

## Africa Earth Observation Challenge - Commemorating a Decade of Empowering African Space Start-ups

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science, technology  
& innovation

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NATIONAL EARTH OBSERVATIONS  
AND SPACE SECRETARIAT



Touching lives through innovation

## PLENARY 2

### PRESENTATION DESCRIPTION

- This presentation reflects on a decade of the Africa Earth Observation Challenge, charting its growth from a national, South African, initiative to a leading pan-African platform.
- It will showcase the programme's impact, success stories, and contributions to Africa's EO innovation ecosystem.
- Looking ahead, it will outline the vision for AEOC 2025 and beyond, inviting stakeholders to help shape the next chapter of EO innovation in Africa.

### Africa EO Challenge as a Platform for Innovation & Collaboration



Mr. Maheen Parbhoo

Senior Analyst at RIIS and Project Manager for the Africa Earth Observation Challenge (AEOC)

## AEOC: A Platform Turning Space Data into Real-World Solutions



### WHAT IS THE AEOC?

An annual open innovation competition that aims to select African entrepreneurs utilising space technologies, equip them with business development training, pitch preparation, and incubation support to help grow their businesses.



### AEOC FOCUS AREAS

**Thematic challenge tracks are aligned with continental priorities, such as:**

- Agriculture
- Urban/Rural Planning
- Climate Change
- Environmental Monitoring
- Disaster Risk Management
- Health Services



### WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

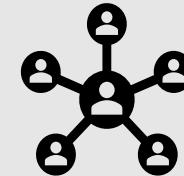
We are looking for:

- Business at pre-seed/seed stage (TRL 7-9 & BRL 1-3)
- Applying space-based data in their business models.
- Business must be Africa-based



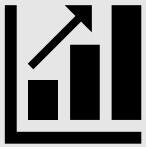
### BENEFITS TO STARTUPS

Winners will receive up to \$10,000 in cash prizes, data packages, business and IP support, media publicity, technical assistance, and access to incubation and mentorship.



### PARTNER CONTRIBUTIONS

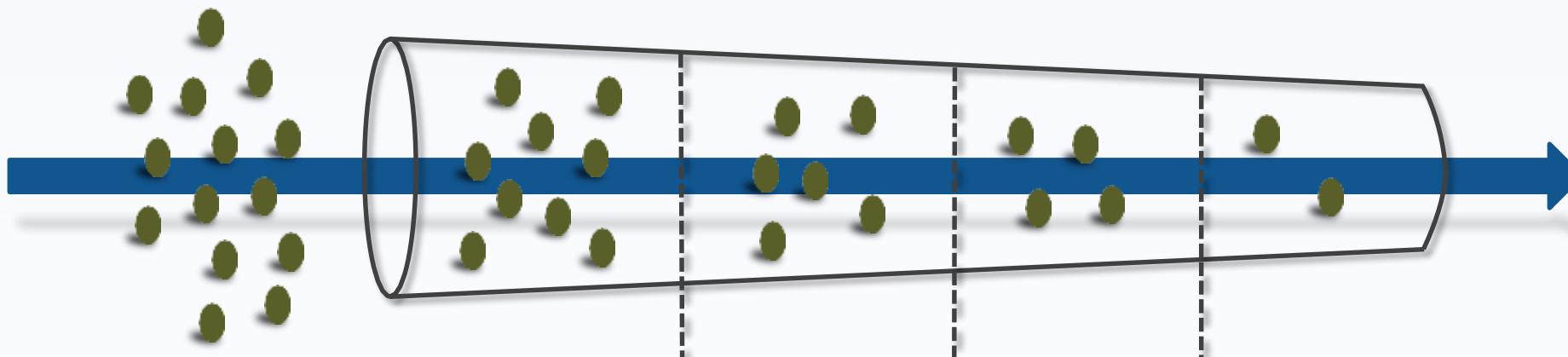
Partners contribute to a collaborative and inclusive programme through mentoring, finalist selection, prize support, and funding, with involvement from space agencies, data platforms, and private sector players across Africa and globally.



### GROWTH, IMPACT AND REACH

Since its inception in 2015, the AEOC has engaged with over 300 startups and 40 delivery partners., making it a leading platform for space entrepreneurial development on the continent.

## The Origins: An Open Innovation Process Sparked New EO Ventures



### Open market → OI Challenge → Validation → Pitching → Support

Many companies are exploring opportunities in the EO space; neither SANSA/ADS nor the private sector are aware of each others' activities

An Open Innovation process facilitated the introduction of SANSA/ADS to 29 potential industry entrants

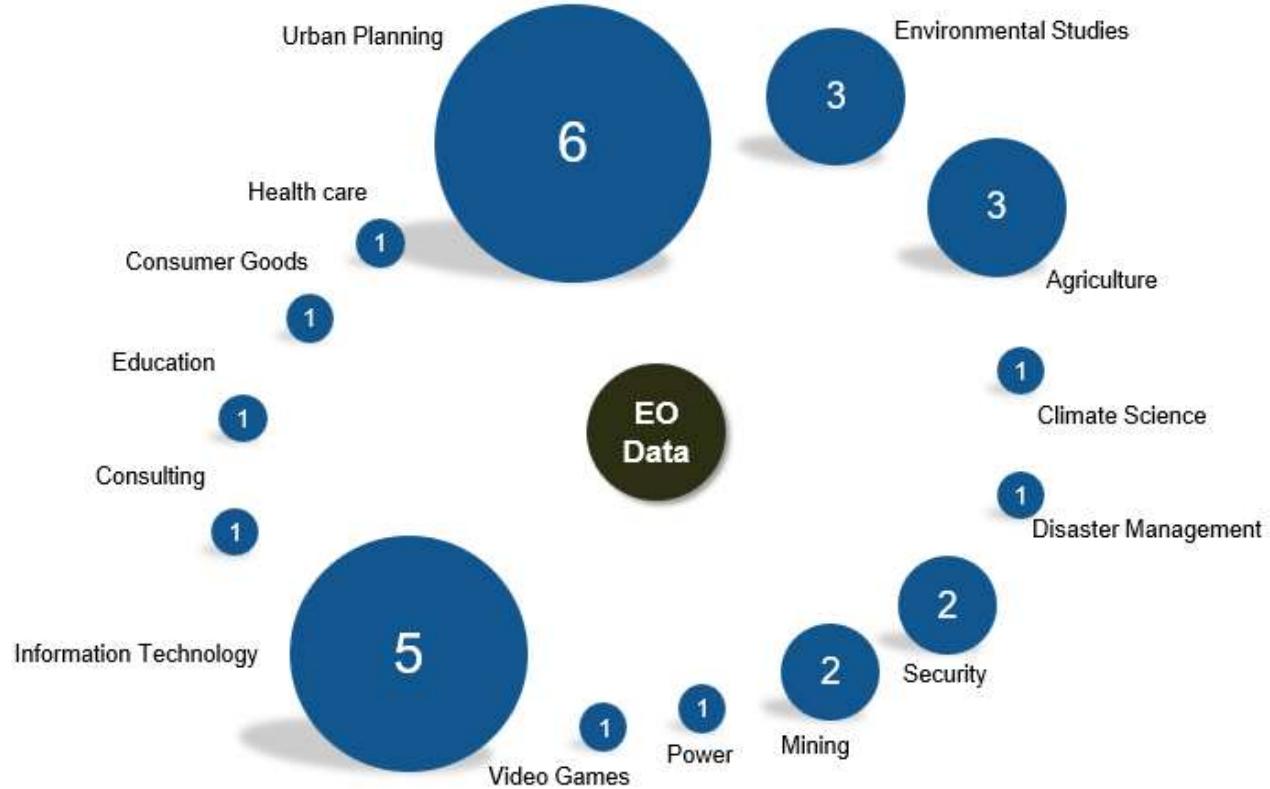
A structured support process assists entrants to validate their ideas – and hence discard non-viable options

New ventures pitch their ideas through a World Café to potential investors, customers and stakeholders

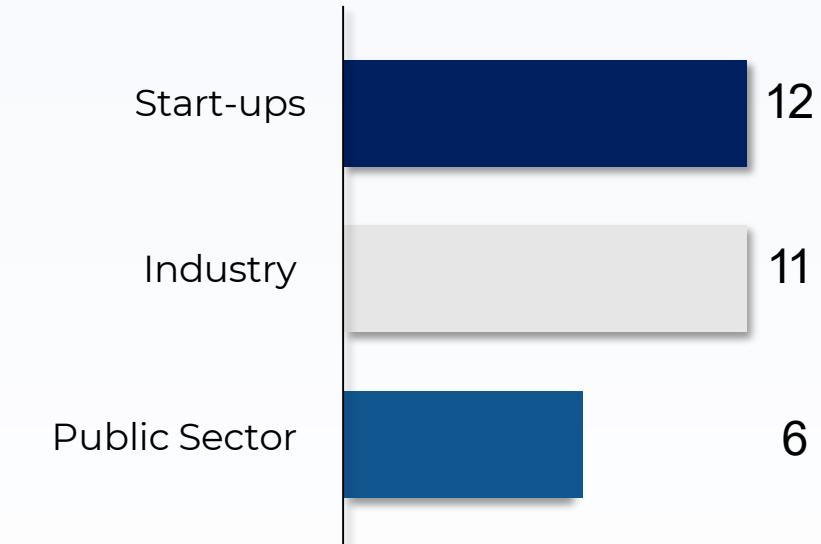
Financial and non-financial support is given to selected new ventures to facilitate market success



## Youth and Start-ups Drove Early Participation



Breakdown of respondents by type of organisation



- Large industry players represented around **40% of submissions** – generally large firms wishing to create new products and services
- **SMMEs** and individuals formed the **remaining 40% of submissions** – true 'start-ups'
- Large contingent of 'youth' submissions (**i.e. <35 years old**)

## Workshops and Mentorship Prepared Startups for Investment



### Business Development Workshop (Nov 2018, RIIS @ Tshimologong)



### Matchmaking Event (Dec 2018, Wanderers Clubhouse)



- Tools presented: **Business Model Canvas, Value Proposition Canvas, Customer Journey**
- Pitching & investor readiness coaching
- Guest angel investor Abu Cassim (JoziAngels)

- **46 stakeholders** (investors, govt, academia, private/public sector, media)
- **12 finalists** pitched solutions → Top 5 selected
- Winners: **90-day access to DigitalGlobe** GBDX & open EO datasets (Landsat, Sentinel)
- **Funding opportunities** via TIA

## Virtual Delivery Turned AEOC into a Truly Pan-African Platform

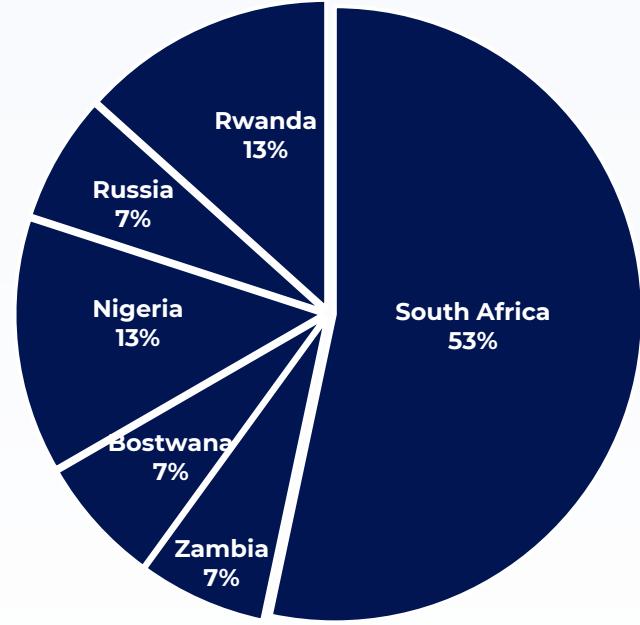


- COVID-19 required shifting support mechanisms to virtual delivery.
- This allowed for the EO challenge to become a **Pan-African** initiative
- Virtual training connected finalists across Africa at no cost to participants.
- This approach **expanded reach, reduced costs**, and proved effective for future **continent-wide initiatives**.

**A robust evaluation criteria was developed:**

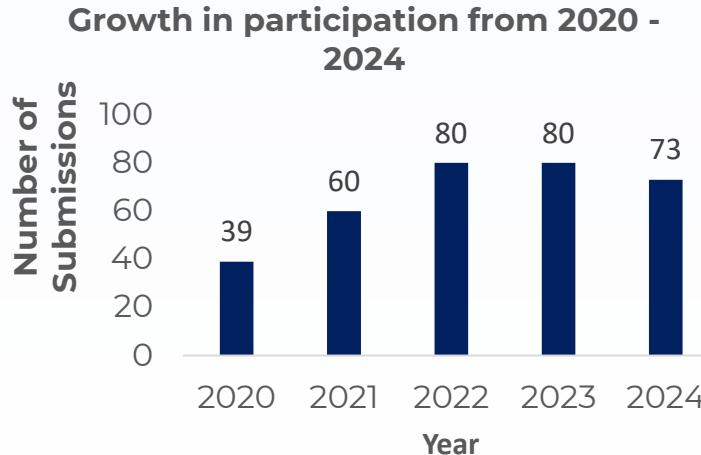
- ✓ **Solution uses Earth Observation Data in an innovative manner**
- ✓ **Contribution to the relevant industry**
- ✓ **Ease and sustainability of implementation, with all possible impacts considered.**
- ✓ **Feasibility of solution**
- ✓ **Viability of solution**
- ✓ **Team capability and intent**

### LOCATION OF FINALISTS

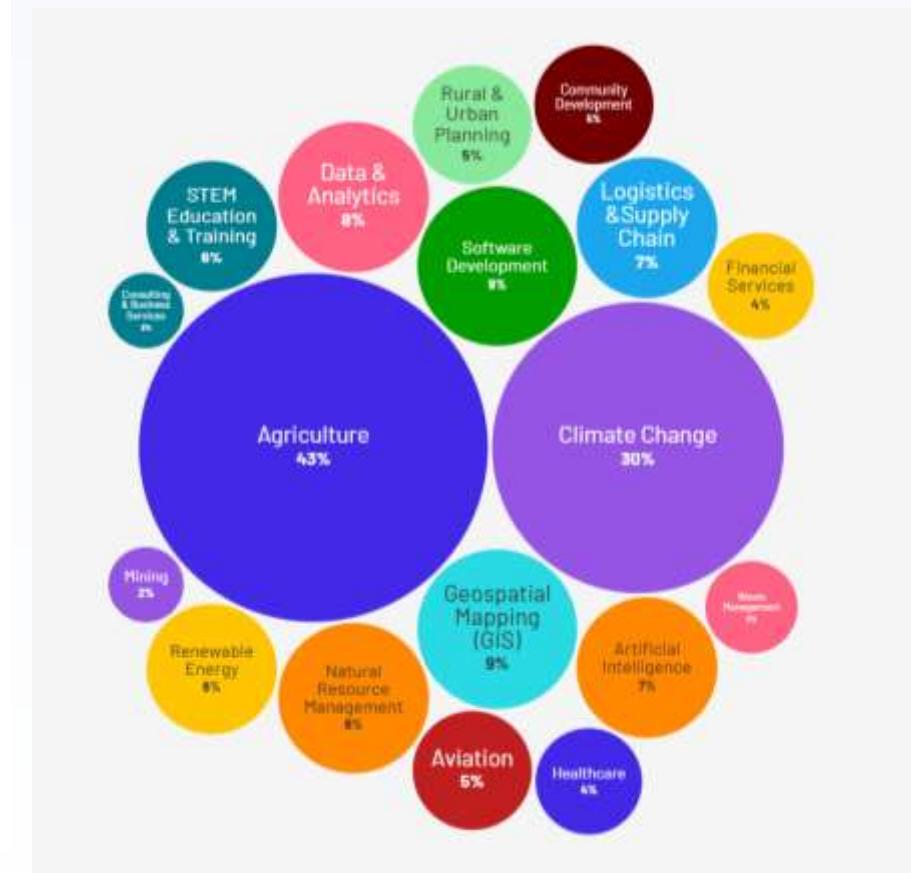


Total of **39 submissions** from across Africa,  
with **15 finalists selected**

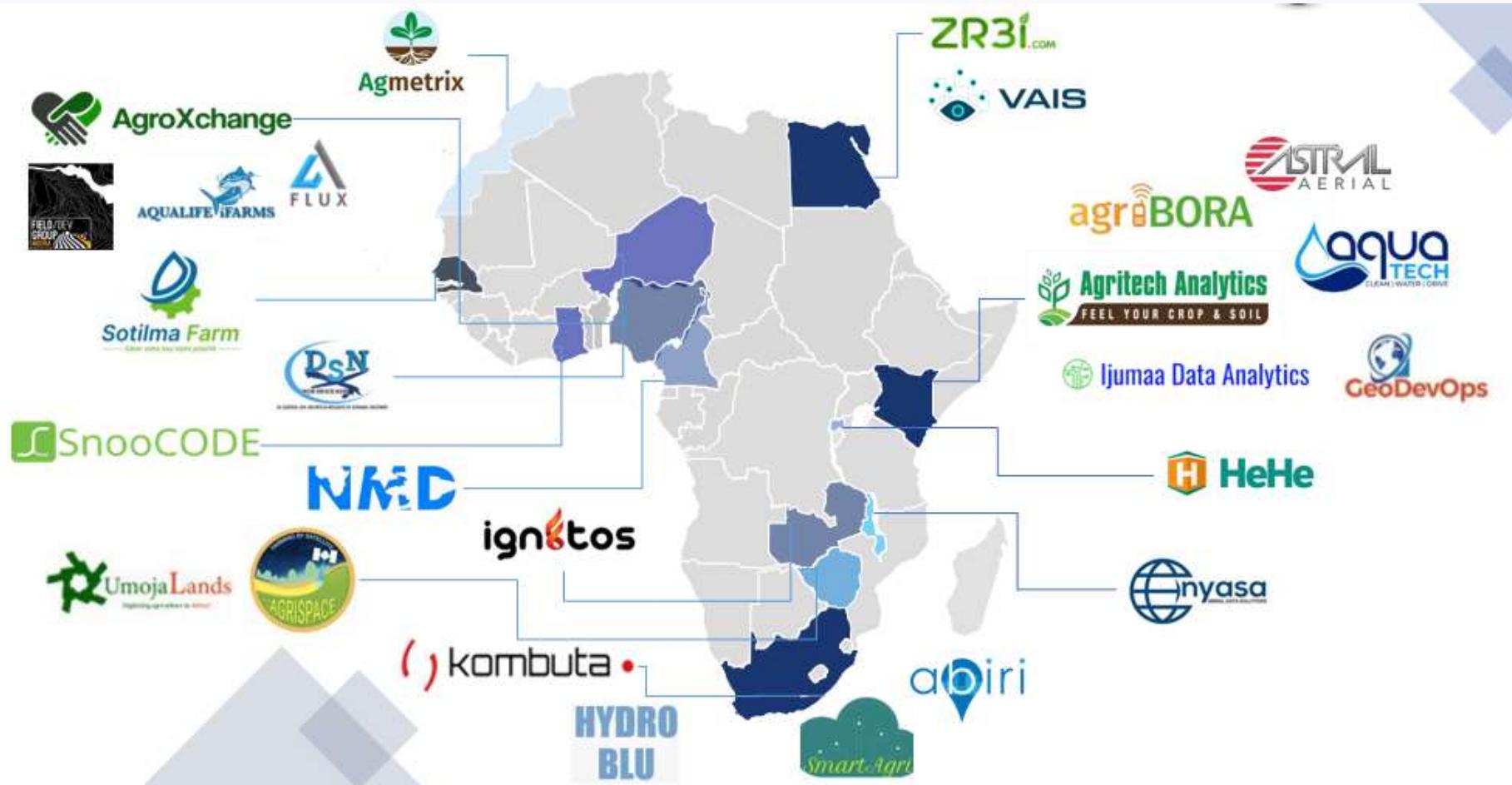
## Building a Stronger Ecosystem for Space Innovation



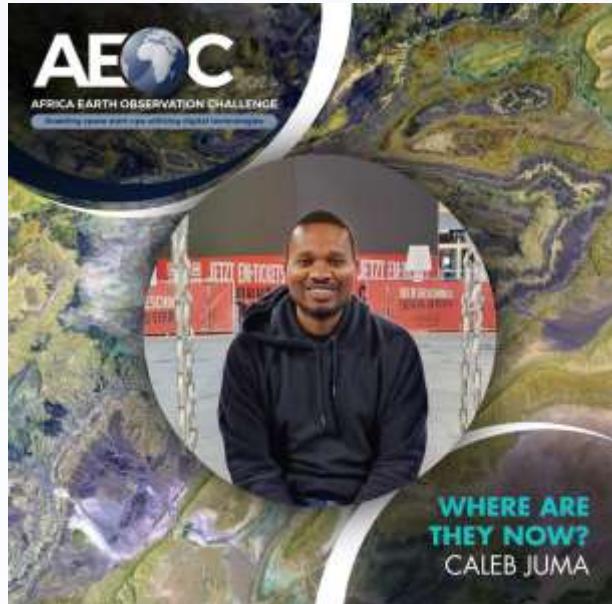
Geographical Representation of Shortlisted Candidates  
2020 - 2024



## AEOC Finalists Demonstrate Solutions Across the Continent



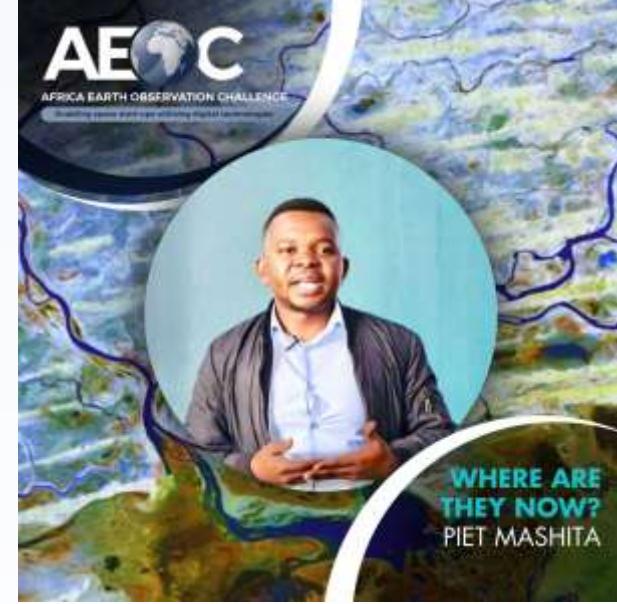
## Startups Emerge Stronger, Validated, and Investment-Ready



... "after the [AEOC] business mentorship and a lot of soul searching, we pivoted into a wider consultation business in the environmental space..."



*"Being a finalist in this competition was not just about recognition, it was a validation of our vision and the hard work we've put into pushing the boundaries of what's possible in the African tech space."*



*... "we have managed to attract an angel investor to our company and developed our prototype (hardware) of a livestock tracking device - which is now in the field-testing phase. We have employed three more people and have better customer relations."*

## AEOC Connects African Innovators with Global Partners

**17+ countries on the African continent and international space players with an interest in Africa's space innovation ecosystem.**

2015-2020



2021



2022



2023



2024



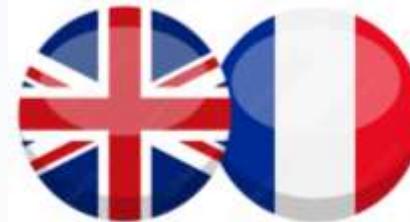
## Key Milestones: Expanding Reach, Diversity, and Partnerships Across Africa

### 2022 & 2024 AEOC finale in Kenya



Hosted **the final pitching event** for the **first time outside of South Africa**, in Nairobi, Kenya

### 2023 Expanding the AEOC into Francophone Africa



Accepted applications in **French** for the first with more targeted PR and comms through our **Francophone partners**

Most diverse cohort of finalists on the AEOC with **10 finalists** hailing from **9 different African countries** (5 of which were French Speaking)

### 2025 Engaging more partners through activation events



More intentional partner engagements through **multiple activation events** (above: AEOC launch **attended by 100+ stakeholders**).

## Scaling Through Hubs, Partnerships, and Sustainable Funding

**AEOC's 2025 and Beyond Vision** is anchored in a sustainability model built on:

### Long-term funding mechanisms

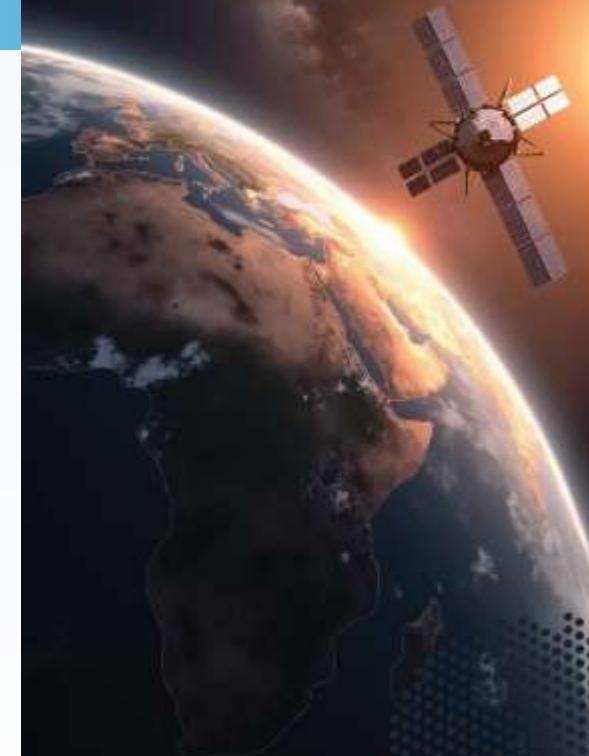
- Public-private partnerships
- AEOC Space Innovation Fund

### Ecosystem ownership

- Co-created with African institutions
- Local innovation hubs, co-hosted with universities, space and innovation agencies

### The vision

- AEOC Hubs in major African cities — physical spaces for innovation, training, and collaboration
- Pan-African Network of partners across public, private, and academic sectors
- Community of Practice anchored in local realities, solving regional challenges



A LEADING PLATFORM  
FOR AFRICA'S SPACE  
INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM

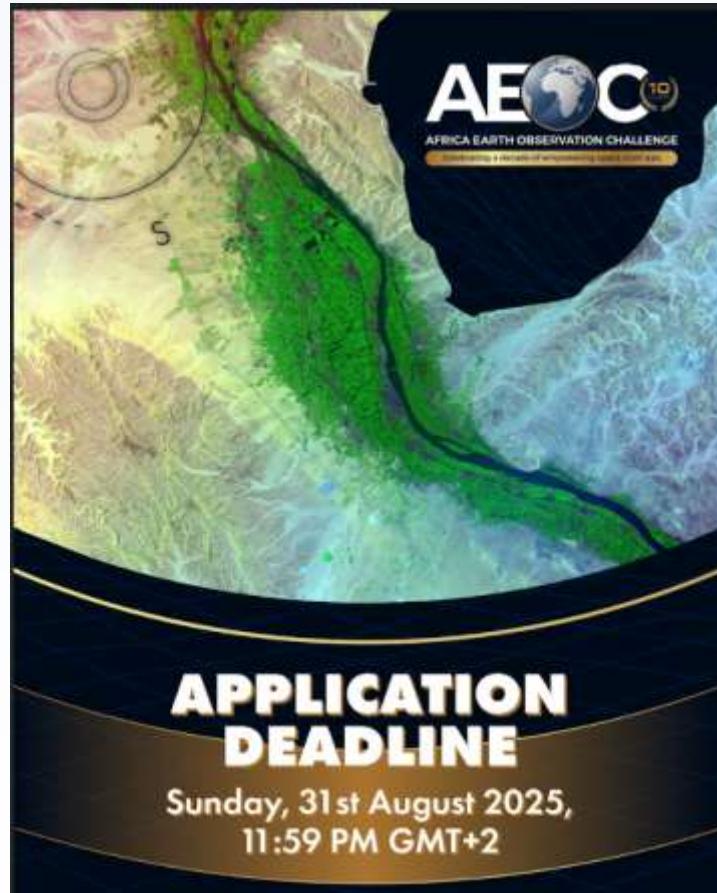
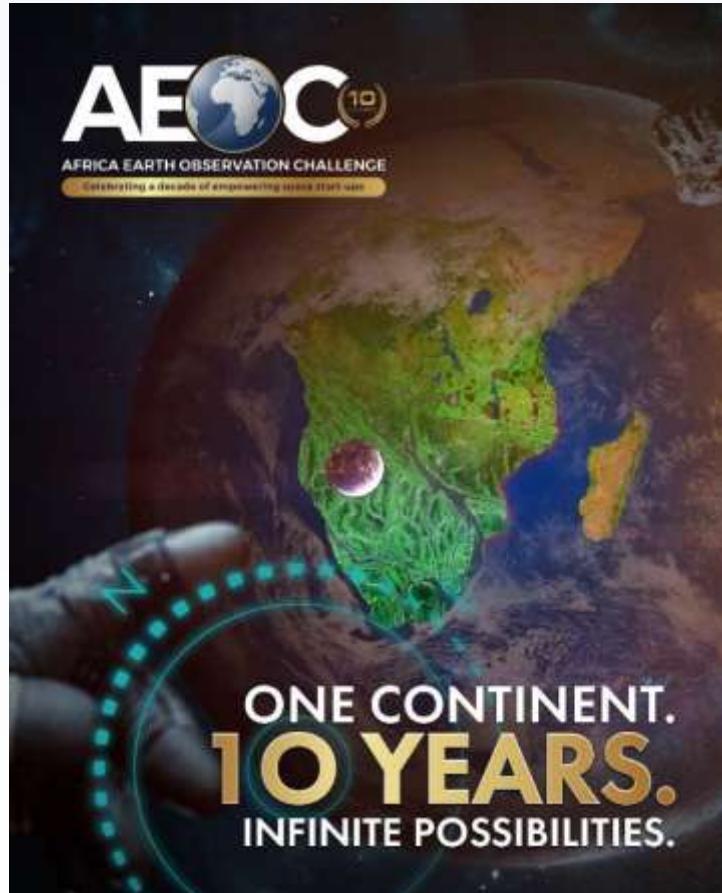


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