



DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS  
STATISTICS DIVISION  
UNITED NATIONS

---

**Expert Group Meeting on the Framework  
for the Development of Environment Statistics  
New York, 10-12 November 2009**

**Opening Statement  
Paul Cheung, Director, UNSD**

Dear Colleagues,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Expert Group Meeting on the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics. I am grateful that you have come here to share with us your experience and expertise and help us in setting the course this important piece of methodological work will take.

This expert group meeting came about as a response to the request by several countries for UNSD to develop an overarching framework that will help them establish a coherent, effective national environment statistics system that integrates environment statistics, indicators and accounts. This demand has been voiced forcefully for example at recent high level international discussions on statistics related to climate change in Oslo and Seoul.

The countries stressed the importance of a framework that clearly marks out the scope and contents of environment statistics; that is integrative in nature, comprehensive and flexible enough to accommodate the information needs of new and emerging environmental and policy issues. Such a framework should allow for the identification of data needs, data sources and gaps, and for the allocation of roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders in the production of environmental data including the assurance of data quality.

It should also support the identification of a core set of environment statistics, definitions and classifications that the international statistical community can recommend for

countries to use as a starting point for developing their environment statistics programmes. Many countries have requested guidance from UNSD in this field.

It has been some time since the statistical community developed the *Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics*, which was published by the United Nations in 1984 and followed by two methodological publications *Statistics of the Natural Environment* and *Human Settlements Statistics*. Several countries used the UN FDES, which is a comprehensive but loose and flexible framework, for the development of environment statistics. While these documents were state of the art at the time they were published, the subsequent 25 years have led to dramatic changes in human knowledge regarding the environment and the role it plays in supporting life on earth and all human activities.

Better knowledge and understanding of the environment has to be reflected in the conceptual basis of the framework for environment statistics. We have to revisit the UN FDES and see how the concepts and methods that build up the framework have stood the test of time or found wanting. National and international experience with the application of the UN FDES and other frameworks, especially their application to new and cross-cutting policy issues such as climate change, will help this assessment.

An important consideration for the FDES is the underlying analytical basis to the framework. There are several broad analytical approaches the FDES might or might not consider supporting. In most approaches the environment is viewed as a source of goods

and services for the society and the economy. The ecosystems approach differs from the other approaches because it views the environment not in terms of its relationship with, or impacts on, people and the economy, but as a system of interacting components supporting the survival of plants, animals and humans.

Analytical approaches are essentially academic in nature; what is important is how they can inform policy formulation. The meeting needs to consider the link between the analytical approaches supported by the FDES and the environmental policy data needs. Another important outcome of this meeting should be a clear statement regarding the necessity to build up the capacity of countries to compile relevant and comprehensive environment indicators to support policy objectives. The revised FDES should also be robust yet flexible enough to integrate commonly-used and internationally recognized frameworks and analytical models.

It is important that this meeting advises the Statistical Commission regarding the content of the revised FDES as a statistical framework for a core set of environment statistics together with definitions and classifications to be used by countries. The meeting needs to advise the Statistical Commission as to whether the revised FDES should cover guidance, for example, regarding national institutional arrangements, data sources and frames, metadata and data quality frameworks, and data communication.

This expert group meeting is the beginning of a process, not the end. The outcome of the meeting will be a report to be submitted to the UN Statistical Commission for discussion

at its 41<sup>st</sup> session in February 2010. The report should clearly state your recommendations on the direction UNSD should take in the revision of the FDES as well as the modalities and a work programme of the revision process.

Before concluding I think it is important to thank Statistics Canada for putting the issue of frameworks for environment statistics on the table by preparing an excellent room document for the 40<sup>th</sup> session of the Statistical Commission. Statistics Canada has also assisted UNSD in organizing this expert group meeting.

I would like to thank you all for coming and sharing your ideas with us. I am counting on your contributions and continued support in this important endeavor and wish you success in your deliberations.

Thank you for your attention.