Open Access to Geo-spatial Information

by

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Democracy:
the ability of a person to have choice.
Choice: freedom; power.

“Knowledge is Power”
Sir Francis Bacon

To have choice you must be empowered, and therefore you must have knowledge.
Some propositions:

Wisdom

Knowledge

Information

Data
Imagery = Rich source of information

Rural area in South Africa
Three Essential Requirements

Usability

Accessibility

Availability
**Accessibility:**

- User knows what data is available.
- Source of data transparent to user.
- ICT infrastructure (including bandwidth and cost).
- Format of data.
- On-time.
- Standards.

- **Affordability (cost) of data.**
- **Open data (restrictions).**
Two arguments

Pro-Restricted and Charged Data

vs

Pro-Open and Free Data
Pro-Restricted and Charged Data

- National security.
- Protection of personal information/identity.
- Protection of intellectual property.
- Protection of sensitive information, including endangered species.
- Users do not appreciate the value of information if it is free (no charge).
- Data collection and maintenance is expensive and costs must be recouped.
- Governments do not fund data collection – information is only a means to an end.
- Institutional protection.
Pro-Open and Free Data

✓ Information has no purpose unless used.
✓ Information must be affordable to all.
✓ Restricted access will limit use of information.
✓ Restricted access will drive the user to other sources — with risk of reliability and quality.
✓ Open data promotes democracy.
✓ Public data collection paid for by fiscus should not be charged for — double taxation.
✓ In cases of emergency fast and ready access to information is critical — no time to resolve access issues and payments.
Key Challenges in Africa

• Politicians do not appreciate need for fundamental geo-spatial information.
• National mapping agency suffers lack of financial support.
• Institutional survival – rivalry, lack of cooperation.
• National mapping agency in some countries is part of military – information is classified.
• Restrictions on imagery acquisition.
• Incapacity to collect, maintain and disseminate geo-spatial information.
• ICT infrastructure limited and unreliable electrical energy supply.
Opening Up Access to Geo-spatial Information

• Fundamental geo-spatial information must be accessible to all.

• Appropriate data policies – limited restrictions only (national security, privacy of individual); affordable; institutional cooperation and collaboration; synergistic arrangements; timely access to relevant, reliable information.

• Capacitating users.

• Political support.
Opening Up Access to Geo-spatial Information

- South Africa’s national mapping agency changed its data policy about 12 yrs ago to cost of supply (COFUR).
- Result in change to COFUR = 500% increase in dissemination of geo-spatial information.
- Multiplier effect to economy (studies in Europe indicate 1:100).
- Cost of saving lives and assets is even more.
Conclusion

Access to open and affordable geo-spatial information is essential in any democratic society.

Thank you
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