Earth Observation in support of Official Development Assistance (ODA)

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Background

Official Development Assistance (ODA) is a complex and rapidly changing international system covering a range of aid mechanisms from the developed to developing countries. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an action plan to take the bold and transformative steps that are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path. It is supported at the highest political level and will drive the ODA priorities over the next few decades.

Many significant developments and changes are taking place in Earth Observation that are bringing this technology from scientific use, to a level where it can be used as an operational source of environmental information in a wide range of (non-specialist) domains. In addition, political, public and scientific interest is growing to make better environmental decision-making through the use of EO to address the grand societal challenges that the world is increasingly facing, as manifest through initiatives such as the Group on Earth Observations (GEO).

Over the last decade, a number of CEOS agencies have started individual initiatives to demonstrate the capabilities and use of EO in the field of development aid with varied stakeholders. These include the International Financing Institutions/Multi-lateral Development Banks (IFIs/MDBs), national aid ministries/departments, aid agencies/organisations and a range of local government organisations in the developing countries as aid recipients.

Through this work, the benefits that EO can bring to ODA operations are beginning to emerge and are summarised as:

- EO can *increase efficiencies in existing operations* through better use of resources (economic, manpower, time) with a globally consistent approach to implement and monitor activities,
- EO can *improve definition of future operations* through more informed development planning and methodologies,
- EO can *extend capabilities* by supporting policy formulation to allow environmental analysis in a way that is not possible by other means (e.g. impact of Climate Change).
- EO can promote *better transparency, responsibility and accountability* through the use of open data.

Way Forward

Recognising this background and previous achievements, the CEOS agencies underline their joint commitment to develop a coherent strategy and approach to promote and expand the use of EO in the domain of ODA, to support activities being carried out in a socially responsible and environmentally sustainable manner. CEOS shall also develop a coherent approach and interface with GEO regarding Development Aid.

The CEOS agencies shall collectively share information and experiences to identify the key issues and actions needed to grow the use of EO in the development aid sector. Areas to be addressed include:

- ***Awareness*** : develop better understanding what EO can deliver through a range of material that is specifically designed and adapted to the needs and language of the development aid community,
- ***Acceptance*** : co-develop (with IFIs/MDBs and Client States) accepted methodologies & best-practice guidelines for the use of EO in ODA working practices (e.g. Monitoring & Evaluation, Environmental Safeguards policies),
- ***Use*** : ensure availability of data sets/tools together with capacity-building and training to ensure that practitioners (IFI/MDB staff and government departments in the Client States) understand how to use EO information easily in their operational activities.

The role of CEOS shall be aimed at the level of overall message & strategy on the use of EO, sharing of information and experiences. More targeted, specific initiatives and activities should continue to be carried out individual space agencies.