**Environment Statistics Self-Assessment Tool (ESSAT)**

**Introduction**

in support of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics

(FDES 2013)





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**Background**

In 2013, the 44th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission endorsed the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics (FDES 2013) as the framework for strengthening environment statistics programmes in countries, and recognized it as a useful tool to adequately respond to the increasing demand for environmental information in the follow-up to Rio+20 and the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The FDES 2013 includes the Basic and Core Sets of Environment Statistics, which were also endorsed by the Statistical Commission.

UNSD, in collaboration with the Expert Group on Environment Statistics, has since developed the Environment Statistics Self-Assessment Tool (ESSAT) in support of the FDES 2013. The purpose of the ESSAT is to assist countries in:

* developing their environment statistics programmes;
* collecting their own data on the environment; and
* assessing the state of environment statistics and the needs for their development at the national level while being consistent with the scope of the FDES 2013.

**Use of the ESSAT**

While the ESSAT has been developed in the form of a questionnaire, it should be used rather as a guide to a multi-stakeholder consultation and discussion process. The completion of the ESSAT should be an organic part of a national consultation on the state of environment statistics and on a strategic plan for the development of environment statistics. Such an initiative, while usually led by the National Statistical Office (NSO) or the Ministry of Environment (or an equivalent national institution), should be carried out as a joint effort by all main relevant stakeholders that play an active role in the production, dissemination and use of environment statistics. Other relevant institutional stakeholders may include line ministries (e.g., Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Energy, Ministry of Water), representatives of academia and non-government organizations, etc. As such, it is desired that a unified understanding of a country’s situation as pertains to environment statistics be realised by all relevant stakeholders to work with the ESSAT. It is therefore recommended that a country establishes or convenes a committee, inter-institutional working group or task force to bring together all the stakeholders to discuss and agree on a common set of responses representing the situation in the country, and that this process is carried out collaboratively in a clear and transparent manner.

Ideally, prior to applying the ESSAT, it is recommended to read the FDES 2013 to gain a proper understanding of the main concepts that are used in the ESSAT and to share a common language. For Part I, the most applicable parts of the FDES are chapters 1 and 2. For Part II, chapters 3 and 4 are most applicable.

Information systematized by using the ESSAT can be used to elaborate a plan for the development of environment statistics based on the needs, capacities and resources of each country. In elaborating a plan, it is envisaged that for many countries the FDES 2013 will be indispensable. A plan which utilises the FDES 2013 can be constructed in a sequential, modular and incremental fashion and implemented over time with the participation of different agencies and partners for the statistics as identified by this tool. This collaboration is key not only to the well-informed assessment of the current state of environment statistics but also to the realistic identification of national priorities and the main elements of a common national environment statistics development strategy, for which stakeholders exercise ownership, take responsibility and can be held accountable.

**The structure of the ESSAT**

The ESSAT consists of two parts, Part I: Institutional Dimension of Environment Statistics, and Part II: Statistics Level Assessment. Parts I and II are closely related and should ideally not be treated as independent of one another.

**Part I: Institutional Dimension of Environment Statistics**

Part I focuses on the overall institutional and organizational structure of national statistics in the country and on specific information regarding environment statistics in terms of, *inter alia*, policy frameworks, mandates, institutional setup, organization, collaboration, resources, international cooperation and uses. Therefore, Part I contains much information which may be of greatest interest from a managerial or policy perspective.

It is divided into the following sections:

1. Identification of institutions
2. Existing national policies relevant to the environment
3. Mandate and organization of national statistics
4. Mandate and organization of environment statistics
5. Production of environment statistics
6. Uses of environment statistics
7. Inter-institutional collaboration for the production of environment statistics
8. Existing and required resources for environment statistics
9. International and regional network
10. Technical assistance and training
11. The way forward in environment statistics

**Part II: Statistics Level Assessment**

Part II of the ESSAT is based on the Basic Set of Environment Statistics (BSES) of the FDES 2013. It follows the hierarchical structure of the FDES (in descending order: component, sub-component, statistical topic, statistic) and serves as a tool to assess the national relevance, importance, availability and sources of the individual statistics contained in the BSES. It also helps to identify relevant quantitative and qualitative data gaps, and to develop a plan for filling them in with a view to strengthen environment statistics according to national priorities, needs and available resources.

The content of Part II is more technical and specific to the field of environment statistics and would possibly require the involvement of a larger number of stakeholders.

**Key concepts from the FDES 2013**

Environmental information includes quantitative and qualitative facts describing the state of the environment and its changes. Quantitative environmental information is generally produced in the form of data, statistics and indicators, and is generally disseminated through databases, spreadsheets, compendia and yearbooks. Qualitative environmental information consists of descriptions (e.g., textual or pictorial) of the environment or its constituent parts that cannot be adequately represented by accurate quantitative descriptors.

Environmental data are large amounts of unprocessed observations and measurements about the environment and related processes. They may be collected or compiled via statistical surveys (censuses or sample surveys) by the national statistical system or may originate from administrative records, geographic databases, registers, inventories, monitoring networks, thematic mapping, remote sensing, scientific research and field studies.

Environment statistics are environmental data that have been structured, synthesized and aggregated according to statistical methods, standards and procedures. The role of environment statistics is to process environmental and other data into meaningful statistics that describe the state of and trends in the environment and the main processes affecting them. Not all environmental data are used to produce environment statistics. The FDES provides a framework that identifies environmental and other data that fall within its scope and then contributes to structuring, synthesizing and aggregating the data into statistical series and indicators.

Environmental indicators are environment statistics that have been selected for their ability to depict important phenomena or dynamics. Environmental indicators are used to synthesize and present complex environment and other statistics in a simple, direct, clear and relevant way. Environmental indicators are generated because environment statistics are usually too numerous and detailed to meet the needs of policy makers and the general public, and often require further processing and interpretation to be meaningful. Environmental indicators may take various forms such as rates, ratios or proportions, and be constructed at different levels of aggregation. The purpose of these indicators is to assess present and future directions with respect to goals and targets, evaluate and determine the impact of specific programmes, monitor progress, measure changes in a specific condition or situation over time, and convey messages. Policy frameworks such as the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) frameworks, the Driving force – Pressure – State – Impact – Response (DPSIR) framework and national environment/sustainable development indicator sets, are typically used to identify and structure indicators.