



GIRAF 2009 - Taking action on geoscience information across Africa

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A workshop in Windhoek

Between 16 and 20 March 2009 97 participants from 26 African nations, plus four European countries, and representatives from UNESCO, ICSU and IUGS-CGI, held a workshop at the Namibian Geological Survey in Windhoek. The workshop – GIRAF 2009 – Geoscience InfoRmation In Africa – was organised by the Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources (BGR) and the Geological Survey of Namibia (GSN) at the Namibian Ministry for Mines and Energy and was mainly financed by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), supported by the IUGS Commission for the Management and Application of Geoscience Information (CGI). The participants came to Namibia to discuss one of the most topical issues in the geological domain – geoscience information and informatics. A prime objective was to set up a pan-African network for exchanging knowledge about geoscience information. GIRAF 2009 builds on the results of a preparatory workshop organised by the CGI and funded by the IUGS, which was held in June 2006 in Maputo at the 21st Colloquium on African Geology – CAG21. This preparatory workshop concentrated on identifying general problems and needs of African geological institutions in discussion with representatives of African geological surveys, universities, private companies and non-governmental organisations. The GIRAF 2009 workshop used the results of this discussion to plan and design its programme

Aims

In detail the five aims of the GIRAF2009 workshop were: to bring together relevant African authorities, national experts and stakeholders in geoscience information; to initiate the building of a pan-African geoscience information knowledge network to exchange and share geoscience information knowledge and best practice; to integrate the authorities, national experts and experts across Africa into global geoinformation initiatives; to develop a strategic plan for Africa's future in geoscience information; to make Africa a more active part of the international geoscience information community. The programme for the GIRAF 2009 workshop was designed to explore each of these aspects to improve the way geoscience information contributes to improve the health and prosperity of the people in Africa.

The Programme

The aim of the week was to better understand the reality of the status of geoscience information management, delivery, and systems from the perspective of the practitioners across Africa. To do that, in addition to VIP welcome speeches and presentations from across the continent, the programme included two sets of breakout sessions allowing more detailed discussion of specific issues, and each day, a novel "Question of the day", where individual feedback was sought on three pointed questions. These exercises ensured that everyone was able to contribute their views and experiences.

The conclusion – a 15 point GIRAF 2009 Strategy and Agreement

The results were intense discussion of the issues which the participants felt were key to developing and improving the way geoscience information could be managed and delivered in Africa. The very tangible outcome of a hardworking but fruitful week was the unanimous endorsement of a series of fifteen practical recommendations – the GIRAF Strategy and Agreement. Our week together provided new and valuable experience and new contacts, networks and friendships and most importantly the base for a sustainable initiative to improve the way geoscience information will be managed and delivered in Africa.

We now look forward and are working on to taking those important recommendations forward.