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Africa: Space Law and Applications - Past, Present, and Future (3)

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A GLANCE AT THE EARTH OBSERVATION POLICIES AND REGULATIONS AND IMPACT ON
DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: FOCUSING ON THE AFRICAN CONTINENT

Abstract

Earth Observation (EO) applications have today become a necessity in addressing development needs of countries. EO systems such as Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS) and the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES) are of significant value in the area of disaster management, health, energy, food security, natural resource management, effective land use, planning, climate, water, weather, ecosystems, agriculture, and biodiversity etc. These are major issues looming in the developing world and especially the African Continent. The application of EO data in developing countries is said to be underutilized due factors such as limited resources, lack of knowledge and technology and most importantly financial reasons among others. Hardly is there a focus on the legal and policy issues relating to Earth observation (EO) data as a major factor in the dissemination of the EO data to developing countries. One major difference in the utilization of the EO data between the developed countries and that of the developing countries; is the use of the policy regulatory framework to manage the access and application of EO observation data. In the sense that, most (space faring) developed countries have adopted or enacted policy regulation that propels the proper use of the EO data. Due to the sensitivity of the EO data for instance remote sensing data, its availability is sometimes regulated. This may have an impact on the availability of the data to the developing countries. This paper seeks to discuss the impact of the EO data regulation both internationally and nationally to its accessibility to the developing countries. It will feature the interplay between international (policy and law) instruments on EO and the national EO policy and regulation of dominant space faring nations; and how they affect the supply and demand of EO data to mostly African countries. The paper will also briefly analyze legal and policy mechanisms relating to EO in selected African countries and the role they play in ensuring that EO data is accessible by its citizens. In discussing the future perspectives it will explore the options such as strengthening the legal and policy frameworks in order to achieve proper and practical economic utilization of EO applications in developing countries.