

**AFRICA
ENVIRONMENT INFORMATION NETWORK**



AFRICA ENVIRONMENT OUTLOOK

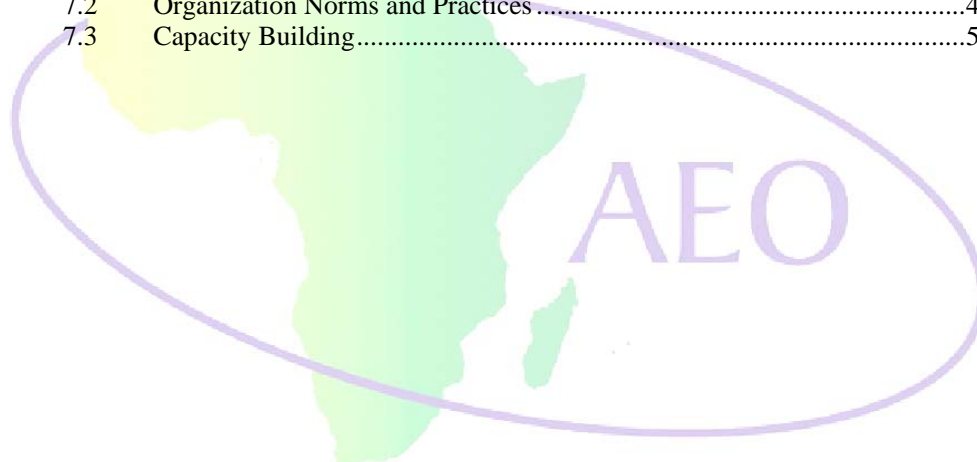
UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

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SECTION I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

UNEP has prepared a framework proposal for the establishment of an Africa Environmental Information Network (AEIN), a capacity building programme 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 overarching goal is to strengthen the capacity of African countries to use good quality ***information on environmental assets*** to make informed investment choices at national and sub-national levels, and manage these assets on a sustainable basis. A key objective of the initiative is to build capacity for establishing the essential data foundation needed to support country-level sustainable development initiatives, focusing on the *environmental aspects*.

The initiative is a direct outcome of the Africa Environment Outlook (AEO) preparation process, and it has been endorsed by the African Ministerial Conference on Environment (AMCEN) as a means for harmonizing and promoting access to data in the Africa region, and acting as ***“a basis for tracking environmental changes using quantitative indicators focusing on national needs.”***¹ In this respect AEIN is designed, first and foremost, to ***build capacity for integrated environmental assessments and reporting at the national level***. AEIN will also enhance capacities at the national level for using modern information management tools to better characterize environmental resources and understand complex processes, as well as linkages among environment and development issues. As an outcome of this capacity building activity, AEIN will provide data and information support to the AEO process.

AMCEN serves as the platform for the implementation and monitoring of the Environmental Component of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). The AEO, endorsed during the 9th Session of AMCEN as ***“a monitoring and reporting tool for sustainable environmental management, as well as [providing] a framework for national and sub-regional integrated environmental assessment and reporting”***, will therefore constitute one of the reporting mechanisms for NEPAD. To this end the AEIN initiative will also provide inputs in the implementation of NEPAD.

1.2 Focus of the guidelines

AEIN was designed to strengthen the data foundation for an integrated environmental assessment and reporting (IEA&R) process at the national level. The rationale was that an improved and harmonised national reporting process was a prerequisite for the AEO process, seen as a *monitoring tool* on how the environment is managed in Africa.

An effective and efficient IEA&R is a holistic process, with three essential characteristics:

- a) The interpretation, assessment and integration of high quality data to generate meaningful and readable information;
- b) The development of spatial and temporal trend information; and

¹ Kampala Declaration, 9th Session of the African Ministerial Conference on Environment, Kampala 1-5 July, 2002

- c) The linkage between environment and socio-economic considerations within a sustainable development context.

The focus of these guidelines is to assist the implementation of the AEIN at the national level focusing on information management that supports this holistic process. The AEIN framework approaches the development of an **information management system** as core to the national process for IEA&R. This approach aims to enhance the use and sharing of environmental data and information resources at the institutional level, while providing a framework for the integration, analysis, synthesis and reporting at various levels. These guidelines focus on, and are intended to assist in streamlining the collection, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of data on environmental conditions at the national level in such a manner as to meet national priorities, within a consistent regional framework and using harmonised approaches.

1.3 Target audience

The guidelines are designed to serve as a resource and provide guidance for national-level personnel and other actors who are engaged in various aspects of implementing the AEIN. Specifically the guidelines target the following players in the process:

- National environmental organizations responsible for AEIN implementation
- Personnel of national environmental agencies responsible for managing the NIEAR process (identification of issues, selection of consultants, identification of core data sets, etc.)
- National data centres involved in the generation of core data and the relevant information products for the NIEAR process
- Environmental information management specialists
- National consultants who prepare specialist inputs for the NIEAR

1.4 Structure of the guidelines

The guidelines are organised into six domains, each of which requires its own sub-strategy (Figure 1), with the objective of highlighting and differentiating specific needs and issues relating to information **management**, information **systems** and information **technology**:

- The need for a **vision** for environmental management information, which sets the strategic context and provides a policy orientation clearly demonstrating the crucial importance of information to the organization's mandate;
- The information requirements for environmental management on the basis of environmental management practice and reporting obligations, involving an assessment of **information resources**, i.e., knowing the organization's information assets;
- The process of **managing** the information resources, maintaining and auditing information as a strategic asset within environmental organizations to support the "core business" of managing the environment;
- The **systems** needed to handle the information to support organizational activities, dealing with the various *interrelated components* including the deployment of appropriate hardware and software that collect, manipulate, and disseminate data and information, and facilitate knowledge sharing to meet environmental policy and management objectives;
- The information and communications **technology** that would provide the mechanisms to implement desired information handling, and ensuring that the technology itself works efficiently and effectively; and

- Managing the *change* associated with the introduction of new policies, technology and procedures, including the variety of issues such as organizational culture and training.

This approach has also been adopted to emphasise the different aspects of AEIN, although it is recognised that some of the components may not be relevant to some countries.



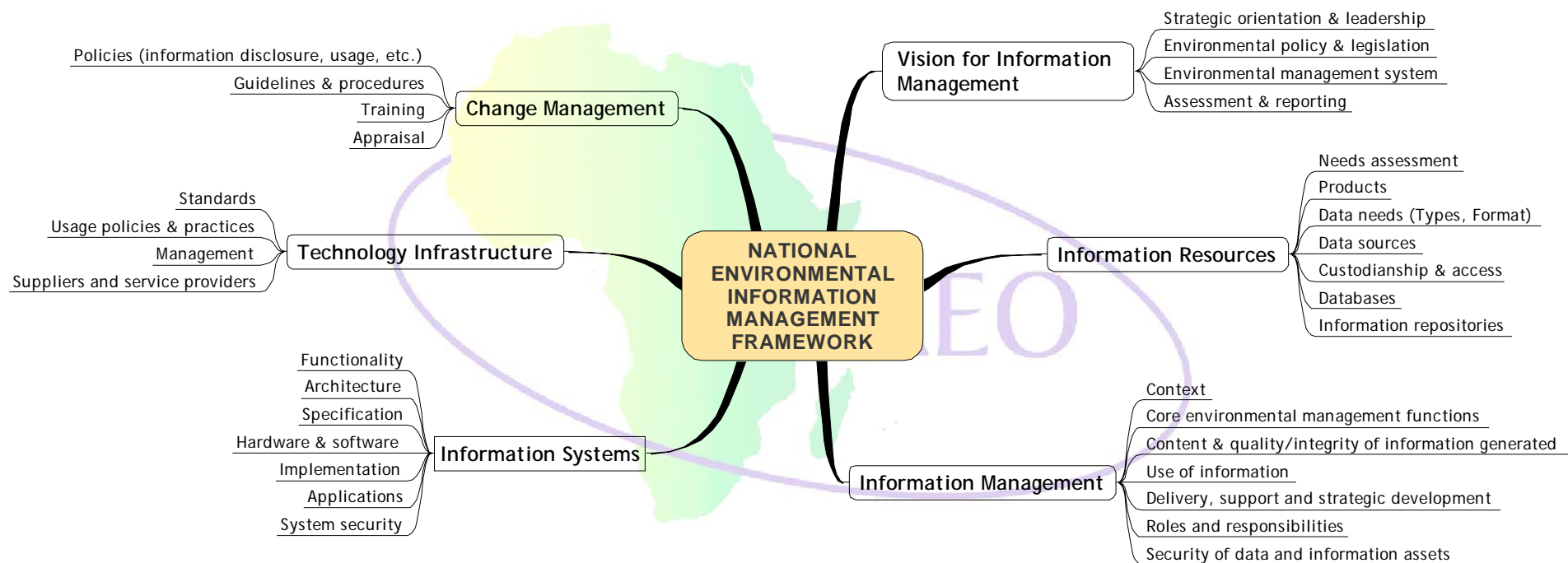


Figure 1: Framework for guidelines development

SECTION II

OVERVIEW OF THE AEIN FRAMEWORK

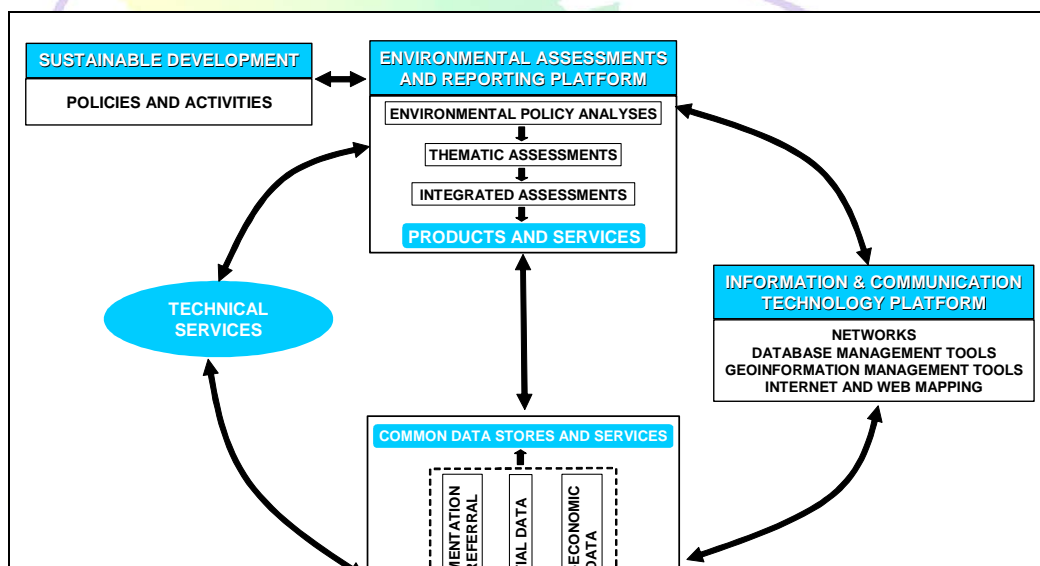
2.1 Highlights

The AEIN Framework is comprehensively elaborated in the “*Proposal for the Establishment of an Africa Environment Information Network — Framework for Capacity Building in Integrated Environmental Assessments and Reporting in Africa*”, and should be consulted as background to the current document. The conceptual framework is highlighted here to provide a context.

The Framework revolves around three key *platforms* (Figure 2), which define activity areas:

□ **An integrated environmental assessment and reporting platform:**

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*;



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