

INFOTERRA, The Global Environmental Information Exchange Network

Statement by

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Distinguished Guests, Infoterra Staff, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I regret that I am unable to be with you as you conduct a National Seminar on INFOTERRA services in Indonesia. I appreciate the opportunity to send this address to be read on my behalf.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Introduction

If we were to draw up a list of ingredients that a country would need to develop a sustainable future for itself, that list would begin with things like permanent peace, security, political will, technology and, of course, adequate financial resources. However, not very far down that list would be access to the information needed to plan and manage for sustainable development. In fact over 170 governments strongly voiced this need at the 1992 UNCED World Summit when they added to the action plan, the famous Agenda 21, Chapter 40 calling upon government and international organizations to improve the global availability of information needed for sustainable development planning, research and management.

Making information for sustainable development planning available around the world is a

complex undertaking. In order for developing nations to have access to this information and in order for them to make the information available to their citizens, they must first have the infrastructure in place to collect, organize and distribute such information in an efficient and timely manner. Just as a country's transportation system will not run without traffic laws, roads, petrol stations, and mechanics. An information system needs hardware, software, documentation, expertise, standards, resources, training and policy.

What does INFOTERRA have to do with all this? INFOTERRA is part of the United Nations Environment Programme with a mission to catalyze the building of effective national information infrastructures which will facilitate the exchange of scientific and technical environmental information within and among countries. The important operating word in our mission statement is catalyze. INFOTERRA headquarters does not build information systems, rather we bring resources and expertise together to craft the environmental information systems governments want and need.

History

INFOTERRA has a short his-

tory. It was established in response to a recommendation of the United Nations Conference on Human Environment (Stockholm, June 1972) and became fully operational in January 1977 with the participation of a dozen countries. At present 170 countries have designated national focal points. In the beginning INFOTERRA operated as only an information referral system. However, upon the recommendations of an independent evaluation done in 1980, INFOTERRA concentrated its efforts on the provision of substantive information.

As a result of the Rio World Summit, UNDP and INFOTERRA are in the process of another programme evaluation. Every indication points to a future INFOTERRA programme which will continue to provide substantive information to users but through a wider variety of mechanisms, including Internet, and a special emphasis on the development of national capacities in information resources management for sustainable development.

Infoterra Structure

INFOTERRA is structured to provide easy access by any nation in the system to the environmental information of any other partici-

pating nations. It is designed to be simple to use, flexible enough to adapt to national requirements, efficient enough to be operated with limited resources, decentralized to make maximum use of existing information systems, and nationally based to strengthen national information flows.

As a result, the real operational part of INFOTERRA lies not in Nairobi but with the individual national focal points. The role of the Programme Activity Centre is to coordinate the activities, maintain the structure of the network, provide the tools and training to assist National Focal Points to do their job with greater efficiency and to help find the financial resources needed to improve capabilities. We are here to serve National Focal Points needs.

National Focal Points

INFOTERRA national focal points (NFPs) coordinate all INFOTERRA activities in their respective countries. The basic role of the INFOTERRA NFP is three fold: 1) to ensure the provision of reliable and timely information to all users, 2) to register sources in the INFOTERRA Directory/database, and 3) to promote the use of the system within the country. In order to be effective in these tasks. An NFP has to make an inventory of environment expertise, and information resources within the country and to be aware of the needs of its user community including government, academia, researchers, non-governmental organizations, business, industry, and the public.

INFOTERRA national focal points are government-designated and government-supported. Access

to INFOTERRA services in any country depends on the commitment and provision of adequate resources by the governments to its NFP to enable it to participate actively in the system. And, of course, the INFOTERRA network as a whole is able to achieve its objectives only to the extent that individual NFPs are able to be active partners. The INFOTERRA Programme Activity Centre may be able to find donors to assist a country with the provision of training or equipment but the government must have a realization of the importance of environmental information and a commitment to the programme in terms of staff, space, and resources. Only of the INFOTERRA national focal point activities supports the need of the government for access to and dissemination of environment information will that government see the INFOTERRA activity as worthy of support. Promotion of the use of environmental information and the system within the government may be one of your most important tasks as an INFOTERRA NFP manager.

We are here to assist you in all your tasks. The network has in place several tools to make your job easier. In the course of this week you will learn how to use each with maximum efficiency. But let me give you a quick overview.

Regional Service Centres

Given the similarity in environmental problems in geographic regions, INFOTERRA has designated certain active NFPs in a region to act as regional service centres. This permits services such a computer search facilities, training, promotion, document delivery to be provided more economically. So

far eleven centres have been established to serve southeastern Asia, southern Asia, western Asia, northern Africa, eastern Africa, southern Africa, western Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, Central Europe, and the countries with economies in transition.

Special Sectoral Sources

Special Sectoral Sources (SSS) are internationally recognized centres of expertise in particular environmental subject areas which assist in the provision of substantive information to INFOTERRA users. The SSS use their own expert knowledge, to provide custom tailored, in-depth responses to queries from governments on priority environmental problems. All requests for this information and responses are channelled through the INFOTERRA Programme Activity Centre which subsidizes charges to developing government users. We currently have 34 SSSs.

International Directory of Sources

The Directory/database is a compendium of sources of environmental information systems and expertise around the World who are willing to respond to INFOTERRA requests for information. The Sources are selected and registered by their respective NFPs. The Directory/database can be accessed by hardcopy, PC-based diskettes or on-line through the INFOTERRA electronic mail system.

Electronic Mail

An electronic mail system available through a Bulletin Board System (BBS) links the INFOTERRA network partners.

Through its use, the typical turn-over time for a query-response can be reduced to days instead of weeks. The Internet services included a subscription list with over 600 subscribers and a gopher which contains the INFOTERRA database and UNEP materials.

INFOTERRA Bulletin

Published quarterly, the INFOTERRA Bulletin acts as a glue to keep the network together. It keeps partners aware of activities in the various NFPs, new publications and databases, training courses, opportunities for donor support. It will soon be available on the INFOTERRA Internet gopher.

Companionship Programme

The 1989 INFOTERRA World Congress in Moscow recommended the establishment of a programme which would twin NFPs in the developed and developing world to provide the assistance needed to the latter and improve the overall capabilities of the network. A year later the first companionship was in place between the USA and Botswana which was soon expanded to include the entire southern Africa region. Since then the donor nations have grown to include Portugal, Ireland, Switzerland and Canada. The recipients include lusophone and francophone Africa, Mongolia, Vietnam, and the Caribbean.

Infoterra's Impact

When reliable information is available to decision-makers in a timely manner, decisions result which move nations and regions

closer to a sustainable future. INFOTERRA has recently published a book outlining some of the results it has achieved entitled "INFOTERRA 15 Years of Making a Difference." Let me summarize a couple stories from the book to illustrate how INFOTERRA might make a difference in your country.

INFOTERRA can provide the information needed for sound environmental planning. The Masai Mara of Kenya borders the Serengeti plains of Tanzania, together they form an ecosystem which incorporated one of the greatest concentrations of large animals found anywhere on Earth. In 1989 INFOTERRA was asked to provide information on models of multiple-use national park management plans. The activities of traditional pastoralists, the Masai people, were in conflict with the grazing land needed for the wild animals. As a result of the information received, a two-tiered reserve system was created. In the inner reserve, the intrusion of human settlement was not allowed, while in the outer reserve the traditional cattle herding was permitted. This effective policy has been instrumental in maintaining the Masai Mara as Kenya's number one tourist attraction.

INFOTERRA can solve environmental problems. In 1990-1991 Morocco fell victim to invading locusts. With aid from the Food and Agricultural Organization, aerial spraying of chemicals was able to keep the swarms under control and preserve crops. Ultimately, the locusts were eliminated, but so were the bees. Moroccan honey production collapsed. The government requested INFOTERRA assistance. Fortunately, from the information received a chemical was sprayed over the region to neutralize the

first pesticide applied and honey bees were reintroduced with great success.

INFOTERRA can prevent serious mistakes. In 1986 a foreign corporation proposed to ship 50,000 tons of used motor oil into Western Samoa each month to be stored, processed and recycled. Western Samoa looks to its marine resources for economic survival and was concerned about any damage that might result from the new plant such as oil spills or air pollution. They queried INFOTERRA which responded within a couple weeks. The government learned that the company has undertaken a similar business venture in Mexico where it had disappeared after building the storage tanks and filling them with toxic waste. Not a drop had been recycled. Upon receipt of the information, Western Samoa deported the company officials.

Conclusion

As the examples I have just given illustrate, the information needed to solve most sustainable development problems is already available somewhere in the world; however, if that information is to be useful in an individual country, that country must be able to locate the relevant material and make it accessible to decision-makers in a form that they can readily utilize. This is what INFOTERRA can help.

If we, as humans, are to survive as a species, we can no longer sacrifice, for our own benefit other plant and animal, not the land, air, water on which these living things depend. Very soon we will have to learn how to live with the world and all its diversity without destroy-

ing whole species and ecosystems. Rational management of the environment must be based on sound information linking the interacting natural elements with the larger framework of development. The

information needed for achieving sustainable development is cross sectoral, complex, and rapidly evolving. No one country, no matter how rich, can hope to have all the information it requires within

its boundaries. We must work together and through the INFOTERRA network we have the cooperative framework to make the difference. Our success depends on our efforts.

KONFERENSI DAN KONGRES KAWASAN ASIA-PASIFIK TAHUN 1995

ASIA-PACIFIC Library Conference

Dengan Tema "Gateway to the future", ASIA-PACIFIC Library Conference akan diselenggarakan di Brisbane, Australia pada tanggal 28 Mei - 1 Juni 1995. Konperensi ini merupakan Pertemuan Pustakawan International Lintas Sektoral yang pertama diselenggarakan oleh Australia bertempat di Bangunan Baru Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre. Program konperensi dilengkapi dengan pameran, kunjungan ke perpustakaan-perpustakaan, lokakarya, kursus/pelatihan, latihan kerja di perpustakaan dan aktifitas sosial lainnya. Tuan rumah konperensi adalah State Library of Queensland yang menggunakan momentum ini sebagai Peringatan 50 Tahun The Library Board of Queensland.

Melalui konperensi ini, diharapkan titik pembuka untuk merumuskan dan mencari solusi atas beberapa tantangan baru pustakawan pada dekade 90an, seperti kerjasama tingkat nasional maupun internasional dapat tercipta.

Untuk itu, partisipasi pustakawan di kawasan Asia-Pasifik sangat diharapkan untuk lebih mengeratkan ikatan antar komunitas pustakawan di kawasan ini.

Beaya Koperensi:

Anggota IPI	A \$ 450
Umum	A \$ 500
Pelajar	A \$ 250
Pendaftaran harian	A \$ 200

Diskon khusus diberikan khusus kepada peserta konperensi, untuk mengikuti training dengan beaya hanya A \$ 500, sedangkan beaya latihan kerja sebesar A \$ 1000/minggu.

Aktifitas sosial seperti jamuan makan malam dan jamuan koktail mengenakan beaya antara A \$ 50 s.d. A \$ 20. Sedangkan tiap kunjungan dikutip beaya antara A \$ 30 daan A \$ 15.

Akomodasi dapat dipesankan melalui panitia dengan variasi harga antara A \$ 76 s.d. A \$ 187.

Pendaftaran dan informasi lebih lanjut, hubungi:

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