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African Environmental Information Network:

Improving Enforcement and Compliance Within Africa

*By Shelly Dill**

Introduction

The African Environmental Information Network ("AEIN") is a cutting edge concept in providing access to information within Africa. The most important result of the AEIN is the facilitation of environmental enforcement and compliance in a region that struggles with those goals. Although protection of the environment is codified in a number of environmental laws and regulations throughout the world, the creation of regulatory instruments in many developing countries has resulted in amplified rhetoric and minimal compliance. Development professionals attribute this lack of compliance, in part, to a lack of information.

Access to environmental information, therefore, has become a vital issue in achieving international development and environmental sustainability. Sound environmental data indicating environmental well-being must be accessible by decision makers at

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local, state, and national levels in order to provide countries with the tools necessary to support sustainable development. Unfortunately, the gap between quality data in the developing world and the developed world has only increased the incapacity of less developed countries to make informed decisions relating to the environment. In response to a global environmental

agenda and in an effort to ensure sustainable development, many African governments have established a number of regulatory instruments to protect their environmental resources.

Despite these mechanisms, however, environmental degradation is still a major obstacle to development in Africa.[1] The failure of these mechanisms stems, in part, from a lack of compliance on the part of the regulated community and a lack of capacity on the side of enforcement agencies.[2] Lack of compliance on the part of the regulated community is sometimes simply due to lack of adequate information on obligations and available mechanisms to bring about compliance.

AEIN is an initiative that was created to provide a framework for capacity building in environmental information management, to enhance access to quality information, to ensure public participation in environmental governance, and to increase compliance. AEIN is an initiative of the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment ("AMCEN"), the preeminent African environmental policy organ.

AEIN's Objectives and Structure

AEIN is a multi-stake holder capacity building network dedicated to supporting sustainable development planning in Africa. AEIN is spearheaded by the United Nations Environment Program ("UNEP") Regional Office for Africa and UNEP Division of Early Warning and Assessment ("UNEP-DEWA"), located in Nairobi, Kenya.[3] UNEP-DEWA focuses on building capacity for early warning and environmental assessment, thereby ensuring that proper mechanisms are in place for sustainable development.[4] The AEIN is intended to bolster Africa's inadequate institutional capacity by addressing the following problems: the lack of harmonized efforts for environmental assessment and reporting; poor compliance and enforcement; and the lack of integrated environmental information into decision making and sustainable development processes.[5]

The implementation strategy emphasizes partnerships among new and ongoing initiatives around the continent. At the national level the network will comprise a community of producers and users of a broad range of environmental information, including non-governmental organizations, universities, and research institutions. Existing institutions that have the mandate for collecting the data will maintain their autonomy and unique identities within the community, but will be affiliated through data exchange protocols.

for the development of an African environmental regulatory system that is functional and effective. The environmental regulatory community in developed countries must be proactive in their long-term support of environmental information initiatives like AEIN. AEIN is in its first phase of implementation – the crucial stage of solidifying partnerships, developing country specific implementation strategies and implementing pilot initiatives is critical to the achievement of AEIN's long-term objectives. If access to transparent and high quality environmental information is not forthcoming, African leaders will not have the information necessary to prevent further environmental degradation and vulnerability within the continent.

National networks will be aggregated together at the subregional level to facilitate coordination and harmonization of activities and information to contribute to the regional level processes.

Key environmental issues of Africa to be addressed within AEIN include: 1) land degradation; 2) protective and sustainable use of forests; 3) effective management of biodiversity; 4) water scarcity and efficient water management; 5) pollution of freshwater, urban, coastal and marine areas; 6) protection of marine and coastal resources; 7) drought and climate change; and 8) population pressures on natural resources and urban areas.[6]

IMPLEMENTATION OF AEIN

AEIN is in its first phase of a three-phase implementation, and is currently funded, through UNEP, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ireland Aid.[7] The emphasis in the first phase is on identifying tools and the information network that currently exist in African countries and to implement various pilot activities in thirteen countries.[8] These pilot activities will test ideas with respect to networking, information sharing procedures, and the adaptation of various methodologies and tools to local communities.[9] Another early step for AEIN will be to support each country in the development of a national strategy to strengthen the environmental information system capacity within the country.[10]

The second and third implementation phases involve filling gaps in data to strengthen the data foundation for long-term and institutional capacity building.[11] AEIN is exploring the development of partnerships with global leaders in sustainable development (e.g., USAID, the World Bank) and with the International Network for Environmental Compliance and Enforcement ("INECE"), which supports regional capacity for enforcement programs.[12] Expected outputs from the program include regular policy and thematic briefs, bulletins of compliance and enforcement initiatives, current environmental reports, a web based compliance monitoring tool for environmental inspectors, reports to international conventions, and the provision of "virtual" information through the Web.[13]

CONCLUSION

AEIN is a far-reaching, innovative, and progressive program that will provide critically important infrastructure support

ENDNOTES:
African Environmental Information Network

[1] *See* Charles Sebukeera, *Strengthening Compliance Enforcement Within Africa Environmental Information Network (AEIN) Framework Concept Document*, Presentation made at the 5th INECE EPC Meeting, 26th to 29th May 2003, Washington D.C, USA.

[2] *Id.*

[3] *See* United Nations Environmental Program's Global Environmental Outlook, *Africa Environmental Outlook* (a comprehensive report on the African environment), *available at* http://www.unep.org/aeo/index.htm (last visited Feb. 16, 2004).

[4] *Id.*

[5] UNEP, Africa Environment Information Network, *Framework for Capacity building In Integrated Assessment and Reporting in Africa*, 2003.

[5] *See* Africa Environmental Information Network-Regional Office for Africa Webpage, *available at* http://www.unep.org/roa/aein/ABOUT.ASP (last visited Feb. 10, 2004).

[6] *See* Africa: UNEP.Net Webpage, *available at* http://africa.unep.net/ein/content1.asp (last visited Feb. 10, 2004).

[7] *See* Africa Environmental Information Network-Regional Office for Africa Webpage, *supra* note 7.

[8] *Id.*

[9] *See* Africa Environmental Information Network-Regional Office for Africa Webpage, *Implementation Plan*, *available at* http://www.unep.org/roa/aein/impl_plan.asp (last visited Feb. 10, 2004).

[10] *See* Africa Environmental Information Network-Regional Office for Africa Webpage, *supra* note 7.

[11] *See* International Network for Environmental Compliance and Enforcement, *available at* http://www/inece.org (last visited Feb. 16, 2004).

[12] *See* Charles Sebukeera, *Strengthening Compliance Enforcement within Africa Environmental Information Network (AEIN) Framework Concept Document*, Presentation made at the 5th INECE EPC Meeting, 26th to 29th