

GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION AND REMOTE SENSING: ESSENTIAL TOOLS IN REDUCING POVERTY IN THE POST-2015 WORLD

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ABSTRACT

It has long been recognized by professionals in the geospatial sciences that geographic information is an important tool in development. Unfortunately, many of those involved on both sides of development – donors and recipients – are not aware of this importance, or it is assumed that appropriate geo-information is or will be available. While agencies as diverse as the World Bank, UN-FAO, and US-AID have all been supporting the development and use of geo-information, more and better understanding is required in the development community. This paper attempts to both identify and, in a simple sense, quantify the importance of geographic information in a major development goal – the reduction of poverty.

For this paper we reviewed the twelve illustrative goals and fifty-four targets identified in the Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Almost every issue mentioned, every problem addressed, and every goal suggested seems to require someone to answer a question that begins with one word: “Where....?”

- Where are the inequalities?
- Where is the risk of disease (e.g. malaria) highest?
- Where are resources being illegally depleted?
- Where is the property boundary?
- Where should the quality of statistical information be improved?
- Where should we be monitoring?
- Where has the disaster struck?

Simply put, at first glance the report reads like a call to action for the world’s geospatial community. However, while the words land, geography, location and information are used a total of 76 times in the report, the importance of geo-information is never specifically identified.

To underline the importance of geo-information we have assessed each of the fifty-four targets and identified the importance of geo-information for each according to a seven point scale ranging from critically important to not being used at all. We believe that geospatial information will play some role in 47 of 54 targets associated with the reduction of poverty in the post-2015 world. “Where” information will be critically important in 22% of the targets, will be used for each of monitoring and analysis in 20%, in organizing, communicating or displaying results in 26%, and will play a limited role for comparisons from one place to another in 65%.

The paper closes with several conclusions, recommendations and some unanswered questions related to geospatial data policy and programs related to poverty reduction.