5 Questions to... Aslam Parker

Aslam Parker is chair of the organising committee of AfricaGEO.

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Why should people visit the AfricaGEO conference?

AfricaGEO (previously known as CONSAS) has a long history as the premier geomatics conference in southern Africa, and it features what is probably the largest geomatics exhibition in Africa (the exhibition was completely sold out back in March). AfricaGEO has a strong and well-filled technical programme, with most disciplines of geomatics covered including mine surveying and hydrographic surveying. We have secured top keynote speakers from most of the disciplines of geomatics, including the presidents of IAG, ISPRS, ICA, OSGEO foundation and many other high-profile presenters. We also have many members of the Young Surveyors Network who will be presenting and attending the conference. There will be special sessions where YSN members will have dedicated time with industry captains and the keynote speakers. We are confident of once again hosting a world-class African conference.

What will be the main subjects covered at AfricaGEO?

The conference has tried to cover most aspect of geomatics, as can be seen from the technical programme, although we have struggled slightly to get more papers on mine surveying. However, there are many papers on GISc and mapping, SDIs, laser scanning, remote sensing and land tenure.

Your event will pay attention to cadastral and land tenure. What is the current situation regarding this topic in Africa in general?

The long-term stability of countries is dependent on equitable and stable land tenure and a secure cadastre. Surveyors are (or at least should be) at the heart of the land tenure debate. South Africa, for example, is going through a incredibly challenging time implementing its land reform and restitution programmes, trying to accommodate customary tenure as well as western-based tenure systems. I guess there are many lessons on land tenure that African countries can learn from each other. I think these are not sufficiently shared, and AfricaGEO is an ideal opportunity to do so.

A dedicated workshop on education in Africa is also on the agenda. Can you tell the readers of *GIM International* something about geomatics education on your continent?

Unfortunately, the AfricaGEO organising committee has cancelled the launch of AGEA at the conference due to the priorities expressed by our national government survey office. This is a great disappointment to those who have put energy into its proposed launch. Hopefully we can pursue the vision of AGEA through another forum, perhaps FIG.

Which developments in the geomatics field do you foresee in Africa for the coming years?

I think that the adoption of geocentric reference frames by African countries will gain momentum with the pending UN Committee of Experts for GGIM proposal for a UN General Assembly resolution on the Global Geodetic Reference Frame (GGRF). The massive advances in precise point positioning (PPP) and other global geodetic services will also reduce the need for relatively dense permanent networks as previously envisaged for countries.

The availability of Landsat8 data and rapid development of land cover products is creating numerous opportunities for land cover mapping in Africa. African countries can better monitor the change in resources and human activity and make more informed decisions based on this. Although the availability of UAVs for rapid data collection and visualisation is a global phenomenon, the challenge in Africa is the lack of regulatory clarity on this matter to ensure that this technology is maximised to its full potential.

If the geomatics community can be innovative in encouraging the rapidly expanding number of mobile-phone users in Africa to crowdsource, the available geospatial information in Africa can grow exponentially. The key is to create incentives, or to demonstrate the

benefit of geospatial information to the ordinary citizen.