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GEOSS African Water Cycle Coordination Initiative
and Capacity Development

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For information

GEOSS African Water Cycle Coordination Initiative and Capacity Development

There is a rapidly growing concern regarding water issues common to the African Region. As a follow-up to the 1st Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS) African Water Cycle Symposium (Tunis, 2009) at which the participants recognized the commonality and regionality of water-related issues and socio-economic impacts caused by water-related disasters in Africa, the 2nd GEOSS African Water Cycle Symposium was convened at the United Nations Conference Centre in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 23-25 February 2011 to explore making use of the international Group on Earth Observations (GEO) framework to develop a plan for an “African Water Cycle Coordination Initiative.” More than 70 participants, including representatives from 21 African nations and River Basin Authorities as well as North America, Asia, and Europe met to consider how GEOSS could provide fundamental services to support water management in Africa, including convergence and harmonization of observational activities, new techniques, interoperability arrangements, and effective and comprehensive data management to strengthen the various on-going and planned water-related activities in Africa.

After reviewing water-related needs and issues across Africa, the participants inventoried activities designed to address these issues and considered how the GEO framework could serve to provide coordination and improved delivery of services in the water sector. A white paper on “GEO Capacity Building and Water Resource in Africa” served as a basis for discussion. To introduce this initiative into Rio+20, it was decided that the African Water Cycle Coordination Initiative (AfWCCI) should focus initial efforts in cooperation with several African river basin authorities/initiatives, with the specific aim to enhance current capacity through improved data collection, analysis, integration, and sharing among the nations comprising the river basins.

The participants also recognized the importance of the fundamental linkages across water-dependent domains; land use, including deforestation; ecosystem services; and food-, energy- and health-securities. Sharing coordinated, comprehensive and sustained observations and information for sound decision-making is a first step; however, to take full advantage of these opportunities, an effective collaboration mechanism is needed for working together across different disciplines, sectors and agencies, and thereby gain a holistic view of the continuity between environmentally sustainable development, climate change adaptation and enhanced resilience. Thus, a key objective of the AfWCCI will be to develop a “workbench” whereby scientists and professionals can work together to test out and validate tools through collaboration on pilot projects within specified river-basins. These tools will subsequently be made freely available to experts for informed water resource decisions.