

OPENING ADDRESS AT GSDI 5 CONFERENCE CARTAGENA
DEREK G CLARKE
CHAIR OF GSDI STEERING COMMITTEE

Mr President, honoured guests and colleagues from around the world, it is my pleasure to welcome you on behalf of the Global Spatial Data Infrastructure Steering Committee to this GSDI 5 Conference.

Mr President, I wish to thank you on behalf of the international spatial information community for inviting us to your wonderful country and this beautiful city of Cartagena. I also want to congratulate and applaud your country for the advances it has made in establishing a spatial data infrastructure and the leadership role it is playing in this region.

It is very encouraging to see the recognition being given to the Global Spatial Data Infrastructure and the rate at which countries are becoming involved. The GSDI has recently received recognition by the United Nation through its UN Geographic Information Working Group, and by the International Standards Organisation, through its Technical Committee 211 - Geographic Information. GSDI has established an excellent working partnership with the International Steering Committee for Global Map, promoting the synergy between the two global initiatives. This will be further evident when the ISCGM holds its meeting at this venue on Friday 25 May.

GSDI is still growing and has much still to do. The awareness campaign must be stepped up to involve more countries. To be truly global will require the involvement of the majority of countries in GSDI. The GSDI Steering Committee has recognised the need to stimulate interest among developing countries. One way of doing this is to come to a country in a developing region. This has happened now for the two most recent GSDI conferences, in Africa and now in South America.

While certain people in a developing country may be knowledgeable about spatial data infrastructures and wish to become involved in GSDI, it is often not enough. There is often insufficient critical mass in the country and little or no political support for establishing a spatial data infrastructure. A further major blockage is the organisational structure of the main government organisation responsible for the collection and dissemination of spatial data. Many of these organisations are archaic, and lack financial and human resources to establish a national spatial data infrastructure and to participate in GSDI. Developing countries have limited resources and we

must be careful not to over-extend them. The best ways in which developing countries can become involved in GSDI and all the other similar global initiatives must be carefully thought out. This will require close collaboration with the other global initiatives.

The GSDI Steering Committee can, and should, provide assistance to developing countries where needed - this should be done in collaboration with other international organisations and donor agencies. The assistance could include training workshops, advisory services on establishing a spatial information infrastructure and organisational reform and strategies for raising awareness among politicians of the need for spatial data infrastructures. All of this costs money, of course, and it will be necessary for the GSDI to structure itself in a way that it can raise funds.

I wish to congratulate Santiago Borrero and his team for organising what promises to be an excellent conference. I trust that all of you will benefit from the programme that has been prepared and that the objectives of GSDI will grow at this conference.

I thank you.