

Global Geospatial Data Resources critical to planning in Africa - Geoinformation experts

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Addis Ababa, 03 May 2011 (ECA) - A workshop aimed at demonstrating how global data sets can be used in Africa was held on the margins of the ongoing Second Session of the Committee on Information, Science and Technology (CODIS). Themed, "Global geospatial datasets for Planning in Africa" the workshop explored the requirements for using geospatial data for planning purposes, and the resources needed to generate the required products and services.

"We need efficient production of fundamental datasets for sustainable development and other geographic information system (GIS) activities on the continent, said Makane Faye, Officer-in-charge of the E-Applications Section of the ICT, Science and Technology Division (ISTD) of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

Speaking on behalf of the Division's Director, Aida Opoku-Mensah, he said that the aim of the workshop was to "provide insight into how global data sets could be used in Africa as well as explore the requirements for using geospatial data by planners."

According to reports to the Information and Communication Service of the ECA, the workshop "provided insight into the availability of global datasets, global geospatial portals and new geospatial technologies for harnessing global datasets for sustainable development."

Participants at the session were informed of the findings by the National Geospatial Information (NGI) of South Africa which concludes that Africa is poorly mapped and most of the data are unreliable. Among the many reasons for the dire state of affairs is "the lack of programmatic approaches to the collection and maintenance of datasets at the national level." This fact complicates prospects for effective planning and delivery of public services to citizens.

Contrasted with the European countries such as the Netherlands, however, global datasets are being used for planning purposes in different applications such as land use, climate, soil and human activities.

The example of global datasets, by IGN France International, created in collaboration with ASTRUM showed coverage of data from most parts of the world, including North Africa, West Africa and the Horn of Africa. Keen geoinformation specialists learnt that a new GIS platform enables users to access GIS resources, including software and data, without the need to have their own proprietary software. The results of their web-based online processing could then be put on their desktop for further applications.

Earlier, at an AFREM special event on computation parameters for the best-fitting Datum, participants learnt that although majority of African countries have now embraced Global Navigation Satellite System technologies (GNSS), the continent remains poorly fitted to the rest of the world, with a low density of permanent base stations. According to Makane Faye, "this situation makes it difficult to accurately relate positions of features in appropriate national mapping systems, with positions derived from GNSS technologies in the global reference frame."

Faye informed the meeting that five permanent stations have been established in Niger, Botswana, Tanzania Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Furthermore, ECA is hoping, through its work programme to review the critical technical aspects of future conversion of current national and regional mapping products and services to new common reference frame.

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