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International cooperation in using space for sustainable development: Towards a "Space2030" agenda (1)

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SPACE SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: VIEWS FROM THE
CONTINENT

Abstract

Nowhere on Earth are the societal benefits of space technologies more urgently needed than in Africa. For this reason, the continent has, in recent years, strongly pursued and promoted such space technologies and applications, as evidenced by the African Space Policy and Strategy (ASPS) and ongoing efforts to establish the African Space Agency (AfSA). The European Space Policy Institute (ESPI), supported by the European Space Agency (ESA), is on the forefront of researching the latest developments, specifically in line with AfSA's mission of exploiting space technologies and applications for sustainable development and the improvement of the welfare of African citizens. The "Space2030" agenda cannot succeed without Africa, and this recognition is reflected in its calls for bridging the space divide.

The starting point in such an endeavour must necessarily be to identify the needs on the ground and to understand and seek ways to support Africa's home-grown initiatives for meeting its challenges. The age of Africa's full partnership in space is dawning with the birth of AfSA. ESPI's approach in this study is to identify linchpin or primary needs within the Sustainable Development domain on which Africa's pursuit and promotion of space technologies and applications rely most of all. These are climate, biodiversity, health, water, education, and space-related capacity building. Promoting African success in harnessing space to support these areas, including via partnership with ESA, requires an understanding of the African international space ecosystem. This means understanding the continent's own Sustainable Development goals and strategies, for example as encapsulated in Agenda 2063, its existing intra-African space partnerships as well as African participation and partnerships in space globally, and its policies and space applications already in use. It also requires identifying African space growth poles in a socioeconomic landscape characterised by the abovementioned primary needs. This must also be supplemented by an understanding and appreciation of uniquely African worldviews such as ubuntu and the Pan-African solidarity norm. This provides a rich contribution to international relations scholarship and provides novel approaches to engaging with the collectivist African posture in seeking solutions in the space arena in a spirit of partnership and unity. Ultimately, engaging with Africa and its rising space nations not only benefits the continent but through concepts such as emerging space middle powers it becomes clear how this helps in legitimising the global space regime, of which "Space2030" is a crucial part.