

„GMES and Africa“ A hopeful case for Euro-African Cooperation in space development

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The initiative taken by the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union Council to organize the “GMES and Africa” events in Lisbon (6-7 December 2007) was timely and relevant. It is actually an evidence that the European efforts of the Commission, ESA, Eumetsat, and their Member States to develop and implement GMES services to benefit Europe’s citizens should be extended to the African continent. The coordination underway by the African and European Unions’ Commissions to associate all stakeholders is essential in securing the realization of the Lisbon Declaration and to draft an Action Plan

The Conference and the related initiative

The European Union Council Presidency by Portugal (second half of 2007) put in the forefront the necessity of a renewed relation between the European and African continents. The strategy, objectives and modalities have been reiterated and spelt out in the Lisbon Declaration¹, adopted by the second European Union – African Union Summit of Heads of State and Government on 9 December 2007, which is in full support of “The Africa-EU Strategic Partnership: A Joint Africa – EU Strategy²”.

In particular commitments were made to support Africa in countering the effects of climate change in accordance with the EU Action Plan on Climate Change and Development and in protecting its environment, through a range of policies, by combating desertification and ensuring the sustainable management of its forest, land and biodiversity, fisheries and water.

Eight partnership areas and priority actions (PPA) have been singled out among which some are of particular relevance to space

technology applications:

- PPA 4 (...) Accelerate the achievement of the food security targets of the millennium development goals (MDGs);
- PPA 6 (...) Co-operate to address land degradation and increasing aridity;
- PPA 8 (...) Enhance co-operation on space applications and technology.

The initiative promoted by GRICES – the Portuguese space office of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education – to organize two technical seminars on 6 December and the event “Space for Development: the case of GMES and Africa” on 7 December 2007 in Lisbon was timely and necessary. It constituted, at the level of participation witnessed, the first attempt to bring together, actors from both continents to address the issue of GMES and Africa.

On the European side the Portuguese Presidency, with the support of the three following Presidencies – Slovenia, France and the Czech Republic, worked together with the European Commission – i.e. DGs Development, Enterprise, Environment and the Joint Research Centre (JRC), the European Space Agency (ESA) and the European Organization for the Exploitation of Meteorological Satellites (Eumetsat). The African side was coordinated by the African Union and its Commission with the involvement of the Secretariat of the African, Caribbean and

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/development/center/repository/EAS2007_lisbon_declaration_en.pdf,
http://www.eu2007.pt/UE/vEN/Noticias_Documentos/20071209declaracaolisboa.htm
² http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/er/97496.pdf

Pacific Group of States and five regional economic commissions covering the West African (Ecowas), East (IGAD), Central (CEMAC), Southern (SADC) and Indian Ocean (IOC) parts of the continent; those were already the partners who had signed the “Maputo Declaration”³ (Mozambique, 15 October 2006) in support of the “African GMES” initiative, and requesting the European Commission, to plan for the extension of GMES services to Africa.

Notwithstanding the declarations adopted by the World Summits on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil, 1992) and Johannesburg (South Africa, 2002) or such commitments as the Millennium Development Goals or the Action Plan of NEPAD’s Environment Component (New Partnership for Africa’s Development) and the Declaration of the G8 Summits of Evian and Gleneagles on Climate change, the sustainable management of the environment and natural resources in Africa remains a major concern. The population increases can only add pressure to the situation. In fact from 1950 to 2000 the population grew from 220 millions to 820 millions and cautious forecasts, announce the 2000 millions mark for 2050⁴, the major part making the choice to live in urban areas.

The way forward to implementation

JRC, ESA and Eumetsat, are already implementing valuable efforts i.a. AMESD, the ACP observatory, the PUMA initiative, TIGER or RESPOND but a coordinated strategy is required.

The Lisbon exercises, attended by 350 participants, led to the adoption of two documents⁵:

- The Lisbon Declaration on “GMES and Africa” 7 December 2007, and
- The Lisbon Process on “GMES and Africa”.

The two Commissions of EU and AU will coordinate the way forward with a common objective, integrated in the Africa–EU Action Plan 2008–2010 adopted by the Heads of State and governments at their 2nd Lisbon summit, to develop through a structured dialogue among Africa and European partners an Action plan to

be submitted for approval at the 3rd EU-Africa Summit, taking place at the end of 2009 in Africa. The Commissioner for Development will take the lead for the EC and the Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology at the Commission of the African Union.

The tasks ahead

The tasks ahead should not be viewed as a challenge or a hope but as an evidence. The success of the extension of GMES core and pilot services to Africa will face the same narrow path to which European promoters have been confronted with. GMES is about space and non-space activities with the former community being coordinated and too often acting as spokesperson of the users. The joint efforts of the European Commission and ESA led to the adoption by their Member States of the European Space Policy (May 2007) and ESA has drafted an Africa strategy, or a strategy for Africa. Space Policies are gradually emerging on the African continent from Morocco to Egypt involving all stakeholders, Algeria and Libya are showing determination in conducting space development programmes and Nigeria and the Republic of South Africa are amongst the most dynamic, if not the only players in Sub Saharan Africa.

However the mutual knowledge is probably asymmetrical among the two communities. The most daunting task is certainly, as in Europe, the involvement of users: this is the key to the long-term partnership among the two continents. The meteorological services can probably be a good indication of the way to go: the combined efforts of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and Eumetsat have contributed to operational procedures and relations among users. The convening of the fourth GEO Summit (Group on Earth Observation) in South Africa in November 2007 has proven a success.

New initiatives needed

More has to be done. What is the situation of the “non-space” or ground measurement networks? Where and in which field should they be improved, and above all, harmonized in order to ensure exchange of standardized data? The infrastructure for direct reception of Earth Observation data is not fully covering the continent and the Lagos Plan of Action and ECA’s (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa) – resolutions 280 (XII) and 313 (XIII) are long superseded.

³ <http://www.eumetsat.int/Home/Main/Media/News/028776?l=en>

⁴ World Population Prospects 2006, <http://esa.un.org/unpp/p2k0data.asp>

⁵ All presentations and documents available at www.mundiconvenius.pt/2007/gmes/

How to contribute to the promotion and sustained operation of integrated applications through a combination of space and in-situ networks is also of significant importance. A myriad of actors are active and not necessarily coordinated in Europe – at Commission, ESA and Eumetsat as well as Member States level not to mention all development and research

institutions with decade-long experiences in Africa. The mapping exercise including in the “Lisbon Process” will deliver invaluable information and contribute to identifying the necessary elements not only for capacity-building but for building capacities paving the way from a logic of donorship to a partnership approach.



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