

GCOS STEERING COMMITTEE
SIXTEENTH SESSION
GENEVA, SWITZERLAND
14-17 OCTOBER 2008

Item 13.3

The Role of GCOS National Coordinators

(Submitted by the Secretariat)

Summary and Purpose of Document

This document introduces a draft letter (Annex A) prepared by the Secretariat for signature by the heads of the four Sponsors of GCOS. The letter urges all countries to appoint GCOS National Coordinators and establish GCOS National Committees. Updated draft Terms of Reference for GCOS National Coordinators (Annex B) are also provided for consideration by the Members of the Steering Committee.

ACTION PROPOSED

It is proposed that the Members of the Steering Committee review and approve the draft letter and revised Terms of Reference for GCOS National Coordinators and that, in coordination with Sponsor representatives present, an efficient process be determined for sending the letter to the relevant focal points of all four GCOS Sponsors.

1 Background

1.1. Action 6 from SC-XV requested the GCOS Secretariat to prepare a joint letter to be sent by the four GCOS sponsoring organizations urging countries to appoint national coordinators and to establish cross-agency national committees or offices. In addition, Action 46 requested the Secretariat to update the Terms of Reference (TORs) for GCOS National Coordinators. Although the preparation of the letter and updated TORs were delayed, draft versions of both have now been prepared. The proposed joint letter is attached as Annex A, and the updated TORs are included as Annex B.

1.2 GCOS has long called for the appointment of national coordinators and the establishment of national committees. The UNFCCC's Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) added its encouragement to Parties to do so in 2002. The Chairman of the GCOS Steering Committee called attention to the desirability of establishing national coordinators and national committees again last year at COP-13 in Bali, Indonesia. Similarly, the WMO Congress XV Resolution on GCOS urged Members "to establish GCOS National Committees and to identify GCOS National Coordinators in order to facilitate coordinated national action on observing systems for climate, taking into account the joint international sponsorship of GCOS and the evolving international arrangements for GEOSS."

1.3 The importance of the need to establish GCOS national coordinators and committees in all countries (only 14 national coordinators have been established to date) is now firmly recognized. In fact, it may be concluded that the future effective functioning of GCOS will depend greatly on the degree to which efficient coordination mechanisms are put in place at national and regional levels. While sending a letter to urge action may have only limited success, it is a necessary and useful first step, especially so if the actions urged are jointly endorsed by the executive heads of the four Sponsors of GCOS.

2 Process Considerations

2.1 The draft letter and revised TORs will need to be finalized and approved by the representatives of the four Sponsors of GCOS, who comprise the Interagency Coordinating and Planning Committee (ICPC). Once all Sponsors agree on the text of the two documents, the signatures of the executive heads will need to be added to the letter. It is intended that the letter be sent to the focal points within each country of each of the Sponsors. In the case of the WMO, for example, this would be to the Permanent Representative to the WMO of each country. There are several possibilities for sending the letter, but the one that appears most effective and efficient appears to be to have each Sponsor send a jointly signed copy of the letter and TORs, using its own letterhead, to its respective national focal point. The letter itself urges consultation by "colleague national focal points for WMO, IOC, UNEP and ICSU, as appropriate, to establish the necessary channels of communication."

3 Recommendation

3.1. It is recommended that the Steering Committee agree on the text of the draft letter and draft TORs and that the ICPC members finalize the document and prepare it for joint signature. It is further recommended that the four Sponsors of GCOS then send the letter to their respective focal points.

Re: Global Climate Observing System (GCOS) National Coordinators

Dear ...,

As the Executive Heads of the four intergovernmental and international organizations that co-sponsor the Global Climate Observing System (GCOS) – the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the International Council for Science (ICSU) – we are writing to encourage you to establish appropriate national coordination mechanisms for the implementation of GCOS on a national level.

GCOS provides the international framework through which the various global observing systems and programmes operated under the auspices of WMO, IOC/UNESCO, UNEP, and ICSU are strengthened and coordinated to meet the full range of user needs for climate and climate-related observations. These include needs for climate system monitoring, climate change detection and attribution, and assessment of the impacts of, and adaptation to, natural climate variability and human-induced climate change.

You may recall that, in 2002, all countries were urged to appoint GCOS National Coordinators, establish GCOS National Committees, and identify GCOS national networks. To date, 13 countries have formally appointed a National Coordinator: Australia, Canada, China, Finland, France, Germany, Mali, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, the Russian Federation, Switzerland, and the USA. In addition, most countries have identified focal points for a range of atmospheric observations. However, National Coordinators and/or National Committees still need to be established in the majority of countries worldwide. As the Sponsors of GCOS, the WMO, IOC, UNEP, and ICSU strongly endorse the call from the UNFCCC Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) at its 23rd session (Montreal, 2005) for countries that have not yet taken these steps to do so now under the joint sponsorship of the national contacts for WMO, IOC, UNEP, and ICSU. A GCOS National Coordinator would also be expected to serve as the working level contact between each country and the GCOS Secretariat in Geneva.

Switzerland and China serve as examples to illustrate how the establishment of national coordinating mechanisms can lead to better awareness of the importance of climate observations, and, subsequently, to increased levels of funding for such observations. In Switzerland, the establishment of a national GCOS Office enhanced dialog among various institutions and led to a well-received first report on the status of national climate observing systems. This report subsequently helped leverage additional base funding by the national government for sustained climate measurements and operation of international data centres. In China, the establishment of the GCOS China Committee has led to enhanced collaboration among twelve national institutions involved in atmospheric, ocean, and terrestrial observations for climate. The GCOS China Committee developed a comprehensive implementation plan for a national climate observing system. This plan has been approved by the climate-related national agencies and currently coordinates implementation in key areas of the country.

We suggest that you consult with your colleague national focal points for WMO, IOC, UNEP and ICSU, as appropriate, to establish the necessary channels of communication and agree on the designation of a National Coordinator. Once such a coordinator is designated, the Director of the GCOS Secretariat (email: gcosjpo@wmo.int) should be informed.

The ultimate success of GCOS will depend on effective coordination at the national level of the contributions of Member countries to the WMO Integrated Global Observing Systems (WIGOS), the IOC-led and co-sponsored Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS), the FAO-led and co-sponsored Global Terrestrial Observing System (GTOS), and the many other in situ and space-based observing systems providing climate-related observation data. The need for an effectively operating GCOS has recently assumed even greater importance with the adoption of the UNFCCC Nairobi Work Programme on adaptation to climate change. In the context of the adaptation imperative, the demand for reliable, high-quality climate observations, for example, to support modelled climate predictions and projections useful in adaptation planning, has probably never been greater.

You will find the attached general Terms of Reference for GCOS National Coordinators helpful, along with relevant information given on the GCOS website (<http://gcos.wmo.int>). The enclosed booklet also provides a brief explanation of the concept of GCOS and some examples of GCOS networks and their contribution to user needs.

We thank you in anticipation for your support for improved coordination of GCOS at the national level. We believe that the strong interest in GCOS implementation by the Parties to the UNFCCC will ultimately benefit the observation networks of all countries and also assist them in meeting the objectives of the Global Earth Observing System of Systems (GEOSS), in which GCOS is designated as the climate observation component.

Yours sincerely,

(M. Jarraud)
Secretary-General, WMO

(P. Bernal)
Executive Secretary, IOC/UNESCO

(A. Steiner)
Executive Director, UNEP

(T. Rosswall)
Executive Director, ICSU

GCOS NATIONAL COORDINATORS - TERMS OF REFERENCE**(UPDATED TO JULY 2008)**

The Global Climate Observing System (GCOS) is sponsored jointly by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the International Council for Science (ICSU) and consists of the climate-relevant components of all national observing networks and systems that make up the global earth observing systems of WMO, IOC, UNEP and ICSU. The responsibility for GCOS implementation and operation at the national level in individual WMO, IOC, UNEP, and ICSU Member countries is thus usually distributed across many departments and agencies rather than being focused solely in a single agency, such as the National Meteorological Service (NMS). It is therefore useful, in order to ensure effective coordination across the GCOS-contributing organizations at the national level and to maintain a coordinated overall channel of communication with the GCOS Joint Planning Office and Secretariat in Geneva, that there be a jointly designated 'GCOS National Coordinator' in each country with responsibility for as many as possible of the following functions:

- Provide a national focus to coordinate communication with the GCOS Secretariat, including updates on national GCOS activities, and, where appropriate, to participate in international GCOS-related meetings and conferences;
- Act as a national advocate for sustainable climate observation networks and systems, and for climate data generally;
- Promote adherence to the GCOS Climate Monitoring Principles and 'best practices' for climate observations;
- Understand the priorities of potential donor agencies and help to identify sources of funding for both national and international GCOS activities, including support for the implementation of agreed GCOS Regional Action Plans;
- Facilitate the identification and provision of GCOS data in a full and open environment to GCOS Data Centers;
- Assist where possible in the exchange of information on the composition and performance of national components of GCOS networks with a view to enhancing the overall performance of the networks;
- Promote the use of the 'Revised UNFCCC reporting guidelines on global climate change observing systems' (FCCC/CP/2007/6/Add.2) for facilitated reporting on the status of national components of GCOS;
- Work within an informal network of GCOS National Coordinators on priority GCOS issues common to all nations (e.g., funding, communications, training, data exchange, etc.);
- Participate in formal and *ad hoc* GCOS-related activities in the context of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, including those of the national delegations to its Conference of the Parties (COP) and Subsidiary Body on Scientific

and Technological Advice (SBSTA), as well as those of GCOS itself (e.g., national reporting on systematic observation);

- Contribute to effective national coordination, through a GCOS National Committee or other appropriate mechanism, amongst those responsible for the component systems of GCOS, including especially the WMO Integrated Global Observing Systems (WIGOS), the IOC-led Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)-led Global Terrestrial Observing System (GTOS).
- Liaise with national users of climate observations and information, including especially the climate research community and those concerned with the application of climate information for adaptation to climate change, to ensure that the ongoing national implementation of GCOS is responsive to the full range of national and international user needs; and
- Liaise with the Regional GCOS Coordinator, where one has been designated.

It is intended that the GCOS National Coordinators will cooperate collectively in an informal network and that groups of National Coordinators will endeavor to meet from time to time, e.g., at SBSTA sessions, to discuss issues related to GCOS and provide advice to the GCOS Steering Committee and GCOS Secretariat, as appropriate.