Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs

New York, 5-6 June 2018

Meeting Summary for side event "Earth Observations for achieving the SDGs"

Conference Room 2, New York, **5 June 2018, 1:15-14:30**

1. Objective of the side event

   The objective of the side event was to tangibly show, through showcasing of European funded projects for research, how Earth observations contribute to achieving the SDGs – in particular, SDGs 2, 3, 5 and 13. As a consequence, to incite discussion around this theme and promote further integration of Earth observations in Member states' reporting in view of the UN HLPF, in July.

2. Organizers & Participation

   The European Commission, with support from the EU Delegation to UN, hosted the side event. The event was moderated by Jack Metthey, Director in the department of research and innovation of the European Commission, and the presenters included the Joint Research Centre (European Commission) and project representatives from the following EU funded research projects: Ecopotential and satellite-based wetland observation services (SWOS).

3. Major issues discussed in the session (in bullet form)

   - Earth observations (EO) offer an unparalleled vantage point in assessing long-term trends in changing terrestrial and maritime eco-systems, due to adverse impacts of climate change (examples of maps showing disappearing lakes in Afghanistan from the Global Water Surface Explorer Tool of the Joint Research Centre and SWOS).
   - EO contributes to make predictions or modelling for better evidence-based decision-making that are affecting local livelihoods, i.e. better planning for transport/road infrastructure and implications for goods delivery.
   - EO contributes to demonstrating the cost-effectiveness of land restoration programmes, example from Ecopotential using FAO's land cover classification system and comparisons with environmental variables.
   - EO can also help to model where imminent health risks may occur, for example, because of droughts (potential negative effects on farming and therefore famine alert) or in relation to malaria because of flooding in densely populated areas (use of data on human settlements layer).
   - Not only the research behind EO but, crucially, also dissemination of these results should be at the heart of policy-making and objectives of other projects in this field. The European Union (EU), with its Copernicus programme (data free of charge), leads the way on this.

4. Main outcome / Key recommendations for action (in bullet form)

   - More investments needed in integrating EO in official statistics of Member states, especially with a view to have further integration in developing countries.
   - Making data from EO actionable, i.e. learning what the maps and geospatial information is actually telling you. Therefore, more training on analysis and interpretation of data.
   - Importance of inter-disciplinary research to strengthen the analyses based on EO data.
   - Making data free of charge, i.e. learning from the Copernicus programme of the EU.
   - Bringing the scientific community and policy-makers closer together to cover the lack of data for SDG implementation.