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UNEP/Global Resource Information Database

Earth Atlas "One Planet - Many People" - A Success Story

by Pascal Peduzzi

The project of the "One Planet - Many People" atlas, led by DEWA-North America and its GRID-Sioux Falls office, was fully supported from the beginning by GRID-Europe, which provided a list of sites of interest and an analysis of 11 of the 80 sites presented. Thanks to all the persons involved in this four-year project, an excellent collaboration gave birth to this impressive Atlas showing before-and-after satellite images of environmental impacts across the planet.

This book quickly became UNEP's best-selling publication ever. Over 1 600 copies have been sold; 1400 copies and 300 CDs distributed; 10.7 terra-bites of PDF files downloaded, equivalent to about 5 200 paper copies of the Atlas. Over 150 TV, radio

and web news, newspaper and magazine articles were released around the world.

The official launch was made during the World Environment Day (WED) in San Francisco on 5 June, but two other launches were held in London and Geneva. The news was then reported by international press agencies such as AP, AFP, Voice of America and hundreds of newspapers. Journalists were impressed by the satellite images and the extent of human impacts on the environment. Some newspapers made small articles, but many gave full-page stories. The "El Pais" Spanish daily newspaper even published an eleven-page dossier!

After the successful release, calls for presentation at conferences, and on radio and TV broadcasts were numerous.



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Growing Interest in Regional GEO Data Portals

by Stefan Schwarzer & Jaap van Woerden

The GEO Data Portal is the authoritative source for core data sets used by UNEP and its partners in the Global Environment Outlook (GEO) report and other integrated environment assessments. Its online database holds more than 450 different variables, as national, sub-regional, regional and global statistics or as geospatial data sets (maps), covering themes such as Freshwater, Population, Forests, Emissions, Climate, Disasters, Health and GDP. The data can be displayed and explored on-the-fly through maps, graphs, data tables, downloaded in various popular formats, or copied and pasted into word processors.

The successful development and wide usage of the Data Portal, combined with strong demand from regions and countries, has led to various initiatives to install regional manifestations of the Data Portal in certain parts of the world. Guided and supported by DEWA/GRID-Europe staff, these regional GEO Data Portals are to provide additional and more detailed data from the region itself, capturing

regional and national information sources and improve access to core environmental data sets for use in GEO and related assessment and reporting work.

The first region that has started to develop such a data system is Latin American & Caribbean region (LAC). After various consultations and review meetings held in the region, the GEO LAC Data Portal will be formally launched in early 2006.

In the West Asia region, a first start has been made by applying the global GEO Data Portal template for its regional implementation. This prototype was set-up in the summer 2005 during a consultation in Abu Dhabi, and currently is undergoing minor adoptions and changes, before being further developed to fulfill the data needs of the regional user community.

A similar approach is taken in the Asia & Pacific region, where the prototype GEO Data Portal is being developed in this second half of the year, and will be reviewed in November before taking the next steps.

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In Geneva, the Atlas was presented during the evening news at the Television Suisse Romande and on the local Geneva TV "Léman Bleu".

Although the product is very visual, interviews were also given to radios (Voice of America, Radio Méditerranée Internationale, United Nations Radio and, Radio Suisse Romande).

Several public talks were given (World Environment Day (WED) roundtable by the Geneva Environment Network (GEN); "Etat de la Planète" organised by the city of Geneva; Swiss Commission for Remote Sensing; S-Dev "International Platform on Sustainable Urban Development"; geogra-

phy teachers for secondary schools of the Geneva Canton).

Public interest continues, as there are four requests for indoor and outdoor exhibitions of the Atlas (two in Geneva, one traveling across Switzerland and one in Spain).

This shows both the power of satellite imagery and the great interest of the public for environmental issues. It is expected that the Atlas will allow better understanding of environmental impacts, and help to catalyse needed changes of policies and human activities toward more sustainable practices.

One Planet Many People, an Atlas of our changing environment. To order it and see examples: www.grid.unep.ch/atlas ■



Dead Sea case study from the Atlas

For decades, heavy demands have been placed on the land-locked Dead Sea to meet the needs of growing populations in the countries that border it. Both Israel and Jordan draw water from rivers that flow into the Dead Sea, reducing the amount of water that would naturally replenish it. The amount of area devoted to evaporation ponds for producing salt has greatly expanded over the past three decades. The creation of salt works tends to accelerate evaporation, further contributing to the reduction in water level. Currently, it is estimated that the water level of the Dead Sea is dropping at a rate of about one metre (3 feet) per year. These images, from 1975, 1987 and 2001, reveal dramatic changes in the Dead Sea over a period of about 30 years. Declining water levels, coupled with impoundments and land reclamation projects, have greatly increased the amount of exposed arid land along the coastline. The near-complete closing off of the southern part of the Sea by dry land (2001 image) reveals the severity of water level decline.

Growing interest in Regional GEO Data Portals

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In Africa, the regional Data Portal has already progressed substantially, being compatible with the global Data Portal and envisaged to capture much more data and

indicators to serve the GEO process, including the African Environment Outlook and other initiatives in and of the region.

For more information visit: geodata.grid.unep.ch. ■



GEO Regional Data Portals prototypes

ENVSEC Process Expands to take in new Activities, Countries and Partners

by Ron Witt

The joint Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiative of UNEP, UNDP, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and NATO continued to expand in many senses during the mid-year period of 2005. Not only did the overall number of project activities expand in the three existing ENVSEC sub-regions (Central Asia, the South Caucasus and SouthEastern Europe (SEE)), but a fourth sub-region Eastern Europe (Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine) for ENVSEC activities, and the potential to bring on board new partners the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe (the REC) on board, were also proposed.

The latest meetings for the ENVSEC Initiative were held in Bratislava, Slovakia (offices of the UNDP Regional Office are there) on 28-30 September. First the ENVSEC Management Board (EMB) that serves as the Initiative's steering mechanism met on 28 September. The EMB

includes the three main partners, plus associate partner NATO and donor representatives, and normally meets twice per year. The entire ENVSEC portfolio of over 30 projects in the three sub-regions was reviewed, as well as funding status and needs, and future activities such as the ENVSEC retreat on 15-16 October. There was agreement to include Eastern Europe as a fourth sub-region and also to find a modus operandi to include the additional partners under consideration.

The ENVSEC Advisory Board meeting (held on 29-30 September) was the largest ever convened, with over 100 participants from the 18 ENVSEC countries, international agencies and donor countries, and the four partners themselves. The Advisory Board meeting in essence was an in-depth consultation with the country stakeholders on current activities and future directions of the ENVSEC initiative - and specific projects - in their sub-regions (countries). Brief presentations were made by all the ENVSEC NFPs and international organizations, plus donors and two major European banks, and

results of a series of ENVSEC projects in the Caucasus, Central Asia and SEE were also presented.

In-depth discussions were held with national representatives from each of the four sub-regions to identify their priorities among existing, as well as for newly-proposed projects (first-stage assessment activities for Eastern Europe will get underway in late 2005/early 2006). Contacts were renewed with existing and established with new ENVSEC NFPs for this purpose.

The ENVSEC Initiative remains an excellent example of collaboration not only between the current four agency partners involved, but internally in UNEP between the Assessment and Regional Coordination Divisions, and thus offers broader possibilities for application in other UNEP regions.

At the same time, DEWA/GRID-Europe continues to maintain and periodically upgrade the ENVSEC website on behalf of the UNEP-based ENVSEC Secretariat and three other partner.

For more details visit www.envsec.org. ■

GRID-Europe Contributes to the New WGMS Report on Glacier Mass Changes

by Jaap van Woerden

Financially supported by UNEP and with the help of DEWA/GRID-Europe, the World Glacier Monitoring Service (WGMS) launched the next edition of the Fluctuations of Glaciers report (1995-2000) in early August.

The five-yearly series 'Fluctuations of Glaciers' (FoG) continually publishes internationally collected, standardized data on changes in glaciers throughout the world. The objectives of the publication are to reproduce a global set of data which affords a general view of the changes, encourage more extensive measurements, invite further processing of the results, facilitate consultation of the further sources, and serve as a basis for research. In fact, this standardized data publication can be regarded as a working tool for the scientific community, especially concerning the fields of glaciology, climatology, hydrology and quaternary geology. As such, this effort also contributes to the strengthening of the scientific basis of UNEP's assessment activities, requiring that sound assessments must be based on reliable data. As a key component, the Global Environment Outlook reporting process greatly benefits from the continued data col-

lection on changes in glacier mass and volume. The FoG series is complemented by regular publications of the Glacier Mass Balance Bulletin (MBB), designed to speed up and facilitate access to information concerning glacier mass balances by reporting measured values from selected reference glaciers at two-year intervals

Fluctuations of Glaciers VIII for the years 1995-2000 is now printed and available both as a hardcopy and pdf (see www.wgms.ch/fog.html).

The MBB reports are available at www.geo.unizh.ch/wgms/mbb.html. ■



Swiss Committee for Remote Sensing Bi-annual Meeting

by Hy Dao

On 30 September, GRID-Europe hosted the bi-annual meeting of the Swiss Committee for Remote Sensing (Schweizerischen Kommission für Fernerkundung - SKF). The SKF meetings are the national arena for the exchange of information on remote sensing activities held in/by Switzerland. One important objective of these meetings is to foster the information between the scientific projects, industry and the space policy of the Federal government (which includes the participation of Switzerland to the European Space Agency).

Eighteen persons from various Swiss academic and governmental bodies attended the meeting. The morning was dedicated to SKF internal business, including information on various projects and future space missions. The afternoon gave the opportunity to present to the SKF some of the remote sensing activities conducted at GRID-Europe: the Iraq Marshlands Observation System (IMOS) project and the "One planet, many people" Atlas. The UNOSAT activities (led by UNOPS and UNITAR) were also presented to the participants. ■

Calendar of Events

(Mid-October- December 2005)

19-21 October
GEO-4 Chapter 7 Authors Meeting
UNEP, International Environment House (IEH), Geneva

24-25 October
GEO cities Workshop
Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain

24-27 October
GEO-4 Chapter 4 Authors Meeting
UNEP, IEH, Geneva

31 October -1 November
GEO Data Working Group meeting
DEWA/GRID-Europe, Geneva, IEH, Geneva

7-12 November
UNEP/DEWA Regional Coordinators Meeting
UNEP/DEWA/NBO, Nairobi, Kenya

8-10 November
Intersecretarial Working Group on Environment Statistics
Eurostat, Luxemburg

14-18 November
Review of GEO Asia and Pacific Data Portal
UNEP/RRC.AP, Bangkok, Thailand

21-24 November
eCognition Basic Seminar and Advanced workshop
DEFIENS, Munich, Germany

23-25 November
GEO Training Manual Lead Authors Review Meeting
Winnipeg, Canada

28 November - 2 December
Conference on Environmental Information for Decision Making, Inter-secretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics (IWG-ENV), OECD Working group on Environment Information and Outlooks (WGEIO), Mexico

7-8 December
Participation in the first planning workshop of the Belgrade Report, EEA Copenhagen, Denmark

11-14 December
Review of GEO LAC Data Portal
UNEP/DEWA~LAC, Mexico

12 December
Core EuroGRID Centres' Meeting
UNEP/DEWA/GRID-Europe, IEH, Geneva

19-20 December
Environment and Security Board Management Meeting
UNEP, UNDP, NATO, OSCE, Vienna, Austria

GRID-Europe's Latest Outputs

Fluctuations of Glaciers VIII for the years 1995-2000. Vol III. Prepared by the World Glacier Monitoring Service (WGMS). IUGG (CCS) – UNEP – UNESCO.

UNEP and UNEP/Post-Conflict Branch activities around the world. Map created for UNEP Post-Conflict Branch.



**Read GRID-Europe Early Warning "Briefs",
available at
www.grid.unep.ch**

