

Spatial Data Infrastructure as a Vehicle for Sustainable Development in Zimbabwe

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SUMMARY

The Zimbabwe Spatial Data Infrastructure (ZSDI) steering committee is a group of voluntary geographic information practitioners that is advocating for the establishment of a functional spatial data infrastructure (SDI) in Zimbabwe. The initiative began in the late 1980s, but the progress has been painfully slow. Lack of awareness of SDI issues, knowledgeable personnel, and lack of government support, among other factors, has contributed to this slow pace of development. This paper is directed towards politicians, senior managers and professional organisations (high-level public and private sector officials) to solicit their involvement and support for the Zimbabwe Spatial Data Infrastructure initiative. The paper aims to provide a greater understanding of the need for Spatial Data Infrastructures (SDI) and how they can be used to support sustainable development in the country. As such, the paper shall not dwell much on the technical aspects of SDI, but will focus on making SDI relevant and pertinent to the current political and socio-economic climate prevailing in the country so that decision-makers can see the need to invest in a legal spatial data infrastructure framework. This paper will try to justify that a sound spatial data infrastructure is the basis for sustainable socio-economic development for the country.

Formalised spatial data infrastructure frameworks assist decision-makers to effectively implement and manage a number of national initiatives and/or policies related to sustainable development. The relevance of SDI, in the Zimbabwean context, to some of these national initiatives and policies will be presented. A brief history of the development of SDI in Zimbabwe will be presented, and some of the current problems hampering the establishment of a legal spatial data infrastructure will be identified. The paper will chronicle some of the efforts that have been undertaken by the Zimbabwe Spatial Data Infrastructure steering committee towards the formalisation of a legal Zimbabwe Spatial Data Infrastructure Framework. A number of lessons will be drawn from successful spatial data infrastructures that have been launched both regionally and internationally. The paper will try to outline how the SDI practitioners in Zimbabwe can benefit from the experiences and lessons learnt from these success stories, so that they can be adopted and adapted to meet the challenges presented by the Zimbabwean situation.