First Meeting of the Expert Group on Environment Statistics
New York, 26-28 March 2014

Final Report

1. The First Meeting of the Expert Group on Environment Statistics (EGES), organized by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) was held in New York from 26 to 28 March 2014.

2. The meeting was attended by 18 experts from Botswana, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Czech Republic, India, Italy, Jamaica, Mauritius, Mexico, Norway, Philippines, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, the United States of America, the European Environment Agency, Eurostat, and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

3. Ms. Iva Ritschelova (President, Czech Statistical Office) chaired Sessions 1 and 2 of the meeting. Ms. Eszter Horvath (UNSD) chaired Sessions 3 and 4.

4. The meeting was opened by Mr. Stefan Schweinfest, Acting Director of UNSD and Ms. Iva Ritschelova, chair of the EGES. After welcoming the participants, they stressed the importance of the meeting to the field of environment statistics, noted the significant role that environment statistics plays in other ongoing discussions such as the Post-2015 Development Agenda and emphasised that the participation of the experts in this meeting's discussions and to further work was paramount.

5. The EGES was organized as follows:

Introduction:	Background and objective of the meeting
Session 1:	Methodological guidance manual for the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics (FDES) Core Set of Environment Statistics (FDES Tool 1)
Session 2:	The Environment Statistics Self-Assessment Tool (FDES Tool 2)
Session 3:	Handbook for setting up/strengthening an environment statistics programme (FDES Tool 3)
Session 4:	Technical assistance, training and capacity building for the implementation of the FDES 2013 in countries
Session 5:	Work Programme of the EGES for 2014-2015

6. Ms. Eszter Horvath presented a summary of the progress made since the last Expert Group Meeting on the Revision of the FDES in November 2012, and articulated the objectives of this EGES as reaching agreement on: (i) the outline of the methodological guidance manual for the FDES Core Set of Environment Statistics, the template for the methodology sheets and the distribution of work; (ii) the need to develop

Part III of the Environment Statistics Self-Assessment Tool focussed on the institutional dimension; (iii) the outline of guidelines for setting up/strengthening an environment statistics programme; and (iv) the work programme, timetable, responsibilities and contributions for training and capacity building.

7. The EGES's discussions were based on documents and the corresponding presentations prepared by EGES members and UNSD. All papers and presentations submitted for the EGES are available and can be downloaded from the Expert Group's website at http://unstats.un.org/unsd/environment/FDES/fdes_eges1.html

8. The main conclusions of the meeting are summarized in the following paragraphs 9–19. A summary of the discussions in Sessions 1–4 is attached as Annex A. The agenda of the meeting is attached as Annex B. The list of participants is attached as Annex C.

Main Conclusions of the Meeting

9. The Expert Group expressed its appreciation to UNSD for the quality of the documents and presentations prepared for the meeting and for the work done since the last Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on the Revision of the FDES in November 2012.

10. The Expert Group agreed on the structure and contents of the planned Methodological Manual according to the concept note presented by UNSD.

11. Regarding Tool 1, the Expert Group discussed and approved the template for the draft Methodology Sheets which are part of the planned Methodological Manual for the Core Set of Environment Statistics. Agreement was reached that the scope of the Manual should be extended to include not only the Core Set, but also the Basic Set of Environment Statistics. Agreement was also reached on the need for additional detail on the statistics, metadata, definitions, etc. throughout.

12. The cluster approach of the Methodology Sheets was agreed upon. Discussion was had among experts about alternative ideas of compilation (e.g. by topic, by sub-component, etc.). However, owing to the diverse nature of the Basic Set of Environment Statistics, and the need for specific expertise in compiling Methodology Sheets regarding a particular field of statistics (e.g. Waste), the cluster approach was agreed as being most suitable. This approach was agreed as being more suitable than developing Methodology Sheets for each individual variable.

13. Based on the experts' presentations of their national experiences in applying the FDES, a plan of action was agreed upon where various members of the EGES could commit to contributing their expertise toward developing and/or drafting Methodology Sheets, or participating in teams to review/develop outputs alongside UNSD.

14. The Expert Group agreed on a distribution of tasks for the development of Methodology Sheets whereby experts' knowledge in their fields of speciality could be best applied. A draft matrix assigning responsibilities to experts was circulated. Experts

agreed to confirm their participation in developing the respective Methodology Sheets with a tentative timeline to have the first batch of sheets finalized by the end of June and forwarded to UNSD for further progression. Over the longer term, the plan among the experts and UNSD is to have Methodology Sheets for all statistics in the Basic Set of Environment Statistics completed by the end of the 2015 calendar year.

15. It was agreed among the experts that the naming, use of terms, concepts and definitions, etc. in any work undertaken on the Methodological Manual be consistent with those used in the FDES. Like the structure in general for each topic in chapter three of the FDES, exclusions should be specified in the introduction for each Methodology Sheet as relevant to each cluster of statistics. The meeting agreed that essentially the definitions used in the FDES, and those to be used in the Methodological Manual, were in accord with definitions used in other methodological guidelines and standards in environment statistics and related fields. However, if legitimate differences did occur in definitions used in various methodologies, the solution would be to explain where they occur and why such differences were justified.

16. Regarding Tool 2, the Expert Group expressed appreciation for Parts I and II of the ESSAT, as well as the draft Part III on the Institutional Dimension of Environment Statistics. The Expert Group discussed and approved in general, the structure and content as presented by UNSD. In response to the discussion regarding the ESSAT, UNSD will examine the possibility of merging parts I and II of the ESSAT. The Group agreed that part III should be moved forward to become part I. Other comments will be taken on board and experts volunteered to participate in the finalization of the tool.

17. Regarding Tool 3, the Handbook for Setting up/Strengthening an Environment Statistics Programme, the need for brevity and practicality was also agreed upon, though it was acknowledged that this is often a careful balancing act. The use of examples of countries with successful programmes and practices was supported.

18. The Experts agreed on a continued exchange of information on their activities and supported the idea of coordinating training and capacity building activities. The Experts requested that training material be made available on the UNSD website. They also requested that UNSD make an effort to coordinate bilateral and multilateral donor activities in the field of environment statistics.

19. It was decided that after a two-week period of collecting further written comments from the Experts, UNSD would provide a detailed plan for progressing Tools 1, 2 and 3. The idea of forming working groups was agreed upon. Moreover, Experts agreed to keep in touch virtually and look forward to meeting again in April 2015.

20. During the meeting a discussion took place about a proposal to consider if the FDES could eventually become a statistical standard. Several experts supported this suggestion and it was felt that this proposal can be considered again by the EGES and the UN member states at a later stage, once the Manual on the Basic and Core Sets of Environment Statistics has advanced.

ANNEX A

Summary of the discussions of the First Meeting of the Expert Group on Environment Statistics

Session 1: Methodological guidance manual for the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics (FDES) Core Set of Environment Statistics (FDES Tool 1)

1. Rayén Quiroga (UNSD) presented on Tool 1 of the FDES Toolkit, the Methodological Manual of the Basic and Core Sets of Environment Statistics and gave an overview of its outline and a description of the template of the methodology sheet.

2. Christian Heidorn (Eurostat) presented a draft methodology sheet for Waste. This sheet was an example of what similar sheets for the Manual might resemble.

3. The subsequent presentations made by Anand Sookun (Statistics Mauritius), Michael Nagy (Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics, Qatar) and Khamis Raddad (National Bureau of Statistics, UAE), as well as a presentation submitted by Philip Bankole (Federal Ministry of Environment, Nigeria) focussed on lessons learned in the national application of the FDES.

4. Iva Ritschelova introduced the documents shared with the Expert Group on the description of the Czech environment statistics in general, a project framework for the development of statistics on waste management and a quality assessment framework for waste statistics in the Czech Republic. These documents were distributed as examples of national practices that could be compiled as part of the FDES Toolkit.

5. Reena Shah delivered a presentation of the first results of an ongoing work to compare the FDES Basic/Core Sets of Environment Statistics with the data requirements of selected international/regional indicator initiatives demonstrating close compatibility between these various efforts.

From the discussions in this session, the key points raised were:

6. It was noted that the FDES is a flexible document which makes it adaptable and suitable in a wide variety of contexts. A key strength of the FDES is that it builds on existing statistical standards and definitions. Since the FDES draws on varied sources for definitions, it was noted that clarity of definitions, especially where applied to metadata is critically important. The methodology sheets should provide clear reference to the source of the applied terms, definitions, classifications, and links to relevant international standards, recommendations and guidelines.

7. The meeting discussed and agreed on the structure and contents of the Methodological Manual for the Basic and Core Sets of Environment Statistics as

presented in the concept note. As part of the Manual, draft methodology sheets were discussed. The experts agreed that the methodology sheets should cover the entire Basic Set, not just the Core Set, as the statistics contained in these sets are closely interrelated. They discussed the preferable coverage of the methodology sheets and agreed that they should be developed for a cluster of statistics (e.g. at the topic or sub-component level of the FDES) rather than at the level of the individual statistics, as statistics belonging to the same topic or sub-component are frequently based on common methodologies.

8. It was agreed that the methodology sheets should contain much more and specific detail on the statistics, metadata, definitions, etc. than Chapter 3 of the FDES where the components, sub-components and topics of the FDES are described. However, at the same time, the methodology sheets should be kept to a limited number of pages, and for more detailed information they should refer to existing methodological guidelines, where available.

9. A draft methodology sheet developed by UNSD was presented to the expert group and discussed. In this sheet, all 20 individual statistics within sub-component 3.3: Generation and Management of Waste were featured. The draft format proposed was sequenced as follows:

1. Introduction;
2. Definitions and descriptions of variables;
3. International sources and recommendations;
4. Methodological guidance for countries; and
5. Other relevant information.

10. The idea that each Methodology Sheet should contain more detailed text supporting the metadata for collecting statistics was raised. A suggestion was made that each Methodology Sheet should include a standard template instructing countries on how to compile a set of metadata. It was also proposed to include dummy tables or blank national data collection questionnaires as examples for countries wishing to embark on the collection or compilation of the respective statistics.

11. The need for the Methodological Manual to accord with the existing structure, hierarchy and coding of the FDES was discussed and agreed upon.

12. It was suggested that potential disaggregation and scale of statistics are too important to appear at the end of the Methodology Sheets and should be brought forward in the document. Geospatial information and cartographic tools in general were suggested to be added as a source of data.

13. As for presentation within the Methodology Sheets, the use in moderation of graphs, boxes and examples was discussed. It was pointed out that where they add clarity to the text or replace long textual explanations, graphs, boxes and examples can indeed be very useful.

Session 2: The Environment Statistics Self-Assessment Tool (FDES Tool 2)

14. Reena Shah and Marcus Newbury (UNSD) presented on the ESSAT as well as information about its development as a tool for countries to use in assessing and diagnosing the state of environment statistics in the application of the FDES. A description of the newly developed draft Part III on the Institutional Dimension of Environment Statistics was also presented.

15. The country presentations in this session focussed on the experience gained through the national application of the ESSAT, either during, or since the 2012 pilot exercise. The presentations were made by Denise Kronemberger (Instituto Brasileno de Geografia y Estatística), Ditshupo Gaobotse (Statistics Botswana), Janet Geoghagen-Martin (Statistical Institute of Jamaica), and Raymundo Talento (Philippines Statistics Authority).

16. Monica Madrid Arroyo (Department of Statistics, Colombia) presented on Colombia's experience in using the FDES in the development of their environment statistics programme, and on Colombia's application of a tool they developed, based on the ESSAT, for regional use.

From the discussions in this session, the key points raised were:

17. Those who had already made use of the ESSAT found it useful and expressed appreciation for it being comprehensive and systematic. Comments were made that it helped countries identify both where to start in assessing their environment statistics, and who the key stakeholders were within particular fields (e.g. water, waste) of statistics. Using the ESSAT also helped countries identify gaps and areas where capacity limitations lie.

18. Several experts observed that when using the ESSAT, collaboration among multiple agencies was preferred. It was also noted that holding an initial workshop with all stakeholders proved to be very useful. As such, the suggestion was made that the ESSAT could emphasize or explicitly state the importance of inter-agency collaboration when applying it.

19. Citing issues such as the burden to countries in filling out the ESSAT as well as the need to have more detailed information for both parts of the tool, several experts suggested that Parts I and II of the tool be merged. However, some experts expressed that they had used Part I in its entirety which identified topics of particular importance, and then used Part II for all statistics within those more important topics. The observation was also made that the ESSAT is not necessarily a tool to be filled out in its entirety at once. Countries are encouraged to use it as per their requirements and not necessarily in full.

20. On Part III on the institutional dimension, praise was given for further questions soliciting information on human resources focussed on environment statistics. Another expert suggested including questions on the skill levels of human resources since it is important to know the size of statistical capabilities.

21. Experts expressed that where countries have a National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) in place, environment statistics should be incorporated therein.

Session 3: Guidelines for setting up/strengthening an environment statistics programme (FDES Tool 3)

22. Rayén Quiroga (UNSD) presented on FDES Tool 3, Handbook for setting up/strengthening environment statistics programmes: statistical methods, institutional and organizational dimensions.

23. Country presentations focussed on the institutional aspects of environment statistics in their respective countries. Presentations were made by Krishna Kumar (Central Statistical Office, India), Francisco Javier Jiménez Nava (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, Mexico), and William Sonntag (United States Environment Protection Agency).

From the discussions in this session, the key points raised were:

24. The experts expressed praise for the Handbook proposal, commenting that it has potential to be a very useful tool.

25. An observation was made that the Handbook must be able to explain the unique aspects of environment statistics compared to traditional economic and social statistics. Such unique aspects include the different sources used in environment statistics (e.g. remote sensing, soil sampling, monitoring stations) and the cross-cutting nature of environment statistics which give need for an organized sustained effort among different national partners.

26. Discussion was had regarding the target audience of the Handbook. Points were made that senior management should be considered as a focus audience since a high level group rather than the statistical practitioner can better encourage and promote the process of setting up or strengthening an environment statistics programme. It was further discussed that pressure from outside of an NSO or Environment Ministry as well as political capital has great potential for exerting influence on a country's environment statistics programme.

27. In order to attract the attention of this kind of audience, a suggestion was made for preparing a separate short document (policy brief), targeting high level policy and

decision makers to promote the role of environment statistics. Further suggestion was made that the contents of this document include text on the purpose and need for environment statistics, especially in terms of better informing decision making on environment, economic and other policies.

28. Points were made and questions asked regarding the identification of a designated leader organisation, though it was concluded that it is not the role of the Handbook to specify a leader for countries, since each country has its own mandate. Rather, the Handbook's role is to facilitate countries' processes toward developing an environment statistics programme. A useful way of doing so is for the Handbook to share examples of country and regional success stories.

29. It was noted that this product has been repeatedly requested by users, and that the endeavour is to make it practical and full of examples.

Session 4: Technical assistance, training and capacity building for the implementation of the FDES in countries

30. Experts through a round table discussion presented their national, regional and international activities and plans in technical assistance, training and capacity building in the area of environment statistics. There was strong willingness to share methodological work and training materials among the experts and to better coordinate capacity building efforts, such as in regional/sub-regional workshops as well as in bilateral country level activities.

Session 5: Work Programme of the EGES for 2014-15 and any other business

31. UNSD described the next steps in the work programme which included the setting up of three groups to focus on the three tools that UNSD is developing with the assistance of the EGES. It was agreed that the matrix for contributions and the revised template for the methodological sheet for the Methodological Manual for the Core/Basic Sets of Environment Statistics, would be circulated shortly. The setting up of the groups as well as the sending out of the revised drafts of Tools 2 and 3 would be carried out after receiving written comments from the participants.

32. The first batch of methodology sheets will be drafted by the teams by the end of June 2014. After an assessment of the process, a timetable for the full set of methodology sheets will be developed.