

IFDC *Report*

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an update on
the work & progress at
IFDC—An International Center for Soil
Fertility and Agricultural Development

IFDC Participates in WSSD



Photo by Dr. L. L. Hammond

Michelle Anthony of the U.S. Geological Survey in the GISD booth at the Earth Summit in Johannesburg.

As Secretariat of the Geographic Information for Sustainable Development (GISD) project, IFDC was represented at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) during August-September 2002. Representing IFDC at WSSD were: Dr. L. L. Hammond, Director, Resource Development Division; Dr. Walter Bowen, Leader, Soil and Nutrient Dynamics Program; and Dr. Paul Wilkens, Programmer.

Funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the GISD project aims to improve the quality, accuracy, and availability of data needed to better understand and monitor the environment and to harness science and technology in support of sustainable

development in Africa. The long-term strategic goal is to make satellite imagery available to policy makers, scientists, and other users around the world so that they can get instant access to satellite photography, and these pictures will help them map watersheds, plan agricultural crop strategies, and trace urbanization trends. Linking that kind of technology to global positioning systems (GPS) provides all kinds of new avenues to increase productivity and to bring the power of technology to the most distant corner of the world. IFDC's efforts using geographic information system (GIS) tools focus on monitoring the depletion of nutrients from the soil. Data base management, map digitization, and computer-based geographic modeling are common tasks performed by the GISD project staff. At the moment, GISD serves as the umbrella for a total of 14 projects in various regions on the African continent.

"One of the main outcomes of the WSSD is the commitment to reduce global poverty and the proportion of people who suffer from hunger by one-half by the year 2015," says Dr. Hammond. "This is an ambitious challenge considering that one-half of Africa's population lives on less than US \$1 per day. The world's growing population calls for not only a fight against poverty but also a fight against hunger. Monitoring and improving nutrient balances play an important role in this battle. Existing agricultural land must become more productive because slash and burn techniques result in a cascade of negative effects and have to be abandoned. The use of GIS methodologies can assist local decision makers prevent these effects and maintain a favorable level of soil nutrients."

Another positive outcome of the WSSD for IFDC is the fact that information was released indicating there is a renewed interest in agriculture among the donor community. It was specifically encouraging to IFDC that delegates to the Summit said new technologies in fertilizers and other agricultural sectors could help reverse the trend of land degradation and low productivity if shared with the developing world. ♦