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## Symposium Explores the Critical Role of Earth Observations Across Africa

Geneva – More than two dozen African nations committed to mobilizing the Earth observation community to contribute to the implementation of the Africa Space Policy and Strategy, adopted by African Heads of State at the 26th African Union Summit held in January, 2016. That was one of the primary outcomes of the first Symposium of the AfriGEOSS Initiative, hosted by the Research Council of Zimbabwe (RCZ) on behalf of the government of Zimbabwe, which took place from 27 – 29 April in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.

AfriGEOSS, an initiative of the intergovernmental Group on Earth Observations (GEO), was formed in 2014 to coordinate access to and use of Earth observations – from satellites, airborne and ground- and marine-based systems – across the African continent. The 27 AfriGEOSS members are focusing their efforts on data access and dissemination, forest management, food security, urban planning and water resources management, as well as contributing to achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda in Africa.

The 1st AfriGEOSS Symposium, "Earth Observations for the Africa We Want", concentrated on ensuring that AfriGEOSS activities respond to the broader African agendas and objectives, including the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063. Minister Ambassador S.K. Moyo of Zimbabwe opened the proceedings stating that, "Earth Observation and Geo-Information Science provide ample tools to tackle issues to do with the prediction and response to natural disasters such as droughts and floods." Moyo cited the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) assessments which rate Africa as most vulnerable to changes in climate, adding that "Earth Observation is of critical value to the planet."

Additional outcomes of the symposium include a commitment to establish national GEO mechanisms in the AfriGEOSS nations to leverage existing Earth observations investments, as well as improve the use of Earth observations for evidence-based policy formulation and decision-making. The participants also pledged to improve communication and outreach to the broader society about the value and benefits of Earth observations to the daily lives of people across the continent.

GEO Director Barbara J. Ryan stated she was "humbled by the level of work underway by the AfriGEOSS countries and partners," and urged all of the national and regional institutions to contribute their data resources to GEO's global data infrastructure "to broaden African access to, and dissemination of, critical Earth observation data."

In closing remarks, Dr Philemon Mjwara, Director General of the South African Department of Science and Technology, noted, "As Africans we have demonstrated that passion, as shown in the last three days, even without financial resources, can make things happen," and pledged that the AfriGEOSS leadership "shall go out and secure the financial resources so that the ideas coming out of the symposium are realised and AfriGEOSS is implemented."

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The Group on Earth Observations (GEO) is a voluntary partnership of governments and organizations that envisions "a future wherein decisions and actions for the benefit of humankind are informed by coordinated, comprehensive and sustained Earth observations". GEO membership includes 102 Member governments and 95 Participating Organizations comprised of international bodies with a mandate in Earth observations. Together, the GEO community is creating a Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS) that will link Earth observation resources world-wide across multiple Societal Benefit Areas - Biodiversity and Ecosystem Sustainability; Disaster Resilience; Energy and Mineral Resources Management; Food Security; Infrastructure & Transportation Management; Public Health Surveillance; Sustainable Urban Development; and Water Resources Management - and make those resources available for informed decision-making.

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