



**Development Partners Consultation on Land Cover Map
and Geodatabase for Africa "AFRICOVER"**

Statement

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Ms. Margrie Smith, Representative of the Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Distinguished delegates from the Development Partners of Africa, Distinguished experts from national, regional and international institutions from Africa and Abroad,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

My first and very pleasant task is to welcome you to the Headquarters of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, where the "African Inventory and Comprehensive Observation of Vegetation/Land Cover and Environmental Resources - AFRICOVER Project, will be presented for your evaluation as representatives of our development partners. Being an important initiative of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), UNECA has always taken keen interest in it as a necessary venture to fill crucial information gaps that inhibit the effective management of our resources and our environment. As the documents indicate, this project is intended to produce a vegetation cover map and related geographic database and to up-grade methodologies for national and sub-regional capacities for mapping and monitoring of the environment.

As you are aware, the social and economic development of any nation is interlaced with her natural resources and how they are assessed, managed and exploited. In Africa, damaging changes in the domain of natural resources and land use are taking place at an incredibly rapid pace under the powerful pressure of population growth and irrational use of the resources. Land degradation, desertification, water and air pollution are among the appalling manifestations of this phenomenon and which were further aggravated by natural and human catastrophes and hazards. The challenge facing African governments, decision-makers, and development operators, is to reverse these trends of degradation and to conserve and enhance the resource base of their countries. However, one of the major problems of assessing the changes and monitoring the exploitation of natural resources in Africa has been the near absence of a systematic resource inventory at the local, national, subregional and regional levels. Without effective means for rapid access to selective, reliable and up-to-date information, it will not be possible for Africans to carry out any rational exploitation, plan for or make rational and considered decisions in the field of natural resources.

A giant leap forward in the process of collection and manipulation of resource information was made possible through the application of satellite remote sensing technologies. These technologies have brought a new dimension in resource mapping. In America and Asia remote sensing has already been introduced and accepted as standard operational methodologies in working out natural resources assessment programmes. In Africa, it is gratifying to note that some countries in the region have incorporated the use of satellite images in many applications, and others are contemplating a similar step.

The capacities of remote sensing to support optimal resource management and sustainable development are greatly synergized when coupled with geographic information systems (GIS). The ability of these systems to manipulate and integrate geographic data, coming from disparate sources increases the capacity of decision-makers to consider the maximum number of options and evaluate their consequences. These two techniques, satellite remote sensing and GIS, form the basis of the project under consideration.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since its inception, AFRICOVER project has gone through an extensive process of revision and improvement. The document submitted today for your consideration has been scrutinized by experts and representatives from African national and regional institutions that will either implement the project or will use its product, at a consultation meeting which deliberated extensively last week here in UNECA. I have been informed that extreme care has been taken to ensure that both the technical specifications and the modalities of implementation of the project such that the objectives of the project could be fully attained. It is also with pleasure that I note that its implementation will be carried out to the greatest possible extent by Africans, in cooperation with our partners from the North.

Distinguished participants,

The social, economic and political problems facing Africa are today so serious and pressing that the entities and institutions responsible for their solution cannot wait to receive their resource information needs in the traditional way, which is often slow and incomplete. It is not an overstatement to say that this project is aimed at responding promptly to the major needs for reliable information so heartily and repetitively expressed by the users of all sectors concerned for natural resources development. I note with appreciation the substantive role of participation and implementation that has been earmarked for the existing sub-regional and national institutions which is an important factor for the sustainability of the project. I believe that the planned implementation by national institutions, but with axis around regional centres, is the most rational way to ensure success. Not only will the centres be strengthened, but this process will make it possible for the countries to benefit from the know-how and expertise that they may be lacking.

The task before you at this meeting is to get acquainted with, discuss, exchange views and assess the different components of the project. We expect that the outcome will reflect a positive response from the development partners you represent and that it will be formulated into effective actions.

In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to my brother and dear friend, Mr. Jacques Diouf, Director General of FAO, and all his colleagues for their untiring efforts in support of the development needs of Africa and for designating Africa as a priority region. I wish also to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the strong and fruitful co-operation which both our sister organizations have maintained in the pursuit of our common objectives. I am confident that the collaboration in the implementation of this project will take this relation to further heights.

Thank you for your attention.