

Three-Day African Geothermal Conference opens at the UN Conference Centre in Addis Ababa Ethiopia

Addis Ababa November 2, 2016 – The sixth African Rift Geothermal Conference (ARGeo-C6) with an attendance of more than 500 participants from about 40 countries was officially opened yesterday by H.E. Motuma Mekasa Ethiopia's Minister for Mines, Petroleum and Natural Gas. H.E. Mekasa observed that “governments need to create adequate enabling laws and a supportive regulatory framework that will make the utilization of geothermal resources possible.”

The Minister further noted that “power shortage and high cost of power undermine efforts to combat poverty and that African countries need to work together in solving the current financing, technology and implementation capacity challenges associated with the development of renewable energy in general and in geothermal energy in particular.”

He reiterated the importance of concerted effort between the government and the private sector. “Africa's doors are open to the private sector for the establishment of mutually beneficial collaboration in developing Africa's vast geothermal resources,” added H.E. Motuma Mekasa.

A plenary session of the ARGeo C6



Speaking at the opening ceremony, Cheikh Bedd, the Director for Infrastructure and Energy Department - African Union Commission (AUC) noted the Geothermal Risk Mitigation Facility (GRMF) instituted in 2012 is helping eleven countries with funds for surface studies and drilling that help in mitigating this initial risk phase of geothermal development. He revealed that to date grants totaling USD 58 Million had been disbursed in three application rounds.

“I am happy to report that yesterday we completed a pre-bidding workshop for the fourth application round totaling USD 29 Million if all the projects that have applied qualify,” noted AUC-IED Director for Infrastructure and Energy.

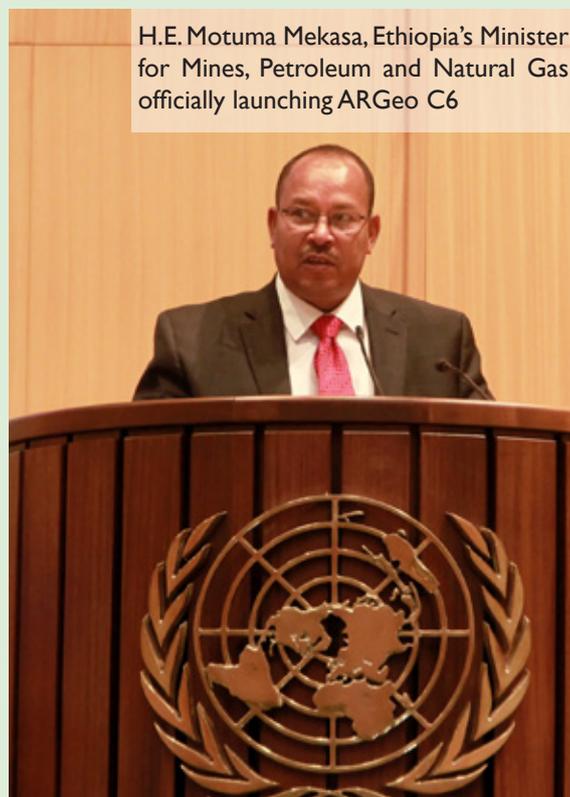
In her address, Juliette Biao Koudenoukpo, Regional Director, UN Environment - Office for Africa noted that “while in the short term the bulk of energy needs are, and will be met by fossil fuels and hydropower, geothermal energy is increasingly seen as part of the solution for energy in the countries of the Great African Rift Valley.” The conference will provide a platform for regional cooperation and it's a great response to the African union agenda 2063 on environmental sustainability.

Energy use is underdeveloped in Africa and geothermal energy is the least developed. Currently, only Kenya is a significant producer of geothermal electricity of over 650 MWe. However, progress in the development of geothermal energy resources has been slow and uneven due to the high costs associated with exploration and drilling and long project lead times (from exploration to development and utilization).

Regarding capacity building, Juliette revealed that “the ARGeo program is moving from project based capacity building towards matured institutional strengthening and is currently providing technical backstopping for the Africa Geothermal Centre of Excellence (AGCE) to be hosted by the Government of Kenya, being the regional leader in geothermal development in Africa.”

The 6th African Rift Geothermal Conference was hosted and organized by the Ministry of Mines, Petroleum and Natural Gas through the Geological Survey of Ethiopia (GSE). These African geothermal conferences are held rotationally every two years. Past African geothermal conferences have been held in Ethiopia, Uganda, Djibouti, Kenya, and Tanzania under the auspices of the UNEP ARGeo Program and the Africa Regional Branch of the International Geothermal Association (IGA).

In his opening remarks the incoming IGA President Alexander Ritcher observed that the African Branch will play a critical role in the accelerated growth of geothermal resources in Africa. The International Geothermal Association (IGA) was founded in 1988. It is a scientific, non-profit, educational and cultural organization established to operate worldwide. The ARGeo, an initiative set up in 2010 under the auspices of the UN Environment and funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) is helping the African member countries to fast track the utilization of their vast geothermal resources.



H.E. Motuma Mekasa, Ethiopia's Minister for Mines, Petroleum and Natural Gas officially launching ARGeo C6

“power shortage and high cost of power undermine efforts to combat poverty and that African countries need to work together in solving the current financing, technology and implementation capacity challenges associated with the development of renewable energy in general and in geothermal energy in particular.” - H.E. Motuma Mekasa Ethiopia's Minister for Mines, Petroleum and Natural Gas

Official opening of the exhibition



Regional Director, UN Environment - Office for Africa and Minister for Mines, Petroleum and Natural Gas of Ethiopia officially opening the ARGeo C6 exhibition.

More than 15 international, regional and local companies are exhibiting their products and services during the sixth ARGeo conference that was opened yesterday. The exhibitions will run for three days starting 2nd November 2016. The exhibition was opened by H.E. Motuma Mekasa, Ethiopia's Minister for Mines, Petroleum and Natural Gas and Juliette Biao Koudoukpo, Regional Director, UN Environment Office for Africa





Parallel technical sessions commence

Four parallel sessions have been organized in the three days of the conference to accommodate the more than 120 technical papers submitted. The increase in number of papers compared past ARGeo conferences is an indication of the increased interest in this event.

The parallel sessions will run daily after the morning plenary sessions and are covering: country updates meant to provide a summary of the status of geothermal development in each of the EARS countries, exploration with a focus on geology, geophysics and geochemistry, direct use of geothermal resources, reservoir engineering, drilling, use of new technologies in geothermal development, environmental and social issues, as well as legal framework and strategy for geothermal development.

Attentive participants in one of the parallel sessions



Launch of the Proceedings of the Western Branch of the Greater East African Rift System

A report on the geologic development and geophysics of the western branch of the greater East African Rift System (EARS) was launched yesterday by Juliette Biao Koudenoukpo. The report highlights factors that influence the development of geothermal systems in the western branch of EARS. The report was prepared by Peter Omenda, a Geothermal Consultant, Meseret Zemedkun, the ARGeo Program Manager, Solomon Kebede from the Geological Survey of Ethiopia, and John Lagat, the Ag. General Manager, Geothermal Resource Development.

Experience gained from the exploration of some of the EARS geothermal prospect areas has shown that the working geothermal models that have guided successful exploration in the eastern EARS sectors (Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya) cannot be wholly applied to the exploration of prospect areas in the western EARS. The fundamental reason for this is that the tectonic and magmatic states of the different rift sectors are not the same and the bases of exploring for their geothermal resources are not directly replicable



Regional Director, UN Environment - Office for Africa, reading a page from the book during the launch.



Decision Makers discuss science and policy implementation for sustainable development of geothermal resources in EARS countries

Roundtable discussions among ministers responsible for mines and energy from EARS countries and other decision makers have concluded that geothermal energy holds the key to the achievement of most of the sustainable development goals. The decision makers discussed modalities of creating an enabling environment for geothermal development in the eastern Africa region. The ARGeo Program Manager Meseret Zemedkin moderated the session on behalf of the Regional Director, UN Environment Office for Africa, Juliette Biao Koudenoukpo.



The round table discussions centered on four key areas:

(1) How to promote science-based utilization of geothermal resources in the region, (2) building a critical mass of skilled experts for sustainable geothermal development, (3) leveraging political will at national strategic levels in terms of policy development and resource mobilization, and (4) enhancing cooperation and synergies among Eastern Africa countries and partners to accelerate geothermal development in the region.

There was consensus that the key success factors for accelerated development of geothermal resources in the region centered on science-based decisions by policy makers; understanding unique characteristics of geothermal resources in the western and eastern branches of the eastern Africa rift system and apply appropriate strategies for each branch. The decision makers also noted that geothermal energy needs to be developed in an environmentally sustainable manner in responsive to Africa's environmental and sustainable development policy as well as the strategic processes such as AU Agenda 2063 and the Common Africa Position (CAP) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 7).

In order to build a critical mass of skilled experts in the region there is a shift from project based to matured institutional support specifically through the Africa Geothermal Centre of Excellence. The center will be designed to address capacity building needs of the region and foster ownership while building on existing initiatives.

Overall, the roundtable discussions encouraged cooperation and synergies among Eastern Africa countries endowed with geothermal resources through international forums for knowledge sharing and experience exchange, pooling resources to maximize benefits, supporting the Africa Geothermal Centre Excellence and sharing geothermal data and information through the African Geothermal Inventory Database (AGID).

ARGeo Launches Africa Geothermal Inventory Database (AGID) - Web GIS

An enhanced platform "AGID - Web GIS" for sharing geothermal information in the East African Rift Region was launched yesterday by Juliette Biao Koudenoukpo - Regional Director, UN Environment, Office for Africa.

The original database was launched two years ago on 29 October 2014 during the 5th African Rift Geothermal Conference (ARGeo-C5) and was up till now consisting of metadata (pdf files, excel sheets etc.) on project sites, organizations involved in the geothermal sector, stakeholders, laboratories, power plants, equipment, manpower, training, reports and member countries.

The enhancement to Web GIS comes with conversion of these metadata files into a GIS format and uploading them into a GIS server making the data available to multiple users through the internet.

