

Learning from the Pioneers

A blueprint for emerging African space programmes

What works, what fails, and how to start with little

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[Space in Africa logo]

The evidence base

15

national space programmes

5

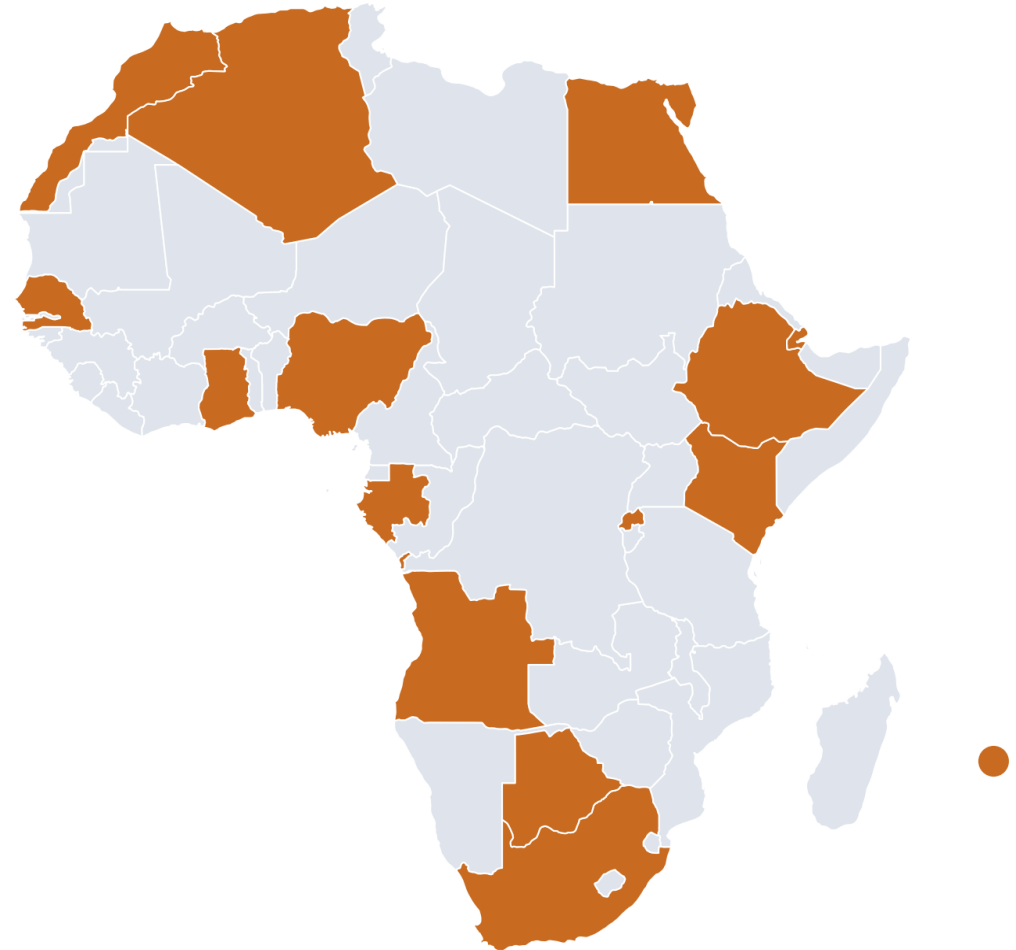
years, returning to the same agencies

6

identical questions

More than twenty African countries have a space programme of some kind.

Around a third are still at the earliest stage.



**“We have a mandate, a small budget,
and no agency.**

What do we buy first?”

The question at the end of every meeting.

They buy the satellite, then look for the users.

- **Earth observation** The imagery arrives. No ministry opens it.
- **Communications** North of USD 200 million committed. The search for paying customers starts afterwards.

Demand is the premise for the spend, not its consequence.

The Pioneer Sequence

- 1 Demand** Ministries using free and commercial data in real workflows.
- 2 Ground** Stations, data handling, and the people who run them.
- 3 People** Engineers trained into a pipeline that continues.
- 4 Assets** Your own spacecraft, securing a supply you already depend on.

Legislation enables capability. It does not substitute for it.

Start with data you do not own

Ground segment comes next.

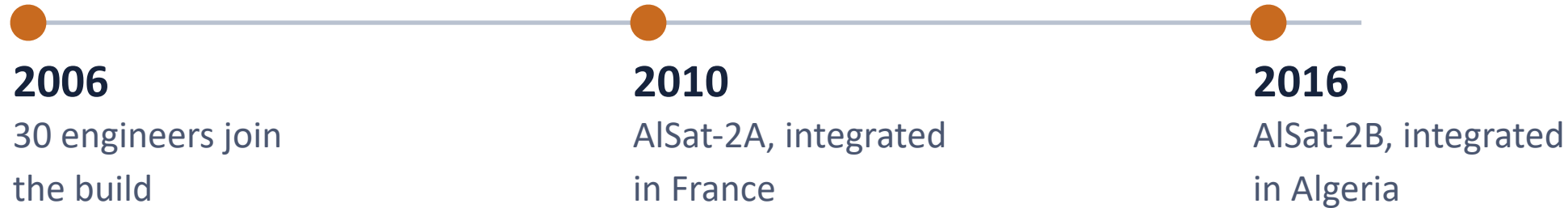
Rwanda, 2026

- A national imagery programme with Planet
- The first fully certified teleport in sub-Saharan Africa

and no Earth observation satellite of its own.

Two programmes. The same year.

Algeria



A second African Earth-observation programme



The difference was not training. It was absorption.

The Absorption Test

Before any spend, answer three questions.

- 1 Who uses this output, by name?
- 2 Who employs this person in eighteen months?
- 3 Who funds the replacement?

Count contracts, not MoUs.

What transfers capability:

- A named headcount
- A hardware deliverable
- A purchase order
- Integration performed in-country

Year one, on a small budget

Analysts inside user ministries

A data-sharing agreement

A licensing regime

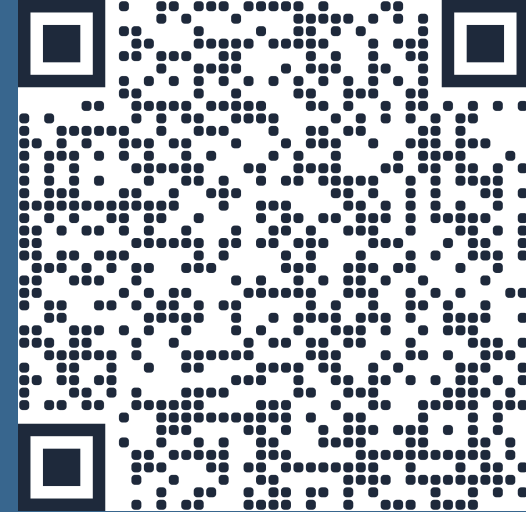
A university partnership

Ghana's first radio telescope was a decommissioned telecoms antenna.

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I advise governments and institutions on space programme design, market analysis, and partnership strategy across Africa.