



ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTING FOR AFRICAN JOURNALISTS

A Handbook of Key Environmental
Issues and Concepts



Environmental reporting
for African journalists:
Handbook of key
environmental issues and
concepts

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Foreword

“Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family.” These words by Kofi Annan underscore the immense importance of information in our society. An informed society will be better equipped and positioned to tackle the challenges of the twenty-first century.



Environmental information forms the crux of environmental action. Thanks to the prominent role that they play in disseminating information, the mass media can ensure widespread distribution of environmental information and thus catalyse environmental action.

In pursuance of its mission to provide leadership and encourage partnerships and access to environmental information as helping to contribute to sustainable development, UNEP recognizes the need to support journalists in the difficult task of interpreting complex environmental issues. This handbook was written in a user-friendly reference style that will ensure speedy access to the information needed both in the handbook itself and in the further readings suggested. The availability of such specific information and references will enable environmental issues to be widely incorporated into mainstream reporting, thus ensuring that accurate environmental information becomes duly and strategically integrated into the public domain sooner, rather than later; systematically, rather than sporadically.

Africa is one of the five priority areas identified by UNEP, accordingly African journalists need to be trained in environmental reporting. Accurate and balanced environmental journalism requires a firm grasp of global, regional and local environmental issues. This handbook is geared towards providing the African journalist with specific background information and guidelines for accurate environmental reporting. It highlights and outlines key issues and the environmental conventions related to them, because of their global significance and the local impact they have. Environmental conventions are particularly important for Africa because of its extreme vulnerability to environmental change. This handbook will provide journalists with a firm grasp of the essentials of these vital conventions and how they play out on the wider environmental field.

The Africa Environment Outlook (AEO) process within UNEP has produced two highly informative and comprehensive integrated environmental assessment reports. The second edition of the AEO report sets out clearly the immense opportunities afforded by Africa's natural resources. The report probes more deeply into the extensive interplay between environmental and economic factors and, in doing so, has set a new benchmark in holistic assessment that looks at both the past and the future. The handbook provides an overview of this cutting-edge AEO process which will enable journalists to appreciate both the bigger picture of the African environment and the emerging wider context of environmental action.

The Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building has underlined the need to base the decision-making process on sound information. This vital principle of *information for action* was also stressed by global environmental ministers at their sixth special session in Malmö, Sweden, in May 2000. The Malmö ministerial declaration states in part that “the role of civil society at all levels should be strengthened through freedom of access to environmental information to all.”

The media continue to play a strategic role in raising environmental awareness, channelling environmental information and inspiring environmental action and, as such, is crucial to the work carried out by UNEP. For this reason African journalists, through the Africa Network of Environmental Journalists, were extensively consulted in the production of this handbook and their input has ensured that the handbook truly reflects their concerns and needs.

Because of the dynamic nature of environmental information, environmental reporting must be concerted, consistent and informed. This handbook answers that need and provides journalists with the necessary tools to deliver such reporting.

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