Land Degradation Neutrality

Flagship Governance Structure and Rules of Procedure

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1 Introductory Remark

Since its foundation in 2018 the governance structure of the GEO-LDN Flagship has evolved organically according to the needs and capacities of the actors engaged in the Flagship. This organic structure has created a lot of ownership and commitment and represents high value.

This document builds on the organic structure and is thought to increase clarity of structures and procedures where needed, without spoiling the flexibility of the current work. This clarity will be key for the long-term sustainability of the Flagship in conditions of volatile donor funding, especially for core tasks. It eases the involvement of new actors, notably for the acquisition of funding, and creates a basis for a stronger participation of countries. Further measures towards the long-term sustainability of the flagship are summarized in the GEO-LDN sustainability strategy.

The Governance Structure allows the Flagship to achieve its goal, as agreed by the group:

To support UNCCD parties in monitoring and reporting land degradation and implementing measures to achieve or exceed LDN (through geospatial data)

The GEO-LDN Flagship operates under the **GEO rules of procedure.**

2 Elements of the Governance Structure

The governance structure of GEO-LDN consists of the following elements:

- Members
- Secretariat
- Working Groups
- Leads Group
- Co-Chairs
- Strategic Advisors

Each of these elements will be briefly characterized in the following according to their composition, roles/ responsibilities, and procedures.

3 Ethical Standards and Intellectual Property

GEO-LDN is committed to upholding the highest standards of ethics, integrity, accountability and transparency across and throughout the community.

The rules for ethical standards and intellectual property from the GEO Rules of Procedure apply to the GEO-LDN Flagship.

4 Members

4.1 Composition:

Members of GEO-LDN can be Individual Members, Participating Organizations and Associate Members.

Individual Members are individuals who are aiming to achieve LDN and are working at an implementation level, or that contribute to achieving Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) through Earth Observation (EO), data integration, policy support, or capacity development. They come from key stakeholder groups: governments, civil society, private sector, universities, development partners, and international organizations. They can participate in the Governance of GEO LDN (Leads Group, Working Group Co-Leads, Co-Chairs, Strategic Advisors) and have voting rights

Participating Organizations are organizations, institutions, and entities who are aiming to achieve LDN and are working at an implementation level, or that contribute to achieving Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) through Earth Observation (EO), data integration, policy support, or capacity development. These may include government agencies from Member States of the United Nations, UNCCD parties and the European Commission, intergovernmental and international organizations, universities, research centers and non-governmental organizations. They can participate in the Governance of GEO LDN (Leads Group, Working Group Co-Leads, Co-Chairs, Strategic Advisors) and have voting rights

Associate Members are commercial firms and national associations of commercial firms. GEO-LDN Associates must be registered as a GEO Member. They can contribute to the GEO-LDN Working Groups. They cannot participate in the Governance of GEO LDN (Leads Group, Working Group Co-Leads, Co-Chairs, Strategic Advisors) and have no voting rights.

Both Individual Members and Participating Organizations have equal voting rights: one vote per member, one vote per organization in case of participating organization membership, to ensure balanced and inclusive governance. Membership of participating organizations provides continuity and organizational backing, while individual membership ensures the direct engagement of practitioners and experts. Together, they ensure that GEO-LDN benefits from both personal expertise and institutional stability in pursuing its mission towards Land Degradation Neutrality

4.2. Roles / Responsibilities

Each individual member has the right and responsibility to engage in the Flagship to move forward the achievement of its goal according to their personal and organizational means and resources.

Individual Members participate in GEO-LDN in their personal capacity, contributing their professional expertise, time, and experience to advance the Flagship's objectives. They may join Working Groups, provide technical or methodological input, and can be elected to the Leads Group as representatives of their personal engagement.

Representatives of GEO-LDN participating organizations represent their organizations within the GEO-LDN network and may participate in Working Groups, contribute to the Flagship's strategic priorities, and take part in Members' Meetings. They are entitled to nominate representatives to the Leads Group elections, engage in GEO-LDN events, and co-develop tools, methods, or capacity-building activities.

Participating Organizations join GEO-LDN as organizations or entities representing a collective mandate and long-term institutional commitment. They nominate one official representative to act on behalf of the organization in GEO-LDN activities and Members' Meetings. Participating Organizations contribute through in-kind or financial support, staff time, data provision, or organizational hosting of activities and events.

Members with voting rights validate and legitimize strategic decisions of the Flagship, especially changes in the goals and the structure of the Flagship. This includes the election of members of the Leads Group.

Opportunities and benefits of joining the GEO-LDN community include: participating in partnerships with governments and non-governmental entities; providing and accessing Earth observation data, information and knowledge in an open environment; increasing the diversity and numbers of users of Earth observations; building capacity throughout the world; increasing visibility and high-level support for sustained Earth observations and leveraging funding for activities nationally, regionally and globally. These opportunities are for Individual members, participating organizations and associates alike.

4.3 Procedures

The *Members* come together every two years for Members Meetings. The Members Meeting can be held in person (ideally back-to-back to other events) or virtually.

The agenda for the Members Meeting is defined by the Leads Group. Invitations are sent out by the Secretariat with four weeks' anticipation and a defined agenda.

In general, the Members are seeking consensus on key decisions. If necessary, decisions are made by voting with simple majority among members present in the meeting with one vote for each organization participating in the Flagship.

Applications for membership are informally presented to and decided upon by the Leads Group. people active in Working Groups automatically become members of the GEO LDN Flagship. Names are submitted by the Working Group Co-Leads to the Secretariat.

In the case of voting, present members coming from the same organization decide together how they want to vote.

4.4 Procedures for Membership Admission and Renewal

Applications for membership in GEO-LDN can be submitted on the GEO-LDN website either as Individual, Participating Organization or Associates. The Secretariat receives and reviews all applications to ensure alignment with the GEO-LDN Vision, Mission, and Objectives.

Individual Membership:

Interested people submit an online application form expressing their motivation, areas of expertise, and intended contribution to the Flagship. Applications are reviewed by the Secretariat and presented to the Leads Group for approval. People active in Working Groups automatically qualify as individual members once confirmed by the respective Working Group Co-Leads. Individual membership remains valid as long as members maintain active participation in GEO-LDN activities. Individuals are considered active if they contribute to the work of the Flagship once per year.

Membership of Participating Organizations:

Institutions, organizations, or entities wishing to become members of GEO-LDN submit a Membership Form specifying their expected contribution (e.g. in-kind support, staff time, data, capacity development, or hosting activities). Applications are reviewed by the Secretariat and submitted to the Leads Group for decision.

To be recognized as a GEO-LDN Associate, candidates must send an application to the GEO-LDN Secretariat. Eligible candidates must demonstrate two or more years of substantive involvement with GEO-LDN and identify their proposed contributions to GEO-LDN, which must be self-funded and sustained.

The Secretariat maintains a registry of all members and ensures regular communication and transparency regarding membership status. The Leads Group may review or suspend membership—whether individual or Participating Organizations—in cases of inactivity, misconduct, or clear misalignment with GEO-LDN's guiding principles.

5 Leads Group

5.1 Composition:

The Leads Group consists of up to 15 people representing the different key stakeholder groups in the GEO-LDN Flagship. None of the key stakeholder groups should have a dominant position in the Leads Group. People with immediate family or other ties should not be in the Leads Group at the same time. Ideally, there is an equal participation of women and men, age groups and people from different continents in the Leads Group.

A maximum of 2 Co-Leads of each of the Working Group and 3 Co-Chairs are automatically members of the Leads Group. Additionally, 4 members of the Leads Group are directly elected by the Members. These People represent forms of engagement apart from the Working Groups, such as liaison with organizations, contact to countries and their interests, engagement in transversal topics, organizational support or general support to GEO-LDN. The number of Leads depends therefore on the number of working groups and additional members appointed by the Members.

The Leads Group is free to invite guests (temporarily or permanently) whenever necessary. The guests bring specific knowledge to the Leads Group that is not covered by the Leads Group members. Guests have no voting rights.

5.2 Roles/ Responsibilities:

The Leads Group provides strategic guidance to the GEO-LDN Flagship, for instance regarding the structure and strategic focus of working groups. It oversees resource allocation, monitors the progress of the activities and the working groups, and guides the work of the Secretariat.

Leads group members also represent the GEO-LDN Flagship externally, for instance for purposes of fundraising. The Leads Group decides on any external responsibilities of the Flagship, for example regarding additional financing.

The Leads Groups approves documents that emerge out of the work of the Flagship either giving records of achievements made or clarifying, orienting and easing the work in the Flagship, all in accordance with ethical standards and intellectual property rules mentioned above. It also recognizes in-kind contributions of members to the Flagship.

For the accomplishment of its tasks, the Leads Group is supported by the Secretariat.

The Leads Group takes care of the alignment of the Flagship with GEO-procedures.

5.3 Procedures:

The Leads Group meets virtually every six months.

A draft agenda for the Leads Group meetings is prepared by the Co-Chairs with support of the Secretariat and approved at the beginning of the meeting.

In general, the Leads Groups seeks consensus on decisions. If necessary, decisions are made by voting with a simple majority of the members present in the respective meeting. A minimum quorum of 50% of the Leads Group members in the meeting is required for the voting to be binding. Leads Group members that have interests (e.g. receiving funds) abstain from voting on issues where their interests are concerned.

Mandates of the members of the Leads Group are always for a period of two years. Reassignment and re-election of the same people is possible. The respective elections or assignment of Working Group Co-Leads and the election of the other Leads Group members in the Members Meeting should not be carried out all at the same time, so that there is always a mix of experienced and new Leads Group members.

The Leads Group elects three GEO-LDN members as Co-Chairs. They prepare (with the support of the Secretariat) and facilitate the Leads Group Meetings and take care of the steering of the Flagship between the Leads Group Meetings.

6 Co-Chairs

6.1 Composition:

The three Co-Chairs are elected by the Leads Group. Ideally, they represent different work-streams, continents and genders within the Flagship to represent its diverse perspectives and experiences.

6.2 Roles/ Responsibilities:

As members of the Leads Group, the Co-Chairs have the same rights and obligations as any other Leads Group member. Their function is to prepare (with the support of the Secretariat) and facilitate the Leads Group Meetings and take care of the steering of the Flagship in the times between the Leads Group Meetings.

In that sense they:

- adhere to GEO requirements and any internal rules GEO-LDN has given to itself;
- take care of an efficient, effective, collaborative and harmonious operation of the Flagship;
- strategically coordinate activities across the Flagship, leveraging networks, negotiating and seeking consensus;
- are points of contact for internal and external stakeholders;
- highlight collective outputs of the Flagship;

- promote inclusive participation across regions, sectors, and stakeholder groups;
- support the development and implementation of mechanisms to monitor progress, evaluate impact, and ensure accountability across the Flagship;
- encourage knowledge exchange and collaboration between working groups;

6.3 Procedures:

The Co-Chairs' mandate is for three years. Re-election is possible. Generally, a rotation of people in the function of Co-Chairs is considered beneficial for the strengthening of the Flagship.

For their tasks the Co-Chairs organize themselves in a lean way according to their means and capacities.

7 Secretariat

7.1 Composition:

Ideally the Secretariat tasks are accomplished by full-time staff contracted through donor funding. For sustainability reasons, it is preferred to count on funding from more than one donor. The number of staff depends on the funds available.

In case no donor funding is available, the Leads Group – based on prior clarification with the people and their organizations - assigns two people for Secretariat tasks with at least 10% of their normal working time. To avoid overloading, such assignments should be temporarily limited. The rotation schedule should be structured to consistently pair an experienced team member with a newer one. This will also allow a good transfer of knowledge about the tasks in the Secretariat.

7.2 Roles/ Responsibilities:

The Secretariat coordinates day-to-day operations and supports the Leads Group and Working Groups.

It prepares and facilitates Leads Group and Members Meetings, takes care of logistics and maintains a membership list (with names, organizations, contact data).

The Secretariat holds contact with Working Group Co-Leads.

It organizes monitoring and acknowledgement of activities and in-kind contributions.

The Secretariat also reports on progress, communicates and liaises with stakeholders and funding donors.

According to the staff available, the Secretariat tasks may be more extended or need to be limited to a minimum. Decisions on the tasks are made by the Leads Group.

7.3 Procedures:

The Secretariat organizes its work autonomously. Through donor funding (if available) office space is provided.

As a linkage to the Leads Group members and Working Group Co-Leads, a weekly virtual meeting (in brief Weekly) is held. In the absence of core funding for Secretariat functions, the Weekly becomes the core organ for the coordination of day-to-day operations. Then, it will be the key function of the people assigned to Secretariat tasks to organize the Weekly and do follow-up, if necessary. In the Weekly decisions can be made that will later be formalized in Leads Group meetings. Participation in the Weekly is not obligatory.

When donor funding is available, the Secretariat also fulfils procedures required by the respective donor(s).

8 Working Groups

8.1 Composition:

GEO LDN currently has three working groups. The topics are Capacity development, Data Analytics and Standards, and Decision support. Members are invited to join the Working Groups. Ideally, each member participates in at least one Working Group.

Each Working Group has two Co-Leads who organize the activities of the Working Group (with details to be defined in Working Group concept notes). One of them is elected by the Working Group members, the other is assigned by the Leads Group. The task of Co-Leads is always assigned for two years. This is done in a way that every year one Co-Lead is newly assigned or elected respectively so that an experienced and a new Co-Lead work together. If desired and agreed upon by Working Group members, when renewing Co-Lead functions, same person/ organization can be extended in the role.

8.2 Roles/ Responsibilities:

The Working Groups do the operational work of the Flagship. They develop the products and services of GEO-LDN, research, test, apply and communicate. They link with other initiatives on the same topic, organize exchange and sharing of knowledge and experiences, recognize different perspectives and needs and support finding a good balance between differing interests. The goal of GEO-LDN connects the Working Groups with each other.

Cross-cutting issues or services, such as gender, land tenure or help desk are addressed by all Working Groups.

8.3 Procedures:

Each Working Group defines its work processes and formats based on clear and commonly understood goals. These goals are revised every two years to check if they are still valid but can be iteratively developed if an obvious and agreed need arises.

The Working Groups report yearly to the Leads Group on their progress. The Working Groups also report on the resources in their availability, including in-kind contributions.

The Secretariat supports the Working Groups with coordination, logistics and (methodological) advice (if possible).

The Working Groups elaborate concept notes that inform others about their goals, services, products, procedures, etc. The concepts notes are revised every two years.

9 Strategic Advisors

9.1 Composition:

Strategic Advisors are individuals or representatives of institutions who support GEO-LDN with strategic guidance and expertise. Advisors are invited based on their relevant experience and networks. Participation is voluntary based on their individual capacity. Ideally, Advisors cover the key domains of GEO-LDN (e.g., capacity development, data analytics and standards, decision support) to ensure balanced expertise.

9.2 Roles/Responsibilities:

Strategic Advisors participate in meetings, Working Groups and related activities and contribute working time as individually agreed. They provide strategic advice on priorities, product design and partnerships; they point to relevant data, methods and shared knowledge, and facilitate connections within GEO and GEO-LDN networks. Advisors display transparency regarding commercial interests and adhere to GEO and GEO-LDN ethical standards and intellectual property rules.

9.3 Procedures:

Strategic Advisors are onboarded through a short letter of engagement outlining expected contributions, time commitment and confidentiality/IP rules. Advisors meet at least annually with the Leads Group to review progress and priorities; They can participate in working groups on an ad-hoc basis. The Secretariat coordinates invitations, logistics and document access, and maintains an up-to-date roster of Advisors and declared interests. Benefits for Advisors include visibility as GEO-LDN Strategic Advisors and access to GEO/GEO-LDN networks, pointers to data and methods, and early product versions.

Annex I: Tabular Overview

Category	Composition	Roles/Responsibilities	Procedures
Members	Individual Members, Participating Organizations, Associates (no voting rights)	Join WGs; provide technical/in-kind/data/capacity inputs; validate strategic decisions; elect Leads.	Members' Meeting every 2 years; consensus or simple majority; applications via Secretariat; WG-active individuals auto-enrolled; one vote per individual/org.
Secretariat	Ideally donor-funded staff; if unfunded, two assigned people ≥10% time with rotating pairing.	Day-to-day ops; prepare/follow-up Leads & Members meetings; membership registry; monitor/acknowledge contributions; comms & donor liaison; support WGs.	Autonomous organization; weekly coordination ("Weekly") with Leads/WG Co-Leads; fulfil donor procedures when applicable.
Working Groups	Three WGs (Capacity Development; Data Analytics & Standards; Decision Support); two Co-Leads per WG (one elected by WG, one appointed by Leads), staggered 2-year terms.	Operational delivery; develop/test/apply/communicate products & services; link to initiatives; address cross-cutting issues (e.g., gender, land tenure, help desk).	Define own processes/goals; revise goals and concept notes every 2 years; annual progress/resources report to Leads; Secretariat support.
Leads Group	Up to 15 peoples; automatic members: up to 2 Co-Leads per WG, Strategic Advisors, Head of Secretariat; plus 4 elected by Members; diversity and balance required; guests possible (no vote).	Strategic guidance; resource allocation; oversight of activities & Secretariat; external representation/fundraising; approve flagship documents; align with GEO procedures.	Meets virtually every 2 months; agenda by Co-Chairs with Secretariat; consensus or simple majority with ≥50% quorum; 2-year mandates with staggering; elects 3 Co-Chairs.
Co-Chairs	Three, elected by the Leads Group; ideally reflect work-streams, regions, genders.	Prepare/facilitate Leads meetings; steer between meetings; points of contact; coordinate strategy, promote inclusion & visibility; support monitoring/accountability; foster WG collaboration.	3-year terms; re-election possible; lean self-organization.
Strategic Advisors	Advisors are part of governance and are automatic members of the Leads Group.	Advisory function to GEO-LDN	Invited by leads group members or the secretariat