



**AFRICA
ENVIRONMENT INFORMATION NETWORK**

FRAMEWORK FOR CAPACITY BUILDING IN
INTEGRATED ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS AND REPORTING
IN AFRICA

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Preface

This document is the outcome of an effort by UNEP, under the political leadership of the Regional Office for Africa, technical guidance and supervision of the Division for Early Warning and Assessment, and collaboration with GRID-Arendal, to prepare a coordinated programme to develop a comprehensive environmental information network in response to needs expressed by African Ministers.

The context for the Africa Environment Information Network (AEIN), as proposed in this document, is the effective *management of environmental assets for sustainable development* — that is, to provide reliable assessments of and information on environmental conditions to guide policy formulation and decision making, and to create an informed citizenry who feel empowered to act intelligently at their own levels in managing environmental resources for the benefit and well-being of themselves and society as a whole. This represents a fundamental shift from previous environmental information initiatives which in a large part tended to focus on monitoring.

Against this backdrop AEIN has been firmly anchored on the highest African environmental policy platform, African Ministerial Conference on Environment (AMCEN). It also sets the stage for providing inputs into the sustainable development policy framework as articulated by African leaders under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

AEIN is also aligned with UNEP's own mandate to *inform and enable* "nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations." It provides a foundation for responding to environmental management and sustainable development issues ranging from the local to the global levels. It focuses on, and will be implemented at the *country level*, using a *sub-regional approach* to generate information to support *regional initiatives*, which information would in turn feed into *global processes*.

The basic concepts which are elaborated in this document have been extensively discussed through consultations with many stakeholders, and have been endorsed by AMCEN. AEIN has been conceived as an *integrated framework programme*. It builds strongly on UNEP-DEWA's earlier efforts under the Environmental and Natural Resource Information Network (ENRIN), and incorporates best practices and lessons learnt from several other initiatives over the past decade of environmental information systems development in Africa.

Emphasis has been put on a strong *country ownership*, and considerable effort has been made not to present AEIN as "another project". It is *African-led*, under the auspices of African Ministers, and will be supported by a cadre of African environmental information experts under the banner of EIS-AFRICA, a pan-African NGO committed to enhancing the availability and access to environmental information, as well as African organisations at the sub-regional and regional levels. It implements *capacity building* not as an end in itself, but rather as a function of a function of specific objectives — as part of the process of generating

products and services. *Partnerships for the collaborative management of information* is central to the Network structure, the basic principle being that *data should be collected and quality-assured once, and then made available for multiple use*.

As a UNEP-supported activity the focus is very much on *capacity building for integrated environmental assessments and reporting*. However, best practices have dictated the adoption of a *framework approach* which includes two other critical *platforms* — effective and efficient *data exchange mechanisms*, and *information and communication technologies*. The AEIN development team strongly believes that all the three platforms need to be comprehensively addressed, although with different emphasis within the proposal, in order to ensure the effective development, management, application and integration of environmental information in policy formulation and decision making processes. The proposal devotes considerable space to the importance of the framework approach, outlining the set-up and functioning of such a framework without diminishing the core function of integrated assessments and reporting. A set of specific activities are proposed to implement the strategy.

The AEIN development team recognises that the full implementation of the *framework* is beyond the scope of any single project, and particularly under the banner of AEIN. Most of the issues involved in the framework are not core to UNEP's mandate and functions. However, all three *platforms* together constitute critical success factors for AEIN. It is therefore imperative for UNEP to be proactive in seeking and building and/or strengthening the necessary partnerships envisaged. UNEP should use its mandate and “convening authority” to seek UN-wide support and involvement, assuring a seamless coordination of efforts while at the same time leveraging additional resources from other donors, for the development of a comprehensive data foundation to support sustainable development in Africa.

Information is an integrating factor in the various sustainable development policy initiatives. We strongly believe that harmonised, validated and shared information resources will serve as a bridge, and tie together different initiatives addressing environmental issues as a cross-cutting theme in poverty reduction and sustained socio-economic development in Africa.

The AEIN Team
September 2002

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AFRICA ENVIRONMENT INFORMATION NETWORK

FRAMEWORK FOR CAPACITY BUILDING IN INTEGRATED ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS AND REPORTING IN AFRICA

SUMMARY

What is AEIN?

The Africa Environment Information Network (AEIN) is a multi-stakeholder capacity building process that aims to harness and enhance access to information and knowledge to support the management of Africa's environmental resources as assets for sustainable development. The goal is to strengthen the capacity of African countries to use good quality *information on environmental assets* to make informed investment choices at sub-national and national levels, and manage these assets on a sustainable basis.

Policy-level Demand

AEIN responds to political aspirations as well as technical needs identified by the African Ministerial Conference on Environment (AMCEN). It is a direct outcome of the Africa Environment Outlook (AEO) preparation process which had been mandated by AMCEN. In this respect AEIN is designed, first and foremost, to build capacity for integrated environmental assessments and reporting at the country level. As an outcome of this capacity building activity, AEIN will provide data and information support to the AEO process. It will also provide regular support to the implementation of AMCEN's decisions and programme of work.

AEIN also responds to expressions of needs from African experts, policy makers, environmental managers and researchers. It will enhance capacities at the national level for using modern information management tools to better characterise environmental resources and understand complex processes, as well as linkages among environment and development issues. It will promote access to, and harmonization of data in the Africa region, and provide a basis for tracking environmental changes for early warning using quantitative indicators and focusing on national needs and priorities. AEIN will therefore provide inputs into the Global Environment Outlook (GEO) process. It will also enhance the region's capacity in International Environmental Governance (IEG).

Information Support for Sustainable Development

In the context of the information-driven economy of today, the enhanced capacities in resource information management and communication technologies will also help to better leverage the *value* of Africa's environmental assets. This would be particularly relevant in the context of international negotiations with respect to the global environmental conventions, as well as trade.

AEIN is designed to provide a broad a framework for the effective harnessing of information and knowledge on environmental resources, and how people are affected by changes in the environment. This knowledge will be channelled into decision-making processes, particularly within the framework of national socio-economic development priorities, as well as the implementation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

AEIN will provide targeted information products and services to support initiatives and decision-making processes in respect of poverty eradication, as well as other sustainable development goals outlined in the United Nations Millennium Declaration and the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development. AEIN will contribute to the harmonisation and facilitation of access to development-oriented information resources that are widely shared at all levels of society. This will empower citizens to act responsibly at their respective levels of decision-making, and thereby promoting transparency and engendering good environmental governance.

Implementation and Expected Outputs

AEIN is conceived as an integrated framework programme that will be implemented through partnerships. It is founded on best practices and lessons learnt over the past decade developing environmental information systems.

The AEIN implementation strategy focuses on three key platforms, which define project activity areas:

- a) Capacity building for harnessing professional skills and methodologies for *analysing data* and *generating policy-oriented and targeted environmental information*, and for *integrating such information into sustainable development decision making*;
- b) Supporting and catalysing *networking* and the development of the *infrastructure and support mechanisms* for a comprehensive and harmonised *national sustainable development data foundation*. The AEIN focus in this regard will be on *core datasets for integrated environmental assessments and reporting*; and
- c) Using information and communication technologies (ICT) to *manage data and information*, and to *facilitate access to information*, and also to *communicate* this information to decision makers at various levels of society, as well as the wider

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