



**United Nations
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INFOTERRA 2000 – Global Conference on Access to Environmental Information
Dublin, Ireland
11-15 September 2000

ANNOTATED PROVISIONAL AGENDA FOR THE MEETING

Item 1. Opening of the Meeting

The Global Conference on Access to Environmental Information is convened in the light of the recommendation of the 20th session of the Governing Council of UNEP to reform the structure of the UNEP-Infoterra network at the national level and to launch this revitalised network at a global conference to focus the attention of states on the importance of promoting and facilitating access to environmental information. The conference is being organised by UNEP in association with the Department of the Environment and Local Government of the Republic of Ireland. The date of the conference coincides with the 10th anniversary of ENFO - the Environmental Information Service operated by the Department of the Environment and Local Government.

Item 1.(a) Introduction by UNEP representative

Mr Gerard Cunningham of the UNEP-Infoterra secretariat will introduce the speakers for the opening session and make some administrative announcements.

Item 1.(b) Opening remarks by Director of ENFO – the Environmental Information Service

The Director of ENFO, Ms Mary Tully will welcome the participants to the conference and make some remarks on the 10th anniversary celebrations of ENFO.

Item 1.(c) Statement by Minister for the Environment and Local Government

The Minister for the Environment and Local Government, Mr Noel Dempsey TD will deliver a keynote address and officially open the conference.

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Item 1.(d) Statement by Deputy Executive Director of UNEP

The Deputy Executive Director of UNEP, Mr Shafqat Kakakhel, will make a statement on behalf of the Executive Director of UNEP Dr Klaus Toepfer.

Item 2. Election of officers

The Meeting will elect a chairperson and a rapporteur.

Item 3. Organisation of the Meeting

Item 3.(a) Adoption of the agenda (UNEP/INF2000/WP/1)

The Meeting is expected to adopt the agenda as set out in the present document.

Item 3.(b) Organisation of work

Given the length and diversity of the agenda with individual items dedicated to various aspects of access to environmental information ranging from policy oriented aspects through to technical matters, it is proposed to have moderators who will act as chairs for the respective sessions. It is recommended that interventions from the floor be limited to three minutes. It is also proposed that recommendations from the floor on various agenda items be submitted in writing to the moderators of the respective sessions. Likewise, delegates wishing to propose points under Item 15 of the agenda (Any other business) will be requested to inform the UNEP-Infoterra secretariat.

Item 4. The catalytic role of UNEP in facilitating access to environmental information

Item 4.(a) UNEP's vision for the Global Environmental Information Network

Dr Timothy W. Foresman, Director of the Division of Environmental Information, Assessment and Early Warning at UNEP will present a visionary overview of the Division's role and networking activities in support of environmental assessment and access to information.

Item 4.(b) Framework for a national environmental information service (UNEP/INF2000/WP/3)

Mr Gerard Cunningham will present a conceptual overview of a national environmental information service that considers policy, legal, operational and technical aspects of the task of facilitating access to environmental information within countries. The task of establishing national consortia to provide this service will be undertaken within the framework of restructuring the UNEP-Infoterra network.

Item 5. Policy and legal aspects of access to environmental information

The task of enhancing access to environmental information is a multi-faceted one, ranging from policy-level considerations down to specific technical details. Information suppliers must be able to work effectively within these diverse boundaries. Operational and technical level activities must be seen in the context of a broader policy and legal framework. Accordingly, the conference agenda is structured to reflect this top-down approach. Two presentations will be made on the policy-level aspects of information access, followed by a moderated discussion.

Item 5.(a) Comparative policy and practice (UNEP/INF2000/WP/4)

Mr Carl Bruch, Director of Africa Programs at the Environmental Law Institute, Washington D.C. will present an overview of international legal instruments on environmental matters that make specific reference to the access to information issue. Reference will also be made to the development of national legislation in this area. Specific case studies will be cited demonstrating citizen right of access to information in situations where planned activities would have a negative environmental impact.

Item 5.(b) The Aarhus Convention (UNEP/INF2000/WP/5)

Mr Jeremy Wates, Secretary to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the Aarhus Convention) at the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), will make a presentation on the convention with specific reference to its origins, its unique negotiating process and its current status of ratification.

Item 6. Assessing demand for environmental information

Before designing any type of service, particularly an information service, it is important to carry out market research in order to determine the needs of the client. The service should then be responsive to clients' needs. The UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) based in Cambridge is a major source of information on biological diversity. The Centre has been involved with studies to assess user demand for information on biodiversity. This methodology is now being expanded to cover a broader spectrum of environmental issues.

Item 6.(a) Methodology for assessing user demand (UNEP/INF2000/WP/6)

Ms Monica Brett, Biodiversity in Development Officer at UNEP-WCMC will present a draft methodology for assessing the information needs of users. The results from pilot testing of this methodology in selected countries and regions will also be presented. Other methodologies used to assess information needs will be presented with a view to harmonisation. A moderated discussion will follow the presentations. Recommendations for improving the UNEP-WCMC methodology will be noted.

Item 6.(b) Application of the methodology – information needs assessment

UNEP-WCMC will report on lessons learnt from the application of the methodology. Institutions from the Commonwealth of Independent States and Africa will be invited to report on the application of the UNEP-WCMC methodology and other methodologies.

Item 7. Assessing the supply of environmental information

The delivery of timely and relevant information to the user community depends on the capacity of suppliers to collect, manage and disseminate information in their respective thematic areas. Part of UNEP-WCMC's work on biodiversity information management included national institutional surveys to assess the capacity of institutions to supply information to the user community. This methodology is now being expanded to cover a broader spectrum of environmental issues.

Item 7.(a) Methodology for assessing institutional capacities (UNEP/INF2000/WP/7)

Ms Monica Brett will also present a draft methodology for assessing the capacity of institutions to supply information to user community. This methodology will be used as a basis to determine the capacity of suppliers to provide information in a key thematic area as a contributing partner to the integrated environmental information service. A moderated discussion will follow the presentations. Recommendations for improving the UNEP-WCMC methodology will be noted.

Item 7.(b) Application of the methodology – national institutional survey

UNEP-WCMC will report on lessons learnt from the application of the methodology. Institutions from Latin America, Asia and Africa will be invited to report on the application of the UNEP-WCMC methodology and other methodologies.

Item 8. Matching demand with supply: networking among suppliers and consortium building

The information needed to solve most environmental problems already exists. The challenge is to ensure that users are put in contact with suppliers. Suppliers often operate in isolation from one another even in the same thematic area. The policy of UNEP-Infoterra is to encourage closer cooperation among suppliers by networking the key suppliers into a national consortium that, collectively, provides an integrated information service to the user community. Some consortium models exist and some are under development. A number of presentations will be made on these models – their objectives, structure, working relationships, services, activities and thematic coverage.

Item 8.(a) National thematic centres – the EIONET model of the European Environment Agency (UNEP/INF2000/WP/8)

Mr Stefan Jensen of the Ministry of Environment of Lower Saxony (NUM), Germany will make a presentation on behalf of Mr Sigfus Bjarnason of the European Environment Agency (EEA). The

presentation will give an overview of the Environmental Information and Observation Network of the Agency. This is a consortium based network with both national and thematic focal points.

Item 8.(b) ENVIS – the Environmental Information System of India (UNEP/INF2000/WP/9)

Mr Harjit Singh, Director of ENVIS – the Environmental Information System of India will present an overview of ENVIS and its work.

Item 8.(c) Infoterra-Cuba action plan (UNEP/INF2000/WP/10)

Ms Argelia Fernández Márquez of the Centre for Environmental Information, Management and Education (CIGEA) in the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment of Cuba will report on plans to establish an environmental information service for Cuba.

Item.8(d) Restructuring the Southern Africa Sub-regional Infoterra Network (SASIN) (UNEP/INF2000/WP/11)

Ms Tuelo Nkwane of the Ministry of Lands and Housing of Botswana will present a regional report on work in progress and plans under development to restructure Infoterra in the countries of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). In 1991, these countries established SASIN – Southern Africa Sub-regional Infoterra Network as a regional initiative to share information on common environmental problems.

Item.8(e) The Environmental Information Network of Uganda (UNEP/INF2000/WP/21)

Mr Charles Sebukeera of the National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA) of Uganda will make a presentation on an operational environmental information network in Uganda.

Item 9. Best practices for establishing and maintaining national consortia

This agenda item will be treated as a moderated discussion open to the floor. It is envisaged that environment ministries and protection agencies will take the lead in establishing the consortium in each country. There are no definitive guidelines or procedures on how this task is to be undertaken. Terms of Reference may need to be drafted for the structure and workplan of the consortium as the overall provider of an integrated environmental information service. The optimum size of the consortium is an issue for which there is no definitive formula. Countries vary in terms of size, population, environmental issues, institutional suppliers, etc. Different scenario models may apply in different countries. In developing countries, weaknesses on the supply side will be evident - the information needed may not be available or accessible, and the mechanism for delivering the information may be inadequate.

The following, non-exhaustive list of sub-items is expected to set the general framework for the discussion.

Item 9.(a) Planning phase – identifying and mobilising thematic centres

The objective is to describe the steps needed to identify the thematic centres and establish the consortium in each country. Elements of a draft TOR will be identified.

Item 9.(b) Implementation phase - consortium workplan and timetable

The objective is to define the tasks of the consortium workplan and assign a sequence.

Item 9.(c) Scenario models for consortium operation

National and regional characteristics may impact on the size and operation of the consortium.

Item 9.(d) Strengthening the capacity of suppliers

This item will focus on problems prevailing in developing countries with respect to the supply of environmental information to users and how these problems should be addressed.

Item 9.(e) Promoting dialogue among suppliers

Institutions working in the same thematic area often operate in isolation from one another. The objective of this item is to examine ways and means of promoting closer cooperation among these institutions.

Item 9.(f) In-country coordination mechanism

The consortium has to be managed if it is to function properly. While the ministry or agency responsible for environmental protection will play a lead role in establishing the national consortium, consideration should be given to a establishment of a Steering Committee to guide the work of the consortium in providing an information service.

Item 9.(g) Communication channels with UNEP

UNEP's main points of contact at the national level are environment ministries. There are strategic and operational dimensions related to the work of the consortium and consequently, a two-tier focal point structure is proposed in order to establish effective communications between national consortia and UNEP.

Item 10. Practical mechanisms and tools for facilitating access to environmental information

A consortium-driven information service will need to put practical mechanisms in place to ensure that the user community is provided with relevant and reliable information on a timely basis. It is envisaged that there may be multiple access points to the information service. The physical location of the user should not mitigate against the level or type of access. Electronic mechanisms and non-electronic mechanisms will need to be examined. This session will be moderated.

Item 10.(a) The role of public access centres (UNEP/INF2000/WP/12)

Mr Noel Hughes of ENFO will give a presentation on the role of public access centres with environment ministries, protection agencies, local authorities and other public institutions as mechanisms to facilitate greater citizen access to environmental information.

Item 10.(b) Tools and institutional networks (UNEP/INF2000/WP/13)

Ms Dorte Bennedbaek of the Ministry of Environment and Energy, Denmark will make a presentation on the use of tools and institutional networks to facilitate access to information in response to the provisions of the Aarhus Convention.

Item 10.(c) Use of electronic tools

The use of electronic tools and media in delivering environmental information to users is efficient, fast and cost effective. Notwithstanding the ‘digital divide ‘ that exists between developed and developing countries, the UNEP-Infoterra network must stay at the cutting edge of new information and communications technologies. Several presentations will be made on tools that enhance access to information.

Item 10.(c).(i) Global Multilingual Environmental Thesaurus initiative (UNEP/INF2000/WP/14)

Mr Bruno Felluga of the National Research Council (CNR) of Italy will make a presentation on the current initiative on the part of CNR, UNEP, EEA and the United State Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) to develop a harmonised vocabulary on the environment.

Item 10.(c).(ii) Global Catalogue of Data Sources initiative (UNEP/INF2000/WP/15)

Mr Stefan Jensen of the Ministry of Environment of Lower Saxony (NUM) will make a presentation on the Ministry’s role as Topic Centre for the Catalogue of Data Sources of the EEA, and the current partnership with UNEP to expand this catalogue globally into a dynamic system to exchange environmental information and experience.

Item 10.(c).(iii) National environmental portals – practical examples from Australia, South Africa and the USA (UNEP/INF2000/WP/16, 17, 18 and 20)

A national portal website acting as a gateway to authoritative sources of information on the Internet is a visible way of presenting an integrated environmental information service to the user community, both within the host country and externally. A number of presentations will be made by developers of environmental information portals.

- (i) Ms Kay Winter of the Department of Environment, Sports and the Territories of Australia will present the Infoterra-Australia national gateway to environmental information that harvests information resources from over ninety organisations and presents it in a coherent, classified form.
- (ii) Ms Monika MacDevette of KalaSahari Trade cc will present SA-ISIS – the South Africa Integrated Spatial Information System – an innovative project funded by the South African Government that uses a consortium of three large organisations to establish a portal site for information on natural resources.

- (iii) Mr Michael Stanley-Jones of the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition – Interactive Health Ecology Access (IHEAL) – will present a paper on the use of geographic information systems to deliver information on environmental health to communities.
- (iv) Mr Mark Kasman of the United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) will present a paper on behalf of US EPA colleague Mr Brand Niemann that focuses on the use of the XML standard to aggregate information from disparate resources and present it in a coherent way via a portal.

Item 10.(c).(iv) Best practice in design of environmental portals

A moderated discussion will follow to identify best practices to adopt in designing portal sites. A standardised approach to portals across the UNEP-Infoterra network would have the advantage of presenting a harmonious image of UNEP-Infoterra services to the user community.

Item 11. Marketing the UNEP-Infoterra global network and national information services

An information service will not be used effectively if it is not visible to the user community. It is important that each consortium markets its products and services. A general paper on marketing environmental information services will be presented. This will be followed by a moderated discussion will take place on marketing and communication strategies to increase the visibility and, ultimately, the usage of the information service.

Item 11.(a) Marketing environmental information products and services

Ms Barbara Jarvis, Chief of Information Services at the United States Environmental Protection Agency will make a presentation on US EPA's approach to marketing information products and services.

Item 11.(b) Unified global network to provide a globally integrated service

Unlike other UN agencies such as UNDP and UNICEF, UNEP does not maintain country offices. However, UNEP is obliged to work with national-level partners and exchange information with its national constituencies. The concept of a unified global information network integrated with national consortia is a powerful tool for providing broad access to environmental information and enhancing the delivery of UNEP's programme of work. This unified global network must be marketed in all countries. Brand name and image are important factors and consideration should be given to the brand name of this global network.

Item 11.(c) National level marketing strategies – promotional materials

Individual countries must market their national information service in order to reach out to the user community. The use of a standard set of strategies promotional materials will again serve the purpose of promoting a harmonious image of UNEP-Infoterra environmental information services at the national level.

Item 11.(c) Monitoring and evaluation of quality of service

Each national information service must be of an acceptable standard therefore continuous analysis of user satisfaction is necessary in order to make the service adaptive to users' needs.

Item 12. Report on UNEP-Infoterra reform for the 21st session of the Governing Council of UNEP

The 21st Session of the Governing Council of UNEP will take place in February 2001. A report on the reform of UNEP-Infoterra as mandated in Decision 20/5 has to be submitted by the Executive Director to the Governing Council. Delegates will have an opportunity to make recommendations on matters related to the reform of UNEP-Infoterra that could be included in this report.

Item 12.(a) Draft declaration for GC.21 (UNEP/INF2000/WP/22)

It is proposed that the meeting should adopt a declaration focussed on the importance of improving access to environmental information and establishing a unified global network of national consortia to deliver information to users. A draft declaration will be circulated as a working document. The meeting will be invited to comment on this draft.

Item.12.(b) Drafting of recommendations

Recommendations submitted to the moderators of the various sessions of the meeting will be circulated for final editing prior to adoption.

Item 14. Adoption of recommendations and meeting report

The draft report of the meeting will be circulated for comments and amendments.

Item 15. Any other business

Delegates wishing to propose points under this item are requested to inform the secretariat as soon as possible.

Item 16. Closing remarks

The Chair will invite representatives from UNEP and the Ministry for the Environment and Local Government to make closing remarks.

Provisional timetable

Monday, 11 September 2000	Morning Afternoon	Items 1, 2, 3 and 4 Item 5 and 6
Tuesday, 1+2 September 2000	Morning Afternoon	Item 7 and 8 Item 9
Wednesday, 13 September 2000	Morning Afternoon	Item 10 Item 10 (continued) and 11
Thursday, 14 September 2000	Morning 1.00 p.m.	Items 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16 Close of meeting