

# **Building An Information Society in Africa – The role of ECA**

**by Abdishakour Gulaid**

# **ECA = Economic Commission for Africa**

- The Regional Arm Of the United Nations
- One of Five Regional Economic Commissions
- Supports the Economic and Social Development of the Continent
- Fosters Regional Cooperation
- Promotes International Cooperation

# ECA PROGRAMMES

- Development Policy Management
- Economic and Social Policy Analysis
- Food Security and Sustainable Development
- Trade and Regional Integration
- Harnessing Information for Development
- Gender and Development Issues

# **Harnessing Information for Development**

- **Involves three programmatic areas:**
  - Strengthening geo-information resources
  - Information and communications technologies
  - Library services

# Geoinformation Activities

## Historical Background

- Organization of Conference and Meeting of Legislative Bodies
  - 1963 - 1996: United Nations Regional Cartographic Conferences
  - 1999 – Today: Committee on Development Information (CODI)

# Geoinformation Activities contd.

- **Establishment of Regional/Subregional Institutions**
  - Regional center for mapping of Resources for development (RCMRD)
  - Regional center for training in Aerospace surveys (RECTAS)
  - African organization for cartography and remote sensing (AOCRS)
  - African center for meteorological applications and development (ACMAD)
  - Southern and eastern Africa mineral resources development center (SEAMIC)
  - Central African mineral resources development center (CAMRDC)

# Geoinformation Activities contd.

## **Current Activities:**

- **Committee on Development Information**
  - Established in 1997 by the ECA Conference of Ministers
  - Three subcommittees (CODI-Geo, CODI-Stat, CODI-ICT) and meets every two years
  - Recommends to conference of ECA Ministers

# Geo-information Activities contd.

- **Expert group meetings**
  - Discuss and provide technical guidance on a specific topic (e.g Meeting on Future Orientation of Geo-information activities in Africa, SDI Africa Book)
  - Planned for 2004/2005: Geographic data as a national asset

# Geoinformation Activities contd.

- **Advisory Services**

- Member states and regional groupings
- Technical and Policy issues (governing boards of RCMRD, RECTAS)
- Assessment of Needs
- Formulation of policies, projects

- **Inventories and Databases**

- Status of Cartographic Coverage and Programmes in Africa

# Geoinformation Activities contd.

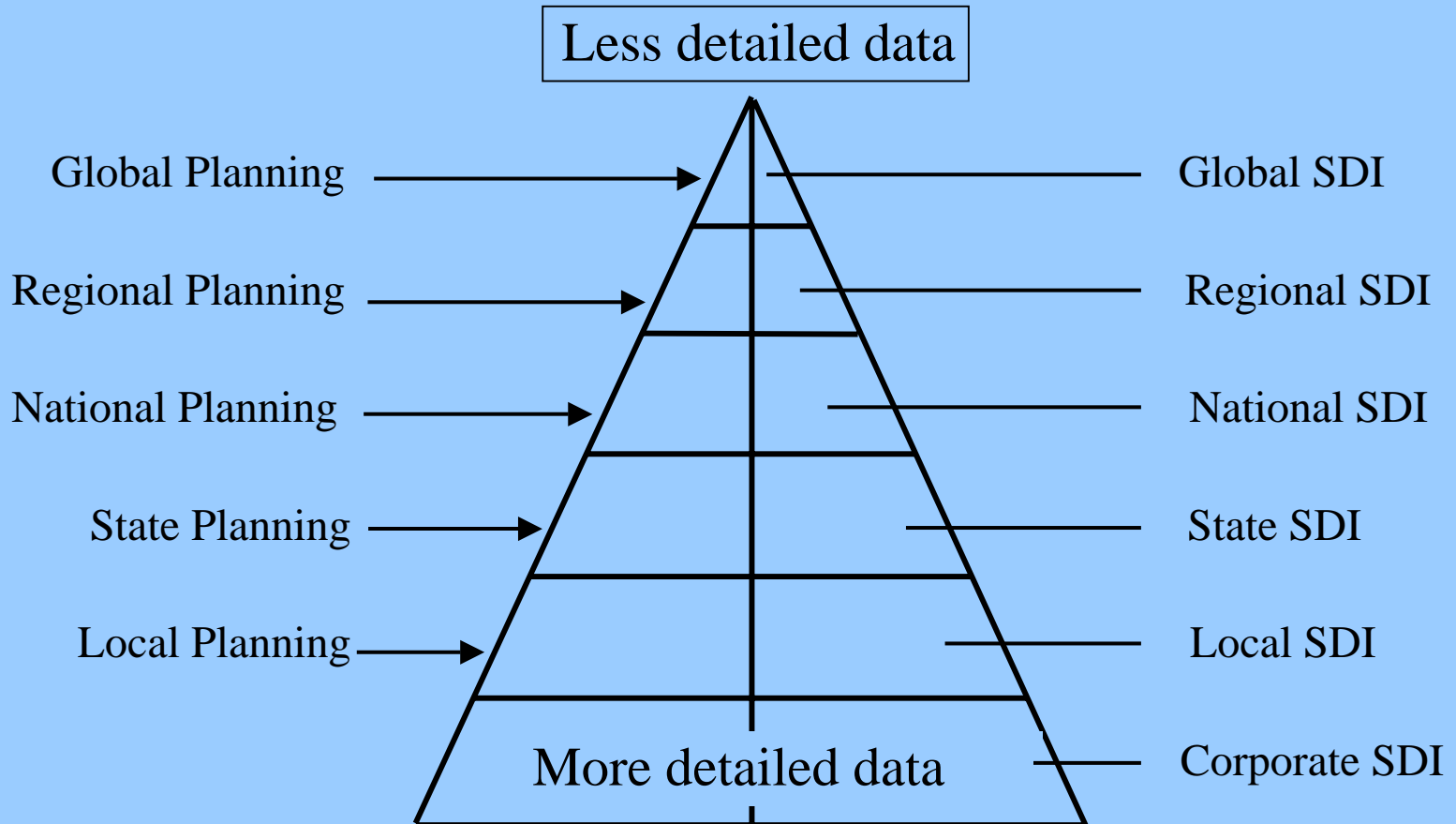
- Capacity Building
  - Regional Workshops
  - Seminars
- Information Dissemination
  - Publication, Technical Papers

# Spatial Data Infrastructures (SDIs)

- Information age to tackle issues of society;
- Spatial information critical to decision-making for many disciplines;
- Evolution from based only into a digital environment with sophisticated spatial and textual databases, earth observation satellites, GPS and communications systems.

# SDI Data Detail Relationship

*By Ian Williamson et. al*



# National Spatial Data Infrastructures (NSDIs)

- **Awareness**
- **Stakeholders meeting and workshops**
- **Advisory services on policy**
- **Steering committees**
- **Group training at major events**

# NSDI Advantages

- Data/Information sharing
- Reducing Duplication of efforts
- Saves costs
- Opens new avenues for collaboration at local/national levels

# Metadata and Clearinghouse

- Awareness raising and providing country spaces
- Gateway planned for 2004
- ECA nodes
  - Cartographic inventory
  - Africa water information clearinghouse
- Three Sub regional workshops planned for 2004

# Information and Communications Technologies for Development

- The African Information Society Initiative (AISI)
- The National Information and Communications Infrastructures (NICIs)

# **African Information Society Initiative (AISI)**

- Launched in 1996 by the African Ministers in charge of planning and economic and social development
- Adopted by the 1996 OAU Summit, Yaounde
- An action framework developed as Africa's common vision to bridge the digital divide

# **AISI contd.**

- Speed up the continent's entry into the information and knowledge global economy
- Preparation of national information and communication infrastructures
- Advocates sustainable build-up of an information society

# **What is National Information and Communication Infrastructure**

**(NICI)**

- A mechanism to implement the global vision of AISI at national level
- A guiding framework for ICT program planning and project development and implementation
- A coordination mechanism between various stakeholders and funding agencies
- An evaluation tool for decision makers

# NICI Key components

- Infrastructure development
- Legal and regulatory framework
- Universal Access
- Research & Development
- Sectoral Applications
- Content creation

# The Stakeholders

- Public Sector
  - Regulatory Bodies
  - Telecommunication Operators
- Private Sector – National and Foreign
- NGOs and Civil Society
- Academia, Research Centers, IT Experts
- Regional and International Organizations

# Lessons Learnt

- **Infrastructure and Access** – real problem
- **Awareness** is increasing but more need to be done at **All** levels
- **Encourage more participatory processes**
  - Institutional policy issues as important as technical ones
  - Include the gender dimension
  - Avoid top-down (only) approaches
  - Improve involvement of private sector, academia and Civil society involvement at design and implementation
  - Capacity building is a prerequisite

# Challenges

- **Need for continuous awareness raising among policymakers and other stakeholders**
- **Identify an ICT champion, preferably at the top levels of government**
- **Putting in place innovative funding mechanisms to implement projects set out in NICI plans**
- **NICI Harmonization at regional level, assessment and peer reviewing**

# Challenges contd.

- Bridge the digital divide, in all aspects
  - Formulate policies and develop information infrastructures, including spatial data infrastructures;
  - Hardware diffusion and Software development
  - Research and development support
  - Sector applications such as e-government, e-commerce, e-land administration, e-health, etc.

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The End

THANK YOU