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Task Group 1

International and Administrative Boundaries

Progress report

Task Group 1: International and Administrative boundaries

Objectives

To provide the international community with a working platform for the collection, management, analysis, visualization and sharing of sub-national data down to the 2nd sub-national level.

Task Group Membership

Manager: Steeve Ebener (WHO)

Members in alphabetical order (directly involved in the technical work of the SALB project):

Teshome Abebe (UNECA)

Cihat Basocak (UNESCAP) *

Brenda Brookes (UN Map Library)

Chukwudozie Ezigbalike (UNECA)

Hani Farouk (WHO/EMRO) *

Elisa Gagliano (UN Map Library) *

Yaniss Guigoz (WHO)

Lal Samarakhon (AIT) *

Alejandra Silva (UN ECLAC)

The persons indicated by the * are new members. Hélène Bray has unfortunately left the group.

In addition to this list of active members, more than 300 individuals within and outside the UN, as well as all the National Mapping Agencies (NMAs) of the UN Member States are kept informed of the progress made by the SALB project through the SALB Newsletter.

Work plan decided during the 6th Plenary meeting

Making SALB reach the present by the end of 2006, which means offering full coverage in terms of:

- Historic changes from 1990 to 2006 at the first administrative level,
- and from 2000 to 2006 at the second administrative level.
- Administrative boundaries maps, with one map for each representative period observed between 2000 and 2006.
- National Mapping Agency (NMA) contact information.

The following specific issues have also been raised:

- Integration of fast track-Global Administrative Unit Layer (GAUL) with the SALB process.
- Sustainability both at project and country level.
- Implementation of the recommendations endorsed by UNGIWG.

The difficulty in finding the necessary funding to achieve the objectives set for 2006 (see the resource mobilization section) forced us to revise them last spring (see the March edition of the SALB Newsletter). Since then, we have tried to update the data set to at least 2005.

Activities completed

During the 5th UNGIWG Plenary meeting the following challenges were identified as the ones which had to be overcome in order to make SALB reach the present by the end of 2006:

- find the necessary financial resources, estimated as USD 545,000, at the time of the meeting,

- expand the technical resources through the establishment of new nodes for the project,
- find ways to engage some specific groups of countries in the process (e.g. Russian and Arabic speaking countries),
- strengthen the connection with regional and global initiatives or bodies.

The following sections report on the actions taken and progress made this past year, while addressing these challenges and the issues mentioned in the previous section.

1. Resource mobilization

During the last UNGIWG plenary meeting it was estimated that USD 585,000 was needed in order to reach the set objectives.

Over the past 12 months we have received USD237,000 pledges in support of the SALB project from the following donors (in US\$):

- USAID:	100,000
- PEPFAR:	37,000
- UNHCR:	15,000
- WHO/HAC:	65,000
- GAVI:	20,000

Unfortunately, at the time of writing this report, most of these funds (US\$172,000) have still not reached SALB, presenting a major limitation towards the timely achievement of the objectives set for the end of 2006.

Most of these funds will be used to support or strengthen the activities of the different nodes, to purchase data and to participate in conferences attended by NMAs.

2. Expansion of the technical resources through the establishment of new nodes

In October 2005, the SALB network was made up of 3 nodes:

- UNECA working on the editing process for the African continent,
- UN Map Library and UNECLAC combining their efforts to make progress on the Americas,
- WHO Headquarters in Geneva coordinating the entire project and covering the rest of the world.

In order to be more cost-effective and reduce the amount of work to be done in Geneva, efforts are being made to establish an additional node that would cover Asia.

In this regard, two meetings took place in Bangkok during this past year:

The first one, held in November 2005 was attended by representatives from FAO, UN OCHA, UNDP, UNESCAP, UNICEF, WCS, WFP and WHO. Its objective was to present the current state of SALB in Asia and to potentially establish partnerships in order to complete and update the data set by the end of 2006. At that time, it was not possible to identify one institution to become the node for Asia.

The second one was held in September 2006 with UNESCAP, UN OCHA and the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT). The objective this time was to find the best operational mode to create a node for the SALB project in Asia, using the initial seed fund of US\$6,000 received from the President's Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

Based on the respective mandates of the participants at the 2nd meeting it was proposed that the Asian node could be set-up as a tandem between UNESCAP and AIT. As a follow-up to this meeting, we have now started the process for obtaining final approval from UNESCAP management regarding this proposition.

In addition, funds received from WHO/HAC to be specifically engaged in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office provided us with the opportunity to open a new node to cover this region. This node will be operational very soon from the WHO Regional Office in Cairo.

The establishment of these new nodes required redefining some of the "SALB regions" in order to avoid any overlap. The detailed list of countries by region will soon be available from the SALB web site. Meanwhile, Figure 1 represents the extent of these regions.

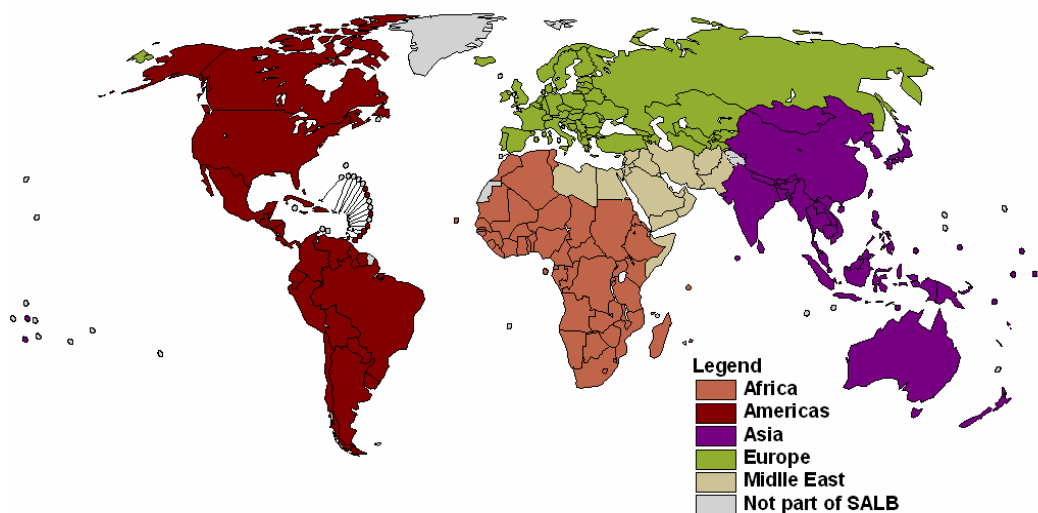


Figure 1 - New extent of the SALB regions

Starting from January 2007, these regions will be used for reporting the progress made with the SALB project.

3. Find ways to engage some specific groups of countries in the process

One of the major difficulties encountered when contacting a country is the language spoken at the NMA. Although it is possible to deal with English, French and Spanish-speaking countries through the different nodes, problems remain when contacting Arabic and Russian-speaking countries.

The establishment of a new node in Cairo will greatly help with Arabic-speaking countries. Meanwhile, an intern based at WHO Geneva is helping in contacting these countries.

Regarding Russian-speaking countries, we were able to benefit from a Russian-speaking intern at WHO Geneva for two months. Her help allowed us to make significant progress in several countries. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to find Russian-speaking interns, and a more sustainable solution remains to be found.

One possible solution would be to have a focal point for the project in individual countries, as is the case in Kyrgyzstan, where we receive a precious help from the UNHCR Country Office.

Until the new nodes are operational, the other difficulty that we have to deal with is the time difference between Geneva and certain countries. Another intern based at UN OCHA /Reliefweb has helped us a lot in this regard during few months. From now, this issue should be solved through the spreading of the different nodes.

We can therefore only encourage UN and non-UN institutions with GIS activities in specific countries or with an internship program to contact us should they be interested in contributing to the SALB project.

Another good way to engage specific countries in the process is to meet with their representatives during meetings or conferences. This has been the case during the following events over the past year, where it has been possible to make direct contact with representatives from 31 countries:

The 8th South East Asia Survey Congress, the Permanent Committee on GIS Infrastructure for Asia & the Pacific Working Group 2 (PCGIAP WG2)workshop and Executive Board meeting (Bandar Seri Begawan, 22-25 November 2005)
the 17th UN Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Pacific (Bangkok, 18-22 September 2006)

The SALB project will make a presentation at the 9th Global Spatial Data Infrastructure (GSDI) meeting in Santiago de Chile (7th of November) with the same objective.

The papers (Ebener & Guigoz, 2005; Ebener & Guigoz, 2006; Ebener et al, 2006) and slides presented during these events can be downloaded from the “Project Overview” page on the SALB web site.

Another important action has been contacting the Permanent Missions of the Member States in New York by letter on behalf of the Under-Secretary-General Tharoor. This letter requests the Missions assistance in:

- ensuring regular supply of their cartographic information to the UN,
- nominating a focal point within the NMAs to obtain needed cartographic information especially in times of crises,
- providing assistance and ensuring the collaboration of the NMAs and/or Statistical Offices with the SALB project.

Finally, the progress of the project has been shared with the entire SALB network, including the NMAs, through 4 editions of the SALB Newsletter. In order to communicate easier with non-English speaking countries, we are considering the translation of some future editions into Spanish, French or Russian.

4. Strengthen the connection with Regional and Global initiatives or bodies

For several years now SALB has been striving for closer working relationships with the Global Mapping Initiative, the Global Spatial Data Infrastructure (GSDI) as well as some Regional committees such as the Permanent Committee on GIS Infrastructure for Asia & the Pacific (PCGIAP), the Committee on Development Information (CODI) in Africa, the Permanent Committee on Spatial Data Infrastructure for the Americas (PC-IDEA) and the Pan American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH).

This past year it has been possible to strengthen the connections already established with the Global Mapping Initiative and PCGIAP.

This has been achieved through two resolutions accepted during the PCGIAP WG2 workshop and 17th UN Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Pacific (see the December 2005 and October 2006 edition of the SALB Newsletter for the full text of these resolutions).

SALB is also contributing to the PCGIAP WG2 Pilot project aimed at creating a seamless data set for the 2004 Tsunami affected area. In this context, SALB is looking at improving the coastline layer for South East Asia. For more information regarding this project and SALB's contribution, please see the paper by Purnawan et al (2006).

5. Integration of fast track-Global Administrative Unit Layer (GAUL) with the SALB process.

A meeting with FAO took place from 1-2 March 2006, in Rome to discuss the possible areas of collaboration between the SALB project and the Global Administrative Units Layer (GAUL) initiative.

It was first thought that a high level of integration would be possible between the two projects, but discussions over this past year finally concluded that the processes were too different to allow such integration.

The revised objective of this collaboration is to reduce duplication between the projects in terms of collection, editing and validation of administrative boundaries maps in order to provide the GAUL and SALB users with common and reliable administrative layers to be used as reference for GIS and mapping applications

A document describing both projects and the collaboration process is currently under preparation. It will be shared with UNGWIG members on completion.

6. Sustainability at project and country levels.

The continued support from the established nodes, the creation of the new ones and the funding that has been received or pledged should ensure the continuity of the SALB project over the next year.

At the project level it will nevertheless be important, starting from 2008, to enter into the annual update mode as it has been demonstrated, taking the Americas as an example (Ebener et al, 2006) that the annual update would cost around 1/5 of the total development costs. In addition to that the distribution of funds throughout the different nodes would also reduce the cost of the project. It is therefore important that efforts be made to sustain the activities of these nodes.

Reaching this stage will also have an impact on the sustainability of the project at the country level because:

the amount of information to be request from them would be reduced to a minimum.

a map would be available which could be used to represent any changes in the administrative structure.

Finally, the discussions continue regarding the establishment of stronger ties between the SALB and the UN Statistics Division.

7. Implementation of the recommendations endorsed by UNGIWG.

No specific mechanisms have been put in place by the UNGIWG secretariat in order to implement the recommendations endorsed by UNGIWG in the past.

This issue will therefore have to be addressed again during the coming UNGIWG plenary meeting.

8. Other Matters

With the departure last April of H  l  ne Bray from the UN Cartographic Section, SALB has become responsible for the updating and maintenance of the UN International Boundaries standard until a replacement is found.

Discussions during these past months with the WHO Office of the Legal Council regarding the representation of disputed areas in the context of the SALB project led to the preparation of a proposal currently under review by the NMAs of Nigeria and Cameroon (in relation with the Bakassi peninsula). If accepted, this proposition might then be used for other countries where a similar situation is observed.

9. State of progress of SALB

The following section describes the progress in terms of information and data that can be downloaded from the SALB web site and how this compares to the situation that was observed at the time of last UNGIWG plenary meeting.

Maps showing the state of progress for each of the SALB regions can now be downloaded from the "Project Overview" page on the SALB web site.

NMA Contact information

The contact information for 134 countries (+ 77 compared to last year) can now be accessed from the SALB web site: http://www3.who.int/whosis/gis/salb/salb_contact.htm.

This is certainly the part of the process where we have made the most significant progress.

January 2000 data

To date tables for 166 countries (+3) are available online from the SALB web site (http://www3.who.int/whosis/gis/salb/salb_coding.htm)

In terms of validated maps, 39 (+6) of them can now be downloaded from the SALB web site (http://www3.who.int/whosis/gis/salb/salb_MDATA.htm). The maps for 52 other countries remain under validation.

2005-2006 data

The historic changes tables for 84 countries are now available for 2005 (+31), 31 of them are available for 2006.

In terms of maps, it is now possible to download validated maps representative of the situation observed between 2005 and 2006 for 24 countries (+15). 11 other maps remain under validation at the moment.

Conclusions

It has not been possible to reach the objectives set during the previous plenary meeting.

The main reason for this has been the lack of funding available at the beginning of 2006.

Despite this situation, it has been possible to make significant progress regarding the updating of the NMA contact information and historic changes tables. Emphasis will now be placed on rapidly improving the number of validated maps.

It has also been possible to strengthen the structure of the project (new nodes, stronger collaboration) and find new resources to ensure the continuity of the project during the coming year.

Should this allow us to speed up the process, we need to continue engaging not only the UNGIWG members, but as many partners as possible. We also need to start looking for the resources that will be necessary for ensuring the annual updates starting from 2008.

Finally, we would like to take the opportunity in this report to thank the different donors and institutions, especially the different nodes who have supported the project during this past year, and have allowed us to make progress.

Proposed work plan for 2007

Based on the structure and resources at our disposal, we propose to continue along the same lines as last year, to have the entire SALB data completed and updated to at least January 2005 by the time of the next UNGIWG meeting.

This would allow us to start with the first annual update in January 2008.

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