Abstract

UNEP.Net – a global initiative to deliver environmental information from disparate source to a diverse user community

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Definition

UNEP.Net is both a global gateway to authoritative environmental information on the Web and a partnership building initiative being led by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

UNEP.Net portal structure

As a global gateway or portal, UNEP.Net is being developed along three dimensions:

- Geographic portals e.g. Africa, South-Eastern Europe, Ghana
- Thematic portals e.g. Freshwater, Mountains, Biodiversity
- Cross-cutting portals e.g. Vital Graphics, SOE, Environmental Law

The diagram in Annex I illustrates the UNEP.Net portal model.

UNEP.Net networking strategy

Over the past two decades UNEP has spawned a number of environmental information networking activities, namely ENRIN, GEO, GRID and Infoterra, that have stakeholder involvement at the global, regional, sub-regional and national levels. All of these networks deal with some aspect of environmental data and information though not necessarily in all countries. Confusion has been caused as a result of overlapping activities; working with different institutional partners in the same country; and sometimes working with different people within the same institution.

The development of UNEP.Net cannot take place without the full support of all those institutions that have the capacity to contribute substantive environmental data and information to the thematic and geographic portals. In undertaking this task these institutions have to work in a coherent and coordinated manner, in effect, operating as one integrated global environmental network under the aegis of UNEP but with coordination delegated on a regional and sub-regional basis.

For example, the Africa regional portal is underpinned by the Africa Environmental Information Network – a pan-African network serving the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN). Existing sub-regional partners will be responsible for coordinating the Africa EIN on a sub-regional basis and there are six sub-regions in Africa – North, South, East, West, Central and the Indian Ocean states. Within each country, a national-level network will operate, underpinning the development of national portals.

UNEP.Net management structure

A three-tiered structure has been established as follows:

(a) Programme Board

The main responsibilities of the Board are policy issues, resource allocation and mobilization and overall decision making. The Board meets by video conference a minimum of six times a year.

(b) Technical Coordination Committee

Main responsibilities will be overall project organization, progress monitoring, quality control and coordination of the development teams in terms of communications and task tracking

(c) Development teams

The development teams are responsible for the development and maintenance of each portal in accordance with agreed standards and procedures.

Technical approach

(a) Design

A standard design template for thematic and geographic portals is being used by the development teams. General design guidelines have been developed to ensure easy access and consistent navigation by users with varying degrees of Internet accessibility.

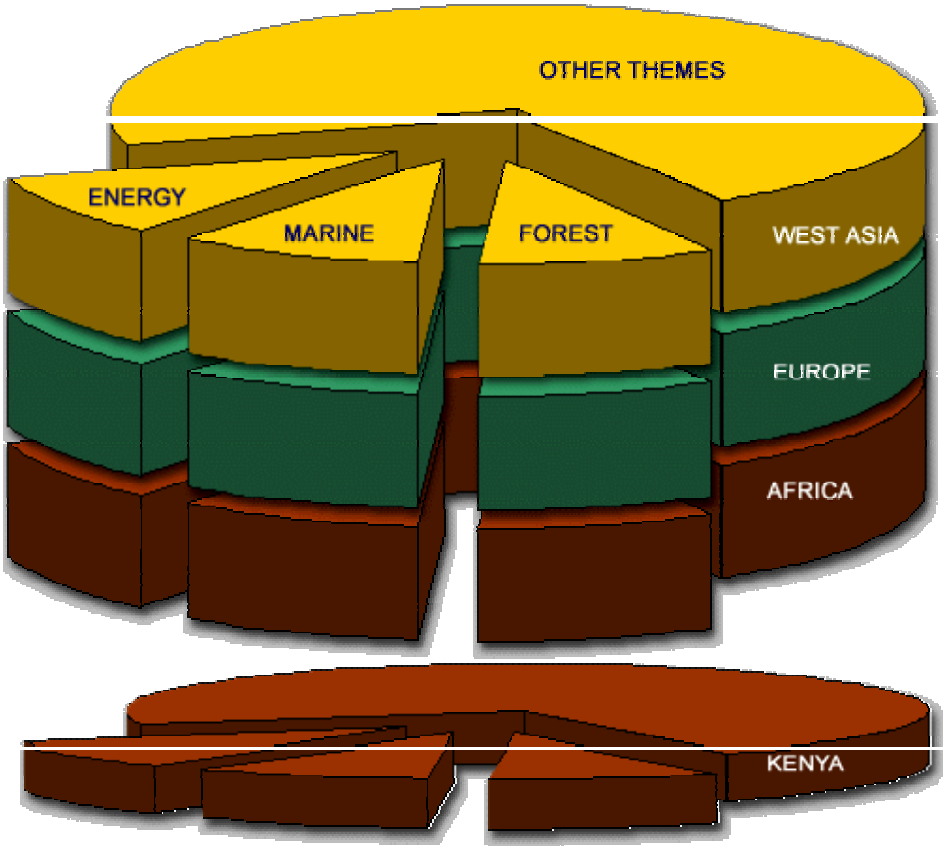
(b) Content

Content is of paramount importance and the environmental data and information being delivered via the portals must be authoritative. Guidelines on content have also been developed.

(c) Metadata

The content must be catalogued in a metedata system. The *Environment Directory* (www.unep.org/env-dir) will be the metadata system underpinning all UNEP.Net portals and there will be two interfaces to the Directory – an off-line and an on-line interface – to meet the different needs of information suppliers .

Annex I

UNEP.Net Portal Concept

- Thematic portals
- Geographic portals