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# THE CHANGING FACE OF AFRICA

## AFRICA IS INCREASINGLY SEEN LESS AS A 'PROBLEM', MORE AS A PLAYER IN ITS OWN RIGHT

For years, the headlines around the world – when there were any – concerned problems. War. Starvation. Corruption. Poverty.

Africa was a failed continent.

Never mind that it contained countries as diverse as Ghana, Botswana, South Africa and Tunisia, to name but a few. Or that it's large enough to contain the US, China, India, Japan and most of Europe, so can hardly be seen as a uniform, single culture (see map).

As far as most people in the West were concerned, Africa was a charity case in need of help. It was something that I frequently encountered when looking for articles to include in magazines that I edited – it was easy to attract interest in issues looking at Africa and how problems involving war lords, crime and disease could be solved, far harder getting good news stories or stories about how African countries were creating their own solutions to the kinds of problems governments on other continents face.

But times are certainly changing, as are western attitudes. Education is obviously a concern for any government, no matter where they govern. But while there's certainly a problem in some African countries with regards to ensuring that children get any education at all – one shared with other countries, of course – high-end concerns familiar to western developed countries are spreading throughout the continent. How, for example, do we ensure that graduates from universities have the skills they need for the workplace? Are those skills suitable for boosting our overall economy?

On page 26, Michael Gould and Jim Baumann look at the 100 African Universities programme, which is helping to plug the gaps in GIS knowledge and experience across the continent. Although African universities have been teaching and researching using GIS for decades, usage has been intermittent and for the most part kept at a basic level. At the same time, industrial and government GIS users have been evolving toward enterprise solutions and this has created gaps in knowledge and experience.

The 100 African Universities programme has been providing software and learning resources to selected universities across the continent, with the aim of fostering sustainable GIS curriculums in its universities.



In their article, Gould and Baumann also look at the success of Kenyatta University in Kenya, one of the members of the programme, and how the programme is already helping to achieve the country's Vision2030 goals.

Countries across the continent are also cooperating on standards of geospatial infrastructure. On page 30, in his latest GSDI briefing for us, secretary general Roger Longhorn, looks at the numerous national and international initiatives underway that are creating the foundation for future developments. In particular, he looks at the new United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management initiative, as well as the 'Addis Ababa Declaration on Geospatial Information Management Towards Good Land Governance for the 2030 Agenda' and plans to further the use of earth observation satellites.

One initiative Roger discusses that should benefit all African countries is the African Geodetic Reference Frame (AFREF), and on page 34, IGN FI, IGN France and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa look at progress on this important framework, which aims to create between now and 2030 a common geodetic reference frame for the entire continent. As well as creating the framework, the new reference system will need to integrate older geodetic points, which have varying degrees of accuracy. Although progress has been slow, it's already paying off, with projects in Cameroon, Sudan and Senegal reaping the benefits, to name but a few.

African countries, like all countries around the world, have their own problems. But increasingly, their successes are being seen as outweighing their problems, thanks to initiatives like the ones in this issue.

I hope you enjoy the issue.