



NEWS from the
Environment Statistics Section
United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD)

Issue 13 - 14

March 2003 - January 2004

ANNOUNCEMENT

UNSD's Environmental-Economic Accounting Programme has moved from the Environment Statistics Section to the Economic Statistics Branch.

From the next issue Envstats will be a joint activity of the Environment Statistics Section (Environment, Energy and Industry Statistics Branch) and the Environmental-Economic Accounting Group (Economic Statistics Branch) of the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA).



EDITORIAL

UNSD Questionnaire 2004 on Environment Statistics: A follow-up to the recommendations of the thirty-fourth session of the Statistical Commission

The UNSD Questionnaire on Environment Statistics has now been revised and is ready to be mailed to the countries during March 2004. This is the third time that UNSD has collected a set of environmental data and indicators from more than 170 countries and territories, using a questionnaire that is compatible with that distributed jointly by OECD and Eurostat to their member and partner countries.

The revision took full account of the lessons learned from the two previous data collections conducted by UNSD in 1999 and 2001 and considered the recommendations of the Statistical Commission made at its 34th session in 2003. The new questionnaire, while maintaining continuity with the previous ones, is more focused on those variables and indicators that have a better foundation in terms of methodology, data availability and data quality. (For more information on the forthcoming data collection please see page 3).

The Statistical Commission discussed last year the results of the first two data collections, based on a summary report prepared by UNSD. The report concluded that there was a significant improvement in the number and quality of responses from the first data collection to the second. Despite this development, response rates, especially in terms of completeness and data quality, were still far from satisfactory.

The reasons for that are manifold. Because there are differences of natural, social and economic conditions, the relevance and importance of environmental issues differ from country to country. This is reflected in the development of the countries' environmental information systems and the priorities given to and the resources made available for the production of environmental information. Only a few countries have established clear institutional responsibilities for the

regular production of environment statistics, therefore the completion of the questionnaire requires considerable efforts in terms of access to data, cooperation and coordination at the country level. The alleviation of these difficulties can be and is motivated and facilitated by international organizations, but success will always depend on the existence of political will in the countries.

Another reason emphasized by the Statistical Commission was the fact that, with few exceptions, there were still no globally accepted standard methods, concepts, definitions and classifications that countries could use when developing environment statistics. Progress in this area falls clearly under the responsibilities of international organizations.

The Commission underlined the complexity of environment statistics and emphasized the high priority to be given at the international level to this new and developing area of statistics. It recommended that continued priority be given by UNSD to the improvement of regular reporting and dissemination of environment statistics. This objective should be achieved through the continuation, regular revision and strengthening of the biennial data collection, and through the gradual establishment of a flexible disseminating system that is adaptable in scope, content and geographical coverage to improvements in reporting by countries. Simultaneously, there is a need to strengthen collaboration of the international organizations active in environment statistics to intensify work in the development of standards, concepts and methods for environment statistics and to provide regular training and capacity building to the countries. The Commission emphasized that the development of environment statistics should be linked to, and fully integrated with, the development of statistics on sustainable development.

WHAT?



8th meeting of the London Group on Environmental Accounting

(Rome, 5-7 November 2003).

The meeting, which was hosted by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations discussed: a) the draft chapters of the handbook on integrated environmental and economic accounting for water resources, which is being prepared jointly by DESA, UNSD and Division of Sustainable Development and Eurostat; b) the handbook on Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting for Fisheries (jointly with UNSD, FAO and United Nations University) which will be issued shortly as a "white-cover" publication prior to editing and posted on the UNSD web-site. It also provided a forum for sharing national and international expertise and experience in the implementation of the accounts.

The London Group spent much time discussing lessons learned from the SEEA revision process and the future of the London Group. The Group agreed to work in three strategic directions: a) consolidate work in those areas that are already advanced through the preparation of handbooks providing methodological and practical guidelines on the implementation of selected components of SEEA-2003 (e.g., water and mineral resources accounting); b) continue theoretical and practical development of components of environmental accounting that are not yet well advanced; and c) assist in promoting the implementation of SEEA-2003 in countries and the use of environmental accounts to inform policy debates at the national and international levels.

As a mode of operation, the London Group has agreed to create working groups on selected topics. Four such groups were identified in Rome, one on water accounting (to be moderated by DESA, UNSD), another on energy and mineral resource accounting (to be moderated by Statistics Denmark), a third on policy uses of environmental accounts (to be moderated by Statistics Sweden and the European Environment Agency) and a fourth on means of introducing social dimensions into environmental accounts as a basis for contributing to sustainability assessment (to be moderated by Statistics Sweden). Electronic discussion groups on those topics will be established.

A document containing the report of the London Group will be discussed by the Statistical Commission at its 35th session in March 2004.

Project on integrated economic and environmental accounting for water resources (Government of Morocco, UNSD and Division of Sustainable Development (DSD)). The project was launched during a preliminary mission of UNSD and DSD in Morocco in June 2003. An institutional set-up was agreed at the national level for the future institutionalization of the water accounts in Morocco. The approach of the project is new as it involves carrying out water accounts first at the river-basin level and then aggregating the accounts over the nine river basins of Morocco. The information at the national level will then be presented in a satellite system of the System of National Accounts. The Oum-Er-Bia river basin was chosen as the pilot as it presents problems of water scarcity, flooding, water quality - as a result of wastewater from sugar and leather manufacturing; and exports of water to other basins.

As part of the project a workshop was jointly organized by the Government of Morocco and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for Sustainable Development and Statistics Division (Afourer, Morocco, 13-15 January 2004).

The Workshop discussed problems encountered in and the preliminary results of the implementation of water accounts in the Oum-Er-Bia river basin. The workshop agreed that water accounting is an important tool for integrated water management at the river basin level. The preliminary experience of the compilation of the accounts has shown the feasibility of the approach. It was recommended that the water accounts be implemented in all river basins of Morocco. The difficulty of harmonizing economic and environmental data in a common framework at the river-basin level was recognized. As a solution, it was proposed to compile physical water accounts at the river-basin level, monetary accounts at the regional level and then reconcile the two accounts.

Interagency Working Group on Environment Statistics

Progress in work on environmental indicators, indicators of sustainable development and integrated environmental and economic accounting is still hindered by the lack of sufficient good quality, relevant and timely basic environmental data. The Statistical Commission at its thirty-fourth session agreed that UNSD should set up the Interagency Working Group on ENVIRONMENT statistics (IWG-ENV), with a special focus on the development and harmonization of methods, concepts and standards, coordination of data collection, and training.

The first meeting of the IWG-ENV took place on 18 December 2003 in Paris, at the invitation of OECD, back-to-back with the meeting of the OECD Working Group on Environmental Information and Outlooks. UNSD, OECD, Eurostat, UN ECE, and UNEP participated in the inaugural meeting, with the objective to agree on the terms of reference of the Group and its work programme for the years 2004 and 2005.

The Group aims at facilitating the firm anchorage of environment statistics as part of official statistics by improving and strengthening the methodological foundation of environmental data. To achieve this objective, the members of the Group will pool their knowledge base and resources in the areas of methodological work, data collection and dissemination, training and capacity building, and the organization of joint events.

Joint methodological work will steer the consolidation and dissemination of results in more advanced subject areas, while thematic subgroups will be organized by the IWG to focus on priority areas for methodological development. Based on a regular review of existing mechanisms, the Group will draw up, where appropriate, proposals to streamline and to further harmonize international data collection. Joint training and capacity building activities ensure better use of resources available at each organization and, at the same time, facilitate the dissemination of harmonized methodologies. Joint events such as conferences, seminars and workshops, would provide a regular forum for the international discussions and exchange of experience in environment statistics.

The permanent members of the IWG-ENV are those organizations/agencies that have a well-established international programme on environment statistics, including direct and regular collection of comprehensive environment statistics from countries. Organizations, agencies and countries with outstanding experience in specific areas of environment statistics will be associated with the work of the IWG as required and feasible, and will be invited on a subject matter basis.

The IWG-ENV maintains strong collaboration with other groups active in related fields, in particular with the London Group on Environmental Accounting and with those working on indicators of sustainable development.

A document containing the Terms of Reference and Work Programme of the IWG-ENV will be discussed by the Statistical Commission at its 35th session in March 2004.

Questionnaire 2004 on Environment Statistics

UNSD will distribute the Questionnaire 2004 on Environment Statistics (Q2004) in March 2004 to all countries except those that report to the joint OECD/Eurostat Questionnaire on the State of the Environment. The questionnaire, similarly to the 2001 data collection, covers four sections:

- LAND, including tables on land use and land degradation;
- WATER, including tables on water resources, water abstraction, supply and use, waste water treatment and water quality;
- WASTE, including tables on waste generation and treatment, with particular emphasis on municipal waste and hazardous waste;
- AIR, including tables on emissions to ambient air and air quality.

The questionnaire has been revised on the basis of the analysis of responses to the 2001/2002 data collection and consultations with countries and partner organizations (DESA/DSD, UNEP, OECD, Eurostat). The Q2004 has now a focus on the areas that are better developed, while quite a few variables/indicators have been left out of the questionnaire until they have better methodological foundation and wider availability. It maintains its compatibility with the joint OECD/Eurostat questionnaire for a core set of variables.

UNSD will send the Q2004 in each country to the national statistical office and, as part of the collaboration with UNEP, to the ministry or similar institution responsible for environmental affairs. Countries will be asked to nominate a focal point for coordinating the data compilation at the national level.

Countries will receive the questionnaire pre-filled with available data from the 2001/2002 data collection and selected international sources. The questionnaire can be filled in electronically or manually. The blank questionnaires will be made available for downloading on the Internet.

Countries will be asked to return the completed questionnaire to UNSD before 30 June 2004. After validation, editing and processing, the data will be available from UNSD's environment statistics database.

Commission on Sustainable Development: Future work programme, organization and methods of work

Beginning 2004, the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) is organizing its multi-year programme of work in a series of two-year implementation cycles. Each cycle consists of a review year and a policy year, and addresses selected thematic clusters of issues in an integrated manner, taking into account economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

In the review year there is a review session, where progress in implementing Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation is evaluated. Assessment of progress is based on information provided in the country reports, in reports of UN organizations and bodies, regions and subregions, as well as major groups. The evaluation should enable an improved understanding of priority concerns, constraints and obstacles in implementation and facilitate an effective policy discussion at the policy session during the second year of the cycle.

The thematic clusters have been selected for the period 2004-

2017, which covers seven two-year cycles.

Cycle	Thematic cluster
2004/2005	Water; Sanitation; Human settlements
2006/2007	Energy for sustainable development; Industrial development; Air pollution/atmosphere; Climate change
2008/2009	Agriculture; Rural development; Land; Drought; Desertification; Africa
2010/2011	Transport; Chemicals; Waste management; Mining; A 10 year framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns
2012/2013	Forests; Biodiversity; Biotechnology; Tourism; Mountains
2014/2015	Oceans and seas; Marine resources; Small island developing states; Disaster management and vulnerability
2016/2017	Overall appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the further implementation of Agenda 21, and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation

The cross-cutting issues (poverty eradication; patterns of consumption and production; natural resource base; globalization; health; small island developing states; Africa; other regional initiatives; means of implementation; institutional framework for sustainable development; gender equality, education) are to be addressed in each cycle with regard to the thematic issues under consideration.

An effective reporting system, including environment statistics and indicators, is essential for reviewing, evaluating and monitoring progress in implementation. Information for decision making, as a cross-cutting issue, will be integral part of the evaluation. The multi-year programme of CSD offers a thematic road-map to countries to establish or further develop their reporting system and evaluate the situation of national environment statistics.

WHO?



Staff News

Ulrich Wieland has recently assumed the position of Chief of the Environment Statistics Section of UNSD. He has a diploma in mathematics and a PhD in computer linguistics. He joined the Commission of the European Communities in 1979, where he first worked in the Informatics Directorate before moving to Eurostat in 1992. During the last 6 years, he was head of section within the environment statistics unit in Eurostat, responsible for environmental data collection, data bases and dissemination. Within this task, he also managed capacity building activities in candidate countries and worked closely with OECD and the European Environment Agency on improving and streamlining environmental data collections.

Maikel Mendez, a graduate of the University of Arizona, worked as a Fulbright scholar on water accounting for 6 months. In particular, he worked on the expansion of the water

accounting framework for the agricultural sector and looked at possible inclusion in the framework of social aspects.

Amy Laurence, a geologist, joined the Environment Statistics Section for six months in September 2003 after graduating from Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs where she concentrated on energy and environmental policy. She has been working with the environment statistics database and assisting with the preparations for the 2004 data collection.

Sophie Grall worked with the Environment Statistics Section from November 2003 to January 2004. She has a Master in Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (Coventry University, UK) and was previously a consultant for Eurostat on regional environment statistics. She contributed to the revision of the Questionnaire on Environment Statistics.

Jonathan Handley joined the Environment Statistics Section in November 2003. He has a Master of Environmental Studies from the University of New South Wales in Australia. As an intern, he assisted the Section in 2001. He is now working on the implementation of the 2004 data collection and on technical cooperation activities.

Yongyi Min joined the Environment Statistics Section in January 2004. She received her Bachelor of Economics degree from the Renmin University of China and was accepted in the Ph. D. program of the Department of Statistics at the University of Florida where she received first a Master of Statistics and then her Doctor of Philosophy degrees.

and possibly a data set to meet users' needs. The extensive use of GIS analysis was also recommended to explore some of the interrelationships among different environmental indicators. Improving the framework and selection of indicators on the environment, and improving national capacities to compile these indicators was identified as an area where work is most urgently needed.

Strengthening the Scientific Base of UNEP

In response to Governing Council decision 22/1 IA on strengthening the scientific base of the United Nations Environment Programme, UNEP established a consultative process to identify gaps and needs in the current assessment structure and means to address them. As part of this process, an intergovernmental consultation was organized in Nairobi on 14-15 January 2004. (See <http://unep.science.org>).

There was a general agreement amongst the representatives that much needs to be done to improve the understanding of ecologic change. The most frequent comments were:

- Interlinkages between ecological problems (e.g. climate change and biodiversity) and interlinkages between socio-economic and ecological problems (e.g. poverty, climate and land degradation) should be the primary focus of scientific work;
- Capacity building for developing countries is a key action. Whereas developed countries have reasonable networks to monitor ecological change, developing countries lack appropriate know-how and financial resources. Ecological problems in developing countries are often very different from those in developed countries and need specific attention;
- The lack of underlying data was a general concern, both in developed and in developing countries. Scientific models can often not be properly tested or applied due to lack of underlying data.

An informal meeting of the UN organizations to discuss better collaboration followed the intergovernmental consultation on 16 January. Although no concrete decisions were taken, there was a general willingness to improve collaboration in well-defined areas, using existing coordination mechanisms, such as the UN System-wide Earthwatch.

UNSD proposed a close collaboration with UNEP in data collection and dissemination within the framework of the Global Environmental Outlook (GEO).

Forthcoming meetings:

Thirty-fifth session of the Statistical Commission (New York, 2 - 5 March 2004).

Inter-Agency and Expert Meeting on MDG Indicators (New York, 29 March - 1 April 2004).

Workshop on Environment Statistics (Strengthening Statistical Capacity in the ESCWA Region) (4 - 8 April 2004).

9th London Group meeting (Copenhagen, Denmark September 2004).

WHEN AND WHERE?



Inter-Agency and Expert Meeting on MDG Indicators

(Geneva, 10-13 November 2003).

The Meeting discussed, among other issues, questions of data availability and quality in the 2003 MDG indicators and reviewed developments by goal, target and indicator.

During the discussions on Goal 7 - Ensure environmental sustainability, different views were expressed on the difficulty of producing data for environment indicators. Some expressed concern that data are not regularly collected in these areas, environmental sustainability is not a priority for many governments and in fact, Goal 7 is often not reported on in MDG country reports.

One important question was raised on whether the use of these indicators for the monitoring of Goal 7 would eventually stimulate the production of the necessary data at the country level. In this context, the improvement of the analysis presented in the global report on Goal 7, possibly expanding the discussion and providing background data, besides the official indicators, would have a great impact on increasing awareness on the importance of environmental issue and the urgency of producing the necessary data.

It was agreed that environmental indicators need improvement and that work in this direction should include the development of a methodological framework and content for the indicators

envstats is produced by the Environment Statistics Section and the Environmental-Economic Accounting Group of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD). The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the United Nations. Comments and contributions for inclusion in future issues should be sent to Kathleen Suite, (envstats), DC2 - 1403A, 2 United Nations Plaza, New York, New York 10017. Tel: (1-212) 963 4847. Fax: (1-212) 963 0623. E-mail: envstats@un.org