

Foundation for Ecological Security launches India Observatory at GeoSmart India 2019

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(L-R) Lt Gen Girish Kumar, Surveyor General of India , Usha Thorat, Chair, Board of Governors, FES and Former Deputy Governor, Reserve Bank of India, Dorine Burmanje, Co-Chair, United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) and Jagdees

The Foundation for Ecological Security (FES), an NGO working on conserving forest, land and water resources at the grassroots, launched its open data platform called the India Observatory on the first day of the GeoSmart India conference here on Wednesday.

Lt Gen Girish Kumar, Surveyor General of India , Usha Thorat, Chair, Board of Governors, FES and Former Deputy Governor, Reserve Bank of India, Dorine Burmanje, Co-Chair, United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM), were present on the occasion.

The India Observatory brings together more than 1,600 data layers on social, economic and ecological parameters at one place. It is freely available for civil society organizations, students, government departments and citizens, and includes 11 technology tools that help in understanding the status and plan interventions for conserving forests, renewing water resources and improving livelihoods of communities.

These tools can work offline on smartphones and are available in local languages with easy to interpret codes and can even be used by semiliterate people. For instance, the Composite Landscape Assessment and Restoration tool, or CLART, helps to identify best areas for groundwater recharge under the MGNREGA scheme. GEET, or GIS-Enabled Entitlement Tracking system, builds awareness on entitlements for marginalized communities by tracking eligibility at the household level. Similarly, the Integrated Forest Management Toolbox, or IFMT, contains tools that assist in both data collection and analysis, and help forest departments in preparing long-term working plans.

On the occasion of the launch, Jagdeesh Rao, CEO of FES, said, “Working on issues of forests, land and water needs a bird’s eye view, as such resources are spread across human boundaries and a spatial view helps strategize preservation of threatened species, conservation of resources like water and biomass and extraction of resources for human needs. Satellite imageries offer a view better than the bird’s eye. Often vast data sets, algorithms and tools are available in a range of organizations, but inaccessible to professionals and people, especially in an intelligible manner. Through this initiative, FES is not only helping the policymakers and administrators in sound decision-making, but is also empowering people in villages and remote areas to build a bright future for themselves.”

“There is a need for sustainable and inclusive development and modern technology would play a great role in it. Sustainable Development means different things to different people, but at its core, it tries to harmonize different needs and devise specific long-term solutions,” Thorat said earlier while underlining that in the context of sustainability, it’s important to realize that “while the ecological footprint of the poor is minuscule, climate change & loss of biodiversity impact the poor more than the rich.”

Burmanje said, “There is a need for broad global collaboration in the geospatial sector to foster innovation, infuse dynamism. An expanding group of individuals is leading to a greater impact of geospatial information. UNGGIM is playing a leading role in this regard, recognizing the need for geospatial data for decision-making. For the public sector it is important to redefine itself in this tsunami of data.”

About FES

FES works towards conservation of nature and natural resources through collective action of local communities. The crux of FES efforts lies in locating forests and other natural resources within the prevailing economic, social and ecological dynamics in rural landscapes. As on September 2019, FES was working with 21,964 village institutions in 31 districts across eight states, assisting the village communities in protecting 6.5 million acres of common lands including revenue wastelands, degraded forest lands and panchayat grazing lands, positively impacting 11.6 million people. FES supports panchayats and their subcommittees, village forest committees, gramya jungle committees, water users associations and watershed committees in order to improve the governance of natural resources. Regardless of the form of the institution, the organisation strives for universal membership and an equal access to women and poor in decision-making.

Source: <https://www.geospatialworld.net/news/the-foundation-for-ecological-security-launches-india-observatory-at-geosmart-india-2019/>