

**ALOS AND ESA THIRD PARTY MISSIONS FOR APPLICATIONS IN
EUROPE AND AFRICA
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Most European Earth Observation (EO) data users rely on several EO missions, both to increase sustainability of their service and to widen the range of observation parameters.

In addition to its own missions such as ERS-1, ERS-2, ENVISAT and the future Earth Explorers and Sentinels, ESA therefore offers access to the scientific and applications community to so-called 'Third Party Missions'. Third Party Missions are complementing the observations of ESA missions, are used to prepare for future ESA missions including cross-calibration and create synergy to favor a wider use of EO data within ESA Member States. Furthermore Third Party Missions (TPMs) enable International co-operation and data exchange schemes with other Space Agencies.

As part of the EARTHNET Programme ESA regularly investigates the benefits of individual Third Party Missions as part of the EO data portfolio offered to European Users through the Multi-Mission User Services. Furthermore ESA aims to co-ordinate and standardize the generation of products from ESA and TPMs for European users, this becoming even more important in the context of European ground segment harmonization initiatives.

The JAXA ALOS mission is ESA's largest Third party Mission Project is of particular interest for the European and African User community, as it offers complementary satellite mission data in both the SAR and optical data domain to the existing and planned ESA missions. ESA today hosts all ALOS data ever acquired over Europe and Africa and is responsible to serve the users residing in Africa and Europe. It offers a large potential for co-operation between JAXA and ESA in data exchange and related ground segment co-operations as well as joint application developments between ESA, JAXA and other Nodes. Besides ALOS the TPM scheme comprises many more missions such as the Korean Kompsat-2 satellite, the French SPOT4 satellite or the small Proba satellite with the hyperspectral CHRIS sensor. All data are being made available to European and African users at either cost of reproduction or for free.

The paper gives an overview of the current status of ESA's Third Party Mission scheme and data access, with a focus on missions available for and over Africa.