

Opening Ceremony of the 1st MESA Forum

Speech by H.E. Jean Claude de l'Estrac

Secretary General of the Indian Ocean Commission

31st August 2015- Crowne Plaza Hotel, Nairobi, Kenya

Hon. Prof. Jude Wakhungu, Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Water and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kenya

H.E. Maliim Mahboub, Executive Secretary of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD)

H.E. Mrs. Rhoda Peace Tumusiime, Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture of the African Union Commission (AUC)

Mrs. Anna BURYLO, Counsellor, Head of Cooperation of the European Union Delegation to the African Union

Representative of the Diplomatic Corp

Distinguish delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour and pleasure for the Indian Ocean Commission to be part of this event.

I would like firstly to convey my best wishes and thanks to the Government of Kenya for hosting this forum and for the warm welcome extended to all the delegates.

Excellences, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like at the offset to acknowledge that considerable effort has indeed been made in the development of Earth Observation technology in Africa. Most countries are now equipped with Earth Observation receiving stations and technical capacity has been built but should also be aware that that some countries are still facing difficulties to adopt and mainstream this technology into their decision making process and planning priorities. Others have infrastructural or management problems. I believe that our forum should endeavour to propose concrete solutions to address these difficulties. I think that we should pay more attention to the management issues. For instance I was in Comoros last week and I can confirm that the equipment installed is not being utilised because of lack of technical skills thus depriving local fishermen of very useful information although the project started well.

All the same have also been able to appreciate the potential of the Regional Implementation Centres that are gradually emerging as centres of excellence. I believe that more efforts should be made to encourage these regional institutions to help building the capacity of national institutions.

If Earth observation technology is to be fully optimised, it is crucial to examine the persistent short falls of the project and those of its predecessor in addressing the gaps that exist between technology development and its application at national level.

It is not disputed that accessing updated, reliable and relevant scientific data is a prerequisite for the formulation and implementation of efficient public policies on sustainable development.

However the facility available is not being exploited to their full potential partly because of management issues. The lack of dedicated personal to translate the scientific data to policy, skilled technicians to maintain the receiving stations, inadequate coordination mechanisms amongst institutions at national level, inadequate communication strategy to support the dissemination of the information. We should work more closely with the focal Ministry and strengthen the national networks of user institutions. This will encourage information sharing and efficient utilisation of resources to reach out to the targeted users of the products. Governments should also retain skilled and put in place incentives to encourage trained personal to remain on the job.

Capacity building should be expedited, on hand training, training of trainers as well as linkages with national universities should be promoted to allow countries to continuously build up their pool of expertise.

I also believe that the project management should be more proactive and provide the necessary technical support and guidance. The regional organisations should remain in their role as facilitators and oversee the proper implementation of the actions. I therefore call upon my colleagues from the regional organisations for us to be more vigilant and guide the program management team.

For us at the Indian Ocean Commission, we consider the ocean to be our new frontier of sustainable development, growth and employment. MESA is crucial for ocean policy formulation and decision making process.

The application of earth observation data had been integrated into the Indian Ocean Commission's climate change strategy and in its disaster reduction programme. A pilot project has been undertaken for fisheries monitoring and surveillance action plan. Focus is now towards the integration of AMESD and MESA products in the regional fisheries strategy. We are looking forward for governments to fully integrate the MESA products and services into their national planning processes and action plans and also participate fully in providing solution to administrative bottlenecks.

Let me conclude, by expressing our appreciation to the African Union Commission, the organising committee, as well as to the European Union for the continuous support to development in Africa. I will pay close attention to the deliberations and outcome of the forum.

I thank you