



Permanent Secretary Ministry of Lands and Mineral Resources

Keynote Address

The Director General for the Pacific Community, Dr. Stuart Minchin, the Deputy Director General for the Pacific Community, Dr. Paula Vivili, Chair for the Pacific Geospatial and Surveying Council, Mr. Vaipo Mataora, Chair for UNGGIM-Asia Pacific, Dr. Antonious Wijanarto, UNGGIM Secretariat, Mr. Teo Chee Hai, Executive Director SDG Data Alliance, Mr. Gregory Scott, Director for the United Nations Global Geospatial Knowledge and Innovation Centre, Dr Li Pengde, heads of various lands, surveying and mapping agencies from the Pacific region, senior government officials, esteemed colleagues, and friends, Bula Vinaka and welcome to Fiji.

It is an honour to be here this morning to provide remarks on the urgent and crucial topic on enhancing geospatial information management to accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and national development agendas. The Pacific is a region of immense beauty, rich culture, and unique challenges. From its breathtaking landscapes to its vibrant communities, the Pacific is at the forefront of some of the world's most pressing issues, including climate change, disaster resilience, sustainable development, and the preservation of biodiversity.

As we know, the Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs, provide a universal framework for addressing these challenges. They cover a broad spectrum of interconnected global objectives, from the 17th. Achieving these goals requires accurate, timely, and accessible data, which is where geospatial information management comes into play.

In my opening remarks to the Fiji Geospatial Information Management Council on the 30th of October I quoted statement made by António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations and share again with you today who said "***The data needs for the SDGs are great, and time is not on our side. Reliable, timely, accessible and disaggregated geospatial information must be brought to bear to measure progress, inform decision-making and ensure effective and inclusive national and sub-national programs that will chart the path toward the***

'Geospatial Way to a Better World,' to assist in the implementation of the SDGs, and transform the world for the better." Unquote

I reminded the Council on the critical role geospatial information plays globally and in Fiji's national development, and today for the Pacific community, in particular, I would like to share that geospatial information offers a lens through which we can better understand, anticipate, and act upon the unique needs of our islands and communities.

Geospatial information provides the data-driven foundation that allows us to identify, analyze, and manage our land, natural resources, and human activities with a precision and depth we've never seen before. Geospatial tools and technologies allow us to monitor deforestation, predict the impact of climate change, map vulnerable areas, optimize resource allocation, and much more. They empower us to respond proactively to the rapid changes that affect our natural and social environments.

In the Pacific, where natural disasters, rising sea levels, and resource constraints are frequent challenges, geospatial information can make the difference between life and loss. By enhancing geospatial information management, we can build resilience, improve disaster preparedness, support sustainable agriculture, manage fisheries effectively, and ensure that no community is left behind. Importantly, these technologies can support decision-making that is rooted in the cultural values and traditional knowledge of our Pacific peoples.

However, the path to effective geospatial information management is not without its challenges. Across the Pacific, we face constraints in funding, technical infrastructure, and trained personnel. Many communities lack access to the necessary tools, while others grapple with issues of data sovereignty and security. We must ensure that geospatial information remains an asset that serves the public good, empowering communities and strengthening their resilience.

That is why we are here today and the rest of the week to discuss and share collectively as a Pacific family under the meeting theme 'identifying problems and finding solutions' through leveraging the United Nations Integrated Geospatial Information Framework or the UN-IGIF.

This is also a tremendous opportunity for collaboration. By investing in capacity-building, knowledge-sharing, and technology transfer, we can strengthen geospatial management and foster partnerships that bridge gaps in expertise, resources, and access. We must work collectively—government agencies, NGOs, private companies, indigenous communities, and international partners—to develop open, equitable, and secure geospatial platforms that serve all Pacific communities.

So, what must we do to ensure that geospatial information management drives progress towards the SDGs and our own national development agendas?

1. *Build Capacity and Strengthen Local Expertise*: By investing in training and education, we can equip local leaders, planners, and scientists with the skills they need to manage and utilize geospatial data effectively. Let us prioritize the development of local talent to lead these efforts, ensuring that Pacific communities have the expertise to make informed, data-driven decisions.

2. *Promote Regional Collaboration and Partnerships*: The challenges we face are often shared challenges, and we can overcome them by working together. Collaborative data-sharing agreements, technical partnerships, and joint research initiatives can allow us to pool our resources, share our knowledge, and maximize the benefits of geospatial technology across the region.

3. *Empower Communities through Accessible Technology*: Technology should not be a barrier but an enabler. By adopting various platforms, cloud-based systems, and mobile applications, we can make geospatial tools more accessible to even the most remote communities. This ensures that information reaches the grassroots level, allowing communities themselves to use these tools in ways that directly benefit their daily lives.

4. *Incorporate Traditional Knowledge and Local Insights*: Geospatial data can be enriched by the wisdom and experience of local communities. Pacific Islanders have long understood the intricacies of their environments; their insights should be integrated into our data platforms. By combining traditional knowledge with modern technology, we create a more holistic approach to managing natural resources, anticipating environmental changes, and protecting cultural heritage.

5. Ensure Data Privacy, Security, and Ethical Standards: As we increase our reliance on geospatial information, we must also protect individuals' privacy and uphold data security. Our geospatial systems must be transparent, accountable, and respectful of community rights. Data should be safeguarded to maintain trust, and ethical standards should be the foundation upon which we build our information networks.

The Pacific is a region that embodies resilience, unity, and a deep respect for the natural world. It is our shared responsibility to ensure that geospatial information management aligns with these values, propelling us toward a sustainable future. We have the tools, the will, and the vision to accelerate the SDGs, to empower our communities, and to address the complex challenges facing our region. By working together, we can create a legacy of sustainable growth, environmental stewardship, and cultural preservation for generations to come.

In conclusion, let us commit to enhancing geospatial information management in the region and our own countries as a powerful instrument for positive change. Let us recognize that every map we create, every data point we analyze, and every decision we make can help bring the Sustainable Development Goals closer to reality. Together, we can build a resilient, thriving Pacific where people and nature flourish in harmony.

I wish all participants well and encourage open discussions to learn from each other as you highlight challenges and share experiences on best practices leveraging the UN-IGIF.

Vinaka Vakalevu.