

South African risk and vulnerability atlas launched

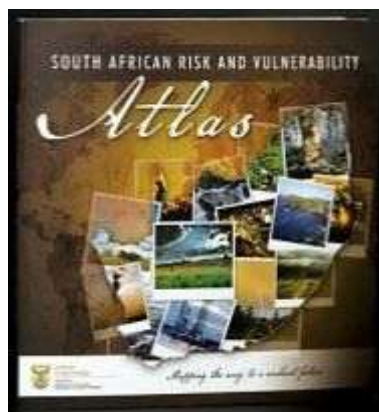


Image: Deputy Science and Technology Minister Derek Hanekom addresses business representatives at the launch of the South African risk and vulnerability atlas.

The Department of Science and Technology (DST), with research done by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), on Friday launched the South African risk and vulnerability atlas.

The atlas was aimed at assisting decision-makers in identifying risk, and planning and mapping a future, which would be more resilient to the changing climatic conditions in the country.

"Ultimately, the research that is done has to act as a valuable planning tool," said Deputy Science and Technology Minister Derek Hanekom, noting that every municipality has an integrated development plan, and these municipalities needed to make certain decisions on development that takes place in the area.



The hard copy of the atlas was launched and introduced to business with the assistance of the National Business Initiative. The more extensive and data-rich electronic spatial database and website, which would be free to use and accessible to all, was expected to come on line in about three weeks.

DST sector innovation and global change chief director Imraan Patel explained that the DST also had an ambition to establish service centres at rural universities, which would be populated by students doing research in climate change related fields. These service centres would be able to assist municipalities to correctly process the information, and include it in planning processes.

The DST was identifying where these service centres could be located, and expected to establish five centres over the next three years, with the first to open in mid-2011.

CSIR scientist Dr Bob Scholes explained that the atlas came as a result of the desire to

improve the flow of information from the research community to society - a problem that was particularly acute in South Africa.

He added that the form of an atlas was chosen, because much of the data is spatial, and needs to be in order to satisfy the requirements of local adaptation. "Also, everyone loves an atlas, and it captures the spirit of ease of use that we have aimed at," said Scholes.


The atlas was also divided into themes, namely water, agriculture, human health, coastal zones, biodiversity, commercial forestry, and land use.

"All of this is covered in the risk and vulnerability atlas. The big challenge is to take the knowledge that we generate, the studies that we do, the improved understanding of what is likely to happen to our earth in terms of climate change, and to translate into better decision making," added Hanekom.

The atlas maps out the future in different regions of South Africa through sources of data and maps that will continue to evolve as the project develops and more data become available.

Business representatives commended the atlas as a welcome resource for business, which could be used as part of business risk assessment, and assist in identifying potential business opportunities, taking into account the challenges of climate change, energy, water, health, education and other critical areas.

Patel urged business to make use of the data and the capacity that had been generated through the atlas, and also requested business to contribute data that they could share to enhance the project. - Engineering News

Posted by SAWDIS at 8/16/2010 08:25:00 PM 

Labels: Climate change, disaster prevention, disaster reduction, Global warming

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