

## **Brief report on RCMRD International Conference (RIC2018), Nairobi, August 15-17, 2018**

The 2018 **RCMRD International Conference based on the theme Space Science for Sustainable Development** was held from the 15 – 17 August 2018 at RCMRD in Nairobi, Kenya. The conference planned to attract 350 delegates, from 10 countries with 60 presentations listed. The conference attracted participants from governments, academics, civil society, and the private sector, with the majority of the participants representing East African countries.

Under the auspices of the Network of Excellence for Land Governance in Africa (NELGA) project, the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST) was represented by Dr Nichola Knox from the department of Geo-Spatial Sciences and Technology. It was noted that it was a great opportunity to finally travel to RCMRD and see the facilities of this well renowned institute. It was also a great opportunity to build up some collaborative ties with participants from East Africa.

Within the scope of the conference it was seen that there were numerous highly relevant topics that address the issue of using earth observation for supporting the SDG's. It was insightful to see presenters direct the attention of their research findings to the SDG's and think about the links between science and policy. This conference tried to create a platform where scientists and policy makers were made to think about both sides and how they communicate to one another. It was clear however that the direction (onus) of the communication seems to lie on the scientists to having to translate their findings into a format that would be understandable to policy makers, rather than policy makers making an effort to understand the science.

Highlights of the conference included the launch of the RCMRD eLearning platform. An exciting development in trying to ensure that space science topics can be accessible to the masses rather than just to the select few that have the opportunity to attend courses at an institution that offers training in geospatial sciences. The plenary discussions held each day were also of great interest and resulted in some very active discussions between the plenary members and the audience. Another highlight was discovering "Youth mappers", many of the East African universities are linked to this NGO. It is a student driven organisation, but useful to be facilitated by the university department. After chatting to a number of students who have been involved in the Youth Mappers through their studies it became clear that it is a great opportunity for our students to link into an international network, work on current and relevant projects, work as citizen scientists, and have the opportunity to apply for funding to attend meetings and conferences

Through Dr Knox, NUST was represented as one of the 12 panel members on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the conference in a plenary discussion that focussed on geospatial educational in tertiary institutes. This plenary captured some of the ways in which different universities engage with government to inform the science to policy engagement. For that it would appear that we at NUST are fortunate to have such a close link to government, as most other institutes did not have such a close tie and had little opportunity to impact on government policy (with the exception of Zimbabwe at this stage). Most institutes also highlighted the importance of the internship programmes, but also the difficulty to link with industry to get placements for their students in internship positions. It was highlighted how important courses that looked at the development and promotion of entrepreneurial skills are for students, to try and ensure they become job creators rather than job seekers.



Photo 1: The presentation of the ISO certificate to the cabinet secretary followed by the ceremonial ribbon cutting for the opening of the RCMRD eLearning Portal.