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2connect-IT helps to enhance aid workers' safety

Field workers employed by development aid organization Cordaid are mainly active in danger zones where communications infrastructures often fail. For their security they largely depend on satellite communications. As Meindert van der Werf, Cordaid's Financial Officer Emergency Aid and Reconstruction puts it: "Without satellite communication we would not be able to do what we aim to do."

Cordaid is mainly active in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America. The development aid organization has branch offices in, among others, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Congo, Haiti and Sudan. In countries where Cordaid does not have its own office, the organisation cooperates closely with local partners. "Our local presence is largely confined to areas that can at times be very unsafe", Cordaid's Meindert van der Werf sums up. "At the same time the communications infrastructures at those locations are often very rickety or managed by local governments that are not averse to pulling out a cable or plug from time to time. Satellite communications allows us to be largely independent from those local networks."

"Although the actual number of systems we use is relatively limited, satellite communication has become indispensable for Cordaid", Van der Werf continues. "To us the welfare and security of our workers are a prime concern. Satellite communications helps us to enhance that."

Equipment

In order to meet Cordaid's satellite communication needs, Veldhoven-based 2connect-IT has thus far provided the aid organization with around 35 satellite telephones from Thuraya and Iridium, three Inmarsat Broadband Global Area Network (BGAN) systems and three fixed satellite dishes. Among the main users of the satellite phones are travelling staff members visiting branch offices abroad. "Our security protocol dictates that, on arrival in a country that is deemed unsafe, staff members inform their manager of their arrival", Van der Werf explains. "They also have to stay in touch while they are on the road in their country of operation."

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Inmarsat BGAN

The satellite phones are also used in emergency aid situations like the one following the devastating earthquake in Haiti, on January 12th 2010. In this case satellite phones were used to periodically relay signs of life and for in situ communication. Van der Werf: "After the quake the entire communications network had been wiped out. Under circumstances like that satellite communications is a good and instantly available alternative."

The extra antenna 2connect-IT had provided Cordaid with, suitable for exterior mounting, meant that the telephones could link up with their satellite even from within the walls of the local office in Haiti. "In that way we were permanently within reach, even with the phones inside, lying on the table", Van der Werf explains. "Accessibility is crucial in situations that can suddenly change when, to name but one thing, violent aftershocks occur."

"Satellite communication allows us to be independent from local networks"

Fixed satellite dishes, that are mainly used for data communication purposes like e-mail, have been set up in Southern Sudan, the Darfur region in Western Sudan and in Bukavu. In Southern Sudan Cordaid also operates an Inmarsat BGAN that mainly serves as a backup for the fixed dish. A BGAN for data traffic is also used in Haiti, while for emergency aid situations a spare BGAN is held in stock at Cordaid's office in The Hague.

About Cordaid

Cordaid is a Dutch development organization focused on delivering emergency aid, fighting poverty, social restoration and influencing government policy. The organisation came into being in 1999 as a result of the merger of Catholic development organizations Memisa, Mensen in Nood and Vastenactie/Bilance. With a yearly budget of 160 million euro, 30 million of which is earmarked for emergency aid, Cordaid every year offers support to around one thousand local social organizations in forty developing countries.

About 2connect-IT

2connect-IT can look back on many years of experience within the industry of wireless and mobile communication and has a profound knowledge of the market and its requirements.

With this expertise, 2connect-IT can advise you on all aspects of wireless / mobile communication such as pre-sales consultancy, hardware, software as well as training, support and repair services. As 2connect-IT is a full service provider, competitive services and airtime rates for all Inmarsat services are offered.

2connect-IT

Cordaid is happy with the support for the overall satellite communications solution 2connect-IT delivers. "One of our key requirements was that the solution had to be reliable, meaning not just the equipment itself, but the networks also", Van der Werf says. "In a danger zone you simply can't afford to see your connections dropping off, leaving aid workers to their own devices. In practice, however, we have experienced hardly any problems at all with our satellite communications equipment. And if a problem does arise, we know 2connect-IT is at hand to help us. In those cases they really go all the way to fix it."

"In my view particularly the flexibility and speed with which 2connect-IT reacts is a big bonus", Van der Werf continues. "Haiti offers a beautiful example of both. Straight after the earthquake we had people on the plane to the disaster area, but we didn't have enough satellite telephones for all of them. That very Sunday night I put in a call to 2connect-IT, with a request for additional telephones, and lo and behold: three hours later they were delivered to the door of my home in The Hague."

2connect-IT regularly arranges training sessions for satcom users. "The satellite telephones in particular are not very complicated to operate," Van der Werf qualifies the need for training. "It is really not a lot different from using a mobile phone, albeit a phone that offers you access anywhere, without having to depend on local networks."

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