

**Telecommunications sector case study
on good corporate practice related to disaster risk reduction**

Company

Thuraya Satellite Telecommunications Company
Dubai, United Arab Emirates

<http://www.thuraya.com>

Overview

The case of the Thuraya Satellite Telecommunications Company demonstrates the important role that the modern telecommunications industry can play in disaster risk reduction. Thuraya is a mobile satellite system that provides satellite telephone services to more than 110 countries. Its mission is “to provide uninterrupted, telecommunications services to a vast region inhabited by 2.3 billion people.”

Thuraya’s users are assured of continuous telecommunication coverage even when terrestrial systems and cellular networks may fail because of a natural disaster. Because Thuraya’s telecommunications via satellite system provides high-quality mobile phone services not only to urban hubs but also to remote communities, it can be used to send information on unfolding developments prior to the spread of a disaster, such as a tsunami. Thuraya explains:

“Thuraya provides vital communication facilities through its satellite services in remote villages and rural areas, where the few available telecommunication lines are most susceptible to malfunction when required most. Thuraya’s internet access, email, GPS, data and fax are valuable services serving as a primary communications medium for people in emergency situations.”

In July 2006, Thuraya signed a partnership agreement with the intergovernmental agency, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), to help provide vital links via satellite to government authorities, rescue teams and humanitarian agencies for relief and rehabilitation efforts. Such on-going communication links reduce the risks associated with disasters by enabling early communication of developments even before the event happens and spreads. The ITU press release explains that this new partnership is part of its:

“ICT-based solutions in emergency telecommunications directed at improving early-warning communication, disaster preparedness

and mitigation. This is a critical area of concern especially for countries with fragile economies and special needs, such as least developed countries and small island developing states.”

Both parties are bringing their strengths to this disaster risk management partnership:

“Thuraya ... is contributing handheld satellite terminals along with solar chargers; ITU will pay for airtime at discounted rates offered by Thuraya and cover the transportation costs of telecommunications equipment to and from disaster-hit areas. ITU will also provide its expertise in technical and operational training for government officials involved in rescue missions.”

Insights

A high-profile disaster such as the Asian tsunami encourage many stakeholders – both private and public – to search for opportunities to undertake disaster emergency relief operations more effectively and efficiently. Bringing to together intergovernmental programmes such as the ITC with international telecommunication systems such as Thuraya can result in new synergies and capacities.

Though the Thuraya/ITC partnership was clearly established in the context of disaster relief, the maintenance of an on-going programme of work including dissemination of technical equipment and technical training significantly improves the capacities of communities – particularly rural, poor, high-risk communities – to manage and reduce their disaster risks.