



Introductory Speech by Dr. Hansjörg Neun, CTA Director
September 7, 2005

Distinguished guests, dear participants, Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much for these warm words of welcome and for opening this conference.

It gives me great pleasure, first, to visit this great country of contrast, Kenya, and second, to have the opportunity to come and share with you some remarks on a most topical subject, participatory spatial information management and communication. That you have found it worthwhile to spare your precious time and come to share your experiences with us attests the importance of the theme. Allow me to express my sincere thanks to all of you for coming, and to welcome you to the conference.

The preparation of this event started 18 months ago and benefited from a number of workshops and conferences, which CTA and other development partners organised.

Before I go far in my remarks, I think it would be appropriate, at least to those of us who may not know about CTA, for me to say a few words on the organisation in the context of this conference.

CTA is an international organisation funded by the European Community and operating in the framework of the Cotonou Agreement since 2000. Its mandate is to facilitate knowledge sharing and to promote dialogue, alliances and capacity for assisting agricultural and rural development in African, Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACP).

CTA provides information products and services that improve access to information, and strengthen the capacity of actors in ACP countries to produce, acquire, exchange and utilise information on their own.

In this context CTA supports an integrated approach based on synergies deriving from intra-agencies collaboration and best use of technologies and media.

CTA assisted in the preparation of this conference by supporting a series of related initiatives including:

- Two PGIS conferences which took place in Malaysia and the USA in 2004,
- A pre-conference PGIS course attended by 33 participants from Africa and Iran, organised and funded in collaboration with ITC, Ermis Africa and the Christensen Fund. This course was offered last week at KCCT/Kenya College of Communications Technologies.
- Support to information dissemination via print and e-publishing of a special issue of ICT Update which has been included in your kits and which you can also download from the internet;

Furthermore, during this conference we will assist in producing a daily digest of your activities to be shared electronically with those who are not in a position to be with us here.

CTA recognises the importance of both indigenous knowledge and participatory approaches that tap into the knowledge of various categories of a community, be they

youths or elders. This recognition takes cognisance of the idea that generating local knowledge is easier through practical experience as in 3 D modelling.

CTA supports demand-driven and bottom up approaches to development and recognises that enhancing the capacity of grassroots organisations to effectively communicate with different stakeholders including policy makers, and research and development institutions is crucial to success.

Considering that all issues related to the territory (resource use, control, access and tenure, and customary values) have spatial dimensions, the use of modern Geographic Information Technologies can play a vital role in visualizing, geo-referencing and adding authority to indigenous knowledge, bridging the communities with their political authorities.

By supporting this conference, CTA is promoting the sharing of experiences gained by practitioners in developing countries with Canadian Indigenous People, the first to apply participatory mapping three decades ago.

We would also like to support the outlining of good practices for making geographic information technologies available to less-favoured groups in society in order to enhance their capacity in generating, managing and communicating spatial information. After this conference CTA will undertake the production and dissemination of relevant documentation. A special issue of *Participatory Learning and Action* (PLA) based on 12 papers presented at the conference will be prepared for March 2006 in partnership with IIED,, ITC, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and CIFOR.

Sixteen technical papers will also be published in the *Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries* (EJISDC).

In terms of building Capacity, CTA in conjunction with other development partners, and as a response to increasing demand, is considering the opportunity of supporting the development of training packages on participatory spatial information management and communication.

Part of CTA's mandate is to support continued active dialogue and exchange of information among rural communities. CTA and hopefully other development partners present at this conference will build on your recommendations to define their forward looking strategies to address this important, new and fast growing domain of participatory spatial information management and communication.

Let me take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all those who contributed to the preparation and organization of this conference.

Furthermore, I would like to invite you to actively participate in the various working sessions and thus learn from each others experiences.

I wish you a fruitful and successful conference and urge each one of you to take the experiences gained here back to our respective home countries and put them into practice. Remember that information is the only commodity that multiplies as it is shared! Along this line, I like to quote from Robert Chambers's paper asking the question "who gains and who loses"

Everybody being here for this conference sharing experience information will gain a lot of:

- rich variety of countries, nationalities
- rich variety of themes covered in a large number of papers

Thank you very much for your kind attention.