United Nations
International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
Secretariat, Geneva

Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (GP/DRR)

Side Event Report

Side event title:	The use of satellite imagery and GIS for community-based disaster risk reduction
Organiser(s):	UNITAR Operational Satellite Application Programme: UNOSAT
Speakers and presenters (name, title, organisation)**:**	**Chaired by:** His Excellency Mr. Delmer Urbizo, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Honduras to the United Nations Office in Geneva, Chairman of the Group of 77 and China for 2007, Geneva Chapter **Moderator:** Mr. Norman Somarriba, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Nicaragua to the United Nations Office in Geneva **Panellists** Ms. Suzanne Lerch, Architect-Urbanist, Canton of Geneva Ms. Etsuko Tsunozaki, Senior Researcher, ADRC Ms. Alice Vozza, ITC-ILO Delnet Programme Mr. Alain Retière, Director of UNOSAT Mr. Yves Haeberlin, Geologist, UNOSAT
Outline of content:	The Chair stressed the importance of the impacts of disasters on human lives, property and livelihood. This state of fact calls for enhancement of the global mobilisation to reduce disasters, with an emphasis on education and training, preparedness, and disaster response in particular by putting the last technologies at the disposal of the developing countries, by setting up a roster of staff to intervene in countries suffering of a disaster, and by making sufficient funds available. Ms. Lerch from the Canton of Geneva gave insights on the case study which served of basis for the panel discussion. In particular, she explained that this project aims at incorporating DRR concerns in land planning policy at the community level, that it begun at the request of the city of Matagalpa, Nicaragua which was in need for decision support tools for disaster reduction, and that the Canton of Geneva is still supporting the project. A documentary explaining the project has been viewed. (Available at http://unosat.web.cern.ch/unosat/achievements/matagalpa/matagalpa_EN.html) The panel discussion highlighted that satellite applications are indeed entering the day-to-day practice of humanitarian relief and disaster prevention both as strategic planning tools and operational decision support instruments facilitated by initiatives like the International Charter Space and Major Disasters, Sentinel Asia, and UNOSAT programme. Contrary to some opinions, satellite imagery is not a sophisticated and difficult to use gadget. Earth Observation satellites are today common sources of updated information. Satellites have a unique ability to provide a quick and reliable overview of even remote places in the world. This wealth of information contributes to hazard mapping, vulnerability assessment and reduction, and urban or rural planning. Moreover at the community level, satellite imagery provides evidence of the vulnerability of a specific territory. Thus it is of great support to participatory process. Decisions can be more restrictive on land use but they are much better understood and so accepted. These tools are essential for better knowledge and management of local territories, by local communities themselves. A participant was wondering “How satellites can play fully their role?” One of the issues is often the availability of funds. But this does not mean that these tools are expansive. A cost-benefit analysis should be applied and for these technologies the balance is very good. But there is also several other important requirements such as training and political will. The main obstacles in the operational use of data provided by satellites are indeed related to the capacity of organizations and communities to absorb and digest the huge quantity of information. A special emphasis has to be given to the training and capacity development, especially at the local level where the risk is best addressed. Actually the relevant and up to date geographic information will be useful only if it is provided to the right person, a person able to take full advantage of the information. And as other requirements is the political will either at national and local level. The commitments and ownership from local actors are indeed also crucial. Moreover, an integrated approach of local development has to be adopted if we want to reduce vulnerabilities to hazards. Satellite Imagery and GIS are valuable tools but useful only if they are effectively used and integrated in decision making process. The side event showed how effective the use of space applications can be for solving issues related to the vulnerability to hazards. But these powerful tools still need to be actively and widely disseminated. The “10% proposal”, the suggestion made that 10% of relief funds are put in prevention, would be a good option to develop collaborative partnerships involving together university, research centre, technological park, international and regional institutions, and local communities. These technologies are more and more used but their potential still remains largely unexploited. That is why ISDR and UNOSAT have engaged discussions for the setting up of a joint unit based in Geneva dedicated to support national platforms for using satellite applications in their endeavours.
Additional Information and links:	www.unosat.org
Contact person:	Mr. Olivier van Damme
Address:	UNITAR/UNOSAT Palais des Nations 1211 Geneva 10
E-mail:	olivier.vandamme@unosat.org
Telephone:	+41 (0) 22 917 86 50