

# Success for Regional NSDI Seminar with African Decision-makers

The seminar entitled 'National Spatial Data Infrastructures: Which benefits for emerging countries?', held on 3 and 4 April 2012 in Ouagadougou in the West-African republic of Burkina Faso, has been hailed as a success. This regional event was organised by IGN France International and the French IGN, in close collaboration with the Geographic Institute of Burkina (IGB), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (CEA) and Esri.

More than 150 participants coming from upwards of twenty different African countries attended this seminar. Many high-level figures were present, including Burkina Faso's Minister for Animal Resources as well as the Minister for the Promotion of Human Rights and Civic Education, the Chief of State General of the Army of Burkina Faso, representatives from embassies in Chad, Japan, Algeria and Morocco and technical counsellors from numerous African ministries.

The event's official opening ceremony was marked by the presence of the Minister of Infrastructures and Access of Burkina Faso, ambassadors from the European Union and France, the president of IGN France International and the general manager of the IGB, setting the stage for the seminar and proving the level of importance that Burkina Faso grants to the establishment of a national spatial data infrastructure and to cartography in general.

Many countries in Africa face various kinds of difficulties: lack of mapping knowledge of public decision-makers, ignorance of the existing data due mainly to their rarity and their dispersion, lack of standards applied to the produced data, resulting in their poor interoperability, lack of synergy and cooperation between the agencies that produce data, causing redundancies and additional costs that could be limited and finally the absence of financial and human resources that weaken mapping agencies and can hamper projects in progress.

Divided into several sessions, the seminar focused on the components essential to the implementation of this type of project. The importance of the implication of high-level government members in the process of implementing an NSDI was again highlighted along with the implementation of strategic and operational partnerships, the fundamental question of data, their production and their updating and finally the role played by users and their expectations.

The ignorance of existing data makes up another challenge that must be overcome by African countries, and often leads them to underestimate the data that they actually possess.

Several African countries including Senegal, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and the Ivory Coast shared their experiences and the current progress of the projects in each of their countries. The project for the implementation of Gabon's National Geomatic Plan, initiated in 2011, was also presented.

To enable mapping agencies to have the key information needed to begin these projects in their respective countries, the plenary session of 3 April was accompanied by a second, more intimate session on the next day that allowed the questions concerning the mobilisation of financing to be raised in the presence of major financing organisations (European Union, French Agency of Development). The session also contributed to the creation of a guide under the leadership of the CEA, the UEMOA, IGN France and IGN France International.

The many exchanges that took place over the two days of this regional seminar have proven that Africa is fully prepared to begin implementing NSDI procedures. At the end of the two-day event, everyone agreed that this regional seminar should become a regular occurrence given the stakes at hand and the problems encountered along the way. This event also reminded everyone involved that the implementation of an NSDI is a comprehensive process that requires a series of progressive steps. While no unique spatial data infrastructure model exists, the participants agreed that the African model, while taking inspiration from the existing models and notably what has been done in Europe and in other countries that were precursors in the field, must now follow its own path.