



DIGITAL EARTH AFRICA PHASE II – INDEPENDENT END OF PROGRAM EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Digital Earth Africa (DE Africa) provides online, routine, reliable and operational tools using Earth observation data to deliver decision-ready products. These products, created using time-series data on changes in the environment from satellite imagery, enable policy makers, scientists, the private sector, and civil society to address social, environmental and economic challenges on the continent, including land use, water resource management, deforestation, urbanisation and coastal erosion.

There were three end of program outcomes for Phase II of DE Africa, between 2019-2022:

- DE Africa is an operationally, technically and financially sustainable and inclusive entity in Africa.
- DE Africa is demonstrating environmental and development impact.
- DE Africa is a flagship initiative that promotes the benefits of open and free earth observation data.

DE Africa is the only platform providing real-time geo-spatial data and products for the continent, making free, open-source data and products universally available.

The project aligns with the strategic foreign policy and development priorities of the Australian government, as well as to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and AU Agenda 2063. It also aligns with the strategic intent of regional bodies, including the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the South African Development Community (SADC).

DFAT supports the key findings of the independent end of program evaluation of Phase II of Digital Earth Africa. We agree DE Africa has made excellent progress against the three expected End-of-Program Outcomes, that DE Africa has largely delivered against all its expected intermediate outcomes. We agree it has exceeded delivery expectations in some areas. There was consistent, persuasive endorsement by all evaluation informants of the objectives of DE Africa.

The transition from an Australian-based team to a wholly African team is largely complete, and the PMO is now fully recruited in South Africa. The platform is now hosted and operated within Africa.

DE Africa is helping to reinforce Australia's reputation in Africa. The program provides an opportunity for Australia to demonstrate its commitment and comparative advantage with regards to using EO data to address fundamental development challenges. For Posts across Africa the program is particularly beneficial in building relationships with government departments they might not typically work with and helped strengthen existing relationships.

DFAT agrees that engagement with Australian embassies and high commissions on the continent could be enhanced to leverage the impact the value the program brings for Australia.

DFAT agrees with the finding that DE Africa's vision is closely aligned with the strategic priorities of the continent and is engaging with continent wide partners to help address Africa's development challenges and that, going forward the program will need to begin to demonstrate increased relevance at the local level. DFAT suggests the country-level use of DE Africa could be improved through increased engagement by the PMO and implementing partners.

DFAT agrees with the methodology of the review, had opportunities to provide input and feedback and was included throughout the data gathering period.

The evaluation met DFAT's independence requirements.

Key Findings, Recommendations and Responses

Key Finding 1 - Governance

The DE Africa governance structure is sufficiently holding the program to account and allows for effective transfer of technical advice from its members, but the structure is not optimised for the Phase III operating context, nor does it have fiduciary responsibility.

Recommendation - The governance structure must be appropriately reviewed in line with the Phase III operating environment and to clarify its roles and responsibilities (especially its fiduciary responsibilities).

Management Response and Key Actions - A review and update of the DE Africa governance arrangements will occur at the onset of Phase III, to ensure appropriate governance structures are in place for the duration of the Phase III. This has been committed in the DE Africa Phase III investment design document.

Preliminary governance review consultations started in March 2023, with the following initial recommendations, with full review and uplift conducted Aug-Oct 2023, for endorsement before end 2023:

- Simplify Governance Board representation.
- Provide flexibility to enable Board meetings to proceed with appropriate representation.
- Ensure Technical Advisory Committee and Governing Board responsibilities are aligned and complementary.

Key Finding 2 - Increased In-country Engagement

DE Africa's vision is closely aligned with the strategic priorities of the continent, and it is engaging with continent-wide partners to help address Africa's development challenges, but there is not the same clarity at national level (despite a growing body of evidence demonstrating local application).

Recommendation - The program will need to demonstrate relevance at country and local level, leveraging its implementing partners to strengthen this process and target specific development challenges.

Management Response and Key Actions - Increased in-country engagement is fundamental to the successful delivery against the following Phase III outcomes and activity areas. Geoscience Australia and DFAT are committed to increasing collaboration on Digital Earth Africa.

Key Finding 3 - Diversity and Inclusion

Further articulate the responsibilities and accountability for managing diversity and inclusion within the program and ensure that a sufficient level of resources and capacity is made available for safe and effective delivery.

Recommendation - A more modest and targeted plan for D&I that is appropriately resourced and articulates clear lines of management responsibility between the PMO and Ips.

Management Response and Key Actions - The DE Africa D&I Strategy will be reviewed to uplift and align the strategy in line with the forward program operating environment and ensure effective integration of lessons learned from Phase II. To better support DE Africa D&I Strategy delivery, a targeted DE Africa D&I Annual Work Plan will be developed to complement the overarching DE Africa Annual Work Plan, including annual D&I related milestones and targets.