



Commonwealth People's Forum: Spatial Knowledge and Land Economy as essential tools in achieving Sustainable Development

Report on CASLE's Participation in the People's Forum Prior to the CHOGM in Malta, November 2005

21-22 November 2005, Malta

1. The overall organisation of the event by the Commonwealth Foundation involved co-operation with a wide representation of civil society and the host government. The Forum brought together over a period of eight days participants from across the Commonwealth to address issues and interests through workshops, exhibitions and cultural events.
2. The funding support from the Foundation enabled CASLE to play a major role in promoting a workshop programme over two full days, in which the informal partnership of four related professions was fully activated. Under the group name of the Built Environment Professions of the Commonwealth (BEPIC), speakers and participants were drawn from the Commonwealth Association of Surveying and Land Economy, the Commonwealth Association of Planners (CAP), the Commonwealth Association of Architects (CAA) and the Commonwealth Engineering Council (CEC).
3. The theme of the first day was 'Spatial Knowledge and Land Economy as essential tools in achieving Sustainable Development'. Regional president Dr Clifford Dann chaired the session, and an opening address was given by Mr Brian Coutts, CASLE president from New Zealand, in which he highlighted that in networking (the theme of the Forum) it was important to
recognise the skills, abilities and expertise of colleagues
understand the roles that each discipline has in the community
respect the professionalism of each other's contribution
communicate with each other.
4. Emily Njeru from Kenya illustrated the significance of spatial knowledge, using geographical information systems (GIS) and land information systems (LIS), in achieving relevant Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), pointing to solutions and experiences in Rwanda and Kenya. The paper considered the issues that led to a unique approach for GIS and LIS in the developing

world as a vital tool in Development Planning, and the availability of information to a wider audience providing data integrity, improved revenue collection, quality and speedy service, support to development programmes, training and capacity building

5. Clare Hadley, European Affairs Adviser, Ordnance Survey of Great Britain, concentrated on 'sustainable land information for sustainable development' in two stages. First, why such information is necessary for all professionals working in the field of development, and second, how such information can be maintained and used to the benefit of all. Principles to be applied were summarised as

- collect once and use many times
- use common identifiers to integrate data
- define and implement the concept of data custodianship
- make appropriate use of technology and skills
- plan for data maintenance when collecting
- use standards where appropriate

Examples from across the world were given and initiatives suggested for creation of information infrastructures.

6. Continuing the theme, Carol Agius, chair of the Malta Association of Geographical Information, emphasised that a GIS can only be as powerful as the spatial knowledge behind it and the data must be fit-for-purpose. It should bring together information from different disciplines and technologies. The presentation provided examples of systems that are now able to provide benefits in Malta arising from the available knowledge and the application of the tool for sustainable development. The process involved new datasets, identification of new patterns of land use and abuse, and solutions to land use problems.

7. In the second session of the day Dr Mark Collins, Director of the Commonwealth Foundation, gave a paper on 'Spatial knowledge in the conservation of biological diversity'. This brought an insight into the 200 global ecoregions, and the objective of the ecosystem approach to "achieve a significant reduction in the current rate of loss of biological diversity. It was noted that the developed countries tend to take a conservation-based approach to biodiversity (i.e. protected areas), whereas developing countries prefer a developmental approach (i.e. resource management).

8. The remainder of the first-day session was devoted to break-out sessions with workshops on specific aspects with four leaders and four rapporteurs. In summing up the chairman referred to three key points:

- Dissemination of knowledge of GIS and LIS systems

- Awareness of these fundamental tools, and
- Availability of information at the touch of a button

At the conclusion the following recommendations were agreed:

The public good requires that all governments and agencies should be made aware of GIS (geographical information systems) and LIS (land information systems) and recognise these as fundamental tools in achieving sustainable land use and management.

Appropriate steps be taken by the Commonwealth Foundation to initiate and fund demonstration of the enormous capabilities and benefits of such systems, to be made available at or before the 2007 CHOGM

9. The second day was devoted to 'Construction Professions working together to ensure Environmental Sustainability (MDG7). It was chaired by Mr Ron Tate, President of the Royal Town Planning Institute. The speakers included the Director General of Malta Environment & Planning Authority, the President of CAA, the regional vice-president of CAA Europe, the Assistant Director of the Institute of Energy and Sustainable Development De Montfort University UK, and the Programme Co-ordinator at Com-Habitat. A full report on this aspect of the workshop can be found on www.comarchitect.org (click on BEPIC).

10. On the following day Dr Clifford Dann was invited to speak at the closing session of CHEC (Commonwealth Human Ecology Council) and he provided a brief report about the first session. He referred to the part that spatial knowledge can play in the ultimate objective of alleviating poverty; and to land information systems identifying land use problems, not least those arising from the drift of peoples to the cities and the informal settlements so often resulting. He suggested that the slogan of the day should be 'Build before destroy'- wholesale demolition of slum areas without first tackling the reason for such settlements would always be disastrous and without humanity. He concluded "Our professions have a vital role to play in advocating the creation of new balanced communities in sustainable locations, with all necessary infrastructure - water and sanitation, waste collection and disposal, schools, clinics, day centres, hospitals, roads and public transport to name but a few - and essentially with employment opportunities and secure land tenure systems. That is the way towards alleviation of poverty."

11. BEPIC also had an exhibition stand which attracted many visitors, and indeed proved a most valuable opportunity for net-working and demonstrating to the Forum participants and members of the public the significance of the professions in working together, especially towards helping to achieve relevant Millennium Development Goals. Volunteers from CASLE and CAA were able to provide virtually full-time attendance. It was gratifying that the Rt Hon Don McKinnon, Commonwealth Secretary General, and Dr Mark Collins, Director of the Commonwealth Foundation, spent some time at the stand.