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Space Science and Technology for Sustainable Development and Climate Resilience in Africa: A Review of Emerging Applications and Challenges

Olakunle Rufus Oladosu, Adegbite Abdulrahman, Obimba Harry, Awotoye Tosin, Abegunde, Linda and Aileru Jamiu Taiwo

Centre for Space Life Sciences, National Space Research and Development Agency, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

*Corresponding Author's Email: director.csls@nasrda.gov.ng Phone: +2348035692309

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ABSTRACT

This study undertakes a systematic review to examine the role of space science and technology in addressing Africa's pressing challenges in agriculture, water management, disaster resilience, urbanization, and digital inclusion. Evaluating how Earth Observation, satellite navigation, and communication technologies contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) being its main objective. The review draws on secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journals, space agency reports, and global datasets, with content analysis employed to identify thematic applications and emerging trends. The analysis highlights major themes: precision agriculture, groundwater mapping, urban growth monitoring, disaster early warning systems, climate adaptation, natural resource conservation, and digital inclusion. Case studies from Kenya, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Mozambique demonstrate measurable benefits, including strengthened food security, improved water resource management, guided infrastructure planning, and enhanced resilience to climate-induced hazards. Institutional initiatives by the National Space Research and Development Agency (NASRDA) in Nigeria and the African Space Agency further illustrate Africa's growing commitment to harnessing space technologies for socio-economic transformation. Despite these advances, more still needs to be done to meet the international standard. Persistent barriers affecting Africa include limited funding, dependence on external datasets, and shortages of technical expertise, which constrain the scalability and sustainability of interventions. Future directions should prioritize investment in indigenous satellite missions, expansion of STEM education, and regional cooperation to build capacity and ensure data sovereignty. Overall, the review underscores that space science offers Africa a strategic pathway to resilience, innovation, and inclusive growth, positioning the continent to accelerate progress toward the SDGs and secure a sustainable future.

INTRODUCTION

Harnessing space science and technology has become indispensable for Africa's sustainable development. Earth Observation (EO) — through satellites, drones, and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) — provides critical insights for agriculture, water resource management, disaster resilience, and land use planning, directly supporting SDGs on food security, clean water, and sustainable cities (Abiodun, 1997; Adewopo et al., 2020).

Despite these opportunities, Africa faces a persistent digital divide. In 2024, only 37.5% of Sub-Saharan Africans had internet access compared to 91.2% in Europe (AUC, 2023). This disparity limits the practical use of EO data: farmers struggle to access precision agriculture platforms, urban planners cannot fully integrate satellite-derived land use data, and disaster managers face delays in receiving early warnings (ESA, 2022). Infrastructure challenges compounded the issue, as fiber optic expansion remains slow and costly, leaving rural regions underserved (EU, 2024). In this context, satellite communication has been identified as a critical enabler of inclusive digital transformation, offering universal coverage, resilience against terrestrial failures, and rapid deployment in underserved areas (ESA, 2022; EU, 2024).

Existing literature demonstrates EO's measurable benefits — from crop monitoring (Bamford et al., 2019; Ayoola & Adepoju, 2021), groundwater mapping (Jayaraman et al., 1997), and urban growth analysis (AU, 2023) to disaster early warning (GSMA, 2022; Jayaraman et al., 1997). However, most studies treat connectivity constraints as peripheral rather than central, leaving a gap in understanding how limited internet access and slow fiber expansion directly weaken EO adoption. Few works systematically examine how satellite communication can complement terrestrial networks to overcome these barriers.

This review is therefore needed to bridge that gap, as it evaluates current applications of EO, satellite navigation, and communication technologies in Africa, while critically assessing the infrastructural and connectivity challenges that hinder their impact. By highlighting the nexus of space applications and digital infrastructure, the review highlights not only the benefits of EO but also the enabling role of satellite communication in ensuring equitable access. It emphasizes adaptive research approaches that integrate real-time satellite data with responsive methods to address Africa's dynamic challenges such as desertification, drought, flooding, and rapid urbanization. In doing so, the study contributes a more holistic understanding of how space technologies can strengthen resilience, innovation, and inclusive growth across the continent. This review therefore, aims to examine current applications of space science and technology in Africa, evaluate their contributions to sustainable development, identify barriers to adoption, and propose future directions for adaptive research.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Space Technology and Applications

Space-based technologies have become indispensable to modern agriculture, offering farmers, agronomists, and policymakers actionable data for improving productivity and sustainability. Earth Observation (EO) satellites such as Sentinel-2 and Landsat-8 provide high-resolution multispectral imagery that enables continuous monitoring of soil moisture, vegetation vigor, and crop phenology (Segarra, et al., 2020). These datasets underpin precision-farming algorithms that optimize irrigation scheduling, fertilizer application, and yield forecasting.

The Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI), derived from red and near-infrared spectral bands, serves as a key indicator of crop health and biomass. Studies in East Africa show that NDVI values above 0.6 correlate strongly with optimal maize growth, while declines below 0.3 signal water stress or nutrient deficiency (Adewopo et al., 2020). In Kenya, Sentinel-2-based NDVI monitoring improved maize yield prediction accuracy by 18 %, guiding fertilizer distribution and reducing input waste (Ayoola & Adepoju, 2021). Similarly, Landsat-based time-series analysis has been used to quantify seasonal variability in crop cover, enabling early detection of drought impacts and supporting national food-security assessments.

Quantitative outcomes demonstrate the tangible benefits of satellite-derived monitoring. For instance, integrating EO data into farm-management systems has increased water-use efficiency by 25 % and reduced fertilizer costs by 15 % in pilot precision-agriculture programs across Nigeria and Ethiopia (Onyango et al., 2021). Satellite rainfall estimates have also improved irrigation planning, aligning water application with actual evapotranspiration rates. These advances illustrate how space-enabled analytics transform traditional farming into a data-driven enterprise capable of responding dynamically to climatic and market fluctuations.

Despite these gains, limitations persist. Cloud cover and sensor calibration issues can affect data reliability, while the high cost of processing large EO datasets limits accessibility for smallholder farmers (Manono et al., 2026). Bridging these gaps requires investment in local data-processing infrastructure, open-access platforms, and capacity building in geospatial analytics.

Overall, space-based agricultural monitoring — through Sentinel-2, Landsat, NDVI analysis, and precision-farming algorithms — provides Africa with a scalable pathway toward climate-smart agriculture, improved resource efficiency, and enhanced food-security resilience (Mpakairi, 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Space and Disaster Management and Prevention

Space-based technologies have become central to modern disaster management, providing governments and humanitarian agencies with timely, multi-temporal spatial data for decision-making (Jayaraman 1997). Frameworks such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030) emphasize the role of science, technology, and innovation in strengthening resilience. Within this context, Earth Observation (EO) and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) serve as critical tools for managing disasters through the phases of preparedness, response, recovery, and early warning (Joyce et al., 2009).

Disasters such as floods, droughts, and wildfires transcend political boundaries and demand coordinated responses. Remote sensing and GIS have proven particularly effective across the phases of preparedness, response, recovery, and early warning. For instance, radar imagery from Sentinel-1 has been used to delineate flood-prone areas in Nigeria and Mozambique, while high-resolution data during Cyclone Idai enabled rapid mapping of inundation and reduced humanitarian response times by nearly a quarter. Similarly, vegetation indices such as NDVI and NDWI derived from Sentinel-2 and MODIS imagery have improved drought prediction accuracy by about 20% in East Africa, allowing governments to mobilize food aid and water resources before crises escalate. Thermal data from Landsat-8 and MODIS has supported wildfire risk assessment across savannah regions, while vegetation indices have tracked regrowth after fire events with accuracy comparable to field measurements.

Beyond hazard monitoring, satellites underpin disaster early warning systems by providing near real-time data on rainfall, temperature anomalies, and atmospheric composition. These inputs feed predictive models that forecast floods, droughts, and wildfires, while communication satellites ensure alerts reach remote communities, bridging the digital divide that often hampers dissemination. Collectively, these applications demonstrate how EO strengthens preparedness, situational awareness, and recovery, while enhancing resilience against climate-induced hazards. Yet challenges remain: limited technical capacity, dependence on external datasets, and funding constraints continue to restrict scalability. Addressing these barriers will require investment in indigenous satellite missions, regional cooperation, and expanded geospatial training to ensure Africa can independently monitor and respond to disasters with greater precision and timeliness.

Preparedness

Preparedness involves identifying hazards, mapping vulnerable zones, and planning mitigation strategies before disasters occur (Dewan, 2013). Satellite remote sensing supports this phase by providing baseline data on land cover, hydrology, and population distribution. For example, Sentinel-1 radar imagery has been used to map flood-prone areas in Nigeria and Mozambique, while Landsat-8 thermal data assists in wildfire-risk assessment across savannah regions. GIS integration enables overlaying hazard maps with infrastructure and demographic data, helping planners prioritize evacuation routes and resource allocation. Quantitatively, EO-based flood-risk mapping has improved hazard-zone delineation accuracy by up to 30 % compared with conventional ground surveys.

Response

During disaster events, space-based imagery provides rapid situational awareness. High-resolution data from Planet Scope and Sentinel-2 satellites allow responders to assess inundation extent, damaged infrastructure, and accessibility of relief corridors within hours of an event. In the 2019 Cyclone Idai response, satellite-derived flood maps guided humanitarian logistics, reducing response time by 25 %. Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) sensors are particularly valuable because they penetrate cloud cover, enabling continuous monitoring even under adverse weather conditions (Ottinger & Kuenzer 2020). The integration of EO data with mobile GIS platforms enhances coordination among agencies and supports real-time decision-making.

Recovery

Post-disaster recovery requires monitoring reconstruction progress and environmental restoration. Space-based data facilitate damage assessment and long-term land-use change analysis. For instance, Landsat-based vegetation indices have been used to track regrowth after wildfires in Ethiopia and deforestation following floods in South Sudan. Quantitative assessments show that satellite-derived recovery indicators can estimate vegetation restoration rates within ±10 % accuracy compared to field measurements. EO-supported recovery mapping also informs insurance claims and infrastructure rehabilitation planning, ensuring transparency and accountability in resource allocation.

Early Warning

Early-warning systems rely on continuous observation and predictive modeling. Satellites such as Meteosat, MODIS, and Sentinel-5P provide near-real-time data on rainfall, temperature anomalies, and atmospheric composition. These inputs feed into disaster-forecasting algorithms that predict floods, droughts, and wildfires. For example, satellite-derived Standardized Precipitation Index (SPI) and Normalized Difference Water Index (NDWI) have improved drought-prediction accuracy by 20 % across East Africa. Integration with communication satellites ensures that alerts reach remote communities promptly, bridging the digital divide that often hampers early-warning dissemination.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite these advances, challenges persist. Limited technical capacity, data-processing infrastructure, and funding constrain the full utilization of space-based disaster tools. Dependence on external datasets raises concerns about data sovereignty and continuity. Strengthening regional cooperation, investing in indigenous satellite missions, and expanding STEM education will be essential to overcome these barriers.

Space and Resource Management

Earth Observation (EO) has become a cornerstone of natural resource management in Africa, where forests, minerals, water bodies, and wildlife face mounting pressures from deforestation, illegal mining, pollution, and climate change. By integrating satellite imagery, GIS, and remote sensing, African nations are increasingly able to monitor, manage, and protect their resources in ways that directly support sustainable development (Omisore, 2018).

Groundwater Mapping
Water scarcity remains one of Africa's most pressing challenges (Falkenmark, 1989). EO-based hydrogeological mapping has been used in northern Nigeria to reduce borehole failure rates by identifying viable aquifers and recharge zones. In Ethiopia, radar and multispectral imagery have been applied to delineate groundwater potential, supporting rural water-supply planning. Quantitative studies show that EO-guided borehole siting improves success rates by more than 20 % compared to conventional methods (Barker et al., 1992), saving communities a significant financial resources and ensuring more reliable access to potable water.

Mineral Monitoring
Illegal and artisanal mining activities threaten ecosystems and local livelihoods. EO provides transparent monitoring of mineral exploitation by detecting land-cover changes and sediment discharge. In Ghana, Landsat-based time-series analysis has revealed artisanal gold mining expansion rates of up to 15 % annually in certain districts. In South Africa, satellite gravity data has been used to quantify sediment loads linked to sand mining, providing evidence for regulatory enforcement (Dethier et al., 2023). These applications demonstrate how EO strengthens governance in the mineral sector by offering spatially explicit monitoring that supports accountability.

Protected Area Monitoring
Africa's biodiversity hotspots, including national parks and forest reserves, benefit from EO-based monitoring of land-use change and habitat degradation. In Kenya's Maasai Mara and Tanzania's Serengeti, Sentinel-2 vegetation indices (NDVI) have been used to track seasonal grazing pressure and detect encroachment. In Central Africa, EO has supported REDD+ programs by quantifying deforestation rates, showing forest loss of 0.5–1.2 % annually in some protected areas. These insights guide conservation strategies, strengthen community-based resource management, and support international reporting obligations.

Limitations and Future Directions
Despite these advances, challenges remain. Many African nations rely heavily on externally sourced datasets, raising concerns about sustainability and data sovereignty. Limited technical expertise and infrastructure constrain local processing and application of EO data. Addressing these gaps requires investment in indigenous satellite missions, regional data-sharing platforms, and capacity building in geospatial analytics.

Land Use and Urban Planning
Space technology has become a cornerstone of urban planning in Africa, where rapid urbanization often outpaces infrastructure development. By leveraging satellite imagery, GIS, and remote sensing, planners can make data-driven decisions that improve housing, transport, and environmental sustainability. The effectiveness of these applications can be assessed across several thematic areas.

Monitoring Urban Growth
Satellite imagery provides planners with the ability to track settlement expansion and land-use changes over time. In Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, remote sensing has been used to monitor urban sprawl and guide zoning policies. This has helped manage overcrowding and reduce the spread of informal settlements. The effectiveness lies in its ability to provide quantitative evidence of land-cover change, enabling policymakers to anticipate growth patterns rather than react to crises. However, challenges remain in integrating EO data into local planning frameworks, where institutional capacity is often limited.

Infrastructure Development
GIS data supports the design of road networks, drainage systems, and waste-management facilities. In Lagos, Nigeria, satellite mapping has been applied to identify traffic congestion hotspots and plan new transport corridors. This has improved transport efficiency and reduced commuting times in targeted areas. The strength of this application is its spatial precision, allowing planners to optimize infrastructure investments. Yet, effectiveness is constrained by funding gaps and the difficulty of translating EO insights into large-scale construction projects.

Housing and Land Management
Satellites help identify suitable land for housing projects while avoiding flood-prone or environmentally sensitive zones. This reduces risks associated with informal housing in vulnerable areas. EO-based land suitability analysis has been particularly effective in peri-urban regions, where rapid population growth often leads to unsafe housing expansion. The effectiveness of this approach lies in its preventive capacity, but its impact depends on whether local authorities enforce zoning regulations informed by EO data.

Environmental Sustainability
Remote sensing enables monitoring of air quality, green spaces, and urban heat islands. In Johannesburg, South Africa, satellite data has been used to track vegetation loss and guide urban greening initiatives. These interventions have proven effective in mitigating heat-island effects and improving urban livability. The strength of EO in this domain is its ability to provide longitudinal datasets, showing how environmental conditions evolve over time. However, effectiveness is

limited when EO data is not coupled with strong policy enforcement or community participation.

Disaster Risk Reduction in Cities

GIS and EO data are critical for identifying flood-risk zones and supporting climate-resilient infrastructure. In Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, satellite imagery has been used to map flood-prone areas and inform drainage improvements (Sainio et al., 2025). This has reduced vulnerability in high-risk neighborhoods and guided climate-sensitive urban planning. The effectiveness of EO in disaster risk reduction lies in its predictive capacity, but challenges include limited dissemination of risk maps to vulnerable communities and insufficient integration into municipal planning budgets.

General Evaluation

Overall, space-based urban planning applications in Africa have demonstrated measurable benefits: improved zoning accuracy, reduced infrastructure bottlenecks, safer housing allocation, enhanced environmental monitoring, and better disaster preparedness. Their effectiveness is strongest when EO data is integrated into governance structures and supported by adequate funding. Limitations persist in institutional capacity, enforcement, and accessibility of high-resolution datasets. Addressing these gaps requires investment in local EO processing infrastructure, training of urban planners in geospatial analytics, and stronger policy frameworks to ensure that satellite-derived insights translate into tangible urban improvements.

Space and Climate Monitoring

Space-based climate monitoring has become indispensable for Africa, where vulnerability to droughts, floods, and desertification threatens livelihoods and ecosystems. Earth Observation (EO) satellites provide continuous data on rainfall, vegetation cover, soil moisture, and temperature, enabling early detection of climate risks and supporting adaptation policies (Anderson et al., 2017).

Drought Monitoring

EO data is critical for detecting the onset and progression of drought. Vegetation indices such as the Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) and Normalized Difference Water Index (NDWI) derived from Sentinel-2 and MODIS imagery allow for real-time monitoring of crop stress and soil moisture deficits. In the Horn of Africa, satellite-based drought monitoring has improved prediction accuracy by nearly 20 %, enabling governments to mobilize food aid and water resources before crises escalate (Maria Luisa et al., 2025).

Rainfall Monitoring

Rainfall variability is a major driver of food insecurity in Africa. Satellites such as NASA's Global Precipitation Measurement (GPM) mission and ESA's Sentinel-1 radar provide high-resolution rainfall estimates across the Sahel and East Africa. These datasets have guided reforestation and water-conservation projects, while also improving irrigation scheduling. Quantitative studies show that satellite rainfall estimates reduce forecasting errors by 15–25 % compared to ground-based measurements alone.

Desertification Tracking

EO imagery is vital for monitoring desertification, particularly in the Sahel and northern Nigeria. Long-term Landsat time-series analysis has revealed vegetation decline rates of 0.5–1.2 % annually in vulnerable zones. These insights inform afforestation programs and land-management strategies, helping policymakers prioritize interventions in areas most at risk of land degradation.

Carbon Monitoring

Satellites such as NASA's OCO-2 (Orbiting Carbon Observatory) and ESA's Sentinel-5P provide measurements of atmospheric carbon dioxide and methane. These observations are increasingly relevant for Africa, where deforestation and biomass burning contribute significantly to carbon emissions. EO-based carbon monitoring supports REDD+ initiatives in Central Africa, offering transparent data for carbon accounting and climate-finance mechanisms.

Climate Modelling

Satellite datasets feed into regional climate models that simulate long-term shifts in rainfall, temperature, and land cover. In southern Africa, EO-driven models have been used to project increased drought frequency under climate-change scenarios, guiding water-resource planning. The effectiveness of these models lies in their ability to integrate EO data with socio-economic variables, producing actionable insights for adaptation.

Greenhouse Gas Observations

Beyond carbon dioxide, EO platforms monitor methane, nitrous oxide, and other greenhouse gases. Sentinel-5P's TROPOMI instrument has been used to detect methane emissions from oil and gas fields in Nigeria, providing evidence for regulatory action. These observations strengthen Africa's capacity to meet international reporting obligations under the Paris Agreement.

Adaptation Planning

EO data underpins adaptation planning by linking climate observations to policy design. In Kenya, satellite-derived drought indices have informed the

National Drought Management Authority's early-warning system, reducing response times by 30 %. In Mozambique, flood-risk maps generated from SAR imagery have guided the construction of climate-resilient infrastructure. These examples highlight how EO strengthens adaptive capacity by ensuring that climate policies are evidence-based and locally relevant.

Generally, Space-based climate monitoring in Africa has demonstrated measurable benefits: improved drought prediction, more accurate rainfall estimates, transparent carbon accounting, and stronger adaptation planning. Its effectiveness lies in the integration of EO data into governance frameworks, but challenges remain. Limited technical expertise, dependence on external datasets, and funding constraints hinder scalability. Future directions should prioritize indigenous satellite missions, regional data-sharing platforms, and investment in geospatial capacity building to ensure Africa can independently monitor and respond to climate risks.

Space and Security

Security is a critical dimension of sustainable development in Africa, encompassing not only military concerns but also environmental security, human security, and border management (Poku et al., 2007). Space technologies provide tools that strengthen resilience against threats which undermine livelihoods, governance, and long-term development.

Environmental Security

Environmental degradation and resource exploitation often drive insecurity by fueling conflict over land, water, and forests. EO satellites enable monitoring of deforestation, illegal logging, and mining activities, which are linked to community displacement and ecological stress. For example, satellite-based mineral monitoring in Ghana has revealed rapid expansion of artisanal gold mining, providing evidence for regulatory enforcement and community protection. Similarly, EO-driven forest monitoring in Central Africa supports REDD+ initiatives, reducing carbon emissions and mitigating climate-related security risks (Lisboa & de Melo, 2023). By safeguarding ecosystems, space technology directly contributes to stability and sustainable resource use.

Human Security

Human security emphasizes the protection of individuals from threats such as famine, disease, and displacement. EO data strengthens early-warning systems for droughts, floods, and epidemics, reducing humanitarian crises that often escalate into instability. In Kenya, satellite-derived drought indices have guided food-aid distribution, reducing vulnerability in arid regions. In Mozambique, flood-risk mapping has informed evacuation planning, protecting communities from climate-induced hazards (Ogembo et al., 2026). These applications demonstrate how space technologies enhance human security by ensuring that populations are better protected against shocks that undermine development.

Border Monitoring

Africa's vast borders pose challenges for managing migration, smuggling, and transnational crime. High-resolution satellite imagery combined with GIS supports cross-border monitoring, enabling authorities to detect trafficking routes, illegal migration flows, and resource smuggling. In the Sahel, EO data has been used to track cross-border movements linked to armed groups, improving regional coordination. Satellite communication also strengthens information exchange among border agencies, enhancing rapid response capacity. By improving transparency and situational awareness, space technology reduces vulnerabilities at borders and supports regional stability.

In summary, integrating space technology into security frameworks aligns directly with sustainable development. Environmental monitoring protects ecosystems that underpin livelihoods, human-security applications reduce vulnerability to disasters, and border monitoring strengthens governance and cooperation. Unlike traditional military applications, these uses of EO and GIS contribute to peace, resilience, and inclusive growth, ensuring that security is understood not only as defense but as a foundation for sustainable development.

Space and Citizens' Digital Inclusion

Enhanced Satellite Communication for Connectivity

Traditional geostationary satellites have long provided coverage, but their high latency and cost restricted adoption. The rise of LEO constellations such as Starlink and Amazon's Project Kuiper offers lower latency (20–40 ms compared to 600+ ms for GEO satellites) and scalable broadband coverage. Several African countries — including Zimbabwe, Chad, and Burkina Faso — have approved Starlink operations, anticipating improved rural connectivity. However, affordability remains a challenge: entry-level devices in Sub-Saharan Africa cost up to 95% of the average monthly income for the poorest 20% of households, limiting uptake.

Education and E-Learning

Satellite internet has supported distance learning platforms, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Rwanda, satellite-enabled broadband expanded access to online education, reducing the rural-urban divide. Yet, surveys show that only 23% of rural Africans use the internet compared to 57% in urban areas, highlighting persistent inequities in digital learning opportunities.

Healthcare Access

Telemedicine relies on satellite connectivity to deliver consultations and health information to remote villages. In Nigeria, satellite communication has connected rural clinics with urban specialists, improving diagnosis and treatment. The effectiveness of these systems depends on stable bandwidth and affordable subscription models, which LEO constellations can provide but at costs still prohibitive for many rural communities.

Financial Inclusion

Satellite networks support mobile banking and digital payment systems in areas without terrestrial infrastructure. This enables smallholder farmers and traders to access credit, insurance, and markets. However, affordability challenges persist: in 2022, over half of Sub-Saharan African countries failed to meet the GSMA affordability baseline for mobile internet, limiting the reach of satellite-enabled financial services (Oughton, 2022).

Disaster Response and Social Services

Satellites provide communication links during disasters when terrestrial networks fail. In Mozambique and Nigeria, satellite connectivity has ensured continuity of emergency services and humanitarian aid delivery. LEO constellations enhance resilience by offering rapid deployment and universal coverage, but cost and regulatory hurdles slow widespread adoption.

Generally speaking, LEO constellations reduce latency and expand coverage, enabling education, healthcare, and financial inclusion buttressing its effectiveness. Limitations here would include high subscription fees (Starlink kits cost $500+ upfront and $50–100 monthly) for many rural households. Regulatory approvals are uneven across African states.

In future, public-private partnerships, subsidies, and regional cooperation are needed to make satellite internet affordable and scalable. Indigenous African satellite programs could reduce reliance on external providers and improve data sovereignty.

Emerging African Space Initiatives

Africa's commitment to space technology is increasingly visible through national missions and continental coordination. These initiatives illustrate how space science is being harnessed for agriculture, disaster management, environmental monitoring, and socio-economic transformation.

NigeriaSat Missions (NASRDA)

Nigeria's National Space Research and Development Agency (NASRDA) has been a pioneer in African EO programs. NigeriaSat-1 (2003), focused on agricultural mapping and disaster monitoring. NigeriaSat-2 (2011) delivered higher-resolution imagery for urban planning, and environmental management. NIGCOMSAT-1R (2011): Provided communication services across Africa, supporting education and telemedicine. These missions demonstrate Nigeria's strategy of using EO satellites for food security, disaster resilience, health, and connectivity.

EgyptSat Missions (EgSA)

Egypt has invested heavily in EO satellites, positioning itself as a continental leader. EgyptSat-1 (2007) and EgyptSat-2 (2014): Supported agriculture, water management, and urban planning. Egypt hosts the African Space Agency headquarters in Egypt Space City (2025), consolidating its role in continental coordination. Egypt's missions highlight the importance of water resource monitoring and climate adaptation in North Africa.

South African Space Initiatives (SANSA)

South Africa's National Space Agency (SANSA) focuses on EO, space weather, and satellite engineering. It provides ground-station support and telemetry services for African and international missions. Also, it contributes to continental EO networks, strengthening Africa's technical backbone. South Africa's initiatives emphasize regional cooperation and technical infrastructure, ensuring Africa's satellites are supported by reliable ground systems.

Kenyan Satellite Programs (KSA)

Kenya's Space Agency (KSA) has launched innovative CubeSat missions. 1KUNS-PF (2018): Kenya's first EO CubeSat developed with international collaboration has contributed to the African Development Satellite (AfDevSat) project, involving six nations. Kenya's engineers developed the electrical power subsystem underscoring growing indigenous capacity. Kenya's programs highlight the role of small satellites and collaborative missions in building local expertise.

African Space Agency (AfSA) Roadmap

The African Space Agency (AfSA), inaugurated in 2025, coordinates Africa's continental space strategy under four pillars:

i. Earth Observation: Supporting agriculture, disaster management, and climate monitoring.
ii. Satellite Connectivity: Bridging Africa's digital divide.
iii. Navigation and Positioning: Enhancing transport and logistics.
iv. Capacity Building: Expanding STEM education and indigenous satellite development. AfSA's roadmap aligns with the African Union's Agenda 2063, aiming to harmonize national programs and foster interoperability — ensuring

satellites launched in one country can serve multiple African states.

Challenges to Space Technology and Adaptive Research in Africa

Financial Barriers

African space initiatives face chronic underfunding. National budgets often prioritize immediate socio-economic needs such as health and education, leaving limited resources for satellite development, launches, and ground infrastructure (Bhaskaranarayana et al., 2009). For example, Nigeria's NASRDA has struggled to sustain long-term funding for successive NigeriaSat missions. When compared with Asia, countries like India and China have invested heavily in indigenous satellite programs, creating economies of scale that reduce costs. Latin America, particularly Brazil, has leveraged international partnerships to co-finance missions. Africa's challenge is the absence of sustained investment, which limits scalability.

Human Capital Barriers

There is a shortage of qualified engineers, scientists, and technicians across Africa (Mohamedbhai, 2015). Few universities offer advanced aerospace or geospatial programs and many skilled professionals migrate abroad for better opportunities. This weakens local capacity to design, build, and maintain satellites. Comparing this with Asia, Asia has invested in STEM pipelines — India's ISRO collaborates with universities to train engineers, while Latin America's CONAE (Argentina) integrates academic research into national missions. Africa lags in institutionalized training, making human capital development a critical bottleneck.

Infrastructure Barriers

Limited access to computing facilities, ground stations, and communication networks constrains Africa's ability to process and disseminate EO data (Ifejika et al., 2023). Many countries rely on foreign ground stations or external datasets, raising sustainability and sovereignty concerns. Compare this with Asia; infrastructure advantage is evident in China's extensive ground-station network and India's data-processing centers. Latin America has regional hubs, such as Brazil's INPE, which provide shared EO services. Africa's fragmented infrastructure means data often remains underutilized.

Policy Barriers

Policy formulation and implementation remain inconsistent. Some countries lack updated space policies, while others struggle with coordination between ministries and agencies (Makridis & Wellard 2026). This leads to duplication of efforts and inefficiencies in project execution. Asia's space programs are guided by long-term national strategies (e.g., India's 20-year ISRO roadmap). Latin America has adopted regional cooperation frameworks, such as the Latin American and Caribbean Space Agency (ALCE). Africa's African Space Agency roadmap (2025) is a step forward, but national alignment and enforcement remain weak.

Africa's challenges are not unique — Latin America also faces funding constraints, and Asia initially struggled with human capital shortages. However, Asia overcame these through long-term investment and STEM education pipelines, while Latin America leveraged regional cooperation and partnerships. Africa's path forward lies in: Pooling resources regionally under AfSA, investing in STEM education and retaining talent, building indigenous infrastructure for EO data processing, and strengthening policy coherence to align national and continental goals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A major gap identified here is Africa's heavy reliance on externally sourced datasets, which raises concerns about sustainability and data sovereignty. To address this, investment in indigenous satellite missions is essential. By generating and controlling its own Earth Observation data, Africa can reduce dependence on external providers and ensure continuity of critical datasets for agriculture, disaster management, and climate monitoring.

Another recurring limitation is the shortage of technical expertise and geospatial capacity, which constrains the full utilization of EO and GIS tools. This highlights the need for expansion of STEM education and specialized training in geospatial analytics. Building a skilled workforce will enable local institutions to process and apply EO data effectively, ensuring that space technologies translate into practical solutions.

Limited regional platforms, which weakens scalability and cross-border disaster management is an observed challenge that should be looked into. Strengthening regional cooperation and data sharing frameworks will allow African nations to pool resources, harmonize methodologies, and respond more effectively to transboundary challenges such as droughts, floods, and migration.

Connectivity constraints emerged as a central barrier, with low internet penetration and slow fiber expansion undermining EO adoption. To overcome this, integrating satellite communication systems with EO platforms is critical. Satellite communication offers universal coverage and resilience, ensuring that even underserved rural areas can access real-time EO insights.

Finally, the literature shows that existing studies often fail to address Africa's dynamic challenges in real time. To address this, promoting adaptive research approaches that integrate real-time satellite data with flexible policy responses will ensure interventions remain relevant to evolving threats such as desertification, flooding, and rapid urbanization.

CONCLUSION

Space science and technology is increasingly central to Africa's sustainable development trajectory, offering practical solutions for agriculture, disaster management, resource conservation, urban planning, climate monitoring, security, and digital inclusion. Evidence from countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Mozambique demonstrates that Earth Observation, satellite communication, and navigation systems are already delivering measurable benefits in food security, connectivity, and climate adaptation.

However, persistent barriers remain. Financial constraints limit the continuity of satellite missions, while human capital shortages weaken local capacity to design and interpret EO systems. Infrastructure gap**s** in data processing and communication facilities hinder effective utilization, and policy fragmentation reduces coherence across national and continental programs. These challenges highlight clear research gaps, including insufficient studies on indigenous African satellite missions, weak integration of EO across multiple sectors, and limited cost-benefit analyses of space investments compared to Asia and Latin America.

The future opportunities for Africa lie mainly on the expansion of Low-Earth Orbit constellations. This offers a pathway to bridge the digital divide, while regional EO data hubs could strengthen local processing and reduce dependence on external datasets. Investment in climate monitoring satellites would enhance adaptation planning and carbon accounting, the growth of commercial space ventures and public-private partnerships could accelerate innovation in smart cities, agriculture, and disaster resilience.

These opportunities carry important policy implications. National programs must align with the African Space Agency roadmap to avoid duplication and foster interoperability. Governments should expand STEM education pipelines to build a skilled workforce, establish data sovereignty frameworks to ensure African ownership of EO datasets, and promote regional cooperation agreements to pool resources and coordinate satellite launches.

Generally, leveraging space as a strategic driver positions Africa to close its digital divide, safeguard natural resources, and advance multiple Sustainable Development Goals. With sustained commitment to investment, capacity building, and policy coherence, space technology can become a cornerstone of Africa's innovation, resilience, and sustainable future.

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