e outcomes of the activities undertaken
- 136 • *Activities*, i.e. the actions that have to be taken to produce the results
- 137 • *Indicators*, i.e. a description of the results in operationally measurable terms (quantity, quality,
138 target group(s), time, place).
- 139 • *Sources of Verification*, i.e. where and in what form information on the achievement (described
140 by the indicators) of the result can be found.

141

142 The achievement of each deliverable will require the appointment of a responsible agency [and an
143 accountable focal point within that agency], a UNSDI Project document that establishes the planned
144 results, the strategy on how to achieve them, and the technical inputs [to be developed at a later date -
145 the set of documents defining a UNSDI deliverable will require the approval of the UNSDI Board
146 following adoption of the governance structure.]. Each deliverable will [if required] have its own
147 financial plan and will establish its funding requirements as a sub-project within the UNSDI project.
148 The budget for each deliverables will need to include management fees for the entire project to support
149 the overarching governance structure.

150

151 [The above project model only applies to UNSDI Board endorsed and agency sponsored deliverables].

152 In recognition of the onerous reporting requirements this project approach would require if applied to
153 individual partner SDI activities that are undertaken in-house using existing resources, a simplified
154 UNSDI format will be recommended to ensure visibility of these activities within the broader UNSDI
155 framework.

156

157 **6. Function of the UNSDI Board**

158 The UNSDI Board is the principal body governing the UNSDI project, as well as informing individual
159 agency SDI initiatives. [It consists of a minimum of seven and a maximum of nine voting UN Agencies
160 whereby ensuring that all UN pillars will be represented: political, peace and security, humanitarian,
161 and developmental.] Included in the board will be the UNGIWG co-chairs, which will also [lead/chair]
162 the Board. The detailed responsibilities, membership, etc. of the Board are attached [to be developed],

163 however, it is the Board which determines the overall project strategy, including: resource mobilization
164 strategy, communications strategy, engagement in strategic partnership with key stakeholders from
165 outside the UN system etc. As part of the latter, the Board accredits both partners and observers to the
166 Project.

167

168 **7. Involvement of Strategic Partners**

169 UNSDI is dependent on partnerships and cooperation in order to meet the overarching aim of UNSDI.
170 This is particularly true for the deliverables it seeks to implement. Hence, UNSDI Board invites
171 partners to join the implementation group(s) on deliverables, which is normally headed by a responsible
172 agency from among the UNGIWG members. As part of these groups, partners participate in the
173 formulation and planning of the deliverables itself, the implementation, the definition of technical
174 standards, processes and modalities.

175

176 All partners together will constitute the UNSDI Partners Group. This entity is being set-up to facilitate
177 the consultative process between the Board and its partners. The UNSDI Partners Group is invited to
178 attend the Annual Plenary Sessions of UNGIWG where special discussion fora will be established to
179 review issues concerning the overall strategy and progress of UNSDI.

180

181 Non-UN entities which are not involved in the implementation of specific project deliverables may
182 participate in the UNSDI process as observers. Both partners and observers will be accredited by the
183 UNSDI Board.

184

185 **8. Institutional Arrangements**

186 To ensure effective projective management and oversight of the UNSDI deliverables, a light
187 governance structure has been formulated to achieve a balance between coordination of the UNSDI
188 outputs [deliverables] and the resources required to ensure effective executive management of the
189 process. In the first instance, UNSDI is a project that is being sponsored and falls under the
190 responsibility and remit of the United Nations Geographic Information Working Group (UNGIWG). In
191 the longer-term, it is envisaged that UNGIWG, as part of the evolution of UNSDI, will develop into a
192 more formalized robust institutional framework.

193

194 **a. Sponsoring Agencies**

195 As both UNGIWG and the UNSDI Board have no institutional or mandated authority or capacity to

196 enter into any legally binding project agreement, all - or a number of – agencies that constitute
197 UNGIWG will need to sponsor the UNSDI project. Therefore UNGIWG, in seeking the
198 operationalisation of UNSDI through a project approach, will require both sponsoring agency (ies), and
199 implementing agency (ies).

200 201 **b. Executing Agency**

202 In the event the sponsoring agency requires additional support in the execution of the UNSDI project,
203 then specialty agencies, such as UNOPS, may be requested to provide operational management support
204 to the project. Within the UN System, UNOPS has been established to provide management services to
205 UN agencies, funds and programmes, as well as to UN member countries (www.unops.org). UNOPS is
206 self-financing and based on the payment of management fees by the “client” benefiting from the agreed
207 services.²

208
209 In the event that an Executing Agency is required, a standard Memorandum of Understanding would be
210 required between the Sponsoring Agency and the Executing Agency. This should cover the following
211 areas:

- 212 • Goals and objectives of UNSDI;
- 213 • Clear delineation of authority between UNGIWG and Executing Agency [draft Matrix
214 available with UNOPS as Executing Agency];
- 215 • Application of standard UN accounting and procurement regulations;
- 216 • UNSDI requiring to raise its own funds; and
- 217 • Determination of level of management fees

218
219 The Memorandum of Understanding should cover the first phase of the project (2008-2010) and be
220 open to any Sponsoring Agency that would wish to join it [draft Matrix available with UNOPS as
221 Executing Agency].

222
223 It is envisaged that the extant UNGIWG Secretariat will eventually be administered through either the
224 UNSDI Sponsoring Agency (ies) [as per current arrangements] or UNOPS. The advantage, from a
225 governance and sustainability perspective, would be for a transition to UNOPS to allow for the

2 [Note: UNOPS have been contacted and expressed its readiness to manage the UNSDI project. However, details have not yet been agreed to and would require specific negotiations once UNGIWG has established that no other agency among its member is ready to render its administrative capacity to set-up and manage the

226 institutionalization of both UNSDI and the UNGIWG Secretariat [Comment: The successful UNOSAT
227 model is an excellent example of how this arrangement can operate. UNOSAT is sponsored by United
228 Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and executed through UNOPS, which has
229 allowed for sustainable and predictable institutionalization of UNOSAT.]

230

231 **10. Project Manager and Project Staff**

232 The UNSDI Board will, through the Sponsoring Agency (ies) [or Executing Agency if required], recruit
233 a Project Manager and, if deliverables demand and resourcing permits, project staff will be recruited on
234 an as needed basis to support of the Board and the achievement of the various deliverables. The Project
235 Manager reports to the UNSDI Board and is responsible for the day-to-day coordination of the UNSDI
236 Project in all its facets. [Subject to UNGIWG membership and UNSDI Board approval it is proposed
237 that the Project Manager and his/her team will also take-over the responsibilities of the extant
238 UNGIWG Secretariat. This should take place in 2008].

239

240 **11. UNGIWG Task Groups**

241 The existing UNGIWG Task Groups will be transitioned and be organized around the deliverables
242 during the course of 2008.

243

244 **12. External Relations, Resource Mobilization, and Relationship with UN Reform Initiatives**

245 The success of UNSDI will depend to a large extent on the capacity of the project to contribute to the
246 attainment of the UN reform efforts (forging system-wide coherence and improve business practices).
247 This requires that all deliverables are formulated and planned in close collaboration with those entities
248 that are tasked to implement these reforms. Moreover, given that the UNSDI deliverables require
249 voluntary financial and other resources from the member states, external relations in general, and
250 resource mobilization in particular, will constitute a major part of the Board and project activities. This
251 includes relationships to the private and corporate sector in order to forge new models of public-private
252 partnerships in the area of geo-spatial information.

253