

**Africa Environment Information Network
Stakeholders' Meeting**

24 – 26 February 2003



AFRICA ENVIRONMENT OUTLOOK

Table of Content

1. Background.....	1
2. Objectives of the meeting	1
3. Meeting format.....	2
4. Participation	3
5. Focus Groups Discussions	3
6. Focus Group Reports	4
6.1 Data Issues	4
6.2 Institutional framework and issues	9
6.3 Capacity building	11
6.4 Plenary Discussions	16
6.5 Linkages with the Conventions and Other Groups	16
6.6 A note on the next AEO	17
7. Conclusions and Recommendations	18
8. Next Steps	20
ANNEXES.....	22
Agenda	23
Briefs by Partners.....	25
Presentations	35
List of Participants	62

AFRICA ENVIRONMENT OUTLOOK

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Court Classique Hotel, Pretoria, South Africa

REPORT

1. Background

The Africa Environment Information Network (AEIN) initiative has evolved as a direct response to political and technical needs expressed by the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN). A central objective of AEIN is to *build capacity* for establishing the essential data foundation and information management framework needed to support country-level integrated environmental assessments and reporting, within the broad framework of sustainable development goals and initiatives. A specific short-term objective is to support the implementation of decisions of AMCEN with respect to the Africa Environment Outlook (AEO) preparation process, while strengthening capacity for state of environment (SoE) reporting at the national and sub-regional levels.

Another short-term objective is to harmonise the information base and approaches to reporting on the various multi-lateral environmental agreements (MEAs) at the national level. Through partnerships and strategic alignments, the AEIN initiative will strengthen the capacities of African countries to generate a broader range of products and services to support integrated environmental management while at the same time, providing a harmonised and comprehensive information and knowledge base to support African countries in meeting their commitments and reporting requirements to the MEAs, funding agencies, and other partners.

In designing the AEIN to meet national needs, which in turn respond to AMCEN's requirements, due consideration was also given to making the initiative to provide information support for the implementation of the Environmental Component of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). In the longer term, AEIN will also support the implementation of NEPAD, as well as global initiatives that focus on sustainable development in Africa.

The AEIN initiative is a "*multi-stakeholder and partnership framework*". The basic concepts upon which it has been developed have been extensively discussed through consultations with many stakeholders, and have been endorsed by the AMCEN. The concepts have also received extensive political support from UN and other international organizations, donor agencies and other regional and international bodies and partners.

2. Objectives of the meeting

As a multi-tier network the ultimate goal of AEIN would only be achieved through effective collaboration among many varied initiatives, projects and programmes of various partners, and other windows of opportunity. The *framework* approach advocated

is to ensure that there is synergy among these activities. Therefore the success of AEIN will depend, to a very large, on open and full cooperative arrangements with key partners involved in environmental information management and related systems development in the region.

The development of partnerships, networking and collaborative mechanisms are central to meeting this challenge. The goal of the stakeholders' meeting was to explore with potential partners ways to pursue a common approach in this regard. Specific objectives of the meeting were:

- Review the AEIN framework concept, and provide inputs for the draft implementation strategy and guidelines;
- Build consensus on key policy and strategic AEIN issues, related to the overall implementation approach, principal products and services, and institutional networking and partnerships;
- Elicit inputs from key relevant partners with regard to the harmonization and streamlining of efforts, and establish linkages to on-going programmes and activities with a view to building synergy;
- Make recommendations for the establishment of the International Steering Committee for the AEIN programme.

Networking and agreement on appropriate institutional arrangements as well as mechanisms that could serve to align on-going initiatives into comprehensive and harmonised approaches would be sought.

The meeting also served a formal launching of the AEIN implementation process.

3. Meeting format

A consultative work-session format was adopted. The agenda for the meeting is indicated in Annex 1.

There were several presentations (see Annex 3) to provide the appropriate context for deliberations. The presentations covered the following:

- The AMCEN context and mandate for the AEIN
- An evolution of UNEP's capacity building activities with respect to integrated environmental assessment and reporting
- An overview of the AEIN framework and implementation strategy
- Brief presentations on partner initiatives relating to AEIN

Detailed discussions were held in three focus groups dealing with the following:

- Data issues
- Networking and institutional arrangements
- Capacity building (institutional support) and training

The meeting was under the overall leadership and guidance of the Director of UNEP's Regional Office for Africa, who chaired the plenary sessions. Deliberations were guided by two facilitators.

4. Participation

There were 37 participants drawn from various organisations, including universities, regional institutions, non-governmental organisations, and the private sector (Annex 4). Participants were selected on the basis of their long experience in environmental information systems development in Africa, as well as the potential for the establishment of partnerships.

5. Focus Groups Discussions

The Kampala Declaration by AMCEN specifically calls for the establishment of the AEIN “to promote access to, and harmonization of data in the Africa region and act as a basis for tracking environmental changes using quantitative indicators focusing on national needs”¹. In order to keep this “core mandate” in perspective, the focus of implementation of AEIN within UNEP will be on integrated assessment and reporting. The immediate objective will be to build capacity for the development and management of *core datasets for integrated environmental assessments and reporting* at the national level, while supporting and catalysing *institutional networking and capacities* related to the management of data and information at the sub-national, national, sub-regional, and regional levels. In order to do this AEIN proposes the establishment of a *Data Development and Exchange Platform* as the basis for networking and collaboration.

The first phase of AEIN implementation (2003 – 2004) is essentially a proof of concept. One basic assumption regarding the phasing of AEIN implementation is that some elements of the programme may already be in place in several countries. On this basis the implementation strategy for Phase 1 assumes that *some data exists in some form, somewhere*. The focus of activities in Phase 1 therefore is to test this assumption, while implementing pilot activities with respect to networking, development of the common data repositories, prototype products, information services, and the appropriate tools and methodologies to support AEIN activities. These activities are aimed at building a stronger foundation for the *production of the next AEO*.

The goal for Phase 1 will be *building capacity for organising, managing data in a networked environment and the analytical processes to support the AEO preparation*. Specific objectives will be:

- To develop an AEO Data Compendium from existing data sources
- To quantify environmental changes, support observed trends, characterise emerging issues, and to assess impacts of such changes on human vulnerability using hard data and indicators;
- Strengthen data networking at the sub-regional level.

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

It is intended that a set of prototype products will be developed and used to engage decision makers in discussions (through Executive Seminars and workshops) at the sub-regional level to "test" their response to such products, and fine-tune the products more to suit their needs, or to develop new product concepts, policy-relevant applications, and services. A comprehensive "roll out" plan for the respective sub-regions will be prepared at the end of the phase.

Against this background, the focus groups were tasked to discuss the broad context for the SoE and AEO reporting processes, and the specific ways by which AEIN implementation will support the process. Discussions were guided by basic questions/issues such as:

- What are the issues relating to *core data sets* that need to be addressed?
- What organisational and institutional framework would be appropriate to deal with the coordination and implementations processes?
- What capacity would be required, and how would capacity needs be met?

Members of the groups would incorporate perspectives, experience and best practices from their individual organisations into the groups' deliberation in addressing the issues, as well as how they could contribute to the implementation of AEIN as currently defined. They were expected to explore the possibilities for collaboration and harmonisation of efforts and approaches. How could AEIN benefit from what their organisations are doing, so that in the near future all stakeholders could benefit from integrated capacity building efforts, harmonised databases, etc.? How could national partners respond to AMCEN's need in terms of AEO more efficiently? More importantly what would be the incentives for national partners to belong to such a network, in terms of their respective national-level priorities?

Group leaders were assigned, but other participants had the choice which focus group(s) they would prefer to join.

6. Focus Group Reports

6.1 Data Issues

The group on data issues and processes discussed what constituted "data", reviewed the data categories used for the AEO/GEO processes, and examined related issues.

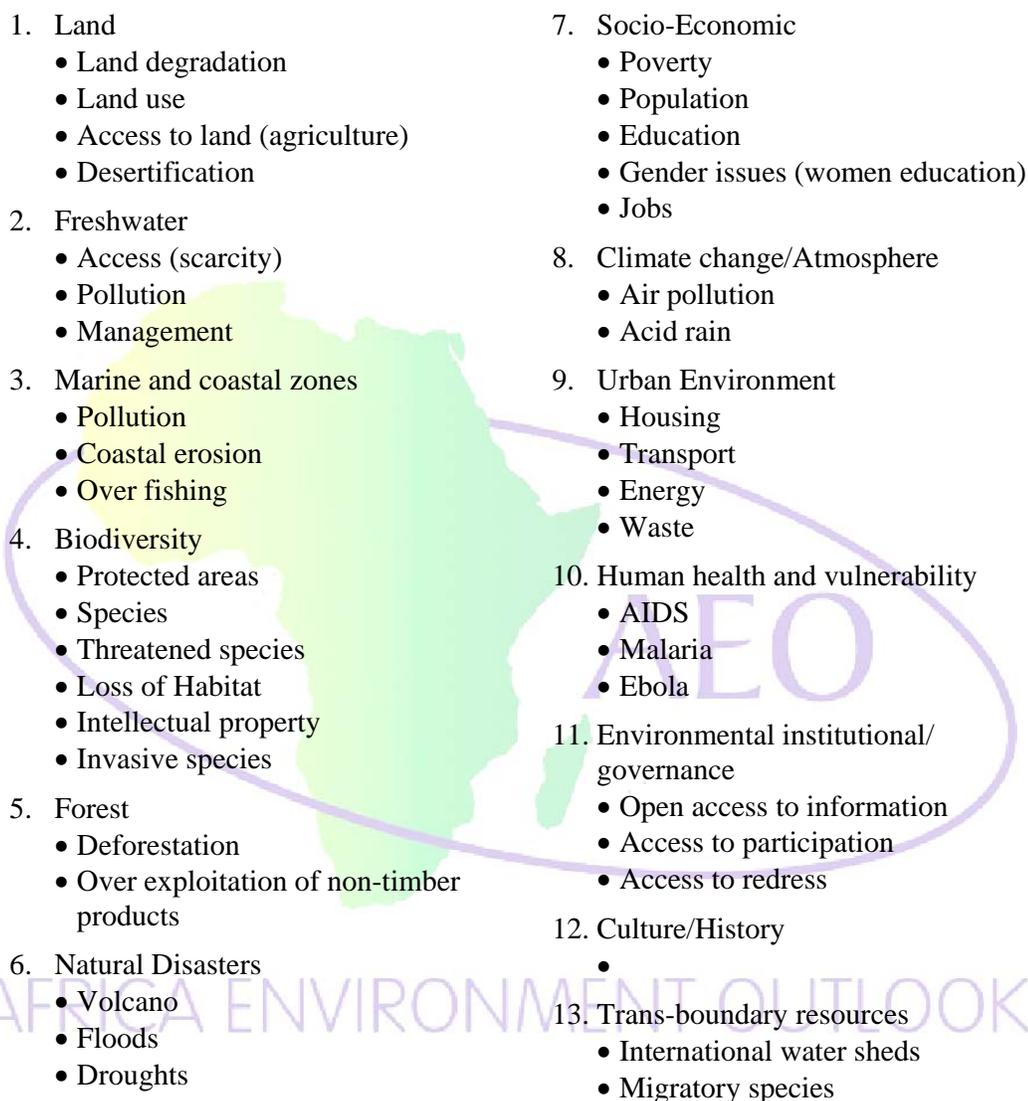
The group identified two broad data types/sources:

1. Statistics
 - Tabular data
 - Reports
 - Analyses
 - Databases
2. Geo-spatial data
 - Geo referenced digital data
 - Flat map files (JPEG, GIFF etc.)

- Hand drawn maps

They pointed out that discussions about data types in Africa should include “authorised” (i.e., official) as well as “unauthorised” (or “unofficial”) data.

On the basis of AEO/GEO processes 9 categories (thematic areas) were identified:

- 
1. Land
 - Land degradation
 - Land use
 - Access to land (agriculture)
 - Desertification
 2. Freshwater
 - Access (scarcity)
 - Pollution
 - Management
 3. Marine and coastal zones
 - Pollution
 - Coastal erosion
 - Over fishing
 4. Biodiversity
 - Protected areas
 - Species
 - Threatened species
 - Loss of Habitat
 - Intellectual property
 - Invasive species
 5. Forest
 - Deforestation
 - Over exploitation of non-timber products
 6. Natural Disasters
 - Volcano
 - Floods
 - Droughts
 7. Socio-Economic
 - Poverty
 - Population
 - Education
 - Gender issues (women education)
 - Jobs
 8. Climate change/Atmosphere
 - Air pollution
 - Acid rain
 9. Urban Environment
 - Housing
 - Transport
 - Energy
 - Waste
 10. Human health and vulnerability
 - AIDS
 - Malaria
 - Ebola
 11. Environmental institutional/ governance
 - Open access to information
 - Access to participation
 - Access to redress
 12. Culture/History
 -
 13. Trans-boundary resources
 - International water sheds
 - Migratory species

Several constraints and issues, in terms of lack, relating to data processes were identified:

On content:

- Economic valuation of resources (analysis)
- Time series trends
- Other valuation of resources
- Continuity of data, time series
- Data does not exist
- Appropriateness

- Definitions of terms within the data collectors
- Core data

On data documentation

- Metadata (Documentation)
- Comparability across countries
- Usefulness of data
- Data sources – some sources are more reliable than others
- Classification systems

On legal/regulatory frameworks

- Cooperation from institutions to validate the data available
- Sharing water data across the countries (ground water scarcity issues in North Africa);
- Accessibility to data (for instance public and media access due to secrecy laws)
- Acceptance of data coming from international institutions

On data management

Lack of:

- Archiving of data

On institutional capacity

Lack of:

- Equipment (hardware, software, staffing, budget, institutional support, etc.)
- Capacity for the collection of the information (Do national level institutions collect the data themselves, or do they prefer international institutions to collect the data for them?)

On technical capacity

Lack of:

- Analytical capacity
- Policy analysis
- GIS analysis

The group made the following *suggestions and recommendations* to address these

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