



NEWSLETTER

GLOBAL MAPPING

Special
Issue

Mapping Sustainable Development Globally

A message from the new Chair of International Steering Committee for Global Mapping

Professor Paul Cheung



Dear Colleagues,

This letter comes to you with greetings from the secretariat of the International Steering Committee for Global Mapping (ISCGM) and in my new capacity as the incoming Chair. I am deeply honoured by your trust and confidence in electing me as the new chair with effect from July, 2013. As the third person to chair the ISCGM, following Professors John Estes (1996-2001) and Fraser Taylor (2002-2013), I am keenly aware of the good work that has been done by my predecessors and

the responsibilities and challenges that await me. I look to you for your continued guidance, support and collaboration.

The ISCGM was established in February, 1996 to spearhead ‘global mapping’ in response to the call for urgent actions at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro for greater information support on ‘the status and trends of the planet’s ecosystem, natural resources, pollution and socioeconomic variables’. Twenty years later, in 2012, the same call was repeated at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). In its Outcome Document, ‘The Future We Want’, the Rio+20 conference made specific references to ‘the relevance of global mapping’, and called for reliable geospatial information for sustainable development policy making, programming and project operations, and disaster prevention and mitigation.

There is no doubt that the mission of the ISCGM in the context of sustainable development agenda is as relevant as when it was first established. It is “to examine measures that concerned national, regional, and international organizations can take to foster the development of Global Mapping in order to facilitate the implementation of global agreements and conventions for environmental protection as well as the mitigation of natural disasters and to encourage economic growth within the context of sustainable development” (Article 2 of the Rules). It is in perfect alignment with the call for action made in Rio in 1992, and again in 2012.

Operationally, the ISCGM has two key tasks. First, it serves as the platform to “advocate the importance of Global Mapping, exchange views, facilitate coordination, and give recommendations” (Article 4). This is the ‘advocacy’ function of ISCGM. Second, the ISCGM has the responsibility to develop a ‘Global Map’, which is defined as “a group of geographical data sets of known and verified quality, with consistent specifications which will be open to the public” (Article 3). This is the ‘production’ function of the ISCGM.

Over the past seventeen years, the ISCGM and its secretariat have been conscientious in its work, addressing the two core tasks with great intensity. International Forums were held regularly to discuss the relevance and use of Global Mapping in monitoring and mapping sustainable development. As of July 2013, the Global Maps of 110 countries and eight regions have been released. New layers of information at 1:1m scale have been added over time. Data-checking software and manuals are produced and training courses have been conducted. This programme of work will continue.

In the coming twelve months, I believe it will be useful to take stock of the past achievements and make appropriate plans for the future. The environment has changed in many ways. At the United Nations, the UN Committee of Experts has been established to coordinate and advance global geospatial information management (UN-GGIM). It is clear that the ISCGM has to align its work programme with this important initiative and to work closely with the entities under the UN-GGIM. In this regard, I have already discussed with the Chair of the GGIM Working Group on Global Map for Sustainable Development (GM4SD-WG), Dr Hiroshi Murakami, and we reached initial agreement on the respective roles GM4SD and ISCGM should play in a harmonized manner.

The technological environment has similarly been greatly transformed. Global maps of various themes are now routinely produced by private companies or countries with access to satellite imageries. Often, these maps are shown at large scales with very recent data. The availability of these thematic global maps has rendered the 1:1m scale maps less useful than before. The future work programme of ISCGM will need to reflect on this changing environment and make the necessary adjustment. How should the ISCGM balance its ‘advocacy’ and ‘production’ roles? How should it work with other producers of ‘global maps’ to advance the monitoring and mapping of the progress and consequences of sustainable development?

I look forward to working with you in the coming years to promote global mapping as a key enabler in sustainable development and to advance the use of geospatial tools in the monitoring of its progress. The ISCGM is an invaluable global institution with a long history and dedicated staff. With your support and guidance, I am sure the ISCGM will continue to make a great impact in the years to come.

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