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UNEP/Global Resource Information Database-Geneva

UNEP/DEWA Coordinates Activities Under New Director

UNEP's Division of Early Warning and Assessment (DEWA) held one of its regular meetings under the title of "Programme Planning, Implementation and Coordination (PPIC)" at UNEP Headquarters in Nairobi during the first week of July 2003. The main purpose of the PPIC meeting was to review all major aspects of DEWA's programme: assessment and reporting, early warning and monitoring activities; and support systems for the same such as indicators, the GEO Data Portal and UNEP.Net, capacity building.

As well, the meeting was concerned with how to improve communications and streamline reporting between DEWA Headquarters and the regions. The PPIC meeting was organised at a particularly opportune time, due to the arrival at UNEP Headquarters only one week earlier of DEWA's new Director, Dr. Stephen Lonergan. Thus it served as a means of orientation for Dr. Lonergan, as well as a means for him to get acquainted with DEWA's pro-

gramme of work (PoW), and the principal persons from all outposted offices and regional centres involved in implementing this PoW.

Each of the outposted programmes including GEMS-Water, the Global International Waters Assessment, GRID-Arendal, the World Conservation Monitoring Centre and the Millenium Ecosystems Assessment, and the six DEWA Regional Centres (i.e. for Africa, Asia & Pacific, Europe, Latin America & Caribbean, North America and West Asia) gave overviews of their involvement in and progress in implementing DEWA's PoW 2002-03. The Annual GEO Statement, GEO-4, early warning, indicators, UNEP.Net, the GEO Data Portal and capacity building activities were all the subject of well-developed presentations and Q&A-type plenary discussions.

The GEO Data Portal was presented in detail by Ron Witt, the Regional Coordinator for Europe, including the process that lies behind,

this being the activities and outputs of the GEO Data Working Group (DWG). The Data Portal was highly commended as a supporting application for the GEO and other assessment activities of DEWA; a strong emphasis will now be placed on development of regional data portals, and capacity building work for use of the same, in the preparatory phase of GEO-4.

The Regional Coordinator~Europe also took part in a end-of-week meeting of DEWA's new Director and other colleagues with UNEP's Executive Director, in order to brief the ED on results of the PPIC meeting and hear his views, and where the DEWA PoW for the next biennium 2004-05 was also discussed. Overall, the PPIC meeting allowed for good interaction and understanding among the globally-distributed network of centres and colleagues, along with the certainty that DEWA's programme is in good hands under its new Director Dr Lonergan. ■

GEO Data Portal: New Internet Map Server Launched

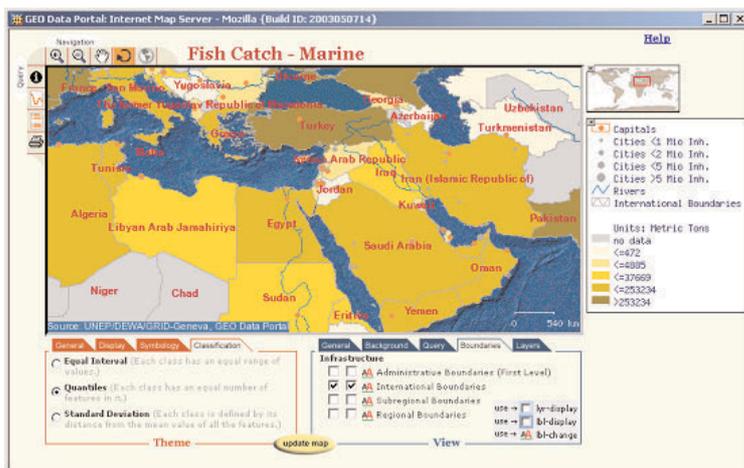
A new very powerful Geographical Information System (GIS) for Internet users was launched in August in order to improve access to environmental data.

The GEO Data Portal is a comprehensive on-line database, designed for UNEP and its partners in the Global Environmental

Outlook assessment process - but also accessible to the public. It holds more than 400 different variables as national, sub-regional, regional and global statistics or as geo-spatial data sets (maps), and covers broad environmental themes such as climate, disasters, forests and freshwater as well as categories in the socio-economic domain, including education, health, GDP and population.

Besides the possibility to easily display data interactively as graphs and tables, the user can now access a very enhanced cartographic module. Apart from basic GIS functionality such as zooming and panning, one can now with only one click overlay selected variable with additional themes, such as boundary layers, cities and rivers and thus combine and analyse several data sets on-line.

It is now much easier and quicker to change the map properties, such as style, line thickness and colour of different layers. The colour ramp or the classification method for the map has been



A quicklook of the latest cartographic management tool of the GEO Data Portal

much improved as well. In addition, one can also initiate a "trend analysis" and thus, for example, display the difference in CO2 emissions between the years 1970 and 2000.

Querying a map layer has also been enhanced - just by clicking on the map one can obtain, for example, the exact number of cities inhabitants, the quality of major rivers or the deforestation rate for a country. In addition to downloading the original 'raw' data files, the user can download and print a high-resolution version of the interactively produced, customised map. The GEO Data Portal will continue to be enhanced in the coming months following priority users' suggestions. ■

Inside this issue	
DEWA-Europe coordinates activities under new director	1
GEO Data Portal: New Internet Map Server	1
Participation to the 17 th Conference EnviroInfo 2003	2
UN System-wide Earthwatch revisited	2
Inputs first GEO Annual Statement	3
UNEP Continues to Study Iraq's Environment	3
ENVIROCAT application training outcomes	4
DEWA-Europe calls for use of recycled paper	4

Participation to the 17th Conference EnviroInfo 2003

The EnviroInfo 2003 Conference on "Environmental Communication in the Information Society" took place at the Cottbus University of Technology (Germany). The conference was a forum for experts from leading-edge technologies, and led to a rich interchange of information and lessons learned in Europe and beyond, necessary for sustainable development. Among 250 participants, Jean-Philippe Richard and Frederic Vogel from the environmental meta-data team at DEWA-Europe attended this interesting meeting.

Different speakers and contributors presented their work in the field of environmental information systems and the latest technology developed to collect, analyze and disseminate environmental data. The focus of the conference was 'the Information Society and Enlargement of the European Union'. A wide group of subjects was mentioned such as the use of generic applications in developing Environmental database, Data Warehouse, Regional

Information System, Standardization of Environmental data and metadata, ISO 19115 standard integration, XML use in data exchange. A major concern raised by some speakers was that, because of the new information technology, more and more computers are used, increasing the amount of waste and the energy consumption, and thus accenting the pressures on the natural environment.

In 2004, the EnviroInfo Conference will be hosted by CERN (European Center for Nuclear Research) in Geneva between the 21st and 23rd October 2004. DEWA-Europe is already strongly involved in the preparation of this event, participating actively to the Organisation and Programme Committees chaired by the State of Geneva and the Department of Interior, Agriculture and Environment (DIAE). The main theme of the Conference will be "sharing": sharing knowledge with knowledge

EnviroInfo Cottbus 2003

The EnviroInfo 2003 conference logo

transfer, data sharing through institutions and non profit organisations; sharing information technology also deals with North-South technological transfer, which is one of the bases of sustainable development. People interested to present a paper or attend next year's EnviroInfo Conference can find all related information at the conference internet site:

<http://www.siang.ch/enviroinfo2004> ■

UN System-wide Earthwatch - revisited

"Earthwatch" was established at the Stockholm United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in 1972 as a UN System-wide mechanism to "monitor major global disturbance in the environment and to give early warning of problems requiring international action". Coordinated by UNEP, Earthwatch was reinforced through the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro and its Agenda-21 chapter on Information for Decision Making. The organizations participating in Earthwatch have since focused on the priority requirements of Agenda 21 and on the delivery of information for decision-making, following the Secretary General's report to the Commission on Sustainable Development on Agenda 21 (Chapter 40), and UNEP Governing Council decisions in response to the General Assembly resolution on "Strengthening International Cooperation in the monitoring of Global Environmental Problems".

The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg confirmed the need to follow-up on Agenda 21 and to improve not only global data collection and monitoring as such, but also coherence, coordination and transparency among partners within and outside the UN, while limiting overlap and duplication of activities. In the resulting Plan of Implementation, particular emphasis is given to major challenges of the world community for the next 10-20 years in the areas of economic, social, environmental and institutional development such as following the UN Millennium Declaration of September 2000 and adopting the Millennium Development Goals (reduce poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation, and discrimination against women by 2015). These targets

are accompanied by indicators to track the progress in meeting the Goals, which are to be substantiated through UN-wide data collections. In addition to supporting such broad initiatives, the role of

Earthwatch is also accentuated by UNEP Governing Council's establishment of consultative process to address the increasing complexity of environmental degradation and the need for enhanced capacity for scientific assessment, monitoring and early warning, while identifying gaps and needs in the current assessment structure and means to address them. Furthermore, the work of Earthwatch is reinforced by the recently established Environmental Management Group (EMG), being a forum for UN agencies and MEA secretariats for enhancing interagency cooperation in the field of environment and human settlements.

The Earthwatch Secretariat is provided by UNEP's Division of Early Warning and Assessment (DEWA), while led by the Assessment Branch at UNEP Headquarters in Nairobi and supported by DEWA-Europe/GRID-Geneva. Aside from organizing regular meetings and maintaining contacts with UN agencies, an important activity of the unit in Geneva is the development of the

The Earthwatch website homepage

Earthwatch website. This tangible and award-winning Earthwatch product gives comprehensive and up-to-date information on all activities related to integrated environment reporting and sustainable development across the UN, and is a major source of information for UN partners, the scientific community, civil society and the general public. It is available at <http://earthwatch.unep.ch>, and now also hosted by the UN in New York at <http://www.un.org/earthwatch>.

The Earthwatch Secretariat is currently consulting with key partners, in order to draft and propose an updated mission statement and terms of reference, as well as to discuss a user needs' survey that is to be conducted in advance of the next Earthwatch plenary meeting. ■

EEA and UNEP Combine Forces to prepare European Inputs for first GEO Annual Statement

Following a resolution of UNEP's Governing Council 22 calling for an "annual statement which summarises in a concise manner the state of the global environment on an annual basis", the Division of Early Warning and Assessment (DEWA) embarked on the process in early 2003 of defining the content and methodology of precisely such a document. As this assessment is being prepared for the first time, much care and effort are being taken to assure that the Annual GEO Statement (AGS) 2003 will set a high standard for years to come, and thus much time has been spent carefully planning and structuring the report, as well as devising the process and timing of its production.

As in each of UNEP's regions, DEWA-Europe was asked to coordinate all pan-European regional inputs to the AGS. This requires close cooperation with at least one existing major partner in Europe, this being the European Environment Agency (EEA), which is already one of UNEP's major collaborating centres for the broader GEO process in the region. Together, the DEWA-Europe office and rele-

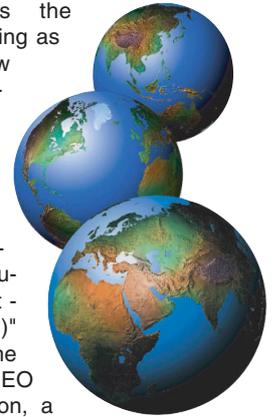
vant staff of the EEA have planned the most effective way of preparing all of the preliminary regional inputs for the AGS.

Because the new AGS covers only a one-year period, much of this brief and highly-readable document will focus on major environmental events and issues which occurred during 2003, both at the regional and global scale. The "feature focus" of the first AGS will be on freshwater, given both the critical nature of this resource and the fact 2003 is the UN Year of Fresh water, and thus take up approximately half of the first AGS.

Each of the regional sections under preparation will include brief (two-three pages) summaries of the major environmental events and issues taking place during the year, including related political processes. For Europe, these have been determined as the extreme weather events (particularly the record-breaking hot summer period), unsustainable transport, overfishing in adjacent seas as well as oil spills. On the political side for the year, clearly the Kiev Ministerial Conference on the

Environment was the major event, resulting as it did in several new multi-lateral environment agreements/conventions.

The regional section follows the "driving forces - pressures - state - impact - response (DPSIR)" model used by the comprehensive GEO reports. In addition, a series of boxes showing policy measures will be embedded in the text, and a timeline showing more of the "major environmental events" of the year. It is anticipated that the 1st AGS will be published in time for the Global Ministerial Environment Forum/Special Session of the UNEP Governing Council in early 2004. ■



Despite Difficulties UNEP Continues to Study Iraq's Environment

With the outbreak of conflict in Iraq appearing increasingly inevitable in early 2003, UNEP's Post Conflict Assessment Unit (PCAU) started to draw-up contingency plans to study the environmental impacts of a potential conflict. While military operations in Iraq were drawing towards an end in late April 2003, UNEP published its *Desk Study on the Environment in Iraq* (see the previous edition of our bulletin), aimed at providing a rapid and timely overview of key environmental issues in the context of the recent war. The next step was to have a presence on the ground to be able to assess environmental problems in full.

As soon as circumstance permitted, UNEP under the overall umbrella of the UN family strived to quickly establish a foothold in Iraq to kick-start the assessment process and provide guidance on measures to alleviate immediate environmental threats. The first mission took place in early July, and sought to establish links with Iraqi counterparts and prepare the groundwork for follow-up technical missions. Under the UN Development Group Needs Assessment, UNEP was also identified as the lead agency for the cross-cutting issue of environment. To fulfill this task, UNEP consulted with other UN agencies and drew on the findings of its missions and network of experts to provide inputs on environmental needs and

priorities within the framework of Iraq's overall reconstruction. A second mission was fielded the following month, and which coincided with the tragic bombing of the UN Headquarters in Baghdad at Canal Hotel on 19 August. Fortunately, UNEP's team, which included a GRID-Geneva staff member, Hassan Partow, escaped unhurt.

Despite the difficult conditions, UNEP remains committed to fulfilling its mandate in Iraq and in October 2003 released a progress report on the environmental situation in the country (*available at: http://postconflict.unep.ch/publications/Iraq_PR.pdf*). On a more positive note, Iraq's Governing Council established for the first time in Iraq's history, a Ministry of Environment for which



From the ashes of the Canal Hotel in Baghdad, the spirit of the UN will regenerate.

UNEP intends to mobilize support and to engage with in assessment studies. For its part, GRID-Geneva will continue to provide GIS and remote sensing analysis for the planned assessment study, which given the prevailing security constraints has become an indispensable tool. ■

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Calendar of Events

(October - December 2003)

1-2 October

ESRI (francophone) User Conference 2003, Paris, France.

1-4 October

WHO's Environmental Health and Information Systems Working Group Meeting, The Hague, Netherlands.

14 October

Visit of UNEP's Deputy Executive Director Mr. Shafqat Kakakhel to DEWA/Europe.

15 October

Environmental Observation: Switzerland in the International Network, Bern, Switzerland.

16 October

Health, Human Services and Humanitarian Affairs User's Meeting (ESRI, UNAIDS), Geneva, Switzerland.

19-21 October

EuroGRID-6 Meeting, Arendal, Norway.

20-22 October

Workshop on Assessment of Vulnerability of Water Resources to Environmental Change in Africa (DEWA), Nairobi, Kenya.

30 October

GRID-Geneva "Partnership" 12th Advisory Board Meeting with SAEFL, UNEP & University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland.

5-7 November

Early Warning on Cyclones Workshop, JRC, Ispra, Italy

6-8 November

International Conference on Sustainability Indicators (SIMO), Valletta, Malta

13-14 November

EEA/UNECE Workshop on Results of and Follow-ups to the TACIS project, Geneva, Switzerland.

16-23 November

Participation in the workshop of the African Data Portal

24-28 November

Integrated Environment Assessment and Caucasus Sub-Regional Env&Sec Workshops for National Focal Points of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, Tbilisi, Georgia.

Envirocat application training outcomes

During the last months, GRID-Geneva's team working on Swiss Catalogue of Data Sources (CH-CDS), was deeply involved in the follow-up of a new application development called ENVIROCAT. This new on-line meta-data catalogue should replace the CH-CDS (<http://www.ch-cds.ch>) before the end of 2003. The main improvements of this new application are the complete on-line data management and the integration of a workflow and user/group rights management.

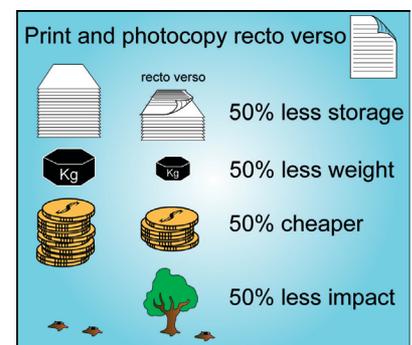
The CDS team, including GRID-Geneva staff members, also followed a specific training on "Zope" and ENVIROCAT application between 16 -18 September 2003, in order to be able to ensure future application maintenance for the Swiss Agency for Environment, Forests and Landscape (SAEFL), which is in charge of the management of this project, as well as support future ENVIROCAT users. ■

DEWA~Europe leads UNEP Environment House "Green Team"

Since 2001, DEWA~Europe/GRID-Geneva has been involved with the "Green Team" to improve environmental practices at the International Environment House, as well as within the entire United Nations community. The team, led by Pascal Peduzzi and Frédéric Vogel of GRID-Geneva and Aniket Ghai of ROE, together with colleagues from other organizations in the building, has already launched several activities on sustainable office management. Its first step was to introduce 90 plastic bins throughout the House for recycling glass, PET, aluminium and batteries. Despite the fact that Switzerland is quite advanced in recycling, it took 18 months and constant effort to overcome bureaucratic inertia and implement this scheme in the office.

The next step on the agenda is to change procurement procedures to buy and print on recycled paper. The past few weeks have been very encouraging, and major decisions are to be made shortly that should expand the use of recycled paper within the United Nations in Geneva.

A common belief is that recycled paper does not match United Nations' standards, but the importance of making this change is demonstrated by some facts. Forty percent of deforestation is due to paper production



and nearly half of it is from virgin tropical forests. One ton of white paper requires 3m² of forest, 60 000 liters of water, and 200 Kwh of energy. By printing recto/verso (direct 50% economy) and switching to recycled paper, we can reduce usage. Recycled paper saves 95% of forest, 99% of water, and two-thirds of energy compared to white paper. It can be cheaper and has been tested without any reported problems. It seems there are only advantages to such environmentally-friendly practices.

If in the 1980's, the deforestation rate reached 40 000 km² per year, the total amount of deforestation is now nearly 160 000 km² per year. However, media coverage has not increased accordingly, and neither have actions to reduce the impacts. ■

GRID-Geneva's Latest Outputs

2002 Annual Report, 30 pages, full color. Internal distribution

Global Environment Outlook Data Portal Brochure, pocket size guide for using UNEP's authoritative source for data sets.

"Environment and Security" Initiative for the South-Eastern Europe (poster)

Post-conflict Environmental Assessment in Afghanistan (poster)

The GEO Data Portal, Using Advanced Internet Technology to Access Environmental Data article, in journal "GEO Informatics", September 2003 edition.