

Africa

Africa remains a continent of contrasts – and this certainly also applies to the seas surrounding the continent. With booming economies in countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya and of course South Africa and therefore a large and fast-growing middle class with amazing buying power, there are also countries still dangling at the lower end of the list of poorest countries in the world, including Benin, Niger, Liberia, and Somaliland. In addition, the differences within countries that are doing better remain high, with wealth often being unequally distributed. It is therefore no wonder that large parts of the African population dream of a better future in Europe, putting their lives and their fates in the hands of crooks and criminals who send them off from the Libyan coast in rusty boats that are likely to sink before they reach Europe. In some parts of Africa piracy is seen as a way out of poverty, aiming to seize and rob vessels from the seas of the Gulf of Aden and the larger Arabian Sea. I already mentioned that Africa is full of contrasts: the land is full of minerals, oil & gas, even gold and diamonds, the people that live there are often poor and do not benefit at all from these treasures. This also applies to the sea that surrounds the continent.

In recent years, the International Federation of Land Surveyors (FIG), together with the World Bank and UNHabitat have done much to raise awareness and build capacity in Africa. Cadastral organisations have been set up, granting land rights to millions and therefore often guaranteeing them an economic right of existence. Land surveying, whether substantially or not, has done its part and it still is to improve the future of Africa. It would be great if hydrography could take its share in the coming years. With the International Hydrographic Organization emphasising for its next World Hydrography Day, on 21 June 2015, that less than 10% of the world's seas has been systematically surveyed and that seas and waterways need to be fully charted and explored, it seems to me that this message is especially true for Africa. Taking to hand large surveys in African coastal and inland areas can mean great chances for shipping, construction and building of new ports, shoreline development, ocean and wind energy and minerals, tourism and recreation and aquaculture and fisheries as well as for the people that work in these sectors.

Both IHO and FIG Commission 4 on Hydrography could take the lead in this development of a larger role for hydrography. Angela Etuonovbe has been chair of Commission 4 since the FIG Congress in Kuala Lumpur last year. Mrs Etuonovbe is from Nigeria and of course she serves the global community of hydrographic surveyors through her work in FIG, but some special attention and lobbying for Africa might just be the spark this continent needs. I wish her all the luck in her work and I promise that Hydro International will continue to support it!

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