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Items for discussion and decision: environment statistics

Revision of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report was prepared at the request of the Statistical Commission at its forty-second session (see E/2011/24, chap. I.A). The Commission also has before it a background document containing the core chapters of the revised Framework. The report summarizes the conclusions of the two expert group meetings held since the forty-second session of the Commission, describes the core chapters of the Framework contained in the background document, and lays out the plan for the remaining actions to be taken to conclude the revision process. The Commission is requested to approve in principle the core chapters of the revised Framework as contained in the background document and to endorse the steps to finalize the revision as described in the present report. Points for discussion are provided in paragraph 25.

* E/CN.3/2012/1.

I. Introduction

1. At its forty-first session, in 2010, the Statistical Commission discussed the report of the Secretary-General on the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics (E/CN.3/2010/9) and endorsed the programme of work for the revision of the Framework, including the development of a core set of environment statistics.

2. In accordance with the decision of the Statistical Commission, the United Nations Statistics Division formally convened the Expert Group on the revision of the Framework (see E/CN.3/2010/9, para. 33). In addition to the experts who attended the preparatory meeting in November 2009, the Expert Group included experts from countries and bodies that had expressed an interest in participating in the revision process. The Expert Group represents 23 countries and 11 international, regional, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and specialized bodies.

3. The first Expert Group Meeting on the revision of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics, organized by the Statistics Division, was held in New York from 8 to 10 November 2010. At its forty-second session, held from 22 to 25 February 2011, the Statistical Commission took note of the progress report of the Secretary-General on the revision of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics (E/CN.3/2011/28) describing: (a) progress made since the forty-first session, namely the steps implemented in 2010; (b) the conclusions of the first meeting of the Expert Group on the revision of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics; and (c) the way forward.

4. The present report summarizes the conclusions of the second and third meetings of the Expert Group held since the forty-second session of the Commission, briefly describes the core chapters of the Framework that will be submitted to the Commission as a background document and lays out the plan for the remaining actions to be taken to conclude the revision process. The Commission is requested to approve the core chapters of the revised Framework as contained in the background document and to endorse the steps to finalize the revision as described in the present report. Points for discussion are provided in paragraph 25.

II. Second meeting of the Expert Group on the revision of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics

5. The second meeting of the Expert Group on the revision of the Framework, organized by the Statistics Division, was held in New York from 4 to 6 May 2011.

6. As agreed at the first meeting, the Statistics Division prepared the following documents for discussion at the second meeting of the Expert Group:

(a) Analysis of (i) global policy initiatives, their frameworks and derived statistical approaches and indicators; (ii) global and regional environmental assessments and their frameworks; (iii) relevant global and regional statistical initiatives related to environment statistics;

(b) Review of existing and emerging environment statistics classifications;

(c) Review of geospatial developments relevant to environment statistics;

(d) Elements, topics and dimensions missing or in need of improvement in the 1984 Framework;

(e) Proposed objective, scope and coverage of the revised Framework;

(f) Review of options for the structure and dimensions of the revised Framework;

(g) Proposed outline of the revised Framework;

(h) Review of existing global and regional environmental indicators, publications, databases based on a preliminary structure and identification of common indicators for the core set of environment statistics.

7. The Expert Group expressed its appreciation to the Statistics Division for the quality of the papers and presentations prepared for the meeting and for the work done since the last Expert Group Meeting in November 2010.

8. The Expert Group agreed on the objective, scope and coverage of the revised Framework.

9. The working groups made significant progress in the elaboration of the structure and contents of the revised Framework. It was agreed that they would further elaborate and fully describe their proposals for the structure, components and building blocks of the revised Framework and send them to the Statistics Division by 31 May 2011. The proposals would include the following elements:

(a) Conceptual thinking and rationale behind the proposed structure;

(b) Table and description of matrix or structural components;

(c) Description of rows and columns (alternative description of rows and sub-rows, and/or columns) or components;

(d) Illustration of the table(s) with real environmental themes, topics and/or dimension (contents);

(e) Identification of advantages and disadvantages of the proposed structure;

(f) Matching the proposed structure with the agreed objective, scope and coverage of environment statistics;

(g) Matching the proposed structure with the agreed criteria for the Framework.

10. The final proposal for the structure of the revised Framework would be elaborated by the Statistics Division based on the contributions from the working groups.

11. The Expert Group appreciated the progress made in the identification of a core set of environment statistics and: (a) agreed with the process that had been followed; (b) agreed that the leading criteria for the selection of the core set should be policy relevance, measurability, methodological soundness and frequency of use; and (c) recommended that the Statistics Division continue with this work in line with the evolving structure of the revised Framework.

12. There was general agreement that the core set of environment statistics should be part of the Framework document. It was agreed that the relevant chapter would

include the reason why a core set is needed; how the statistics were chosen; and what the relationship is between the core set and the Framework.

13. The Expert Group unanimously agreed that an additional face-to-face meeting was necessary, preferably after the global consultation process, so that the experts could discuss the observations and suggestions and collectively work to finalize the revised Framework. The tentative dates for this meeting were 2 to 4 November 2011.

III. Progress made between May and November 2011

14. The Statistics Division started working on the draft chapters of the revised Framework in June 2011. However, bringing the recommendations of the two working groups into a single coherent framework structure proved more difficult than expected and the Statistics Division was unable to keep the agreed timetable. The first five draft chapters of the revised Framework (Introduction; Chapter 1: Relevant developments pertaining to environment statistics since 1984; Chapter 2: The environment statistics domain; Chapter 3: Purposes and properties of the Framework; and Chapter 4: The structure and components of the revised Framework) were therefore circulated to the Expert Group during the last week of October, and the outline of the remaining two chapters (Chapter 5: Core set of environment statistics; and Chapter 6: Towards implementation) were presented to the Expert Group at its third meeting in November 2011.

IV. Third meeting of the Expert Group on the revision of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics

15. The third meeting of the Expert Group was held in New York from 2 to 4 November 2011. The Expert Group discussed the draft chapters of the revised Framework.

16. The Expert Group:

(a) Acknowledged with appreciation the progress made in the draft chapters of the Framework and congratulated the Statistics Division for the work done;

(b) Recognized that there was still significant work left to be done to produce the final draft for consideration by the Statistical Commission at its forty-third session;

(c) Discussed the draft chapters one by one, identified the gaps, and made detailed substantive and editorial recommendations to improve the document;

(d) Agreed that the time left for finalizing the document and carrying out a wide consultation process was very tight;

(e) Agreed that neither the quality of the Framework nor the adequate consultation process should be compromised;

(f) Agreed that the main objective was to produce a high-quality, conceptually sound draft of the Framework for the forty-third session of the Statistical Commission.

17. To achieve this objective, the Expert Group agreed upon the following:

- (a) The document needed to be better focused and shortened significantly;
- (b) The core of the Framework consisted of the current chapters 3 and 4 (objective and scope, relationship with the System of Environmental-Economic Accounts and other statistical frameworks, conceptual foundation, structure and components of the Framework) and chapter 5 (core set of environment statistics). Work should focus on the development of these chapters, taking into account the recommendations agreed upon at the Meeting;
- (c) A subgroup would be set up to work closely with the Statistics Division and Statistics Canada on chapters 3 and 4;
- (d) A subgroup would be set up to work closely with the Statistics Division on chapter 5;
- (e) The revised chapters would be circulated in the Expert Group, with enough time for internal and external consultation with the most important stakeholders;
- (f) The deadline for the final draft to be submitted as a background document to the Statistical Commission was 31 January 2012;
- (g) The remaining process for concluding the revision would be described in the report of the Secretary-General on the revision of the Framework, which would be submitted to the Statistical Commission for discussion at its forty-third session;
- (h) The Statistical Commission would be requested to approve the core chapters of the Framework as contained in the background document and to endorse the process for finalizing the revision as described in the above-mentioned report.

V. Core chapters of the revised Framework

18. As agreed, the Statistics Division, with the assistance of Statistics Canada and the two subgroups, has focused on the revision of the core chapters of the Framework.

19. These core chapters include: what is a framework; why a framework is needed for environment statistics; a description of the environment statistics domain; the objective, conceptual foundation and scope of the Framework; its relationship with the System of Environmental-Economic Accounts and other statistical frameworks and domains; the structure and components of the Framework; and the recommended core set of environment statistics.

20. These chapters are to be circulated for comments to the members of the Expert Group by 3 January 2012. Based on their comments, the core chapters will be finalized and submitted as a background document to the forty-third session of the Statistical Commission by 31 January 2012.

VI. Process for finalizing the revision after the forty-third session of the Statistical Commission

21. Upon the approval by the Statistical Commission of the draft core chapters of the revised Framework and the core set of environment statistics, the Statistics Division will finalize the draft, with the help of the Expert Group, by 31 March 2012.

22. The final draft of the revised Framework will be circulated for global consultation in April and the first half of May 2012. Based on the comments received, the draft will be revised and finalized by the end of May and submitted to the Bureau of the Statistical Commission for approval.

23. Upon the approval of the Bureau, the Statistics Division will test the revised Framework and the core set of environment statistics in pilot countries during 2012.

24. With the help of the Expert Group, the Statistics Division will prepare a detailed plan for implementation of the Framework and the core set of environment statistics for the forty-fourth session of the Statistical Commission in 2013.

VII. Points for discussion

25. **The Commission may wish to:**

(a) **Approve the core chapters of the revised Framework, including the core set of environment statistics as contained in the background document;**

(b) **Endorse the process for finalizing the revision as described in paragraphs 21 to 24 above.**
