

58TH SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL COMMITTEE (STSC)

SOUTH AFRICA

COMMENTS AGENDA ITEM 15

SPACE AND GLOBAL HEALTH

Delivered by

DSI

Madam Chair,

My delegation is pleased to present a brief statement on this agenda item. The South African National Space Agency (SANSA); is supporting the National Department of Small Business Development (NDSBD), Department of Human Settlements (NDHS), and the National Disaster Management Centre (NDMC) by providing Earth observation data and decision support tools to help fast track delivery of services required during the COVID-19 pandemic, and has increased the uptake of geospatial technologies by government.

The use of up-to-date human settlement data has supported the NDHS in identifying informal settlements, which require shelter to ensure social distancing. Mapping of wholesalers and spaza shops (also known as tuck shops) assisted the DSBD in fast tracking the delivery of the national Spaza Shop Support Programme, (food assistance programme) ensuring that qualifying spaza shop owners have access to seed funding and bulk buying of essential items at discounted price during lockdown periods. This reduced travel times to the retail centres by spaza shops owners and communities during lockdown, hence, reduced the risk of spreading the virus.

Madam Chair

The South African Group on Earth Observations (SA-GEO) is a vehicle established to coordinate South Africa's Earth Observation (EO) activities, encourage collaboration and sharing of EO data, products and services in order to promote the benefits of EO in South

Africa. As part of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, the AfriGEO Secretariat, with support from South Africa and the AfriGEO Community established the AfriGEO COVID-19 Working Group to share experiences, data and information on the use of EO to support planning and decision-making in response to COVID-19 pandemic. The WG provides a platform to assist countries that do not have capacity to access tools, datasets and information as well as promotion of open and free access of these fundamental datasets. Some of the work done included identification of free and open EO data and demographic datasets to map vulnerable areas as well as assisting AfriGEO Member States in monitoring the spread of COVID-19.

In addition, the WG promoted modelling of scenarios and projection of COVID-19 cases based on facilities and resources available, and population densities and the use of human settlement layers to identify the vulnerable communities. South Africa and the AfriGEO Secretariat hosted and co-chaired the virtual COVID-19 workshop to showcase the use of Earth observations in supporting decision making during and after the COVID 19 pandemic and create awareness of the working group engagements to rest of the AfriGEO community.

Madam Chair

According to the World Health Organisation, exposure to mercury, even in small amounts, may cause serious health problems, and is a threat to the development of the child in utero and early in life. Mercury may have toxic effects on the nervous, digestive and immune systems, and on lungs, kidneys, skin and eyes. Mercury exposure is a major public health concern, and people are mainly exposed to methylmercury, an organic compound, when they eat fish and shellfish that contain the compound.

The South African Mercury Network project is making history in South Africa and on the African continent by establishing new ground base monitoring stations for mercury observations. Mercury speciation measurements will be conducted at the Cape Point

Global Atmosphere Watch station, further enhancing the station's long-term mercury data set.

With those brief words, I thank you for your kind attention.