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Sub-committee on Geoinformation: Policy issues

Geo-information and NEPAD¹
Executive Summary

¹ Invited paper by Craig A. Schwabe, Director: GIS Centre, Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)

Geo-information and NEPAD¹

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) is the “integrated strategic framework” within which member states of the African Union (AU) are to individually and collectively bring about the holistic socio-economic development of the continent. This plan of action has received the support of international, continental and regional agencies including the United Nations, European Union, the G8 and the non-aligned movement of countries. The intention of NEPAD is to create a common vision and strategic framework within which all existing initiatives can be pursued in an integrated and coordinated fashion. Furthermore, it lays out a set of goals and objectives to be accomplished by NEPAD by the year 2015 that includes the eradication of poverty, putting Africa on a sustainable growth and development path and to harness the benefits of globalization for the continent.

What becomes apparent by reading through the NEPAD documentation and what is stated above is that much information will be required for its implementation and monitoring. Geo-information will be a critical component because of its ability to integrate data from disparate sources (e.g. censuses, national surveys) and undertake analyses that enable priority areas to be identified at a sub-national level for government intervention in the provision of services and infrastructure. This needs to be done within an appropriate framework that takes into the consideration the societal, policy, theoretical, international best practice and strategy spheres present on the African continent to ensure that the necessary connectivity between data sets and components of the information system can be achieved resulting in it being used optimally.

A worldwide trend is to develop a set of indicators that can be used to focus ones attention on what specific information is required to understand the socio-economic and developmental trends in an area. As NEPAD builds on the implementation of the Development Goals of the Millennium Declaration, the indicators that have been developed by the United Nations for this initiative can be used as a basis to develop a set of indicators that provide relevant targets for the African continent and will assist in identify the core data sets needed for the implementation and monitoring of NEPAD’s goals and objectives. A cursory examination of the Millenium Development Goal (MDG) indicators should emphasize that the census information of a country is one of the most important data sets because it is required to populate so many of the indicators. Furthermore, it is the basis upon which an understanding can be obtained of the demand for both public and private sector developments and investments. Other core data sets include information on economics (e.g. GGP), environment (e.g. land cover and use), health (e.g. access to facilities), access to services and infrastructure (e.g. water) and the amount of funds being allocated to development projects.

The lack of access to census information and national survey data in African countries, especially in a spatial context, points to the need for the development of appropriate statistical systems for the gathering, analysis and dissemination of this data. This lack of

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information has been recognized by African states and that is why the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) was mandated to implement the African Information Society Initiative (AISI) in 1996. The intention of this action framework is to make Africa a sustainable information society by 2010. This is to be accomplished by building the information and telecommunication infrastructure of each country over a period of two to five years. To date much progress has been made and many programmes have been implemented, including the Committee for Development Information (CODI). This committee is one of the implementing arms of the AISI and is addressing such issues as statistical systems in African countries, the development and use of geo-information and developing capacity on the continent to collect, maintain and disseminate development information.

There are many other information initiatives that are on the go in Africa at this time. Each has a mandate whether it is from an international agency such as the United Nations, a continental institution such as the African Union or it is being implemented by one of the regional economic commissions. For the continent to benefit from all this initiatives it is imperative that their capacities are harnessed to the benefit of NEPAD. What is clear is that the AISI has the support of not only the African Union and NEPAD but also the international community. Therefore, it is within this framework that the development of the core geo-information data sets needed to implement and monitor NEPAD should occur. However, much work needs to be done to accomplish the AISI's objectives by 2010.

An inventory of what geo-information exists to develop the core data sets to implement NEPAD will have to be conducted and completed by the latest 2005. The geo-information institutions in Africa that have the capacity to capture the core data sets that are not already in a spatial format will need to be identified and co-opted to into a network that will have the responsibility to capture the information using innovative and standardized methodologies. Over a period of five years the core data sets will have to be captured and mechanisms implemented for their maintenance. In parallel, the institutional, human resource and technology requirements to use, maintain and update the core data sets at a national level will have to be defined. Awareness programs will have to be developed and regionally implemented to inform national decision makers about the spatial information system and the value of its use in decision-making so that sufficient financial resources can be allocated to develop the geo-information infrastructure at a regional and national level needed to implement NEPAD.