

# Internet atlas comes to SA

A new online climate database aims at promoting public access to scientific information.

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The South African Risk and Vulnerability Atlas (Sarva), an online atlas of local risk and vulnerability in the context of global environmental change, will be offered in SA in January 2010.

The Sarva project was initiated by the Department of Science and Technology and the online atlas is being developed by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).

This Internet atlas will have similar features to Google Earth, which allows users to zoom in on specific locations in SA and get information about the future climate. This is aimed at equipping decision-makers with information on the impact and risk associated with global change in the region.

Dr Bob Scholes, CSIR systems ecologist and principal investigator in the southern African Millennium Assessment, says: "The atlas will not only contain continually updated maps, it will be an easy-to-navigate, interactive spatial product at many scales, and will include case studies as well as other narratives to inform global change adaptation responses and planning".

He explains that the atlas will provide an electronic geographical information system and will involve SA researchers from various disciplines to continuously update the content with new research.

According to the CSIR, the online element will facilitate value-addition to "raw" research data, to make the resulting information accessible to decision-makers in a practical application format.

The atlas is being designed as a 'distributed' system, linking to outlying databases, to build a community engaged in spatial data provision in global change, risk and vulnerability.

The CSIR has promised to provide easily understood global change sensitivity and vulnerability information at regional, national, provincial and municipal levels. It will also help support national initiatives such as the National Disaster Management Framework, says the CSIR.

The atlas will become a one-stop shop for relevant climate change findings, which would inform projections of global change, land cover change and biogeochemical change for SA, states the organisation.

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