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**Eighth United Nations Regional Cartographic
Conference for the Americas**

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Item 8 (d) of the provisional agenda*

**Reports on achievements in geographic information in
addressing national, regional and global issues, including
best practices and applications**

**National data infrastructures: sharing geo-spatial
information as an asset for environmental public policies****

Abstract

A decade ago in the Latin American and Caribbean region, national mapping agencies' main concern was the production of topographic and thematic maps of their territories. Computer Cartography and Cartographic Information Systems as well as GIS were becoming integral part of their operation and the "supply-driven approach" was dominant in the organizational processes. Although the concept of "Geo-spatial Data Infrastructures" (GDI) has been present in the literature for more than a decade, it has only been in the past few years that some countries in Latin America have turned their attention into the importance of adopting a more holistic and "demand driven" approach to meet the societal needs of geo-spatial information and knowledge.

There have been some advances in the region, such as the incorporation of metadata standards, the adoption of digital technology, improvements in geo-spatial data libraries and the integration of cartographic data bases. Although there have been some successful experiences in the incorporation of geo-spatial applications in public policy processes, both in government and at the community level, the concept of a geo-spatial data infrastructure has not been made explicit.

One of the areas in which the Latin American and Caribbean community is demanding a more comprehensive spatial framework is in the design and implementation of environmental public policies. Spatial considerations are integral to environmental information and knowledge. Therefore, the establishment of the political, legal and organizational frameworks to develop the environmental component of the GDI in the Latin American and Caribbean region is an important priority.

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Developing improved mechanisms for “data sharing” will be an important element of a successful data infrastructure, and countries have not dedicated enough attention to this issue. Due to cultural characteristics of the region, there are very few mechanisms in place to promote efficient use of resources in the production and dissemination of geo-spatial products and services. A regional initiative that builds on the efforts of international organizations such as the International Cartographic Association and the United Nations Environmental Program could be a driving force to establish a regional policy for geo-spatial data sharing. Services such as regional geo-spatial data libraries, environmental atlases, and real-time satellite image services could be developed to serve as resources for the different countries of the region.

The participation of the mapping organizations of the region in the 8th UNRCC-A (United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for the Americas) offers a unique opportunity to start a dialogue about the role that these organizations could play to launch a process for building sound regional policies to support the development of a geo-spatial data infrastructure.
