

Summary of feedback from experts regarding the FDES

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Outline

- Main feedback regarding:
 - Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics
 - Chapter I: The Nature of Environment Statistics
 - Chapter II: The Framework Approach to Environment Statistics
 - Chapter III: A Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics
 - Chapter IV: Application of the Framework
 - Human Settlements Statistics
 - Statistics of the Natural Environment

Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics

- Some respondents said the scope should cover:
 - A core set of indicators
 - Frameworks and systems used in environment statistics (at a minimum explaining the relationships between each of these frameworks).
- Some respondents said the audience should be:
 - National Statistics Offices and other producers of official environment statistics. Users of environment statistics are another important audience.
- Some respondents said the contents should cover:
 - Main concepts
 - Classifications
 - Data items (i.e. variables) and definitions
 - A core set of indicators
 - Emerging issues: GIS, remote sensing and climate change
 - Reference to sustainable development
 - Frameworks/systems used in environment statistics
 - Institutional arrangements
- The whole document needs updating

Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics

- Is it important to have a conceptual framework for the development of environment statistics?
 - Yes
- Which parts of the FDES are still relevant? Which parts need updating? And what is missing?
 - The entire FDES needs to be redone/updated/revised
 - Might reconsider the information categories
 - Additions may include
 - An explicit statement of the purpose of the document
 - Guidance on institutionalization
 - Guidance on data presentation (e.g. maps, graphs etc.)
 - Guidance on data quality
 - Information regarding GIS
 - Information regarding the use of remote sensing in environment statistics
 - Discussion of the concept of an ecosystem
 - Discussion on the relevance of different geographic (e.g. local, national, global) and temporal scales;
 - Explain the relation to, and between, other statistical frameworks/systems (e.g., SEEA, EPEA, MFA, SNA, water statistics, energy statistics, health statistics, etc.)

Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics

- What implications do multilateral environmental agreements have on the FDES?
 - MEAs have significant implications for environment statistics and the FDES
 - MEAs stimulate the development and harmonization of statistics and they are the most important users.
 - MEAs have implications for the selection/specification of topics (to some extent the MEA define the topic)
 - MEAs will have more implications for identification of required statistical variables.
- Who do you think should be the main audience for the FDES?
 - National Statistics Offices and other agencies producing environment statistics
 - Users of environment statistics

Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics

- What role should the FDES fill?
 - Hub between the statistical system and the environment agencies
 - A basis for a common structure of statistics, i.e a paramount approach, extended with handbooks covering the details
 - It should facilitate the organisation of collection and dissemination of environment statistics and indicators
 - The FDES can play a role of integrating the different approaches to environment statistics to ensure that there is consistency and duplication is minimised
 - The revised FDES can serve a general/main framework that can be utilized to collect, compile, analyze environmental issues
 - It should also serve as a coordinative mechanism for environmental statistics.

Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics

- Should the existing structure of the publications (conceptual framework separately from the statistical variables, classifications) be maintained?
 - Some respondents indicated yes
 - Some respondents indicated no
- Should the revised FDES touch upon the issues of the relationship between environment statistics and official statistics and the role of the different stakeholders?
 - Of those that responded to this question, almost all said yes.
- Should it give guidance for the process of institutionalization of environment statistics?
 - Yes
 - But this should be discussed
 - This should cover the role of different stakeholders
 - This could include the comparative advantages and disadvantages of each type of institution

Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics

- Should a core set of statistics and indicators be recommended for countries to use as part of the FDES?
 - It could be useful for the FDES to recommend a core set of statistics and indicators
 - A core set of indicators may be devised to critically monitor the changes in the environment for use of policy makers.
 - Because countries may have different priorities in collecting statistics depending on their needs and capabilities, this core set of statistics and indicators should be a set of guidelines.
 - How that core set is developed is most important.
 - Processes like this are not fast nor are they uncomplicated.
 - Definition of good indicators results from the genuine interaction of data producers, scientists and policy makers.
 - Such a set must be developed in cooperation with other institutions such as the OECD and Eurostat, and must draw on experiences in such institutions

Chapter I: The Nature of Environment Statistics

- A: Definition, scope and characteristics
 - Main feedback:
 - A clarification of what are environmental statistics is needed.
 - To have definition is useful
 - A discussion on boundaries to and overlap with economic and social statistics would be helpful
 - The major users and producers of statistics should influence the definition, scope and characteristics of environment statistics
 - The scope of environment statistics is driven by policy needs, which might be different from country to country or from the global to the national perspective.
 - The scope of FDES may be extended to include emerging areas such as disaster and climate change statistics, and natural resource accounting, development induced displacements/destruction, rehabilitation of human settlements.
 - Man made disasters/accidents affecting natural environment and human settlements and humans being should also be included.
 - Statistical units and data items should be defined in a way that different data sources can be used complementary and can be linked to other kind of data (e.g. socio-economic data)
 - The constraints we encounter are that data collected by other organizations are not in a harmonized way.
 - It is possible today to describe more clearly the “communities of interest”—groups of people/organizations whose common interests provide important signals to the dimensions of the environment where statistics and indicators would be of most interest to policy-making

Chapter I: The Nature of Environment Statistics

- B: Data needs, sources and uses
 - Main feedback:
 - Out of date and needs updating
 - Need more information regarding the:
 - coordination of environment statistics
 - link with other statistics such as social statistics
 - The section should also be updated to reflect contemporary and emerging reporting frameworks such as:
 - the Millennium Development Goals
 - Sustainable Development Indicators
 - the Measuring the Progress of Societies Project
 - and Beyond GDP discussions
 - Major data needs include:
 - Climate change
 - Sustainable development
 - Biodiversity
 - Ecosystem services
 - Management practices other than conservation

Chapter II: The Framework Approach to Environment Statistics

- A: Framework versus system
 - Main feedback:
 - This section is generally well-written and remains a useful description of the current situation. It should require little updating.
 - Both the system approach and the framework approach are in fact useful.
 - A framework approach is useful for environment statistics since there is no generally accepted underlying theory, standards or a common numeraire.
 - A statistical framework is supposed to identify the fields of concern with an illustration of classifications, selected statistics and indicators for application
 - The framework approach could provide inputs to the system approach, e.g the statistics in the framework could be used in the Environment-Economic-Accounts (EEA).
 - Abandoning a rigid stock-flow model for a less rigid framework was critically important to the Montreal Process and remains the most fruitful approach.
 - It may be useful to not separate the guidelines for statistical concepts, definitions and classifications from the FDES
 - It would be good to have a list on most relevant separate guidelines available
 - The concept of core values is one that this FDES process should consider as an option for developing a more policy-relevant framework.

Chapter II: The Framework Approach to Environment Statistics

- B: Current approaches to the organization of environment statistics
 - Main feedback:
 - A clear formulation of “what we need to know to avoid disaster in the coming twenty years” is a lot more helpful than a specific approach.
 - A range of other approaches are mentioned by respondents, consisting of the:
 - Sector approach
 - Ecosystem approach
 - capital framework
 - policy/thematic approach
 - Driving Force-Pressure-State-Impact-Response (DPSIR) framework
 - The ecological approach provides an easier linkage to key policies and values for protecting, conserving, managing, and producing goods and services from the environment
 - Often the choice of statistics/indicators in the stress-response approach devolves into debates over whose stressor or response area is most highly valued
 - All the four approaches are still relevant as these capture different aspects of environment

Chapter II: The Framework Approach to Environment Statistics

- C: Purposes and properties of the framework
 - Main feedback:
 - A good section, still pertinent today
 - The purpose of FDES at global level is to aide the individual countries to identify and formulate their data/information requirements.
 - The FDES should provide sufficient guidance to countries to make their environment statistics directly comparable
 - Comprehensiveness should not mean that everything should be in FDES but that it should play its role of hub
 - Could be expanded with “meeting policy demands”
 - There is also a strong demand on more recent data
 - FDES should be open and flexible
 - Should also support other reporting formats

Chapter III: A Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics

- A: Structure of the framework
 - Responses diverged on this question:
 - The concepts here are still useful, but they need to be reinterpreted in light of the experience of the past 3 decades in global environmental information, monitoring, and reporting.
 - the framework can be a useful tool to help identify and organise the environment statistics that are useful for establishing such cause-effect relationships.
 - the information categories look appropriate albeit weighted towards the social and economic rather than biophysical aspects of the environment.
 - Maybe one could consider a restructuring of the information categories? More in line with the DPSIR model
 - There are no clear indications as to where the data would be more appropriate.
 - It would be better to redefine the components of the environment into key environmental sectors (e.g. The Heinz Center report, State of the Nation's Ecosystems)
 - The structure should be revised taking into account SEEA, existing international questionnaires and other existing statistical reporting systems
 - It would be good to link to the greenhouse gas inventory system of UN/FCCC.
 - It is better to have similar structure with SEEA if the development of environment statistics has close relationship with SEEA
 - This should be revised to an ecosystem approach

Chapter III: A Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics

- B: Contents of the Framework
 - Main feedback:
 - Topics/tables have to be determined after choice of framework
 - We can get rid of the table format, and give a decent level of detail to the list of statistical “topics”, e.g. 20 items, then it may work.
 - References to large parts of existing environmental statistics are missing: SEEA - material flows, environmental expenditures, environmental taxes etc., environmental industries, waste statistics.
 - Already existing detailed guidelines (e.g. from UNSD, Eurostat or OECD) could be mentioned here
 - No clear demarcation can be seen between events and impacts as they are so closely related

Chapter III: A Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics

- C: Relationships to national and resource accounting systems
 - Main feedback:
 - We should try to integrate FDES and SEEA
 - This section should be updated to reflect the advances in environmental-economic accounting as well as the recently updated System of National Accounts.
 - The ongoing references to SNA imply that the reader has a working knowledge of those accounts.
 - Although the writers may have had that knowledge, today's readers probably don't.
 - The working assumption in several of these paragraphs is that government agencies responsible for reporting on economic and/or social statistics will wind up being called upon to assemble environmental information and report on it.
 - I don't think that's a tenable assumption today.
 - The emergence of environmental agencies in many countries—developing as well as developed—suggests to me that they will be the ones accountable for reporting on environmental conditions and trends.
 - They are not tied to a “national accounts” point of view. To me, that accounts viewpoint is no longer helpful here.

Chapter III: A Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics

- D: Framework tables
 - Main feedback:
 - Too early to comment...
 - Topics/tables have to be determined after choice of framework
 - The increasing importance of environmental statistics means that users and producers should be consulted on the contents of the framework, and therefore providing comment would not be a simple or straightforward task.
 - The tables should give some details, but not be an exhaustive list of indicators so that each country can customize the data according to their particular needs.
 - One could consider elaborating environmental effects of climate change.

Chapter IV: Application of the Framework

- A: Review of environmental problems, concerns and related statistical topics
 - Main feedback:
 - This approach places too large an emphasis on government needs and too little emphasis on the importance of consistent, credible environmental information to non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
 - There has been much work at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government about what the attributes are of successful government programs and how the most successful government programs have leaders who focus their attention on the public values they are creating for the citizenry.
 - It addresses two major environmental concerns i.e. depletion of natural resources and degradation of environmental quality.
 - FDES is a very useful tool to review the environmental problems, concerns
 - It is a useful tool but to be used by experts and policy makers

Chapter IV: Application of the Framework

- B: Determination of the statistical variables
 - Main feedback:
 - The FDES is useful as an organising framework but the two technical reports on human settlement statistics and natural environment statistics are more useful for identifying statistical variables
 - Once the environmental topics are identified, the quantifiable variables for each topic can be identified.
 - We need be careful in avoiding introducing rigidities.
 - The framework should not be too detailed
 - detailed overviews should perhaps be given in other related products/technical reports/handbooks, etc.
 - There has been absolutely no mention of three things that I think are critical from today's perspective:
 - Statistical sampling as a mechanism to obtain estimates of environmental conditions and trends
 - Imputation as a mechanism to model conditions on a “wall to wall” basis across a landscape.
 - The importance of spatial variation as well as change over time.
 - An “evolving” list of most significant topics, like the MDG targets list, would be more helpful

Chapter IV: Application of the Framework

- C: Assessment of data requirements, sources and availability
 - Main feedback:
 - The framework itself may only give a direction to country but FDES coupled with guidelines, which contain statistical concepts, definitions, classification etc. may help in assessing data requirements, sources and availability for the countries
 - If one would like to let the FDES be a useful tool in the assessment of data requirements, sources and availability, one had better to make the assessment in more detailed description.
 - If the assessment is based on a clear formulation of the demand side (not: on “Framework tables”), then it might be useful.
 - The potential use of the data is not mentioned
 - The FDES as a framework may not have sufficient details needed for assessing data requirements, sources and availability
 - Once the environmental topics are identified, data requirements, sources and availability can be identified via discussion with stake holders and the line agencies.
 - Maybe some kind of “guidelines” would be more appropriate than a “framework”?

Chapter IV: Application of the Framework

- D: Structuring of information systems and statistical publications
 - Main feedback:
 - FDES can be designed from a statisticians point of view, but information and dissemination of statistics from users point of view.
 - The FDES provides the basic structure for the development of environment statistics database and the preparation of the compendium of environment statistics.
 - For publication, it depends on the statistical system and the NSO to decide on what to publish and in which format.
 - This is not as important as the two first purposes (A and B; review the environmental problems and concerns, and identification of statistical variables

Human Settlements Statistics

- Main feedback:
 - Most of the statistics in this report are conventional and are readily available from NSOs.
 - A general review of all the statistical topics and variables should be carried out.
 - This needs to be updated taking into account developments which have taken place in the last 2 decades.
 - The need for a separate Human Settlements framework is highly questionable as most issues are either covered by the FDES or by the MDG framework.
 - The role of this type of statistics is not clear to me. I do not think this framework is very much applied.

Statistics of the Natural Environment

- Main feedback:
 - This publication is very useful, but a general review of all the statistical topics and variables should be carried out.
 - Useful to give a total overview of statistical variables in this framework vs. topic by topic in separate publications.
 - Statistics of the Natural Environment could be, thematically, all FDES
 - The classification above has to be updated in an ecosystem perspective.
 - Water part should be updated after completion of IRWS
 - Scope and contents of statistics of natural environment can be extended keeping in view natural resource accounting framework.

Summary

- From the responses some of the key things this meeting needs to consider include:
 - The structure of the FDES
 - Feedback from respondents included having:
 - a single document
 - an overarching document with supporting documents
 - The content of the FDES
 - Feedback from respondents included:
 - having a core set of indicators in the FDES
 - having data items (i.e. variables) and definitions in the FDES
 - having classifications in the FDES
 - using an ecosystems approach for the FDES
 - having the FDES support more than one approach
 - having an elaboration of the relationship between the FDES and other frameworks/approaches e.g. the SEEA, DPSIR etc
 - Including or strengthen content regarding climate change, GIS, remote sensing, natural hazards,...