

# **The 7th AARSE Conference**

## **Application of Earth Observation and Geoinformation for Governance in Africa**

October 30 to November 2, 2008

By. Dr. T. Woldai

The 7th biennial conference of the African Association of the Environment (AARSE) took place in Accra, Ghana from October 30 to November 2, 2008 and was **hosted by the Centre for Remote Sensing & Geographic Information Services (CERSGIS), University of Ghana, Legon, Accra, Ghana**. The main theme of the conference was "Application of Earth Observation and Geoinformation for Governance in Africa" and was held at the Accra Conference Center. The conference was **co-organized by: SAMBUS CO. LTD, GEOTECH CO. LTD, RUDAN ENGINEERING CO.LTD, CTK, Aero Surveys, Ghana Survey Department and various Ghanaian Ministries, Universities and conference related agencies. Co-sponsoring organizations include: ASTRIUM-EADS, International Institute for Geoinformation Science & Earth Observation (ITC) as Platinum sponsors, UNEP, FUGRO, ESRI-SAMBUS Co. Ltd (Ghana), European Space Agency as Gold Sponsors, SOKKIA/GEOTECH, EIS-Africa (partner organization of AARSE), UNU-INRA, USAID/TIPCEE, TRIMBLE NAVIGATION, EPA-GHANA, BEAK CONSULT, Department of Science & Technology (South Africa), GEO, UNOOSA, US Department of State, ISPRS, International Land Systems, GeoEye/DATA DESIGN as bronze sponsors.**

---

### **The conference featured:**

- over 300 presentations and 40 posters,
- 10 keynote addresses in 4 Plenary Sessions,
- thirty-one (31) technical sessions representing eight (8) sub-themes on various aspects of Geoinformation Sciences and Earth Observation,
- 2 poster sessions,
- various workshops: pre-conference GEOSS workshop on: "**Water Security and Governance in Africa**"; Organised in association with AARSE, IEEE, ICEO, ISPRS, ITC, OGC, 52N, and the University of Johannesburg, SA; a half-day Youth Forum organized by ISPRS, GEO and AARSE and a workshop on UN-ECA initiative on: "African Reference Framework (AfREF)"
- special sessions conducted by:
  - o the European Space Agency on "TIGER";
  - o US-Department of State on "Global Dialogue on Emerging Science and Technology (GDEST)";
  - o UNOOSA on "UN-SPIDER";
  - o FUGRO; Special ESRI USER and application session,
  - o GeoEye technical sessions;
  - o ERDAS Technical Session, and
  - o ITC on "University Network on Disaster Risk Reduction in Africa (UNEDRA)".
- 4 meetings (AARSE Council, AARSE General Assembly, EIS Africa, UNEDRA), and
- 3 round tables and many business meetings.
- A full GEONETCast reception facility was installed (the antenna was provided by the Ghana Meteorological Organization and the other necessary components were provided through EUMETSAT).

The 7th AARSE Conference **was attended by five hundred and forty (540) registered participants** from **forty (40) countries** including over 300 students from Ghana, **twenty-eight (28) exhibitors** (Ghana -7; Rest of Africa – 8; Europe – 7; North America – 3; Russia – 1; Middle East – 2) and institutional organizations and development partners. The **conference was opened by His Excellency Dr. Alhaji Alieu Mahama, The Vice President of Ghana** who was introduced to the Conference participants by **Mr. Alhaji Ahmed Yirimea Awudu, the Honorable Deputy Minister, Minister of Local Government, Rural Development & Environment**. In his keynote address, the guest of honor commended the conference for its facilitating role in increasing awareness of the benefits of geo-information for good governance. He said that it was essential to develop innovative ways to bridge the geospatial science – policy gap in Africa and devising strategies for effectively educating and sensitizing African Policy makers on the role of geospatial technologies in the management of sector-wide plans and programmes. He concluded by suggesting that many important questions should be asked including the extent to which geoinformation tools were being used by African policy makers to plan and manage natural resources in their respective countries; to monitor land cover and land use change, climate change, deforestation, and desertification; what efforts were being made to strengthen the human and institutional capacities of African geo-information scientists, researchers and practitioners to build decision-support databases for use by planners and policy makers to understand the usefulness of geo-information tools and space-based technologies for disaster and emergency management as well as marine surveillance and pollution control? The Vice-President expressed his hope that these issues would be addressed if African countries were to move forward as developing nations towards the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals, especially Goal 7 on environmental sustainability.

Before the Vice President's speech, both the Chairman of the Local Organizing Committee, Mr. Foster Mensah, and the President of AARSE, Tsehaie Woldai welcomed participants to the conference. The AARSE President pointed out the importance of natural resources in Africa as the most important potential source of wealth in a continent that is paradoxically the richest in the endowments of natural resources but poorest in development. He suggested that the geo-information specialists attending the conference had a responsibility to innovatively influence policy to change this situation.

Immediately after the welcoming address of the AARSE President, **congratulatory messages** followed from the 1<sup>st</sup> Vice-President (and past President) of the **ISPRS, Prof. Ian Dowman**, and the **President of IEEE-GRSS, Prof. Tony Milne**. This was then followed by Dr. Giovanni Rum, on behalf of GEO Director **Dr. Jose Achache** on: "Global Earth Observation Systems (GEOSS) Build-up in Africa" and the award ceremony.



*Ian Dowman receiving AARSE Merit Award from the Vice-President of Ghana.*



*Partial View of the Exhibition Hall.*

The **AARSE MERIT AWARD** this year went to **Prof. Ian Dowman**, Past President and 1<sup>st</sup> Vice-President of ISPRS for his unflinching support to AARSE and its ideals in the promotion of Geo-information sciences and Earth observation in Africa. His Excellency **Dr. Alhaji Alieu Mahama, the Vice President of Ghana, handed over the award**, a plaque and commemorative award to Prof. Dowman. Nominations for the awards was made by African national organizations and individuals which was subsequently approved by the Executive Council of AARSE after going through a number of deliberation as is required by the constitution.

The organization and logistic part of the conference was very good. The LOC has devoted a great deal of thought, time and energy in its planning, not only in deciding on the excellent facilities, the technical program and the scientific exhibit, but also in the social activities. In spite of the long daily duration of the sessions (up to 6:30 p.m. sometimes), the attendance was reasonable and constant till the end with oral presentation short, focused and discussions afterwards lively. The abstract papers were distributed in a book form and a CD. To avoid those who present a paper but never show-up during the conference, the LOC in consultation with the AARSE Council have decided to send the full proceedings to all who registered three weeks after the completion of the conference. In the new regulation, all papers submitted to the conference but could not be presented at the conference in person (by one of the author(s)) would not be included in the final proceedings. In addition, those who paid in advance may receive a copy of the proceeding but their paper might not be included unless convincing argument is given to the LOC in advance.

The technical programs were accompanied by visit to various exhibition stands. The social events (e.g., Conference reception, AARSE Gall Dinner, ITC alumni party, etc.), allowed a better social interaction and fruitful discussions.

For the second time, AARSE conference witnessed the presentation of joint AARSE and ESA (European Space Agency) award for the best oral, poster presentation and the best student contribution. Oral evaluation criteria were based upon: innovative content of paper, time keeping, clarity of presentation and articulate response to questions. Selection was made by: Session chairpersons + 3 randomly selected session participants and the three Awarding Committee members. Best Poster and Student contribution evaluation criteria were based upon: innovative content, quality of visualisation and attractive design. The selection was done by the Award Committee selected for the occasion.

**7th AARSE Conference Closing Ceremony:** EC, through its President thanked the Government of Ghana, the Local Organizing Committee, and all funding and supporting organizations described above for making the conference a success. The moral and continuous support that 7th AARSE Conference enjoyed from ITC, GEO Secretariat, the ISPRS President and ISPRS Commissions were highly applauded. ESA (European Space Agency) grant for the AARSE-ESA Award and UNEP for funding African researchers participate to the conference were also appreciated. The deliberation by the AARSE President was immediately followed by the AARSE-ESA award and the citation of the Accra AARSE Declaration (see ANNEXII) including a call to everyone to attend the next AARSE Co-sponsored conferences: July IGARSS09 Conference in Cape Town, South Africa and October 2009 AFRICAGIS conference in Kampala, Uganda and the 87<sup>th</sup> AARSE Conference in UN\_ECA Headquarter, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in October 2010.

Mr. Jonathan Allotey, Executive Director, EPA-Ghana, in his closing ceremony thanked AARSE, ISPRS, exhibitors, co-sponsors of the conference, LOC and IOC. He promised to present the declaration to HIS Excellency Alhaji Alieu Mahama, The Vice President of Ghana who would subsequently distribute it through his good office to the African Union, UN-ECA and the NEPAD Secretariat in Ghana. With the vote of thanks to all, Mr. Jonathan Allotey declared the 20086 AARSE 7<sup>th</sup> Conference closed.

**Action:**

- The EC decided the conference communiqué to be released and sent with covering letter jointly signed by AARSE President and CERSGIS Chairman to the following organisations and individuals:
  1. Hon Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Ghana
  2. Hon Minister of Infrastructure, Ghana
  3. UN Economic Commission for Africa
  4. NEPAD
  5. African Union
  6. African Development Bank
  7. GEO Secretariat
  8. ISPRS
  9. ESA
  10. NASA
  11. Canadian Space Agency
  12. ICA
  13. African Government through AARSE National Point of Contact.

**Highlights:**

- AARSE is now incorporated under the Companies Act, 1973 (Act 61 of 1973), and that the Company is a company limited and is incorporated under section 21 of the South African act.
- Additional list to the Executive Council was Mr. Foster Mensah, confirmed as new Vice-President for Western Africa; Dr. Mohamed Mohamed, confirmed as Vice-President for Central Africa; Prof. Sias Mostert, confirmed for another term as Vice-President for Southern Africa; Prof. Harold Annegarn, confirmed as Treasurer of AARSE replacing Dr. Wilbur Ottichilo; and Dr. Elizabeth Zeil, confirmed as Editor of AARSE replacing Prof. Musisi Nkambwe. Dr. Mohamed Mohamed remains as Web Master of AARSE. Prof. Evelyn Embede's term as AARSE Vice-President for East Africa, terminated this years after eight years service. The position is left open until a suitable candidate is found.

- UN-ECA (Addis Ababa), Morocco and Cape Verde were put forward by AARSE EC to host the next AARSE Conference. The request from Dr. Linda Pereira for the Government of Cape Verde to host the next conference was incomplete and as a result no considered in the selection. *Dr. Andre Nonguierma (UN-ECA, Ethiopia)* and Prof. Kamal Labbassi (Morocco) both gave a compelling presentation on why their organization is best suited to host the next AARSE Conference. Upon their deliberations, the suggestion was put to the GA. By majority vote, **UN-ECA was awarded to host the 8<sup>th</sup> AARSE Conference in Addis Ababa in early October 2010**, while Morocco was honoured to organize the 9<sup>th</sup> AARSE Conference in 2012.
- The President of ISPRS, Prof Ian Dowman expressed his satisfaction for the strong collaboration between ISPRS and AARSE (a regional member of ISPRS), which was further demonstrated at the 7<sup>th</sup> conference through the joint ISPRS/GEO/AARSE sessions on Capacity building as well as the ISPRS/AARSE exhibition booth and session on **YOUTH FORUM**. ISPRS considers AARSE its primary partner in Africa. As in the past, they will jointly organize workshops and symposia in the continent in future. ISPRS has agreed to make free all ISPRS highlights distributed to AARSE members as well as accessibility to its documentation. ISPRS will assist and support AARSE in the international arena and it will join AARSE in the AFRICAGIS in Kampala, Uganda.
- IEEE involvement in the 7<sup>th</sup> AARSE Conference was very significant and direct. The **MOU between IEEE-GRSS and AARSE was signed** by the presidents of the respective organization in front of the Ghanaian and North American media. GRSS reiterate its commitments to working with AARSE in order to help realize the benefits of remote sensing science and technologies throughout Africa. Tony Milne made the invitation to AARSE to accept 100 free Associate Memberships to IEEE-GRSS. The primary benefit of these memberships is access to IEEE-GRSS publications and other resources. The University of Johannesburg, University of Cape Town, AARSE, NASA and Department of the Navy – Science & technology will host the IEEE-GRSS IGARSS 09 Cape Town Symposium from 13-17 July 2009. An average IEEE conference has around 3000 participants.
- **"Africa-Atlas of our changing environment"** distributed to all participants in the form of a CD and a book. The more than 300 pages Atlas was compiled by UNEP with contributions from AARSE, EIS-Africa, NASA, WRI, etc, and launched by Google Earth last month.