

**Mr Chairman,
The Representatives of the Govt. of Italy
The Director General of IAO
Director General of RCSSMRS
The FAO Representative in Kenya
Distinguished Delegates**

On Behalf of the Directors SDR and TCO and the Africover project – FAO Headquarters and the Africover Project, I wish to thank-you for your active participation in this the Second National Co-ordinators Working Group. Your deliberation this week have underscored the high level of national commitment to realising the goals of establishing a harmonised, multi-purpose data base for use in intergrated national and regional development planning. I cannot over emphasise the importance of this meeting as a forum for country interaction, exchange of ideas and as a mechanism for providing feedback to you on the progress of the project and at which new ideas can be tabled. The work has been harmonious -----and that is a credit to all of us.

As we have clearly identified information on land and it's attributes is not only the foundation for national planning, but also provides the building blocks for regional and global systems needed for monitoring global food security and the health of our planet.

FAO has embarked on many national scale programmes, with our member nations, to promote development of monitoring systems, based on universally accepted indicators, that provide the information required for sound decision-making for the sustainable management of land and water resources, and also for understanding better the processes and trends in their use and degradation. These have enabled more timely and effective prevention, control and restoration measures to be applied. But never before have we had the opportunity to co-operate with so many member countries at one time or indeed embarked on a continental programme of this kind – Africover is a unique programme - such an ambitious project has never been attempted - it is setting new goals for standardisation and harmonisation of land classification across Africa-referenced to a common geodetic system. Indeed, I think we are all proud to be part of the first module of this continental programme. Your presence here – backed by the fruitful interactive exchange- has been testimony to your commitment to the long-term success of the project.

As we have heard - current national-level data on land and it's attributes have large gaps and are often of poor quality. Baseline information on land quality and the state of land degradation and erosion, and of the soil fertility status of cultivated lands, are limited, and information on current land cover/use does not exist in many of your countries. This initiative embodied in the Africover concept is a systematic step in the direction of providing homogeneous, multi-purpose resource information to assist the process of development planning and providing a baseline against which the degradation of the resource base can be monitored in a systematic way. The tools of LCCS, AIMS and ADG are some of the mechanisms which will facilitate this.

We have during our discussions identified a number of Data needs and User requirements and we have furthermore identified that they are different - at international, national and local level.

Governments that are signatories of various UNCED initiatives - Convention on Biological Diversity, Convention to Combat Desertification - are confronted with decisions to be made on land use conflicts involving claims for identification, demarcation and control of nature reserves and claims for agriculture and other uses. Thus, they need reliable information on the potential and constraints of land resources in order to make adequate decisions on their allocation and use. Africover, as we have seen, is providing a substantial contribution to this end and your national commitment is ensuring its realisation.

Most sustainable development decisions are inherently multidisciplinary or cross-sectoral, because they require trade-offs between conflicting goals of different sectors. However, most natural resource development agencies are single-sector oriented. Africover, together with its multi – purpose database and Geographic Information System (GIS) technology can help establish cross-sectoral communication - by providing not only very powerful tools for storage and analysis of multisectoral spatial and statistical data, but also by integrating databases of different sectors in the same format, structure and map projection.

The paradigm of sustainable agriculture (embodied in Chap 14 –Agenda 21) and land resources management (Ch. 10) has evolved during the course of implementing Agenda 21. Over the last ten years, the view of sustainable agriculture as a means to produce food and income while minimising negative impacts on the environment has changed in favour of a much more positive and multifaceted vision. Simultaneously, the perceptions of roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in agriculture and land resources have changed dramatically. Land is not just a resource to be exploited, but a crucial vehicle for the achievement of improved socio-economic, biological and physical environments. Concretely, by paying attention to the multiple functions of agriculture and land use, all economic, social and environmental functions of agriculture, at multiple levels, are recognised and included in decision making in order to promote synergies between these functions and to reconcile different stakeholder objectives. Africover is a timely initiative to generate a multi-purpose resource database in response to the need for /evolving multi-functional agriculture.

The Promise of new technology, related to resource inventory monitoring and management as well as information management and decision support systems is starting to be realised – we hope that you see Africover as one of the first critical components of this integrated system.

Equally, natural resources management issues have become increasingly complex and interdependent and require integration of land and water information with sectoral information and improved decision-support tools. New technology allows the creation of comprehensive integrated systems, which give access to multi-scale information and multi-purpose analysis in support of decision-making in land and water. The creation of the

Africover database and its interrogating s/w –Africover Database Gateway will facilitate the creation of these integrated systems.

With new low-cost technologies and tools now available, development and implementation of rapid and effective land and water monitoring has become accessible. The success of the concept relies on integrating recent advances in information technology (rapid data capture through remote sensing and Space Borne Positioning Systems SBPS, fast workstations and software, rapid development of applications, and multi-media for speedy dissemination of information) with local researchers and land and water resources planners and managers. But the onus remains on the national working groups only you – working actively at the national level can ensure the dissemination and up-take of the information emanating from this project – the future of its application rests permanently with your capacity to ensure its assimilation and integration on a sustainable basis in the national and sub-national planning programmes of your countries.

I wish you every success in this endeavour and look forward to strong collaboration in jointly developing and exploiting the national application programmes which will ensue from this first phase of the Africover project.

I would take this opportunity to thank the team that has made this meeting possible

including :-

The administrative support staff including: -

Philip Kiarie, Beldina Owalla, Julia Amayo, Susan Musandu, Patrick Kimani and Peter Nyamu.

The hard working and diligent technical team of the project – Caroline Ten-Over, Mr Rob Postma- also as joint Rapporteur, Mr Antonio Di Gregorio – for his continued innovative approaches and of course to the new CTA Luca Alinovi for organising and leading such a fruitful meeting.

I would give a special thanks to the session chairmen whose leadership has helped us reach substantial resolutions without difficulties.

To the RCSSMRS for its continued support to the project we are eternally grateful and we welcome back to the project Mr. Chodota.

I would also like to bring to your attention the invaluable support of the Operations and Resource Mobilisation team that facilitates this whole project working at FAO H.Q.'s. and the Representatives of FAO in the field who are your local project interface.

To the Safari Park Hotel for their excellent facilities

I would finally add our sincere collective thanks to the Govt. of Italy including all the representatives of the government here today and especially to the Director General of IAO and Mr Foti for taking time to exceptionally join this forum, also to the government technical advisor- Prof Gorgoni for supporting this programme and providing their collective technical expertise to us. We are particularly grateful for your support in providing the opportunity of the Eastern African countries to become the first module of the Africover programme. We hope that the national and regional commitment and quantifiable results achieved by the countries as well as the whole range of potential applications discussed will serve to encourage YOU to maintain your support to this project.

May I wish you a safe return home and our sincere thanks for your active participation -

Again Thank - You to you all for making this such a productive meeting.