

Minister's remarks for Session 4: South Africa's contributions and benefits

South Africa, through the Department of Science and Technology, has made major strides in the development and implementation of the South African Earth Observation Strategy (SAEOS), which is aimed at promoting an integrated Earth observation system. The strategy, approved in October 2006 and launched during the margins of the GEO IV Plenary in Cape Town, captures the country's response to the 10-year Implementation Plan for a Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS). The SAEOS Earth Observation Data Centre and web-based Portal have been developed and are currently being operationalised and institutionalised. The Portal is integrated into the GEOSS Common Infrastructure (GCI) and contributed resources to the GEOSS Data-CORE. South Africa strongly believes that the SAEOS model could form the basis for other African EO strategies.

In November 2007, the South Africa became the CEOS chair and adopted a theme of 'Data democracy for developing countries' as its special project during its tenure as CEOS chair. This initiative laid a foundation for GEOSS Data Sharing Principles.

It must be acknowledged that the long term sustainability of GEOSS depend on the member states; and more effort and emphasis must be put in strengthening and promoting national GEO (mechanism) and regional coordination. South Africa undertakes to address the lack of GEO activities on the African continent. The AfriGEOSS initiative will ensure that the African continent actively participate and contribute to GEO vision. This will also ensure that certain aspects of GEOSS are built or tailored to response to the technological challenges faced by the developing nations. The regions should make efforts to develop collaborative capabilities to implement system of systems solutions pertinent to their challenges.

South Africa has hosted the GEO Global Biodiversity Observation Network (GEO BON) Secretariat for three and a half years. In this time GEO BON established a global biodiversity community of practice and has grown to include a number of regional and national biodiversity observing systems.

South Africa is active in the implementation of GEO Global Agriculture Monitoring

System (GEOGLAM). The national Crop Monitoring system continues to be improved with results from research carried out on our Joint Experiment for Crop Assessment and Monitoring (JECAM) site and monthly contributions to the GEOGLAM bulletin.

Land cover / land cover change mapping has received due attention with South Africa playing a prominent role in the AFRIGEOSS "Working Group on Land Cover Mapping for Africa" having members on both the Executive Board and the Technical Advisory Committee.

The South African Earth Observations community is active in the implementation of GEO tasks. There are now 11 active communities of practices in SA-GEO covering a wide range of interests including natural resources, both terrestrial and marine; Education & Awareness, Legal & Policy, EO infrastructure, Calibration & Validation and synthetic aperture RADAR.

South Africa has completed the development of the calibration and validation site near Pretoria, a useful infrastructure for satellite, airborne sensors and imagery calibration and validation. This site will contribute to the CEOS Working Group on Calibration and Validation, particularly the sub-WG on infrared and visible optical data from Earth observation satellites, and form part of the global Cal Val network.