#TheEarthTalks

GEO WEEK 2023 MINISTERIAL SUMMIT

10 NOVEMBER 2023 / CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

FIRST GEO YOUTH DECLARATION

We, the GEO Youth[1], are honoured to present the first ever GEO Youth Declaration to the GEO Ministerial Summit.

The Earth is no longer whispering but screaming!

Our planet and humanity are threatened by the dire impacts of climate change such as frequent extreme weather events, social injustice, food insecurity, loss of biodiversity and economic regression. These impacts are observed distinctly across different regions and are expected to worsen in the coming decades if significant mitigation and adaptation measures are not implemented.

Why should you care? We are facing severe global challenges that threaten human livelihood, biodiversity, and the Earth at large, yet, Earth observation (EO) capabilities are not utilized extensively, especially in developing countries where they are scarce and dispersed. This is unfortunate given that young people make up a growing segment of the global population pyramid. Furthermore, current estimates predict that at least 50% of Youth in Africa will be unemployed and economically inactive by 2025[2]. Importantly, young people and EO data are two assets that are not fully harnessed yet. With the necessary skills and resources, we can play a key role in tackling climate change. EO capabilities have proven instrumental by providing early warning systems during extreme weather events and have contributed to food security through agricultural monitoring.

1 Youth/Young people are used interchangeably to refer to ages 18-35.
2 Source: African Development Bank

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We therefore call upon you, GEO members and delegates, to harness these two invaluable assets, while creating platforms that will enable all of us, with the youth as the drivers of the future, to explore sustainable approaches in producing and using EO data, and to provide innovative solutions that will result in creating employment opportunities.

In today's rapidly advancing world, we have identified several challenges that hinder our ability to maximise the full potential of youth and Earth observation data.

There are limited specialized skills among young people, hindering the production and application of high resolution and localized EO data and effective participation in the global economy. Furthermore, there are limitations in the process of skills and technology transfer, and retention, which amplifies the gap between knowledge acquisition and practical application. In some cases, one finds a disconnection between industry and academic institutions in terms of the required skills and knowledge. Not all academic programs offer comprehensive and specialized Earth observation programmes that cater to the specific industry needs, practical experience, and exposure to industry practices.

Young people's voices are not always heard in the EO community, especially in decision and policy making committees. This impedes the inclusion of fresh innovative and creative ideas. Inactive youth participation also limits succession planning, raising concerns about future leadership, skills development, and knowledge transfer.
These challenges persist due to a lack of resources, such as high-resolution data, infrastructure (including software and hardware) and effective data sharing mechanisms. Too often, projects operate in isolation, failing to engage with communities or potential partners from other sectors or disciplines and failing to communicate the benefits of EO.

There are broader global challenges that need to be addressed, such as a limited understanding of environmental, socio-political and health challenges. Indigenous Knowledge Systems are not always comprehensively integrated in addressing societal challenges. Hence, there is a significant digital gap between the indigenous and scientific community, which tempers with community ownership and action on mitigation and adaption strategies.

Finally, while we support GEO's mission and its post-2025 strategy, the funding mechanisms for the development of transformative programs that foster youth engagement for capacity building are not sufficient.

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To tackle these challenges, we call on GEO members to work together with the Youth to explore the following solutions:

- To empower youth through exposure to the global EO network through improved access to resources and increased capacity building.
- To bridge the gap through stronger collaboration between academia, private and government organizations, including the establishment of partnerships, and joint research projects.
- To develop global, competitive, sustainable, and future-centric EO products that can be employed as decision support tools that inform policy making for adaptive and mitigative strategies in different scales and regions.
- To establish multilateral mechanisms to make high resolution data accessible.
- To catalyze innovation and entrepreneurship to facilitate the commercialization of solutions, ensuring sustainability in the EO sector while generating revenue capabilities.
- To effectively communicate science using less technical/scientific language and use social media platforms creatively to maximize the audience reached.
- To comprehensively include Indigenous Knowledge Systems.
- To provide financial investment.
- To develop systematic youth engagement platforms, such as communities of practice, leveraging existing youth networks within GEO.

To this end we call upon GEO and delegates to:

- Foster engagement among these diverse stakeholders, bringing together knowledge, expertise, and resources.
- Give youth a seat at the table through Youth Member State positions in GEO governance and committees.
- Develop targets and a costed implementation plan for the post-2025 strategy.

Through joint endeavours, we can harness the full potential of Youth and EO data to foster sustainable development, informed decision-making, and a deeper understanding of our planet's intricacies.

In the echoes of the Earth's scream, lies the imperative for collective responsibility.

GEO GROUP ON EARTH OBSERVATIONS