



dailydigest PGIS'05

Introduction

They arrived from over 50 countries from across the world. One hundred and sixty participants – from diverse cultures and professional backgrounds – descended on the scenic Kenya College of Communication of Technology in Nairobi, just a stone's throw away from the world-famous Nairobi National Park. And the purpose of this meeting? Three days of meetings to exchange ideas about Participatory Spatial Information Management and Communications.

The conference has been made possible courtesy of CTA, the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation, as well as numerous other funders, including the Ford Foundation, Christensen Fund, and ITC.

Participants geared up for an exciting day ahead. They comprised of practitioners from research institutions and rural communities, as well NGO workers. Among them, CTA Director Dr. Hansjörg Neun; Director of IIRR-East Africa, Dr. Isaac Bekalo; Director of RCMD, Dr. Wilbur Ottichilo; and renowned rural development specialist, Dr. Robert Chambers.

Days highlights

Following the morning's presentations the participants split into three working groups to discuss issues relating to 'Enabling and disabling



environments for Participatory Geographic Information Systems (PGIS)'. Using a snowball methodology, facilitators aided the participants in identifying which key factors influence the successful introduction of Participatory Spatial Information Management and Communications.

Key issues that emerged during the day included:

Building partnerships to overcome disabling legal frameworks



Dave De Vera, the Executive Director of Philippine Association for Inter-Cultural Development (PAFID), gave participants a memorable presentation on strategies required to enhance a positive and

enabling environment for Participatory Spatial Information Management and Communications. He focused extensively on examples from the Philippines and Malaysia. This included how local communities have partnered with international NGOs to define gaps in land-use and land tenure, and to come with their own version of the law.

"We must proactively engage with National Government through partnership agreements, in order provide a 'legal' cover to do mapping."

Dave De Vera

Creating an enabling environment for participatory social organisation

Mac Chapin of the Environmental Law Institute (ELI) discussed some of the obstacles communities encounter while setting up their own community mapping systems. He further emphasised the need to create an enabling environment for participatory social organisation.



“Participatory projects are social development, community-based projects ... they are not about technology transfer... they are about organisational issues that communities have to solve.... PGIS projects are social development projects with a technical component.”

Mac Chapin

Building on our rich heritage of participatory mapping



Robert Chambers took the participants through the rapid growth and spread of participatory mapping practices and the rise of their various applications – not only in natural resource management, but also in many other domains. Chambers noted that the current PGIS practice originally emerged from the use of sketch mapping in the nineteen eighties to the sophisticated use of Spatial Information Management and Communications technologies in use today. Although he also noted, regarding the history of the use of mapping in participatory development, that:

“It would be a mistake to kick away the ladder... It would be a mistake to think of sketch mapping as primitive compared to PGIS.”

Robert Chambers

An informed community anticipates and adapts to issues of emerging conflict

Albertus Pramono from the Indonesia Mapping Network (JKPP) noted in his presentation that an informed community can anticipate and adapt to issues of emerging conflict in the use of PGIS mapping, yet he did warn that communities needed to have a good understanding of some important issues.

“The adoption of Spatial Information Technologies should be accompanied by a good understanding of the ethical, organisational and power implications.”

Albertus Pramano

Capacity building and using maps as a medium to communicate spatial knowledge

Peter Poole introduced participants to his experiences in tenure mapping in the Americas. After explaining how mapping was done in these countries, including Brazil, Ecuador and Guyana, he raised the issue of how sustainability of tenure mapping can be achieved.

Conclusion

It was indeed an exciting first day. The conference attracted extensive press coverage from national TV networks and newspapers. Participants concluded with a lively debate on emerging issues that cut across nations. One participant remarked, “What I thought was specific to my PGIS experience in Africa is indeed is worldwide.”

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