

What's my real job again?

Where does Global Pulse start and end technically? It's a question I often have to answer, mostly because of my very ambiguous role leading work both inside (at Global Pulse), outside (with the crisis mappers, open data peeps, volunteer hackers etc) and across (UNGIWG, UNSDI) the UN.

The UN, both traditionally and increasingly, has the role of coordinator between both its internal agencies and external NGOs, government agencies and affected communities in the geographical areas in which development and humanitarian efforts take place. On top of that, it's still doing the political and physical (food aid, heritage sites etc) legwork that helps to keep the world safer and more stable. That's a lot to ask of any organization, and it's a huge amount to ask of one whose systems until very recently were based on a slower-moving, less-connected social world.

There's a lot to be done, data-wise, to support all of that. We need to improve the information to people making decisions across the whole of the UN: give them information that's timely, covers their areas of interest, and covers the geographies they're interested in. There are good people all over the UN and outside who are working on this, and I'm working with many of them in my non-GlobalPulse role, watching them make things work better from areas as far apart as mapping which agencies are helping in a natural disaster to satellite-based estimates of refugee settlement sizes and better conditions for New-York-based technologists.

Global Pulse's remit is helping governments to improve their knowledge about possible development crises in their areas. That doesn't include any of the following things I do: data and coordination in natural disasters, improving community knowledge, improving technology available to the UN, connecting related UN agency staff to each other, raising awareness of technology possibilities across the UN, mapping political changes, improving the maps available to the UN and its partners, running humanitarian technology events and projects, leading and advising mapping teams, raising awareness in the UN about how to work with technologists, linking UN staff to outside agencies, companies, academics and technologists who could help them with their systems, raising awareness of the UN in local and global technology groups, working on disaster information responses, clarifying data licenses for data going into and out of the UN, helping the UN to work with open source and open data communities, guiding crisis mapping work and connecting humanitarian technologists with each other. Or any of the work that I do to help create the environment in which Global Pulse and its technologies can thrive. And some other stuff, but I forget what that is at the moment.

It does include: design the systems and survey the technologies needed to improve (better data and faster, better insights from that data) government analysts' situation awareness of development and potential development problems in their countries. Highlight and design processes and technologies that are not available (and preferably available open-source) to those analysts. Find ways to get those technologies built, tested and fielded – preferably using global pulse staff if they're available, but also finding synergies between what the analysts need and what

people in related fields and agencies need too. Which also means spending time creating relationships with agencies, companies, universities, groups and individuals who can help with design, build, test, field, and keeping an eye on developments in all the groups, communities and areas that can help with this.

My apologies for the non-techie post. I needed to get some things about my dayjob straight, as much for myself as for anyone else. And I've spent a year paying for myself to go to events as an individual only to find that everyone's assumed that it's part of my work. Which has admittedly been very useful sometimes, and made several things more possible than they were. But sometimes one has to draw a line somewhere.