

Using improved maps and data to meet the Sustainable Development Goals

Written by Zarin Khan

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Suva, Fiji – Experts from around the world will gather in Suva, Fiji, later this month to exchange innovation in the use of satellite data, unmanned aerial vehicles (drones), open source software and other tools that assist decision-making in land use and disaster management.

Recent developments in technology and practices to improve maps and data that support sustainable development and economic growth will also be at the forefront of discussions at the upcoming 17th Pacific GIS/RS (Geographic Information Systems and Remote Sensing) User Conference, co-hosted by the Pacific Community (SPC), The University of the South Pacific (USP) and Fiji's Ministry of Lands.

The largest of its kind in terms of Pacific Islands region participation, this week-long conference (28 November - 1 December) will bring together producers and users of geospatial data and information such as representatives from Pacific Island governments, international agencies, consulting companies and the private sector.

When the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were agreed upon by 193 countries in September last year, the United Nations stressed the importance of increasing the availability of high quality, timely and reliable data (e.g. population and health), disaggregated by geographic location.

Experts stated that geographic information about people and the planet is critical for better decision making and using resources more wisely as this will be an indispensable element in achieving the 17 global goals.

Geospatial, or geographic information shows where social, environmental and economic conditions occur.

It helps answer questions such as: where are people at risk of rising sea levels and climate change? How do we protect people living there? How many hectares of forests are there? Are we managing them sustainably? How do we manage natural resources in an effective and sustainable manner? How do we assess impacts of hazards and assist disaster planning, preparedness and response activities for Pacific Island Countries?

“The Pacific can greatly benefit especially from the collective wisdom of the scientific and technical practitioners in remote sensing and GIS technologies,” SPC Geoscience Division Director, Professor Micheal Petterson, said.

“This conference connects the Pacific region with the expertise and global development challenges and solutions of scientific organisations in larger regions.

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“Linking the wider Pacific geospatial community with these international technical agencies demonstrates development and scientific leadership from the Pacific Community,” Prof Petterson added.

Financial contributions from satellite data and GIS/RS software vendors, regional and international partner agencies, USP and the Fiji Government, have allowed participation of Pacific Island nationals, stakeholders and partners at this conference.

“We are delighted to support the Pacific Islands GIS/RS community to improve the sustainability and resilience of our Pacific Island countries. I wish the conference great success,” The University of the South Pacific, Vice-Chancellor, Professor Rajesh Chandra said.

The Pacific GIS/RS User Conference has been held annually since 1999.

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Useful link:

<http://gisconference.gsd.spc.int/>