

Background and objective of the meeting

The increasing prominence of evidence-based approaches to informing policy decisions emphasize the need for high quality statistics in support of the policy making process. Unlike economic statistics, however, environmental statistics have, up to now, been collected in a largely *ad hoc* fashion. Statistical data collection and reporting have mostly been conducted to suit the needs of individual policy initiatives, following the ebb and flow of environmental concerns. As a result, the overall quality of environmental statistics has suffered, frequently lacking one or more of the standard attributes of high quality statistics: relevance, accuracy, timeliness, accessibility, interpretability and coherence.

The existence of *ad hoc*, widely dispersed environmental statistics with varying degrees of quality clearly underlines the need for a comprehensive and integrative *framework*—a basic organizing structure to guide environmental statistics. A framework provides guidance on what should be collected and how to ensure quality: quality of the datasets and quality in the execution of statistical activities. A coherent environmental statistics framework also facilitates the integration of basic environmental datasets with other datasets, in particular, socio-economic data. The need for a framework for environment statistics had been voiced by several countries at the Oslo and Seoul conferences on climate change and official statistics as well as at the 40th session of the Statistical Commission in February 2009.

The UN Statistics Division published three handbooks during the eighties and early nineties: the *Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics* (FDES), *Statistics of the Natural Environment*, and *Human Settlement Statistics*.

Several countries used the FDES for the development of environment statistics. Since the preparation of these handbooks, however, given the dynamic nature of environment statistics, much has changed in terms of concepts, methods, definitions and classifications and other framework approaches evolved, so the FDES has to be revised to take these changes into account. The revision has to be based on national and international experience with the application of the FDES or other frameworks as well as on new approaches and initiatives in this field.

The Expert Group Meeting, organized in collaboration with Statistics Canada, will discuss the role of a framework in the development of environment statistics and the lessons learned when applying different frameworks. It will review new approaches. The experts will subject the FDES to a review and will discuss the directions of the revision of the FDES and the modalities of the revision process. The output of the EGM will be a report for the 41st session of the Statistical Commission in February 2010.