

Introductory remarks by Julian Hunt talks at CoZSSA 2, Nov 2005

Ministerial colleagues, I am greatly honoured to open this conference on Coastal Zones in Sub Saharan Africa. This is my second visit to western Africa, first to Ghana. I look forward to seeing more of Accra during the conference.

Environmental and climate change present great challenges to every country in the world and especially to coastal urban areas, where most of the world's population will be living by the end of this century. Already more than 50% live in urban areas. This conference follows on from the work in many African countries on environmental problems of coastal areas that were presented in Abuja and then at WSSD in Johannesburg in 2002. Then the first conference on coastal zones in sub Saharan Africa was held at the Royal Society and Natural History Museum in London in 2003, when ministers and experts began to focus on key policy issues, including planning of urban areas, combating the adverse effects on food supply and biodiversity of international fishing on African coastal communities, and dealing with environmental hazards such as those in oil rich areas. The effects of deforestation also have major effects on regional climate as David Bellamy will explain after my remarks. Other conferences have been held on the problems of climate change and coastal communities including one in Houston, Texas in 2004 where we discussed many of the problems that we saw recently when hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans.

After the London meeting the Kenyan government, whose committed environmental minister had attended it, helped set up a network COSMAR for encouraging environmental initiatives in African coastal communities. We shall be hearing more about this from Mr Ali Mohamed at this meeting, and how it connects to other initiatives in African collaboration through NEPAD. Another African centre ACMAD is represented at this conference.

ACOPS, as organizers of the London conference, together with Elsie Owusu Architects and the Royal Society of Arts in London were very pleased to take up the suggestion of the Honourable Jake Obetsebi-Lampsey, minister in the Ghana government, to hold a jointly organized meeting in Accra to focus on the issues of African coastal cities, and particularly on the practicalities of planning and people's involvement in the great changes that are necessary for economic and social development consistent with adapting to the special features of the changing climate and environment in these areas.

The organizers of this meeting are very grateful to the sponsors for their support without which the meeting could not have been held; Shell, the British Council, Hilden Trust, University College London, Transport for London. We are also grateful to local sponsors as you can see on the poster.

We were very pleased to receive a warm letter of support for this conference from Tony Blair the UK prime minister. He has been very active this year in emphasizing the importance of sustainable economic development in Africa at the meetings of the G8 and African heads of government. We also have a message from Nicky Gavron, deputy Mayor of London, who has emphasised how cities need to work together to find the best methods to deal with climate change. There are special problems of low-lying African coastal cities like Accra, Dakar, Lagos, Mombassa and also major cities around the world including London and Houston where we held conferences this year.

To turn to our programme, I believe this conference is one of the first in the world where we can discuss the three essential elements that make for successful environmental policy, namely

- scientific understanding and prediction
- explanation and communication of the issues through politics, media , art and education
- finding solutions in engineering, agriculture, planning, systems and design; these have to be practical, economic, lasting, and through art and design even inspirational. They also have to be appropriate for each community; although local traditions will lead to many different types of solution; we can all learn from each other.

We have participants here representing all these disciplines and they have varied experience in Africa and the rest of the world. The results of the conference will be published; but more importantly we hope that some new network will be established in Africa to take forward action, on a holistic design based approach, for the future of African coastal cities and communities. There have been several important initiatives in Africa, especially NEPAD. I hope that this idea will also flourish with the help of NEPAD and all other agencies working in Africa. Together with my ACOPS and university colleagues in the UK, I look forward to helping in whatever way we can.