

Opening of the 4th Tiger Workshop
Speech by Mrs Lindiwe Hendricks, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
University of the Western Cape, Bellville, Cape Town
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Chairperson of the Technical Advisory Committee of AMCOW, Dr Henry Ntale
Rector of the University of the Western Cape, Prof Brian O' Connell
All honoured guests present here today
Ladies and gentlemen

It is a great honour and a great pleasure for me to preside over the official opening of this important workshop. On behalf of the Government and people of South Africa I would like to extend our welcome to all of you, particularly the international participants present here today. I hope your stay in Cape Town is both productive and enjoyable.

The requirements for good health, economic development and growth, poverty eradication, and national empowerment are some of the pressing challenges faced by this continent, to which availability of adequate supply of water that is fit for use is crucial.

The 2006 United Nations Human Development Report that was released two weeks ago in Cape Town looks at that very issue and the challenges arising from lack of access to water. In its opening comments the report states that the water crisis facing the globe is not as a result of scarcity, it argues that the crisis is a result of poverty, power and inequality.

The report states that 1.2 billion people across the globe are without access to safe water, that high infant mortality rates are directly attributed to lack of access to safe water – with up to 1.8 million child deaths being directly related to unclean water, and the impact that water borne diseases have on perpetuating poverty and holding back economic growth.

The report goes on to argue that it is the wealthy both between countries and within countries, that have access to water and “scarcity is manufactured through political processes and institutions that disadvantage the poor. When it comes to clean water, the pattern in many countries is that the poor get less, pay more and bear the brunt of the human development costs associated with scarcity.” And it goes on to argue that providing water and sanitation is to give people dignity and offer them the opportunity “to lead a healthy, dignified and productive life.”

This Human Development Report further notes that the levels of technology today allow us to travel to Jupiter to explore the possibilities of life being able to exist on that planet, where on our own planet there is still so much suffering.

However, it is this very technology that can provide some of the solutions to the water challenges that face us. Without appropriate tools, skills, as well as accurate and reliable information to support and inform decision making processes, being able to adequately address the water challenges that face us will remain a pie in the sky. Dysfunctional information systems or systems that are in a state of disrepair, also limit informed decision making processes. It is therefore logical for all of us to take advantage of various initiatives that are aimed at addressing some of these needs.

The TIGER Initiative as most of you may recall, was first conceptualised at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002; and it was primarily aimed at assisting African countries to improve their deficiencies and limitation in the collection, analysis and dissemination of water related geo-information by exploiting the advantages of Earth Observation (EO) technology. We should also remember that evolution of TIGER was a result of contributions by various partners such as the European Space Agency, the Canadian Space Agency, the Committee of Earth Observation Satellite (CEOS), UNESCO, UN Africa-Water Group, African Ministers Council on Water (AMCOW), the African Development Bank, other African organisations and the South African Department of Water Affairs and Forestry. Such a collaborative approach is indeed commendable.

Workshops have since been held on how best to take the initiative forward in terms of institutional arrangements, stakeholder consultations and other preparatory activities. In 2004 a 10-year Strategic Plan was drawn up, setting a long-term framework to engage the African user community and donor agencies in a process that made this initiative a concrete step forward towards achieving the aims of the WSSD. This framework required a Steering Committee be set up to drive the process.

Concurrent to these workshops a consultation process was also undertaken with various stakeholders including water authorities and technical centres to better understand the specific institutional, technical, economic and social needs of the water sector in Africa. That needs-gathering phase was quite useful in determining the direction and events that followed.

To demonstrate the effectiveness and value of TIGER, water related projects were awarded to African scientists whereby earth observation satellite data were provided by space agencies and the CSIR for use in practical projects that address local issues. I believe that showing the practical relevance of this geo-information was an excellent way to pilot TIGER and I have been informed that the results of some of the projects will be presented during the next two days.

Ongoing capacity building in the use of tools for access, analysis, dissemination and application of information products in the resolution of water resource management challenges should not be underestimated. It is stated in the TIGER Strategic Plan that one of the aims of the project is to ensure that technical centres in Africa acquire skills and capabilities to derive and disseminate space-based water information to water authorities and other stakeholders; the desired goal here is to achieve self-reliance in this field by building capacity.

We must therefore congratulate the European Space Agency, UNESCO, and other international partners for their response to this need by having an initiative to address the information gap. It is also gratifying that African countries have bought into the concept and have undertaken to be fully part of the process; however, we need to continue mobilising for more intensive involvement of African countries in this initiative.

Chairperson, it is indeed commendable that more than 50 geo-information related projects have been awarded to various researchers throughout Africa involving more than 150 African organisations, and it is important that these research outcomes address broader national and continental challenges that Africa faces today. This Workshop will need to ensure that the integration of research into addressing our challenges does take place.

The collaboration among various role players in both the public and private sectors to ensure access to information by African countries in support of sustainable and integrated management of water resources is acknowledged and appreciated. Endorsement of this initiative by AMCOW at the recommendation of the Technical Advisory Committee earlier this year means that African Ministers of Water will champion and support this process by creating enabling environment within which TIGER can optimally operate. It is important that this initiative should also support broader objectives of the African Union and NEPAD.

Ladies and Gentlemen, now is the best time for other international partners and space agencies to come on board in support of TIGER. Everyone has a role to play regardless of whether he or she is from Government, civil society, research, corporate sector to pitch in and assist in the best way they can to promote, and advance this initiative one way or the other. Links to related initiatives is also important to ensure synergies, better co-ordination and most importantly optimal utilisation of limited resources

For instance South Africa's new Space Agency whose establishment was approved in July 2006 and which is geared to be launched next year in May should have some links to TIGER since their objectives are similar. Perhaps the CSIR Satellite Application Centre could play a role in ensuring that the two initiatives talk to one another since it provides tracking and control services for satellites and support a wide variety of satellite applications to South Africa, while also being a partner in TIGER.

There could also be links to the following ongoing initiatives:

- The Group on Earth Observations (GEO), which has representation of 47 countries with its main function being the co-ordination of strategies and systems for Earth Observations and identification of measures to minimise data gaps.
- The South African Environmental Observation Network (SAEON), which is an information management network that establishes research and education platform for long-term studies of the ecosystem that also enhances our ability to detect, predict, and react to environmental change.
- The South African Earth Observation Strategy (SAEOS) also has excellent potential for collaboration with TIGER. SAEOS is an interdepartmental initiative whose objective is to harness the Earth Observations in South Africa in support of policy and decision-making for sustainable development and making information available to broad spectrum of users.

Chair, the argument that drier countries need to manage their water resources more optimally to ensure sustainable use is relevant, particularly in Southern Africa. And achieving sustainable use of water requires the provision of reliable and accurate information in terms of both coverage and integrity. Through TIGER and its collaboration with these initiatives we look forward to this information being provided in a cost-effective manner.

Whilst we implement TIGER and develop world class technical skills in African countries on the collection, analysis and use of water related geo-information through earth observation technology, it is important that we recognise the 'digital divide' and that countries and organisations on our continent do not even have the basic equipment and resources such as computers, nor do they have the necessary communication systems to participate in such a project. We must ensure that they also receive attention.

Chairperson, in conclusion allow me to quote what the United Nations Secretary General, Mr Kofi Annan, said when he officially opened the Third United Nations Conference on Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Space in July 1999 in Vienna, Austria. He said: "*Outer space does not only stir the soul; it also has great practical implications for the lives of people everywhere.*" At the same conference the Algerian Ambassador to the United Nations, Mokhtar Reguieg, said: "*Space technology and techniques are crucial for the socio-economic development of countries.*"

Ladies and Gentlemen, space information can effectively be used for management of resources upon which our livelihood depend. I hope the deliberations and discussions during the next two days are fruitful and take Africa to the next level by contributing to the socio-economic development of our continent.

I now declare this workshop officially open.

I thank you.