

# Seeing What Matters

The Community  
Demand for a  
Humanitarian  
Satellite

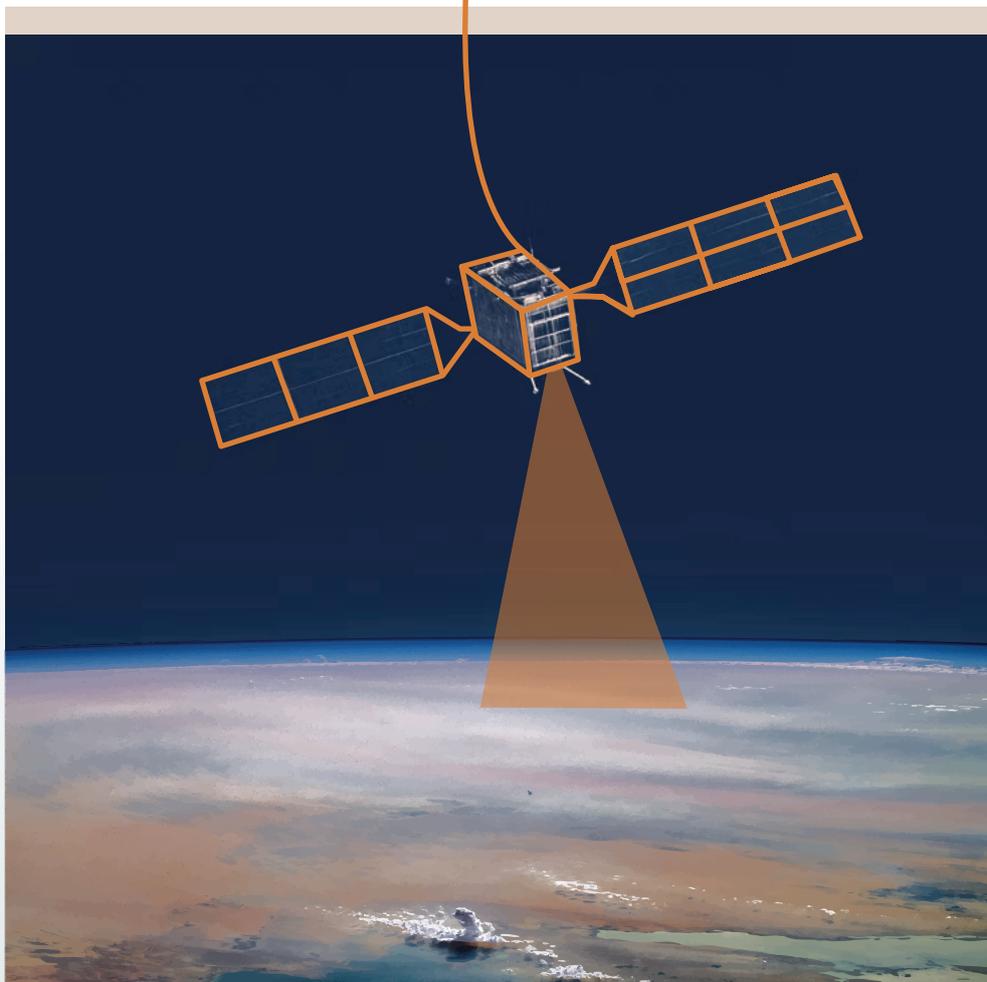


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# Introduction

This report, prepared by [Common Space](#) and reviewed by our community, presents the findings from a global survey assessing demand for an openly licensed, community-tasked satellite mission dedicated to the greater good. Drawing on 241 responses from 195 organizations across the humanitarian, research, climate, journalism, and human rights communities, it documents a clear and pressing need for high-resolution satellite imagery that is affordable, shareable, and governed in the public interest.

## Survey objectives and scope

The primary objective of this survey was to understand user demand: who needs high-resolution imagery, for what purposes, under what conditions, and with what governance expectations. It was designed to surface common requirements, ethical concerns, and operational constraints across diverse communities that rely on Earth observation (EO) data for humanitarian outcomes. This report is intentionally not a feasibility study, cost model, or technical design specification. Instead, it focuses squarely on demand, asking whether a shared, open, humanitarian satellite mission is needed and what success would look like from the perspective of users.

## Defining “humanitarian”

In our context, humanitarian refers broadly to activities aimed at protecting human life, dignity, and well-being, particularly for populations affected by conflict, disasters, displacement, environmental degradation, and structural inequality. This includes, but is not limited to, emergency response, food security, public health, environmental protection, accountability for human rights abuses, and long-term resilience and recovery.



## Consistent, cross-sector demand

The findings confirm strong and remarkably consistent demand for openly licensed, high-resolution imagery across sectors and geographies. Respondents emphasized the need for imagery that can be shared without legal or financial friction, integrated into operational workflows, and governed transparently to minimize harm. Together, these responses demonstrate that existing commercial and government-led systems leave significant gaps for humanitarian applications.

## Our current opportunity

Today, more satellites are observing the Earth than at any point in history. 1,193 EO spacecraft downlink hundreds of terabytes of data every day, making satellite imagery a critical source of information for more and more users.<sup>1</sup> At the same

<sup>1</sup> Wilkinson, R., Mleczo, M. M., Brewin, R. J. W., Gaston, K. J., Mueller, M., Jamie, S. & Yan, X. (2024). "Environmental impacts of earth observation data in the constellation and cloud computing era." *Science of the Total Environment*, 909, 168584.

time, the economics of Earth observation have shifted dramatically. Satellites are now easier, cheaper, and more scalable to build and operate than ever before.<sup>2</sup> This creates a rare window where a mission designed for public good, rather than commercial gains or national defense, can deliver a transformative impact at a fraction of the historical cost.

## Our innovation

A community-based, ethically governed satellite mission would represent a fundamental shift in how high-resolution imagery is treated: from an inaccessible, tightly controlled commodity to an equitable public good. It would not be a mission funded by venture capital seeking to extract immediate returns or a secretive, highly controlled asset for intelligence. Such a mission would make EO more accessible and responsive to local priorities, while embedding safeguards for responsible use.

Imagine the shift in power if two billion people in conflict zones had access to the same imagery as the governments observing them. For the billion people living in informal settlements, open maps mean more visibility and more agency to claim rights, services, and dignity. For the more than 100 million people affected by disasters each year, open data can mean the difference between a crisis managed and a crisis avoided. Imagine journalists and civil society organizations able to verify the destruction of villages, the expansion of detention sites, or the environmental impacts of extractive industries in near-real time, without relying on data philanthropy or expensive licenses. Open, high-resolution imagery would shift accountability from those who control access to those who seek truth, strengthening investigative reporting, legal evidence, and public trust in moments when facts are most contested. Imagine frontline communities able to document shoreline loss, deforestation, heat exposure, or water scarcity as it unfolds, using the same high-quality imagery as governments and corporations. Open access would allow those most affected by climate change to substantiate their claims, advocate for adaptation resources, and hold decision-makers accountable, ensuring that climate impacts and responses are measured not just from above, but in service of those bearing the greatest costs. The question is: **why have we not imagined any of this much sooner?**



Humanitarian Open Street Map Team

**Imagine the shift in power if two billion people in conflict zones had access to the same imagery as the governments observing them.**

<sup>2</sup> Satellogic NewSat cost per satellite is less than \$1 million with up to 300,000 km<sup>2</sup> of daily capture capacity per satellite at 0.7m resolution. [https://investors.satellogic.com/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://investors.satellogic.com/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)  
In January, Satellogic also signed a \$18 million agreement to deliver two 50cm-class imaging satellites. <https://investors.satellogic.com/news-releases/news-release-details/satellogic-signs-18mm-usd-a-greement-portugal-deliver-two-mark-v>

## The Problem with the Status Quo

Despite unprecedented volumes of observations, high-resolution imagery remains largely inaccessible to those who need it most. Together, these barriers reinforce information asymmetries at precisely the moments when visibility matters most. The populations most exposed to conflict, climate disasters, and structural inequities are often the least visible from space, limiting the ability of responders, researchers, and communities to anticipate harm, coordinate action, protect precious resources, and save lives. The survey results confirm a set of systemic barriers that block humanitarian use at scale:

- ② **Access is priced out of reach.** High-resolution imagery is routinely cost-prohibitive for non-profits, universities, local governments, journalists, and humanitarian responders operating on constrained budgets.<sup>3 4</sup>
- ② **Licensing prevents sharing and learning.** Restrictive terms often prohibit redistribution, collaboration, publication, and use in machine learning workflows, undermining collective response and long-term capacity building.<sup>5</sup>
- ② **Humanitarian needs are deprioritized.** Tasking systems favor commercial and government customers, often ignoring the areas of greatest need and leaving an entire community of users with limited coverage, long delays, or outdated imagery.
- ② **Governance raises ethical concerns.** Reliance on defense-controlled and intelligence-linked assets creates mistrust, limits transparency, and constrains use in sensitive contexts.
- ② **Transaction costs waste precious resources.** Organizations report spending disproportionate time negotiating access through ad hoc partnerships, only to receive imagery that is incomplete, low quality, or no longer actionable.<sup>6 7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Pricing for imagery < 1m resolution generally falls within the \$15 to \$30 per km<sup>2</sup> range, while tasking typically starts at \$40 to \$60 per km<sup>2</sup>, often going higher for in-demand areas.

<https://skyfi.com/en/pricing>

<sup>4</sup> Maxar's sub-meter WorldView-4 imagery costs \$22.50/km<sup>2</sup>, meaning that purchasing one-off imagery for a country the size of Ukraine would cost US\$13.6 million.

<https://agupubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1029/2022EF002904>

<sup>5</sup> The existing End User Licensing Agreements from commercial providers demonstrate how difficult licensing can be for any organization trying to use their data for impact.

<https://www.planet.com/licensing-information/>

<https://vantor.com/legal/>

<https://satellogic.com/license-agreement/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/v25/039/86/pdf/v2503986.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Kondile, Phahla; Msomi, Mandla Praisegod; Moosa, Basiiraa; and Okoro, Chioma (2025) "Benefits and Challenges of Using Satellite Imagery for Property Valuation Data Collection," CIB Conferences: Vol. 1 Article 57. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/3067-4883.2069>

# H Highlights

**Open licensing is mission critical.** Respondents overwhelmingly identified restrictive imagery licenses as the single biggest barrier to humanitarian impact. Open data is the difference between scalable public-good use and locked-down, siloed workflows.

**Strong cross-sector consensus around requirements.** ~70% of respondents require sub-meter imagery, with 34% needing  $\leq 50$  cm for building-level analysis. Nearly all respondents (97%) require true-color (RGB) imagery and 67% need Near-Infrared (NIR).

**Operational demand centers on crisis geographies.** Demand centers on event-triggered and crisis-based tasking, with many requesting daily or sub-weekly revisit during emergencies. Conflict and post-conflict regions (22%) represent the highest immediate need, followed by urban/peri-urban (16%) and rural (13%) areas where informal settlements, service gaps, and displacement drive urgent analysis. There was a strong emphasis on the Global South where high-resolution data scarcity is most acute.

**Aspirational needs to enhance resilience.** Beyond operational requirements, nearly half of respondents emphasized that high-resolution Short-Wave Infrared (SWIR) and thermal imagery are resilience-building capabilities that enable proactive monitoring of floods, fires, drought, agriculture, environmental degradation, and recovery over time. Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) was also repeatedly flagged as a valuable complement for cloudy regions and floods.

**Open access = local power and capacity.** Open access enables immediate use by local innovators and mappers while also supporting longer-term capacity building across all sectors and geographies through training, curricula, and community-led analysis. Respondents emphasized that removing licensing barriers turns imagery into a shared learning asset, not just a response tool.

**Designed to plug into existing systems.** Respondents stressed that a humanitarian satellite should operationally integrate with existing UN, academic, and volunteer mapping hubs and adhere to established humanitarian data responsibility frameworks, while strengthening interoperability, Analysis Ready Data pipelines, and ethical governance at scale.

**A mandate, not just interest.** 93% of respondents asked to stay engaged, offering not only to use data but to help govern, train, validate, and operationalize a community-tasks humanitarian satellite as a durable global public good.



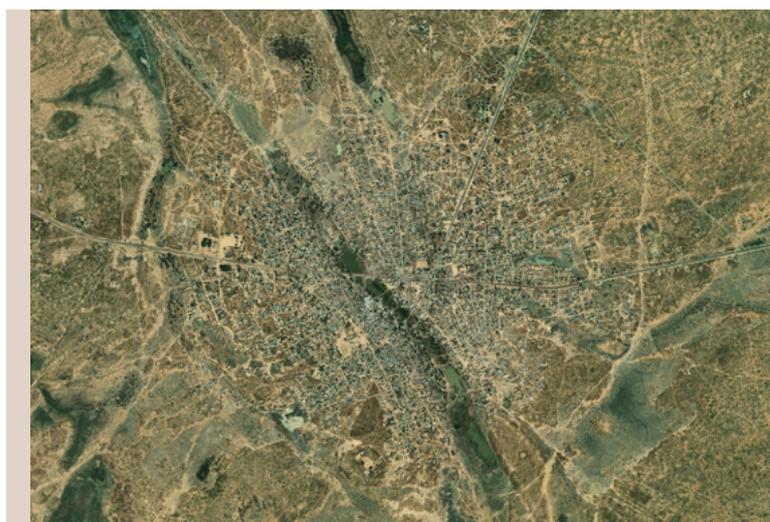
# M Methodology

To characterize global demand for high-resolution satellite imagery, Common Space conducted a structured, mixed-methods assessment integrating quantitative survey analytics with qualitative thematic coding. The survey was designed for existing users of satellite data whose missions serve the public good and to understand these key questions: what imagery is needed and what safeguards need to be in place, for what purposes, and at what scale of societal impact. The goal of the survey was not to assess technical feasibility or cost, but to consolidate user-defined requirements and constraints that have historically limited the value of Earth observation for humanitarian applications.

Questions focused on spatial resolution, latency, and spectral characteristics because these parameters directly determine whether imagery is actionable for priority use cases like damage assessments, displacement tracking, environmental monitoring, and accountability efforts. Additional questions captured priority geographies and populations served to understand where unmet demand is most acute, as well as practical and ethical barriers. The survey combined closed-ended questions, rankings, and open-text responses to enable both comparative analysis and the capture of nuanced practitioner experience.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation to explore variation across use cases, such as resolution requirements by application type and revisit cadence by hazard or crisis class.

Qualitative responses were coded inductively to identify recurring themes related to access barriers, governance expectations, ethical safeguards, and gaps in analytical infrastructure. In parallel, beneficiary modeling incorporated global exposure datasets to estimate both the populations currently reachable through existing high-resolution imaging systems and the expanded populations that could be served under an open, community-tasked mission architecture.



Large village in Chad | Copernicus

Responses were solicited through established humanitarian and research coordination channels, including United Nations agencies, international and local NGOs, academic research centers, environmental organizations, and human rights groups. Distribution prioritized networks of practitioners with direct experience using or attempting to use high-resolution satellite data in real-world contexts. In total, 241 responses were received from 179 distinct organizations spanning all major geographic regions and operational domains.

As with any practitioner-driven assessment, the findings reflect the perspectives of organizations already engaged in or adjacent to the Earth observation and humanitarian data ecosystem. While this introduces a degree of self-selection, the survey was intentionally designed to consolidate insights from users with direct operational experience navigating existing access, licensing, and governance constraints. As a result, the analysis emphasizes depth of use-case knowledge over statistical representativeness of all potential future users. In addition, responses capture stated needs and constraints rather than observed behavior under a fully open-access system; actual usage patterns may evolve as access, tooling, and institutional capacity expand. These

limitations do not diminish the central conclusion of the survey but rather define its scope as a demand-focused assessment intended to inform mission design and governance, not market sizing or adoption forecasting.

Together, this analysis provides a grounded evidence base for the mission’s technical requirements, governance design, and projected societal impact, rooted directly in empirical user needs and lived operational experience.

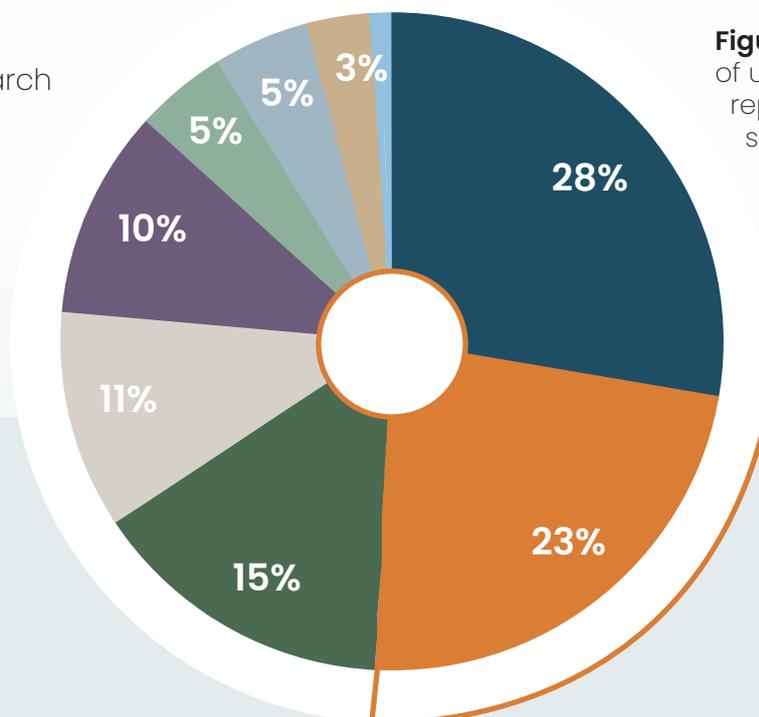
You can access the anonymized survey data and analysis here:



## R Respondents

The 241 respondents to the Common Space survey represent a diverse cross-section of users of satellite data. Their work spans a wide range of sectors, with particularly strong representation in climate action (179), disaster resilience (172), food security (118), urban resilience (100), public health (98), sustainable infrastructure (95), poverty alleviation (77), and human rights (59).

- INGO
- Academic/Research
- Commercial
- Government
- UN Agency
- Civil Society
- Local NGO
- Media
- Multiple Types



**Figure 1.** The distribution of unique organizations represented by survey respondents. International non-governmental organizations were most represented (28%), followed by a academic/research organizations (23%).

**What types of organizations are represented in the survey? (n=195)**

Their roles ranged widely and included leaders of large international non-government organizations (NGOs) and grassroots nonprofits, geospatial experts supporting a range of organization types, program and sector-specific leaders, emergency managers, first responders, human rights advocates, technical advisors, community mappers, researchers, data scientists, epidemiologists, statisticians, educators, economists, finance specialists, geographers, students, and investigative journalists. They represent a community deeply engaged in addressing climate impacts, crisis response, displacement, rights protection, and the vulnerabilities of rapidly growing urban systems.

Organizational diversity further underscores the breadth of demand. Respondents include international NGOs (28%), academic and research institutions (23%), commercial entities (15%), government (11%), UN agencies (10%), civil society (5%), local NGOs (5%), and media (3%). This distribution reflects the full ecosystem of institutions that rely on satellite data to address some of the world's most pressing challenges.

Survey respondents overwhelmingly serve communities living on the frontlines of crisis and inequality, with many overlaps across these demographics. The largest share of use cases supports displaced populations, cited by nearly two-thirds of respondents. A majority also work with children (58%) and women (55%), reinforcing the connection between high-resolution imagery and protection of vulnerable groups. Significant portions of respondents focus on urban dwellers (49%), indigenous populations (43%), informal settlement residents (33%), and coastal or climate-exposed communities (37%). Rural livelihoods are also prominent, with smallholder farmers (45%) and pastoralists (23%) frequently mentioned. This demonstrates that an open humanitarian satellite would directly benefit populations who are most marginalized: those facing conflict, displacement, climate stress, limited services, and historic inequities in visibility and representation.

Flooding in Monrovia Liberia | Open Cities AI



# Community Needs

The community expressed consensus around the value and urgency of an independent, openly governed humanitarian satellite. Respondents repeatedly characterized the potential impact using language such as “massive,” “game-changer,” “total transformation,” and “an unbelievable amount of vulnerability alleviated.” The responses present a clear mandate: high-resolution, openly licensed imagery would meaningfully expand the reach, timeliness, and equity of satellite-supported humanitarian decision-making. Users anticipate not incremental improvements, but a structural shift in how crises are monitored, understood, planned for, and acted upon.

Kutupalong Refugee Camp | OpenAerialMap

## Areas of Interest

Survey respondents identified a wide range of geographic areas where high-resolution satellite imagery is most urgently needed and many of their areas of interest overlap (e.g., conflict areas are often urban, coastal, and/or agricultural). The largest share of use cases (nearly a quarter) centers on conflict and displacement contexts, making crisis-affected geographies the single most prominent imaging priority. Another significant block includes urban and peri-urban areas and rural communities, together representing over one-third of responses especially when adding those who want coverage over all populated areas. Important secondary geographies include coastlines and river basins, agricultural zones, and forests and protected areas. Indigenous lands also emerged as priority, despite an underrepresentation of indigenous experts and leaders in the survey. While only 3% noted that disaster-affected areas were their top area of interest, this is a misleading statistic, as many respondents are focused on disaster risk reduction, disaster response, and/or disaster management writ large. Some respondents work on flood modeling, for example, and noted coastlines and river basins were their primary focus. These respondents requested daily coverage when disasters occur over their primary areas of interest.

What is your primary area of interest?	(n=241)
Conflict and/or post-conflict zones	23.01%
Urban/Peri-urban areas	15.90%
Rural communities	13.39%
All of the above	12.13%
Coastlines and river basins	6.69%
Agricultural zones	6.28%
Forests and/or protected areas	6.28%
Populated areas	4.18%
indigenous lands	4.18%
Disaster affected areas	2.93%

**Figure 2.** Respondents were asked to select their primary area of interest from a menu of options. These categories are also not mutually exclusive and include many overlapping demographics. For example, people affected by conflicts can also be urban dwellers.

Across geographies, respondents converged on a consistent set of critical points of interest that require routine, reliable, high-resolution monitoring. Ongoing access to data is paramount and in stark contrast to the status quo of ad hoc, often one-off snapshots negotiated from commercial providers.

The top priorities include damaged infrastructure (63%), roads (61%), informal settlements (55%), and refugee and IDP camps (50%). The percentages are the minimum share of respondents selecting that option. Critical social infrastructure such as hospitals, clinics, and schools also feature prominently, alongside farms, bridges, markets, and ports. Collectively, these points of interest represent coverage of the most vulnerable communities, including transportation networks, social services, settlements, shelter systems, and livelihood assets that determine access, resilience, and safety during crises. Beyond a mapping mission, the clear implication for mission design is a satellite optimized to detect changes: infrastructure damage, accessibility shifts, expansion of settlements or camps, encroachment on forests or Indigenous lands, and other forms of environmental or conflict-driven degradation.

Infrastructure / Point of Interest	Count	Percent
Damaged infrastructure	152	63%
Roads	147	61%
Informal settlements/slums	133	55%
Refugee and IDP camps	120	50%
Hospitals and health clinics	115	48%
Schools	100	41%
Farms	91	38%
Bridges	74	31%
Markets	61	25%
Ports	53	22%
Animal herds	34	14%
Coral Reefs	26	11%
Nuclear sites	21	9%

**Figure 3.** Respondents were asked where they needed data coverage in terms of points of interest. They could select multiple options.



# Spectral Bands

Survey results demonstrate that respondents are eager to leverage multispectral capabilities beyond standard 3-band RGB. Nearly all respondents (~97%) identified true-color RGB as essential, and a strong majority (~67%) require NIR for vegetation dynamics, water differentiation, and material classification. Strikingly, almost half of respondents (117) indicated exploratory needs for SWIR and thermal, revealing a broader spectral demand than typically assumed for humanitarian missions.

Only about one quarter of users can be served with basic RGB. Most require enriched configurations: a substantial segment uses RGB + NIR, while the single largest cluster (87 respondents) prefers RGB + NIR + SWIR, with additional value from thermal information

even at coarser resolution. Thermal demand is linked to heat stress, fire detection, urban microclimates, evapotranspiration, and hazard mapping across agricultural, urban, coastal, and wildfire-prone environments.

Although SAR was not included as an option, many described use cases (e.g., floods in cloudy tropics, landslides, conflict smoke cover) where SAR is especially helpful. Respondents shared how this mission could be complemented with SAR: “I understand this initial push is for an optical imaging satellite, but wanted to share that our organization would also be extremely interested in a humanitarian high-resolution SAR satellite. Illegal mining (often resulting in slavery and chimpanzee poaching) takes place under the canopy of relatively densely vegetated forests in many areas that optical imaging simply cannot reach. Additionally, many threats occur in tropical rainforest areas where near-constant cloud cover makes optical imagery difficult to use.”

Use Case Cluster	Recommended Minimum	“Good” Configuration	“Ideal” Configuration
<b>Conflict &amp; post-conflict</b>	3-band RGB	4-band RGB	5-band (RGB+NIR+SWIR) + access to thermal (even at coarser res)
<b>Urban / informal settlements / camps</b>	3-band RGB	4-band RGB + NIR	4-band + thermal (for heat, fires, industrial)
<b>Rural communities</b>	3-band RGB	4-band RGB + NIR	5-band (RGB+NIR+SWIR) + thermal for drought/fire
<b>Coasts &amp; river basins</b>	4-band RGB + NIR	5-band RGB+NIR+SWIR	5-band + thermal
<b>Agriculture &amp; food security</b>	4-band RGB + NIR	5-band RGB+NIR+SWIR	5-band + thermal (for ET/crop stress proxies)
<b>Forests / protected areas</b>	4-band RGB + NIR	5-band RGB+NIR+SWIR	5-band + thermal for fires/peat/smoke
<b>Indigenous lands / rights</b>	4-band RGB + NIR	5-band RGB+NIR+SWIR	5-band + thermal for mining, fires, encroachment signals

**Figure 4.** An analysis of top respondent use cases by spectral configuration.



# Spatial Resolution

The survey reveals a strong and unambiguous requirement for high spatial resolution: approximately 70% of respondents need sub-meter imagery, and nearly one-third specifically require  $\leq 50$  cm ground sampling distance (GSD) to meet the technical demands of their missions. These users include those working on building-level damage assessment, informal settlement mapping, camp infrastructure monitoring, environmental enforcement, and other fine-grained humanitarian analyses.

At coarser resolutions, critical features are often not discernable. At 1m GSD, small structures begin to merge into single pixels; narrow alleyways, courtyard boundaries, and outbuildings blend together; and the subtle spatial signatures of crisis events become undetectable. Many forms of damage, including roof collapse, scorch marks from fire, shelling patterns, debris fields, or missing structural elements, typically manifest at 1 to 2-meter scales, making them invisible or ambiguous at 1-meter resolution. Multi-level buildings and dense informal settlements also “blur,” limiting analysts’ ability to classify structural types or detect change over time.

In displacement contexts, the resolution gap becomes even more consequential. Accurate tent counts, camp expansion monitoring, identification of semi-permanent shelters, latrine locations, water points, internal road conditions, and drainage channels all require sub-meter imagery. With 50 cm resolution, tents and small structures are separable, enabling estimates with reasonable confidence. At 1 m resolution, tents can be indiscernible from surrounding pixels, but enumeration errors can exceed 20–50%, undermining planning for food, water, health services, and shelter allocation.

Earth Science and Remote Sensing Unit, Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center



# Revisit Rates

Beyond spatial resolution, the survey shows temporal cadence to be a defining requirement for humanitarian relevance. Respondents expressed a highly heterogeneous set of revisit needs, unified by one dominant theme: flexible, event-driven access is essential. When asked how frequently new imagery is required for their operational areas, the largest share (40% of all respondents) identified on-demand or event-triggered acquisition as their primary requirement. This reflects a core truth across humanitarian workflows: crises do not follow orbital schedules, and the value of satellite data depends heavily on responsiveness when conditions change.

Other users reported more routine cadence needs: monthly (14%), weekly (13%), and daily (10%), with an additional 8% needing imagery every three days. These numbers mask strong variation by mission type.

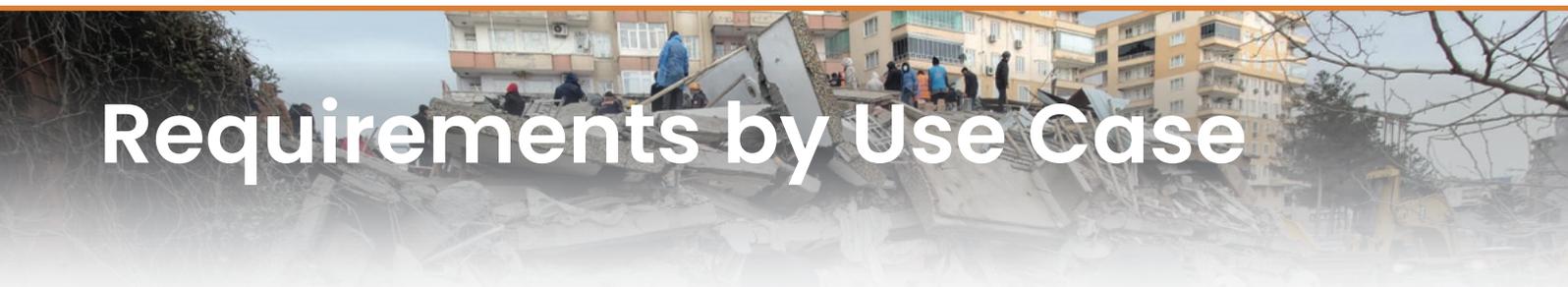
- ② Conflict, displacement, and civilian protection users demonstrated the most acute temporal demand, often requiring imagery within 24–72 hours of a new attack, population movement, or infrastructure loss.
- ② Disaster response also requires event-driven imaging, where conditions evolve hourly to daily; cloud-cover and area impacted (e.g., flash floods versus widespread, persistent flood events) make a big difference in the value of optical, high-resolution data; in these scenarios, medium-resolution imagery can serve hazard tracking, but building-level validation still relies on high-resolution data sources.
- ② Urban and peri-urban analysis showed a hybrid pattern: crisis-response needs during disasters paired with weekly to monthly monitoring for planning, informal settlement growth, and infrastructure change.
- ② Rural communities, agricultural systems, and environmental monitoring expressed more moderate revisit needs (often weekly to seasonal) but emphasized a sharp increase in temporal requirements during droughts, fires, pest outbreaks, or displacement spillovers.

Across sectors, a key insight emerges: **very few humanitarian workflows require continuous daily sub-meter imagery, but many require the ability to surge capacity around hotspots to generate dense temporal coverage before, during, and immediately after crisis events.** This is less about persistent daily imaging and more about reliable temporal granularity when it matters most.

The survey results therefore support a mission architecture that combines:

- ② routine wide-area monitoring (monthly or better) and
- ② rapid, on-demand tasking enabling sub-weekly revisit in priority areas.

Such a hybrid temporal model aligns closely with both the operational realities and the ethical imperatives of humanitarian response, providing imaging when people are most vulnerable and when decisions are most time-sensitive.



## Requirements by Use Case

Disaggregating revisit needs by use case reveals a highly patterned set of operational requirements. In conflict and civilian-protection settings, true daily 50 cm revisit is only essential in a narrow band of high-intensity scenarios: rapid urban destruction, scorched-earth operations, shifting front lines, sudden surges in displacement, large fire

events, and rapid movement of armed actors. These represent fewer than 5% of all surveyed use cases, but they are precisely the contexts where lives are most at risk and where timely verification carries the greatest evidentiary and humanitarian value. For most conflict monitoring, 1 to 3-day revisit combined with event-triggered tasking is operationally sufficient, particularly when supported by moderate-resolution daily sensors (e.g., VIIRS, MODIS) and complementary SAR.

In displacement and camp-monitoring workflows, respondents noted that daily imagery can be valuable for early fire detection or sudden population influxes. Still, 2 to 3-day revisit is adequate for most routine mapping because tents, shelters, latrines, water points, and micro-infrastructure are only discernible at  $\leq 50$  cm GSD, and the features themselves evolve on multi-day rather than hourly timescales.

For environmental hazards like floods, cyclones, landslides, and wildfires, the demand for daily coverage reflects the physical dynamics of these events: rising water levels, shifting fire perimeters, or rainfall-induced ground movement. However, respondents emphasized that sub-meter daily imagery is not typically required. Moderate-resolution (1 to 5 m) sensors can track hazard evolution, while 50 cm data is most needed after peak impact for building damage, washed-out roads, and infrastructure assessment.

Across urban change, forest monitoring, agriculture, coastal erosion, and protected areas, the subset of respondents selecting “daily” revisit often did so aspirationally; operational requirements overwhelmingly fall between weekly and monthly, with event-driven tasking during shocks. Several respondents noted that requests for higher cadence were shaped by chronic cloud cover, suggesting a desire for temporal redundancy rather than intrinsic need for daily, high-resolution imaging.

This suggests a hybrid revisit strategy for a humanitarian satellite mission: monthly wide-area basemaps, weekly or sub-weekly revisit for priority regions, and on-demand, rapid tasking during crises. Most cases are better served by a combination of moderate-resolution daily imagery, event-triggered high-resolution tasking, and routine weekly-to-monthly change detection through a model that balances operational reality with technical feasibility. The community needs high-temporal situational awareness at moderate resolution (1–5 m) and event-driven tasking at 50 cm.

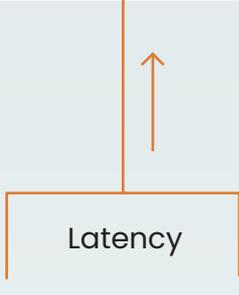
## A Note on Latency Categories

**Near-Real-Time (NRT) / Low Latency (Minutes to 1 Hour):** Emerging LEO (Low-Earth Orbit) constellations with inter-satellite links (ISL) can provide image data within 15 to 30 minutes of acquisition.

**Rapid/Tactical Response (1–6 Hours):** Modern, high-revisit commercial satellites, particularly those using advanced ground networks (like direct downlink to regional stations), can deliver data in 1–3 hours for critical, time-sensitive, or high-resolution needs.

**Standard Commercial (6–24+ Hours):** Standard, high-resolution imagery for non-critical mapping, agricultural assessment, or environmental monitoring usually ranges from 12 to 24+ hours, depending on the “tasking” (requesting) requirements.

**Archive/Routine (Days):** If the imagery is not freshly captured but retrieved from archives, the latency is minimal (minutes), but the temporal latency (age of the data) is high.



Use Case	≤5 m	≤1 m	≤50 cm	Typical Revisit Need	Latency	Why this Latency Matters
Building damage (high intensity conflict, post-disaster)	No	Limited	Yes	1 to 3 days	Rapid (1-6 hours)	Enable same-day response plans
Road access status	No	Limited	Yes	1 to 3 days	Rapid (1-6 hours)	Logistics routing and corridor validation
Bridge collapse	No	Limited	Yes	1 to 7 days	Rapid (1-6 hours)	Safety and access plans
Fire / shelling detection	Limited	Limited	Yes	Daily to 3 days	NRT / Low latency	Situational awareness
Validation of rapid urban destruction	No	Limited	Yes	Daily	NRT / Low latency	Early warning and alerts
Tent counting	No	Limited	Yes	Weekly-monthly + event-driven	Standard Commercial (6-24 hrs)	Capacity planning
New arrivals (camp inflow)	Limited	Limited	Yes	2-3 days	Rapid (1-6 hours)	Surge planning
Flood extent (for major events)	yes	yes	N/A	Daily to 3 days	Rapid (1-6 hours)	Targeting responses
Affected buildings (post-event)	No	Limited	Yes	1 to 3 days	Standard Commercial (6-24 hrs)	Damage assessment after peak
Road blockages (post-event)	No	Limited	Yes	1 to 3 days	Rapid (1-6 hours)	Humanitarian access
Fire perimeter	Yes	Yes	N/A	On-demand	NRT / Low latency	Active fire response and containment
Agriculture phenology	Yes	Yes	N/A	Weekly to monthly	Archive / Routine (Days)	Seasonal monitoring

Table continues on following page

Use Case	≤5 m	≤1 m	≤50 cm	Typical Revisit Need	Latency	Why this Latency Matters
Land use / land cover (LULC)	Yes	Yes	N/A	Annual to seasonal	Archive / Routine (Days)	Long-term planning
Coastal erosion	Yes	Yes	N/A	Monthly to seasonal	Archive / Routine (Days)	Gradual change detection
Forest loss	Yes	Yes	N/A	Weekly to monthly	Standard Commercial (6-24 hours)	Monitoring and enforcement
Safe corridor validation (conflict zones)	No	Limited	Yes	1-3 days	Rapid (1-6 hours)	Civilian and convoy protection
Damage verification for accountability / rights monitoring	No	Limited	Yes	1-7 days	Standard Commercial (6-24 hours)	Evidentiary documentation
IDP settlement growth tracking	No	Limited	Yes	3-7 days	Standard Commercial (6-24 hours)	Monitoring and planning
Shelter suitability / roof type mapping	Limited	Yes	Yes	Annual to seasonal	Archive / Routine (Days)	Planning and resilience
Anticipatory flood pathway modeling	yes	yes	N/A	Seasonal / pre-event	Archive / Routine (Days)	Pre-event preparedness
Landslide detection	No	Limited	Yes	Event-driven	Rapid (1-6 hours)	Post-event hazard response
Watershed sediment plume tracking	Yes	Yes	N/A	Weekly	Standard Commercial (6-24 hours)	Environmental monitoring
Damage to cultural heritage sites	No	Limited	Yes	1-7 days	Standard Commercial (6-24 hours)	Documentation and protection
Verification of humanitarian facility destruction (hospitals, schools)	No	Limited	Yes	1-3 days	Rapid (1-6 hours)	Protection, advocacy, and response

Table continues on following page

Use Case	≤5 m	≤1 m	≤50 cm	Typical Revisit Need	Latency	Why this Latency Matters
Oil spill detection	Yes	Yes	N/A	Daily to weekly	Rapid (1-6 hours)	Containment and mitigation
Crop failure early warning	Yes	Yes	N/A	Weekly-monthly	Standard Commercial (6-24 hours)	Seasonal risk monitoring and early warning
Wind damage mapping	Limited	Yes	Yes	1-7 days	Standard Commercial (6-24 hours)	Recovery and insurance assessment

**Figure 5.** An analysis of top use cases alongside their likely spatial resolution, revisit, and latency requirements, as well as a description of why that latency is important for this use case.

# Spatial Coverage

Spatial coverage is a critical operational consideration, especially as higher spatial resolutions means smaller areas of coverage. Satellites imaging at greater than 1m spatial resolution typically have swath widths from 13 km to 18 km, compared to the 290 km wide image strips of Sentinel-2 at 10 m spatial resolution.<sup>8</sup> Disasters and conflicts often affect areas spanning multiple cities, regions, or even countries, meaning that even tasking ultimately prioritizes populated or high-risk locations, these are large areas to cover. In many cases, the locations of greatest need are not known at the time of tasking; the core analytical question is often not just “what is happening here?” but “where is it happening at all?” While tip-and-cue approaches can improve efficiency, they still depend on an initial wide-area view to identify emerging hotspots, assess spatial extent, and avoid blind spots. Because very high-resolution sensors inherently image relatively small swaths, no single collection or even sensor can fully capture the scale of impact. This makes interoperability with other satellite systems and derived products essential: broader-coverage data can provide situational awareness and context, helping to bound uncertainty, estimate overall impact, and guide where high-resolution collections should be targeted to deliver the greatest humanitarian value.

<sup>8</sup> <https://documentation.dataspace.copernicus.eu/Data/SentinelMissions/Sentinel2.html>

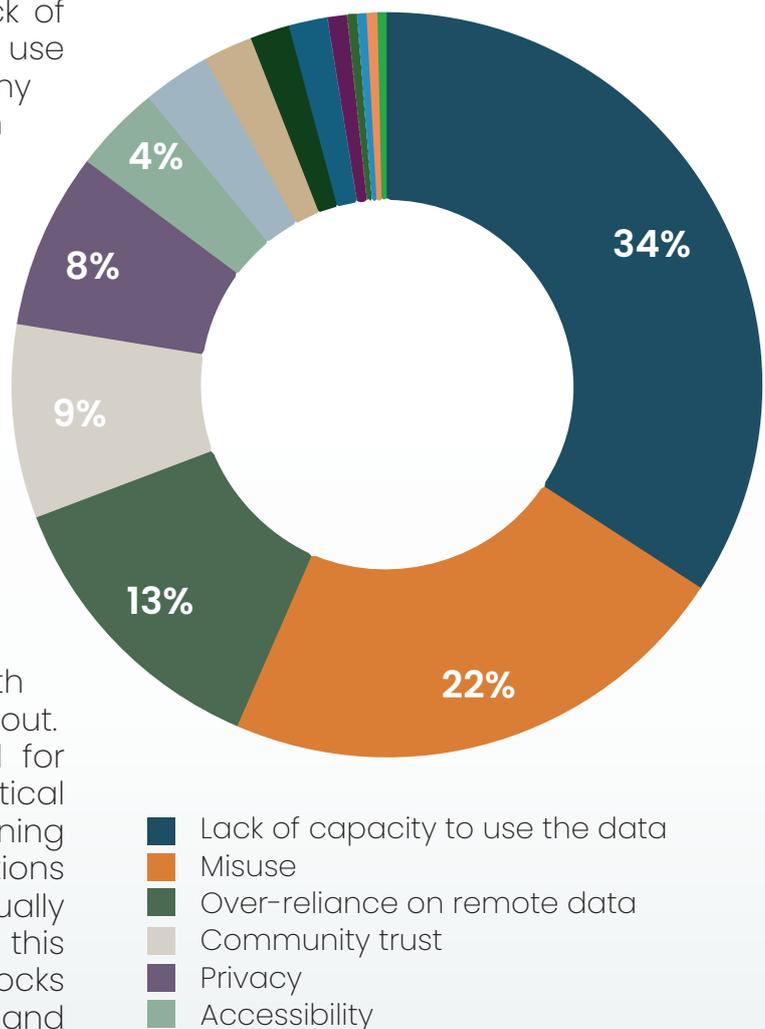
# C Concerns: Current & Future

The impactful application of high-resolution imagery is stymied by a combination of paywalls, complexity, and ethical risk, not just technology. A humanitarian satellite that solves only data availability but not the governance, tooling, and capacity side will only partially unlock this demand. Concerns about community trust, privacy, and over-reliance on remote sensing at the expense of local knowledge further reinforce the need for a mission that centers on humanity, not just technology. Responsible governance, strong ethical guardrails, harm-minimization protocols, and workflows that meaningfully integrate local perspectives and analog data sources will be critical to ensuring that high-resolution imagery strengthens, rather than supplants, local agency.

## Capacity

Survey respondents expressed a wide-ranging set of concerns about the risks and ethical challenges of satellite data use in humanitarian contexts, with capacity limitations emerging as the most common barrier. Roughly one-third of participants (34%) identified a lack of skills, tools, or time to effectively use high-resolution data. Many respondents described an uneven landscape in which a handful of technically advanced organizations can fully exploit high-resolution data, while the majority struggle with basic steps like preprocessing, interpretation, or integrating imagery into routine workflows. Several noted that even when they do receive imagery, they do not have trained analysts, compute environments, or standardized tools to operationalize it. This gap creates a two-tier humanitarian system: those with geospatial capacity and those without. Respondents emphasized the need for simplified products, shared analytical hubs, automated pipelines, and training structures that allow local organizations to benefit immediately while gradually building their own capabilities. In this sense, open data is catalytic: it unlocks classrooms, skill-building, and experimentation, enabling a broader ecosystem to “learn its way into” effective satellite use. A successful mission must therefore deliver not only pixels, but pathways for adoption.

**Main concerns regarding satellite data use in humanitarian contexts (n=239)**



**Figure 5.** The top concerns expressed by respondents. Each respondent chose their main concern from a menu of options.

## Misuse

Concerns about misuse, including targeting, repression, surveillance, and the misinterpretation of imagery, were also significant (22%) and carried a distinct moral weight. Respondents highlighted the risks that high-resolution imagery, if ungoverned, could expose vulnerable communities or be weaponized in conflict settings. Several noted the increasingly dangerous information landscape, where high-visibility products can be twisted, manipulated, or taken out of context, and where social media accelerates the spread of misinterpretation. Others worried that “open” could inadvertently mean accessible to malign actors as well as humanitarians. These concerns underscore that an open humanitarian satellite must not replicate the extractive dynamics of past systems. Instead, it requires governance that embeds consent, transparency, tiered access controls where necessary, red teaming to anticipate misuse scenarios, and mechanisms for community oversight. Safeguards must be treated as core infrastructure, not afterthoughts. To address these concerns collectively, responsible governance, strong ethical guardrails, harm-minimization protocols, and workflows that meaningfully integrate local perspectives and analog data sources are critical.

## Sustainability

Across the survey responses, one concern surfaced with striking consistency: fear that access could disappear just as communities begin to rely on it. Many respondents described past experiences in which commercial donations were withdrawn, licensing terms abruptly changed, pilot access expired, or open-data programs were defunded with little warning. This “rug pulled out” dynamic is not hypothetical; it is a lived pattern in the humanitarian

ecosystem. Organizations spoke of having to beg for imagery, negotiate ad hoc arrangements, or rebuild workflows when a provider’s priorities shifted and/or project funding ended. The cost of this instability is not only in operational delays, but in lost trust, lost institutional memory, and lost lives.

Reliability of access is as critical as openness if organizations are expected to design workflows, train staff, develop analytical pipelines, and build decision systems around imagery sources. When programs vanish, those investments evaporate. In conflict zones, displacement crises, climate disasters, and high-risk environments, uncertainty about data continuity becomes a barrier to adoption as real as price or licensing. These concerns make clear that the Common Space mission cannot simply be open; it must be resilient. Sustainability must be baked into every level of the mission architecture:

- ② **Financially**, through innovative funding models that do not depend on a single donor or market cycle. Club good models and data trusts like **PLACE** are valuable examples of how philanthropic investments alongside a membership model that attracts commercial support can sustain data access.
- ② **Operationally**, through long-term commitments to collection, archiving, and open licensing.
- ② **Governance-wise**, through community oversight that protects the mission from political shifts or private-sector consolidation.
- ② **Technically**, through designing systems that ensure continuity even during anomalies, failures, or transitions.



## Open or Bust

Licensing, cost, and restrictive access emerged as the most systemic obstacle to using high-resolution satellite data for impact (explicitly cited by 61% of respondents). The conclusion is unambiguous: open licensing is not an enhancement but the single most important enabler of humanitarian value. It allows high-resolution imagery to scale beyond individual projects into shared infrastructure supporting coordination, capacity building, ethical oversight, and local ownership. Without open licensing, many priority use cases simply cannot function. Multi-stakeholder workflows such as community-led mapping, disaster response coordination, machine learning, academic research, and rights monitoring are routinely blocked by commercial restrictions. Open imagery enables shared basemaps for informal settlements, rapid public dashboards during crises, national-scale agricultural and food-security monitoring, and transparent documentation of environmental and Indigenous land rights impacts. For a humanitarian satellite mission to meaningfully reduce harm and unlock the impact envisioned by the global community, a foundational commitment to open data must sit alongside strong governance, ethical frameworks, and community oversight.

Open access in a humanitarian context is not binary; it requires careful design to balance coordination and impact with the responsibility to prevent harm. Paired with a clear ethical framework, data trust-based models can enable openness while introducing governance, accountability, and safeguards around sensitive use cases, including graduated access, purpose-based controls, and community-informed oversight. Rather than restricting data by default, this approach reduces risk by shaping how data are accessed, interpreted, and applied, ensuring that open high-resolution imagery strengthens collective action, protects affected communities, and aligns transparency with humanitarian principles.

### How does an open license enable greater impact?

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- Enables machine learning
- Enables community mapping
- Enables multi-agency collaboration
- Enables public transparency
- Enables long-term archive use
- Enables capacity building
- Ensures the satellite data will reach the people who need it

# Mission Design Implications

The findings from this needs assessment translate into a clear set of user experience requirements for any satellite system intended to serve community needs. One of the explicit goals of this exercise was to convert our community feedback into a set of requirements for our physical satellite(s), and to determine what was most important to our community so that we can make informed tradeoffs in our system design and mission plan. These takeaways emerged from the survey:

## Licensing & Governance

To unlock real humanitarian impact, Common Space must deliver imagery that is shareable, publishable, and legally frictionless. The system must commit to:

- 🌀 Open licensing (e.g., Creative Commons license like CC BY or CC BY-SA)
- 🌀 No redistribution or derivative-use restrictions once access is granted
- 🌀 Transparent, community-guided tasking governance
- 🌀 Workflows designed for multi-agency and cross-border collaboration

## Usability of data:

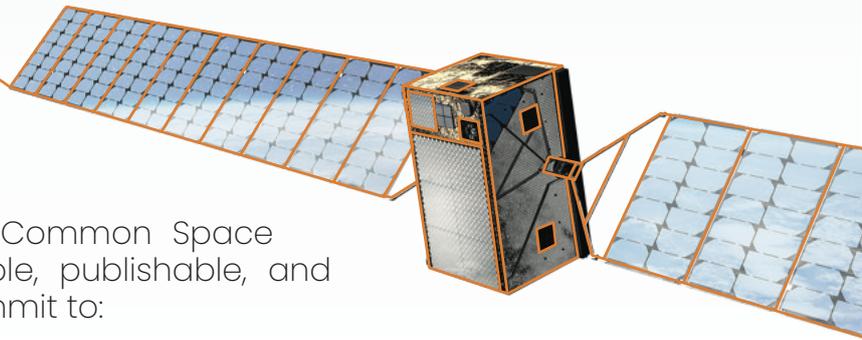
High-resolution imagery has limited value if it cannot be used effectively. Common Space must ensure that data is immediately actionable through:

- 🌀 Analysis Ready Data (ARD) and AI-ready formats
- 🌀 Browser-native tools for common tasks (Population mapping, Damaged infrastructure detection, change detection, footprint extraction)
- 🌀 Training, documentation, and sustained partnerships with groups like HOT/OSM, Missing Maps, universities, and large INGOs.
- 🌀 Simple interfaces for tasking, data access, distribution, and impact.

## Sustainability and mission continuity

Users do not simply need imagery; they need ongoing, predictable access. To ensure continuity, Common Space must:

- 🌀 Lean, cost-efficient systems, for both hardware, software, and operations
- 🌀 Governance and licensing structures that guarantee continuity regardless of market or political fluctuations
- 🌀 Self-sustaining funding sources (e.g., blending philanthropic, up-front investments with a club good membership model)
- 🌀 Engaging industry partners who have existing assets in orbit who could meet some, if not all, of the community needs as a complement to building our own constellation of satellites



## Resolution

The mission must provide better than 1m resolution to meet operational demands. There will be trade-offs when considering greater than 50cm resolution, including cost, reduced swath width, increased data volumes, and greater demands on constellation size and downlink capacity. Balancing these trade-offs with our satellite partners will be key to preserving value and sustaining the mission.

- ⦿ Minimum threshold of 1m resolution with goal of unlocking higher resolutions where financially feasible
- ⦿ Considered satellites with different resolutions to meet various user needs - either through a new build or acquisition of existing capacity in orbit

## Spectral Configuration

Common Space should deliver the spectral configuration that serves the widest range of users without over-engineering the system. This keeps the mission focused, cost-effective, and aligned with existing workflows. Rather than embedding all modalities in a single platform, respondents favored a partnership-driven approach that integrates these extended capabilities through data fusion, interoperability, and coordinated tasking to maximize collective impact while preserving system simplicity. Survey evidence supports a clear baseline:

- ⦿ Common Space payload: Pan + RGB + NIR to cover the majority of operational use cases
- ⦿ Extended capabilities to meet emerging needs and a broader set of use cases: SWIR, thermal, SAR, hyperspectral

## Latency

Latency, not just resolution or revisit, will dictate usefulness for community needs: life-saving and access decisions often require imagery within 24-72 hours, while resilience, recovery, and accountability workflows tolerate longer delays but demand higher evidentiary clarity. The system must prioritize:

- ⦿ Low tasking latency (predictive tasking, and tasking ahead of engagements)
- ⦿ Low delivery latency (fast downlink, efficient product processing, availability to downstream systems)
- ⦿ Operational pipelines that minimize friction (Granting access, and training)

## Revisit

Revisit requirements depend on mission type, but the overwhelming need is responsiveness, not constant global refresh. Revisit is the tool to ensure we can respond to sudden onset, and on-demand tasking requirements. Common Space should deliver:

- ⦿ Constellation of satellites aimed at daily revisit, where it's needed.
- ⦿ Orbits optimized for where people live, and disasters happen.
- ⦿ Sufficient capacity to support both routine monitoring and crisis surges
- ⦿ Tip and cue systems for smarter tasking and mission support
- ⦿ Ensure that we can get a first shot of a disaster within the 72-hour window regardless of timing.

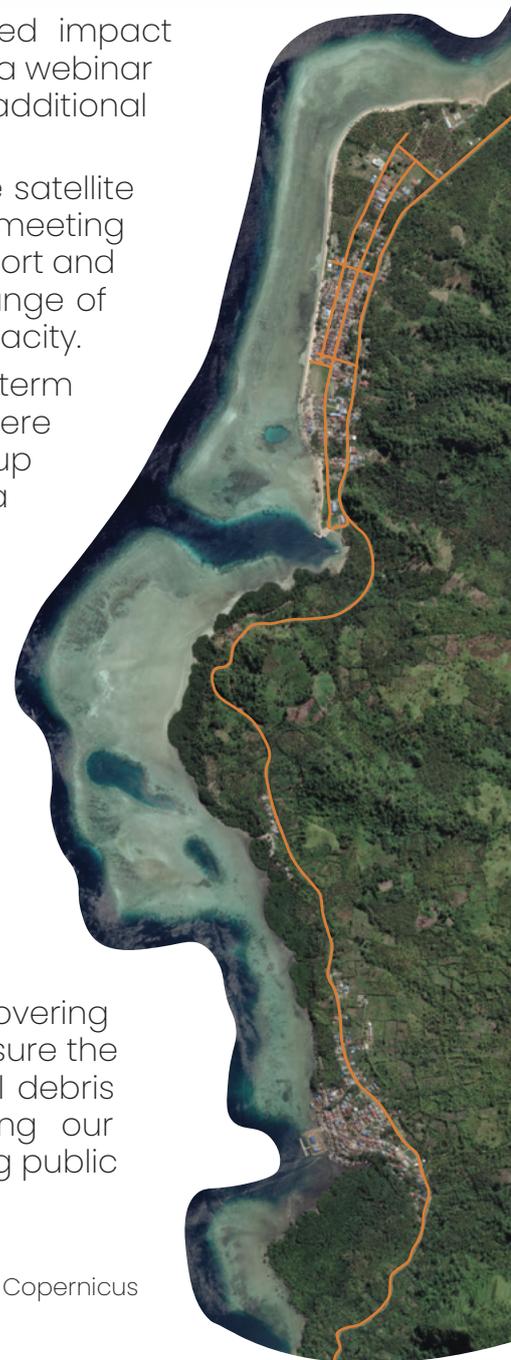
# Conclusion & Next Steps

The evidence gathered through this assessment is unambiguous: the humanitarian, human-rights, climate, and development communities are constrained not by imagination or familiarity with the technology, but by access. The findings in this report demonstrate both the urgency and the viability of a dedicated, community-driven satellite mission defined by open access, shared and transparent governance, ethical safeguards, capacity building pathways and technical specifications anchored in real operational need. The community does not simply want data; they want a system they can trust, shape, and sustain.

This mission is not a replacement for what already exists, it is an infrastructure investment that allows an entire ecosystem of diverse stakeholders to operate at the scale and speed today's global crises demand, while securing independent and consistent access in support of their missions. When Common Space succeeds, downstream organizations benefit immediately, and their collective impact is multiplied.

## Next Steps

- **Release of this demand report** alongside the associated impact report to be promoted through several channels, including a webinar series to further engage the community and solicit additional feedback and support
- **Launch a Satellite Request for Proposals (RFP)** to engage satellite manufacturers, operators, and data partners capable of meeting our requirements. The RFP will point to the findings in this report and detail further technical needs, while also encouraging a range of proposals from building a satellite to acquiring existing capacity.
- **Convene a Governance Task Force** to define the long-term governance of Common Space and the satellite mission. There will be an open call for experts to join the task force. This group will develop a community-informed tasking protocol, a data trust and membership model, an ethical and human-rights framework, and an open data license that balances access, safety, and accountability. Outputs will culminate in a formal governance recommendation package.
- **Advance fundraising and strategic partnerships** to secure the catalytic capital to contract with our satellite provider(s). Fundraising will be aligned to phased technical milestones and governance readiness. Initial philanthropic funding will be essential for upfront costs while our future club good model supports ongoing operational costs.
- **Undertake an environmental impact assessment** covering satellite manufacturing, launch, and operations. This will ensure the mission adheres to best practices for sustainability, orbital debris mitigation, and responsible space operations, reinforcing our values and commitment to minimize harm while maximizing public benefit.



# Our Thanks & Call to Action

We extend our deepest thanks to everyone who contributed to this report, those who completed the survey and those who read (and re-read) our drafts to ensure this reflects community needs and realities. Your perspectives, use cases, and candid reflections have been invaluable. Your input is shaping what a truly humanitarian satellite mission must deliver: open, timely, high-resolution data that strengthens decision-making and expands visibility for the communities who need it most. In the appendix, we include a list of participants who opted to have their names acknowledged.

We also recognize the incredible support of the **Kluz Prize for PeaceTech, Unorthodox Philanthropy**, and **Taylor Geospatial**. They are the initial funders and early champions who are helping us make this big dream a reality.

And a big thank you to Seamus Geraty for lending his amazing design abilities for the final report.

We also acknowledge the analytical assistance provided by AI via ChatGPT for accelerating discovery of relevant literature and contextual data and for helping structure and organize the survey dataset.

## How can you support this mission?

If you are a **future user of our data**, provide a letter of support [using this template](#). Many thanks to the dozens of organizations who have already done so.

If you are a **philanthropic funder** or are connected to funders who should support this mission, connect with us to learn more and help us unlock catalytic funding.

If this report and **our mission resonate with you**, promote our findings and help spread the word across your networks.

If you are a **commercial or technical partner**, engage through the upcoming RFP or partnership discussions. We also welcome your insights and in-kind support.

If you have **expertise in governance** and related topics like tasking protocols, ethical frameworks, data trust models and licensing, express your interest in our task force and help shape one of the most innovative approaches to democratizing high-resolution data.

If you are a **storyteller**, help us communicate the importance and value of this mission and what it means to your work and the lives of billions of people.

If you have not yet had an opportunity to **share your own data needs**, the survey will remain open, and we welcome your participation.

## Connect with the leaders behind Common Space.

Rhiannan Price at [rhiannan@commonsplace.world](mailto:rhiannan@commonsplace.world)

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# A Appendix

Full survey instrument: form [available here](#).

Question	Type	Options
Name	Open Text	
Role	Open Text	
Organization	Open Text	
What type of organization?	Open Text	
Email	Open Text	
What sectors does your work support? Check all that apply.	Multiple choice + free text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Human rights</li> <li>Human trafficking</li> <li>Food security</li> <li>Climate action</li> <li>Urban resilience</li> <li>Public health</li> <li>Poverty alleviation</li> <li>Child protection</li> <li>Sustainable infrastructure</li> <li>Disaster resilience</li> <li>Agriculture</li> </ul>
Write 2-3 sentences describing your use case and how high-resolution satellite data would/does play a role.	Open Text	
What is your primary area of interest?	Multiple choice + free text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Urban/peri-urban areas</li> <li>Rural communities</li> <li>Agricultural zones</li> <li>Forests and/or protected areas</li> <li>Coastlines and river basins</li> <li>Mountainous or hard-to-access terrain</li> <li>Conflict and/or post-conflict zones</li> <li>Oceans</li> <li>Indigenous lands</li> </ul>
Are there specific infrastructure or points of interest you regularly need monitoring from space? Check all that apply.	Multiple choice + free text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools</li> <li>Hospitals and health clinics</li> <li>Roads</li> <li>Refugee and IDP camps</li> <li>Informal settlements/slums</li> <li>Nuclear sites</li> <li>Bridges</li> </ul>

		Damaged infrastructure Farms Markets Animal herds Ports Coral reefs
What population(s) does your use case(s) support?	Multiple choice + free text	Children Women Urban dwellers Trafficking victims Fisherfolk Slum dwellers Displaced populations Indigenous populations Coastal communities Small island developing states Farmers Pastoralists
How frequently do you need new imagery for your priority areas?	Multiple choice + free text	daily every three days weekly monthly on-demand / event triggered
What is the highest resolution imagery you need?	Multiple choice	$\leq 5$ meter resolution $\leq 1$ meter resolution $\leq 5m$ resolution
What spectral bands do you need? Check all that apply.	Multiple choice	True color Near-infrared Shortwave infrared Long-wave infrared Thermal infrared
How often would you use high-resolution satellite imagery if access was no longer a barrier?	Multiple choice	daily weekly monthly
How many people are impacted by this use case(s)? Please be as specific as possible. Ranges are acceptable.	Open text	
What difference would open access to high resolution satellite imagery make in your work?	Open text	
What are your main concerns regarding satellite data use in humanitarian contexts?	Multiple choice + free text	privacy misuse over-reliance on remote data community trust cybersecurity lack of capacity to use the data data low priority/value

Would you like to be listed as one of our contributors when we publish the aggregated research findings?	Multiple choice	Yes No Maybe
Any suggestions of others we should reach out to about this mission? Please include name and email address or LinkedIn profile.	Open Text	
Would your organization be interested in writing a letter of support for the mission?	Multiple choice	Yes No Maybe (I'll look into it)
Would you like to stay involved with this effort? We anticipate ongoing consultations and small group discussions as we pull together our findings and validate mission recommendations.	Multiple choice	Yes No
Any additional feedback you'd like to share?	Open text	

## **S**urvey Contributors

These are the survey respondents who agreed to be recognized in alphabetical order.

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