Kigali November 2, 2018–The 2018 Seventh Africa Rift geothermal conference closed its gates with an unequivocal resolve by countries in the eastern Africa rift system to mainstream direct use in geothermal power development. The over 350 delegates resolved that in the next 2 years, ARGeo countries will focus on tapping the immense opportunities that direct utilization of geothermal portends for this continent. This is because direct uses of geothermal resources have the potential to contribute to the socio-economic development of the African continent.

The conference noted that the enhanced direct use of geothermal resources is great for fighting hunger and poverty and ultimately enhance the livelihoods of communities living in geothermal-rich localities. The goal is for countries to invest in projects that can deliver tangible benefits for communities in geothermal-rich regions.

Countries will continue seeking innovative technical assistance for resource assessment, appropriate technology and assessment of markets for crop drying, chilling of agricultural products and fish farming, among a host of other applications. Countries will also seek innovative financing options that range from utilizing capital markets, pension funds, carbon and green funds. Involvement of private developers will enhance and fast-track geothermal development in the region by bringing together knowledge and finances skills. Realizing the different characteristics of geothermal systems between the Western and Eastern branches of the EARS, the conference resolved to adopt an integrated approach including harmonizing geothermal development policies and legal framework.

There will be a two-day field trip to Karisimbi and Gisenyi geothermal prospects on 3-4 November 2018.

Domesticate direct use applications in response to the felt needs of communities

Africa needs direct use projects that respond to its unique needs. This was the resounding punch line during the Direct Use plenary discussion on the third and final day of the 7th geothermal conference taking place in Kigali, Rwanda. The plenary session chaired by Dr. George Muia (GDC, Kenya) comprised Martha Mburu (GDC, Kenya), Luca Angelino, International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), Arni Ragnarsson, Iceland GeoSurvey and Caitlin Smith – US Power Africa.
Africa’s main need is food security and sustainable livelihoods. Geothermal direct projects should, therefore, explore agriculture-based projects to make the lives of communities living around geothermal prospects more comfortable, just as USA, Europe and China use geothermal for district heating during winter. And the good news is that the use of geothermal resources in agriculture is a time-tested venture.

And there is a lot of hope. Kenya already has a demonstration project in its Menengai project with prototypes for milk pasteurization, greenhouse heating, and a laundromat using heat harvested from brine before re-injection. More than 2000 entities have expressed interest to establish geothermally-driven agricultural and industrial projects. GDC-Kenya is seeking funding for a feasibility study after which a geothermal direct use park will be established within a 50Km radius from the project to allow entities to set up various projects. Still in Kenya, KenGen has a fully operational geothermally-heated spa that adds a variety of experiences to tourists visiting the Hells Gate National Park. For geothermal prospects with lower temperatures, it is possible to drill a shallow well up to around 1000m depth and use it for direct use agricultural and industrial projects and for electricity production using a binary system.

Africa Geothermal Branch of IGA holds second AGM
The African geothermal branch of IGA chaired by the President Dr. Peter Omenda held its second AGM during the 7th ARGeo conference. ARB membership is open to individuals and corporates. Members agreed to make membership contributions by end of November 2018. So far more than 30 members have already paid up. A road map for the next one year was also discussed and endorsed.

David Djarnsson celebrates birthday during ARGeo-C7
It was such a pleasant surprise for David Djarnsson from MFA-ICEIDA when he was ushered into Room 5 at the Rwanda Convention Centre, full of the ARGeo-C7 organizing committee. On the table was a cake, complete with a candle, which he gladly cut as the group melodiously sang happy birthday to him. David appreciated the gesture and shared the cake with them all.