

PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVES INFORMATION SHEET

Name of the Partnership/Initiative

“ITU/UNITAR/OSS Capacity Building on the applications of ICT for the establishment of Environmental Information Systems for Sustainable Development in Africa - SISEI”

Expected date of initiation: September 2002

Expected date of completion: December 2005

Partners Involved:

Governments:

Algeria, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, France (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Gabon, Gambia, Germany (GTZ), Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Madagascar, Mali, Morocco, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Republique de Centre Afrique, Rwanda, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia.

Intergovernmental organizations:

International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Observatory for Sahel and Sahara (OSS), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)

Permanent Interstates Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), Union du Maghreb Arabe (UMA), Inter Governmental Agency for Development (IGAD), Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Major groups:

EIS-Africa, Agence pour le Développement de l'Information Environnementale (ADIE), Network on Environment and Sustainable Development in Africa (NESDA), Regional Center for Mapping of Resources for Development (RCMRD), African Organization for Mapping and Remote Sensing (OACT), Musokotwane Environment Resource Centre for Southern Africa (IMERC-SA-SARDC).

All partners mentioned above are involved from the early stage and have expressed their interest to participate actively. It is expected that the partnership evolves, bringing in additional countries and institutions to join on an equal basis.

Leading Partners:

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Main objectives of the Partnership/Initiative

In preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), and in the framework of the New Partnership for Africa's Development, the partners mentioned above have agreed to jointly develop a capacity building programme on the applications of Information and Communication Technologies for the establishment of Environmental Information Systems for Sustainable Development in Africa.

This partnership aims at initiating a national and sub regional capacity building programme, on the applications of the new information and communication technologies for the establishment of environmental information management and monitoring systems in Africa. It aims at generating adequate conditions for the establishment of a coherent and efficient institutional framework, and the development and appropriation of technological tools for the accessing, exchange and circulation of useful information.

Significant efforts are being made to manage natural resources and the environment, involving scientific and technical research, the implementation of appropriate programmes and projects in the field, and the harnessing of local know-how. The results, in the form of products, information and data, represent a unique scientific, technical and cultural heritage for sustainable development and the fight against poverty in Africa.

However, it has to be recognized that this information heritage is often dispersed on account of sectoral compartmentalization at the inter-institutional level, resulting of an apparent lack of information at the local level which contradicts the existence in reality of an information heritage within national and international institutions or bodies specializing in Africa throughout the world. This loss of "**institutional memory**" is now recognized as being one of the major obstacles to sustainable development in Africa.

The general objective of this initiative is to provide countries and regional organizations with systems for the validation, circulation and harnessing of relevant environmental information with a view to strengthening the participative approach at the different decision-making and operational levels and thereby promoting enlightened decision-making.

Specific objectives of the partnership are to respond to the needs expressed by a large number of environmental stakeholders in developing countries. As well as being a technological tool, it seeks to encourage the environmental community to share experiences and information heritage, balancing information supply and demand.

This approach aims to create a synergy of both human and financial resources, establishing environmental information systems within national programmes such as national development plans, national environmental action plans, poverty eradication plans, etc. It will also catalyze the development of National and Regional Spatial Data Infrastructures (NSDI and RSDI) for use in planning and decision making for sustainable development

There is a direct relationship of the Partnership/Initiative with the objectives of Agenda 21 as the strengthening of the collection and exchange of information is recommended by Agenda 21 (Chapter 40 and by other international legal instruments relating to the environment such as the Framework Convention on Climate Change (Article 5 - Research and Systematic Observation, and Article 12 - Communication of Information related to Implementation), the Convention on Biological Diversity (Article 12 : Research and Training, Article 17 : Exchange of Information, and Article 18: Technical and Scientific Cooperation), and the Convention to Combat Desertification (Article 16: Information Collection, Analysis and Exchange, and Article 19: Capacity building, Education and Public Awareness). Moreover, several ITU conferences have emphasized the role of telecommunication and information technologies for environmental protection and sustainable development.

The detailed objectives, as expressed by the partner sub regional organizations and national institutions, primarily focus on:

- i) strengthening of national capacities;**
- ii) supporting and encouraging ongoing initiatives;**
- iii) enhancing the value of the existing information heritage;**
- iv) develop efficient decision making processes and mechanisms ;**
- v) establishing an operational network of institutions using or producing information.**

Those objectives are very close to some of the goals and objectives of the United Nations Millennium Declaration, as this initiative aims at generating an information community who, through the use of new technologies - especially information and communications technologies - will have the knowledge to elaborate policies for poverty eradication.

Expected results

The establishment of such environmental information management and monitoring systems is based on the principle of generating institutional agreements and technical solutions proposed by the partners according to local contexts and conditions. Particular attention will be paid to the points of interaction and transfer between national and sub regional levels. The partners will therefore be invited to determine the substantive aspects involved, with a view to setting up information exchange mechanisms between the African continent and external partners in the framework of solidarity between North and South; and the African countries and sub regions, bringing together existing experience and capacities.

Expected results of such initiative, through a progressive implementation at three levels - national, sub regional and regional are:

- A functional, coherent and efficient **institutional framework** that makes for synergy in current or planned endeavours;
- An operational **technological tool** for the access to and the exchange and circulation of useful information;
- **Technical structures that can exchange dialogue** in order to integrate scientific and technical data in planning and decision-making processes;
- **Increased use of Internet-based information sources** in support of processes intended to assist in decision-making through **improved ergonomics** of the access gateways;
- Better **integration of the different players** in participative decision-making processes;
- **Easier access for the different institutions** and the general public to **environmental information** in the public domain, such as legal texts;
- A **telecommunication and information network** interlinking national systems through the regional nodes;
- A **distance learning platform** through the bringing online of different environmental learning modules;
- An **operational process of quality monitoring** and of data and information sharing and exchange for the purpose of ensuring synergy between the different players and programmes.

Specific targets of the Partnership/Initiative and timeframe for their achievement

The initiative will serve the various partners concerned with environmental issues, namely the **authorities** (coordination bodies, ministries and their respective technical services), the **scientific and technological community** (research laboratories, higher education and training institutions, etc.), the **civil society** (NGOs, associations, etc.), the **private sector** (consultants, companies, etc.) and **partners in cooperation** (multilateral and bilateral development agencies, etc.).

The three-year initiative is aimed at making SISEI operational in the four sub regions of the African continent, namely CILSS-ECOWAS, IGAD, UMA and SADC. In addition to the sub regional bodies that will be establishing their own sub regional systems, several countries in each sub region will implement operational systems.

Four stages are proposed for the deployment of the initiative:

Stage 1: Duration: 6 months

The first stage relates to the capitalization of experiences and the transfer of know-how and skills for the strengthening of regional, sub regional and national capabilities ahead of the decentralized implementation of the initiative. The regional steering, scientific and technical committees will be established. The first stage is aimed at analysing and consolidating the experience gained in the launch and development phase of the SISEI, in particular in the conceptual areas, on the basis of the following:

- Building and documenting examples to ensure the replication of the concept on the different scales;
- Studying compatibility between the level of approach and methods to be applied;

- Refining target user groups in order to reach a compromise between accessibility of information tailored to the target users and the widest possible dissemination of that information.

Stage 2: Duration: 8 months

This stage will serve to strengthen regional and sub regional capacities for acquiring the necessary means to implement actions at the respective levels as well as at the national level.

Stage 3: Duration: 24months

The third stage relates to the operational implementation of the SISEI. During this phase, the regional SISEI, four sub regional SISEI and some 25 national SISEI are gradually set up in year-by-year stages. In parallel to this, specialized tools are developed, and tested through a collaborative and technical work, for further integration into the SISEI.

Stage 4: Duration 6 months

This stage will serve to review the progress achieved in participating countries and sub regions, to assess the efficiency of such a network, and plan for improvements as well as broadening the initiative to other African countries and Regions.

Coordination and Implementation mechanism

No single agency or NGO can aspire to be the sole interlocutor of countries and sub regions on environmental issues or sustainable development or the sole supporter of related capacity building efforts. There is a wide range of needs and priorities depending of various circumstances and there is a great variety of approaches to capacity building and a wide range of modalities and sources for international support –albeit with overlaps to be avoided, gaps to be filled, and synergies to be exploited.

UNITAR, ITU and OSS, in close collaboration with their partners and beneficiaries, will be coordinating the overall partnership implementation, as well as will oversee the operational setting-up and training method components using existing African capacities. Each component – national, sub regional and regional – will have its own coordination and implementation mechanism, including a steering committee composed of the leading institutions as well as the main donors.

Arrangements for funding

Financial issues are crucial points for this kind of initiative which should be consider really as a partnership, also when considering budgetary issues. In that context it is expected that funding comes from three channels – multilateral grants and loans, direct bilateral assistance, and in-kind contribution and investment from countries and sub regions.

Bilateral and multilateral partners have already committed funding to support SISEI implementation; other financial partners have formally expressed their interest. In addition, collaborations with regional and sub regional initiatives will allow greater synergy and mutual strengthening of efforts.

ITU, through the Telecom Surplus Fund, has already committed 595,000 US\$. France is supporting the overall coordination up to 138,000 US\$. In the framework of their already planned activities, ADIE will contribute to the initiative in Central Africa for an amount of about 570,000 US\$, and NESDA will organize activities in the framework of the initiative for a budget of about 175,000US\$.

Partner countries and sub regions have already formulated project documents and in which they have committed themselves to contribute in-kind for 1/3 of their respective SISEI project.

Countries and sub regions will define the amount of financial resources needed for implementation, based on their needs and expectations. The overall budget of the SISEI initiative falls into the following four main categories:

- Capitalization of experiences for further transfer of know-how
- Strengthening regional and sub regional capacities
- Operational implementation of SISEI at regional, sub regional and national levels
- Assessment and planning for improvements

Arrangements for capacity building and technology transfer

To review available external support in a way that is comparable between topics and across countries and sub regions, standard categories of capacity building and technology transfer modalities have been agreed upon: (a) training; (b) documentation and dissemination of best practices; (c) country-to-country and sub region-to-sub region cooperation; (d) networking support; (e) provision of specialised technical expertise; (f) demonstration-replication.

In that spirit of partnership, sub regional and regional organizations will have a key role to play in implementation of the regional and sub regional components of the SISEI and in supporting countries in the establishment of their national SISEI.

The initiative is based on the strengthening of national and sub regional capacities mostly through institutional facilitation with a participatory approach for consensus building, technical training, training of trainers, as well as legal and technical capacity building measures through a south-south cooperation.

Based on previous experiences gained from national, sub regional and regional related initiatives, it has been possible to identify potential arrangements for technology transfer.

The infrastructure and telecommunications facet of this initiative is considering the general low level of technical capacity in the countries (limited bandwidth) and difficulties in accessing such capacities. Specific arrangements will be studied on a case by case basis so that each country and sub region will progressively handle and host their own SISEI portal. The efforts made in respect of the structuring and dissemination of information will have to be accompanied by a strengthening of the communication capacities of the local users in order for the information to become accessible Africa-wide. It will also be necessary to integrate local server solutions as from the initial phase in order to foster adoption of the SISEI by the partner institutions. Technical solutions will be sought as an answer to the following needs:

- Strengthen communication capacities in the countries concerned using local strategies;
- Promote adoption of the technologies and systems by users and SISEI partners;
- Clearly specify the demand for environmental data that are useful for development in Africa and initiate specific activities under each of the identified themes;
- Evaluate the impact on demand of knowledge of the information capital;

Budgetary allocation for equipment is also a crucial point as countries may not have the capacity to invest in hardware and software to develop and to run IT applications, and ensuring effective participation of the stakeholders for a wide dissemination of environmental information and products.

Links of Partnership/Initiative with on-going sustainable development activities at the international and/or regional level (if any)

Pilot initiatives were conducted jointly by ITU, OSS, UNITAR, countries and sub regions. On the basis of those projects, a methodology was developed and refined for the implementation of the national SISEI. That methodology was applied in a similar fashion in other countries, with a few minor differences to accommodate the specific features of national contexts. In each case, SISEI projects have been integrated into an existing institutional framework in order to reinforce established mechanisms – i.e. national environmental action plan (NEAP), national, sub regional and regional action programmes (NAP, SRAP and RAP, respectively) developed in the framework of implementation of the CCD.

Since 1995, OSS has initiated important research on indicators to measure the process of CCD implementation, as well as NAP. This work, which were presented during the COP4 held in Bonn December 2000, led to the definition of a concept for monitoring and assessing NAP, SRAP and RAP. A joint OSS/UMA project, co-funded by the European Commission (SMAP) and using such a concept, has been initiated recently in Morocco, Tunisia. The results of this pilot project will be shared with SISEI partners. The SISEI initiative constitutes a key element for assessment and monitoring as it brings institutional mechanisms and tools that will allow concerned stakeholders to share and circulate useful information on desertification.

In the framework of its activities, ADIE contributes to the development of dissemination mechanisms, as well as to enhance the value of environmental data in Central Africa. Tools elaborated and developed in close cooperation with local administrations, private sector and NGOs aim at strengthening the capacities of ADIE country members. The first phase of ADIE work programme – until end of 2003 – will provide important lessons learnt, and will contribute to the preparation of the second phase. Experience gained through ADIE activities will be integrated to this partnership/initiative.

Within the framework of the Project : “Development of institutional and data framework for integrated environmental assessment and reporting for West Africa” implemented by NESDA and UNEP, the two institutions envision the creation of a regional network for integrated environmental information management in West Africa.

NESDA has been involved in the GEO (Global Environment Outlook) process for more than 10 years, and will produce the first West African State of the Environment report by December 2002 in the same line of GEO and AEO (Africa Environment Outlook) reports. The network to be created would serve as a source of information for the elaboration of national SOE reports for all the countries of the sub region and should influence the making decision process.

The African Geographic Information Infrastructure for Sustainable Development initiative, presented as a Type II Partnership, aims at strengthening the capacity of government, civil society, and private institutions to develop, integrate, analyze, disseminate, and use geospatial information; and, making this information (data, knowledge, projects, etc.) available and accessible to policy-makers and managers of land, water, and wildlife resources in Africa, so they can improve their livelihoods and sustain their resources now and into the future.

Monitoring Arrangements

The initiative will be subject to a continuous monitoring and review by the different steering committees at national, sub regional and regional level. A set of indicators will be defined and gathered during stage 1, based on past experiences brought by the partners.

The SISEI web portal (www.sisei.net) will be the major communication tool to inform the partner community about developments, progresses made, events, etc. The same information will be also available on the partners' web sites.

A News-letter will be also widely disseminated to the environmental community working in and for Africa.

Other relevant information

Sustainability issues

It is expected that at the end of the 3-year phase of this Partnership/Initiative a number of countries and sub regions will have fulfilled most of the expectations mentioned here above.

The operational network of sub regions, countries and institutions established through this partnership will then constitute the backbone for an expansion of the initiative to the entire African continent and beyond.

Synergies with other Type II Partnership/Initiatives

There are several similarities and complementarities between the proposed Partnership/Initiative titled “Capacity Building on the applications of ICT for the establishment of Environmental Information Systems for Sustainable Development in Africa - SISEI”, and the “African Geographic Information Infrastructure for Sustainable Development” initiative. Discussions have already started to identify areas of collaboration and synergy that would ensure greater impact of both initiatives for the benefit of African sustainable development.

Selected partner websites:

www.sisei.net,
www.nesda.kabissa.org,

www.adie-prgie.org,
www.unesco.org/oss,
www.eis-africa.org
www.opengis.org/gisd,
www.cse.sn/sid
www.cilssnet.org
www.igadregion.org
www.gsdi.org
www.itu.int

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