



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
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Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC



Visualizing emergencies GIS side event sponsored by Switzerland and WFP Emergency Division featuring the work of the Geospatial Support Unit

Side event on the margins of the second regular session of the Executive Board

Co-hosted by Switzerland

Monday, 18 November 2019, 13:45–14:45

Aula I (Aula Delegatis), WFP headquarters

Lunch will be served in the Peace Garden from 13:15 to 13:45

Content and objective

It is often overlooked that the accuracy and efficiency of World Food Programme (WFP) operations, particularly in emergencies, is linked to the availability of data. This data is particularly useful in targeting humanitarian assistance if it can be visualized. The complexity of WFP's operations in an increasingly challenging world and the scarcity of resources have led to an ever-increasing need for accurate, usable information and geospatial products such as static maps, analysis reports and interactive dashboards. So-called Geographic Information Systems, or GIS, have become indispensable in WFP's operational decision making, especially in the area of emergency preparedness and response.

With over 2,000 maps and another 10,000 geospatial tools produced annually in support of its operations around the world, WFP has the most advanced geospatial infrastructure and assets among all United Nations and international agencies. However, very little is known about how WFP develops and visualizes spatial data and how this supports different emergency response phases.

This side event, therefore, aims to expand the understanding of GIS products and services; showcases how the utilization of cutting-edge geospatial technology and innovation supports early warning, emergency preparedness and response efforts, and explore additional ways of extending WFP GIS capabilities to its partners and wider humanitarian community towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 2.

The event is sponsored by the Swiss Permanent Representation and will feature a number of experts and country directors in a discussion on how WFP's strengths in GIS can be leveraged and its innovation scaled up to better support the field and more holistic approaches to emergency preparedness and response. The discussion will include an explanation of the fundamentals of GIS, without using technical jargon, followed by a deep dive into how GIS is used to make emergency response more efficient, effective and ahead of the game. This event will showcase a variety of visual material, highlighting geographical contexts and operational uses for GIS products. It will also touch on partnerships that WFP is pursuing with other humanitarian actors.

Prior to the event, a lunch will be offered in the Peace Garden for prospective participants. At the end of the event, the floor will be opened for questions and answers.

Outcomes

Event outcomes will serve to:

- explain what GIS is (“it is more than just maps”);
- illustrate how GIS can be used as a basis for informed decision-making at various stages in emergency preparedness and response; and
- critically discuss challenges and explore what the future might hold for the role of geospatial services in slow and sudden-onset emergencies for WFP and the entire humanitarian community.

As a result, participants will gain a basic understanding of what GIS is and become aware of the relevance of geospatial services for WFP’s operations. They will also be exposed to the concept that using and sharing data is an issue which concerns the entire humanitarian community and can bring a better mutual understanding of what is going on in emergency contexts which will, in turn, promote coherent decision making and an efficient/effective allocation of resources.

Format

The side event will bring together selected GIS experts and country directors with experience of geospatial tools. They will, in turn, present a series of short and well-illustrated speeches that will be linked to one another to form a coherent storyline. The speeches will not last more than a few minutes each and be visually enhanced by slides of GIS tools and field situations. All will be present on the stage from the beginning, possibly perched on stools, and pass the narrative from one to the next. The floor will be opened for discussion at the end of the presentations. A Swiss representative will moderate the event. It is the intention to invite the WFP Deputy Executive Director Mr Amir Abdulla to open the event with a short speech.

Tentative agenda

- Welcoming and opening remarks by Mr Jean-Luc Bernasconi, Deputy Head of the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit, Head of Europe, Asia and America of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (5 min)
- Introduction to the theme from WFP’s management and strategic perspective by Mr Amir Abdulla, Deputy Executive Director, WFP (5 min)
- What is GIS, by Ms Lara Prades, Head of Geospatial Information Systems Unit, Emergency Division, WFP (10 min)
- Focus on the GIS role in early warning, emergency preparedness and response by Ms Margot van der Velden, Director, Emergency Division, WFP (5 min)
- GIS during the response to a sudden-onset crisis by Mr Meygag Abdirahman, WFP Country Director, Iraq (5 min)
- Data sharing between agencies and use of WFP GIS data by other humanitarian partners by Ms Mary Brown, Swiss Humanitarian Aid (5 min)
- Podium discussion, facilitated by Mr Jean-Luc Bernasconi (20 min)
- Closing remarks, by Mr Jean-Luc Bernasconi or Mr Amir Abdulla (5 min)