



NEWS & NOTES

Environment Statistics and Environmental Accounting
United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD)/DESA

Issue 15

September 2004

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

Report of the London Group on Environmental Accounting

The completion of the revision of *Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting 2003*, commonly referred to as SEEA 2003, was the culmination of many years of work and marked the end of an important phase in the development of environmental accounting. As a result, the London Group on Environmental Accounting, which played a major role in the revision process, had to rethink and redefine its future role. At its 8th meeting in Rome, the London Group discussed its work plan, mode of operation and organization and the conclusions of the discussion are presented in the report to the Statistical Commission (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/envAccounting/lgreports.htm>). The London Group will continue to provide leadership in defining best practices in the theory and practice of environmental-economic accounting and to provide a forum for sharing experiences in the field. The Group's work will focus on three directions: (a) consolidation of work in areas which are already advanced through the preparation of handbooks and practical guidelines; (b) continuation of theoretical and practical development of those areas that are not yet well advanced; and (c) promotion of the implementation of the SEEA-2003 in policy fora. As a mode of operation, the London Group has established working groups on specific topics. Four subgroups were identified during the 8th meeting of the London Group: one on water accounting, another on energy and mineral resource accounting, a third on policy uses of environmental accounts and a fourth on means of introducing social dimensions into environmental accounting so as to better measure sustainable development. (More details on the work of the subgroups can be found in the report). The Group also agreed to retain the Coordinating Committee, which will be responsible for coordinating the activities of the Group, in particular, organizing meetings, facilitating the functioning of the subgroups, identifying

priority areas of work in consultation with the Group; and promoting the use of the SEEA-2003. The Statistical Commission, after discussion, endorsed the work plan and organization of the London Group and "noted with satisfaction the success of developing countries in the implementation of water and other natural resources accounting and stressed the usefulness of the accounts as tools for integrated resource management as well as for dialogue with policy makers".

Inter-agency Working Group on Environment Statistics (IWG-Env)

The Statistical Commission at its 34th session in 2003 discussed UNSD's work programme in environment statistics in detail and agreed that UNSD should set up an Interagency Working Group in this area. This year, at the 35th session, the Commission considered the first report of the Interagency Working Group on Environment Statistics (IWG-Env). The objectives and terms of reference of the Working Group were approved by the Commission together with a work plan for 2004 and 2005. The main objective of the Working Group, namely, to firmly anchor environment statistics as part of official statistics by improving and strengthening basic environmental data, is to be achieved through joint activities in methodological work, data collection and training. The Working Group focuses on water statistics in this biennium, with a view to consolidate data compilation guidelines in the areas of water resources, water use, waste water discharge and treatment and water quality. A seminar on water statistics is planned in 2005 as part of the work session series on specific methodological issues in environment statistics, which will be revived under the umbrella of the IWG-Env. First results of enhanced coordination and collaboration between the member agencies are the joint UNSD-UNEP data collection in environment statistics and the ESCWA workshop on environment statistics that was co-organized with UNEP (see more on page 2).

The Handbook of National Accounting: Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting for Fisheries

The final draft of the handbook of national accounting *Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting for Fisheries* has been issued as a "white cover" publication prior to official editing and posted on the UNSD and FAO websites. The handbook, referred to as SEEAF, will be published by the United Nations and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. It is the first of a series of handbooks, which support the implementation of the SEEA 2003 by providing methodological and practical guidelines on fisheries, a selected component of the SEEA 2003. This handbook provides a common framework for organizing economic and environmental information related to fisheries, permitting the monitoring of the economic importance of fisheries, the improvement of fisheries management and the estimation of the full costs and benefits of fisheries. The integration of economic and environmental information in the SEEAF framework provides a useful tool for Integrated Coastal Area Management, adopted in Agenda 21, as it allows the evaluation of costs and benefits of different fisheries and non-fisheries policies and development strategies.

UNSD/UNEP Questionnaire 2004 on Environment Statistics

The third biennial questionnaire on environment statistics was sent out at the end of March 2004. For the first time, it was a common action between UNSD and UNEP to improve the content of both the United Nations statistical data base and the Global Environmental Outlook data base. The questionnaire was sent to 150 countries and territories. Countries which did not receive the questionnaire include the OECD and EU countries, since data can be obtained through the more detailed OECD/Eurostat questionnaire, and the countries with less than 100,000 inhabitants (except those that had responded to the 2001 environment questionnaire). The questionnaire was sent to both Environment Ministries and Statistical Offices and asked for coordination within the country. To date, 37 countries have replied to the questionnaire. Reminders were sent to all other concerned countries. Nearly all respondents replied electronically, which will speed up data processing. UNSD is currently validating the data, and will contact countries for further information as necessary. Available data should be on the UNSD Web site at the end of December 2004. In order to meet this deadline, it is important that countries send their data on time. All countries are invited to take the necessary action to make sure that available data arrives at UNSD as soon as possible. Data sent in before October 31st will be taken into account for the first dissemination on the UNSD Web site.

New websites at UNSD

The **Environment Statistics Section** has established a Web-site with links to official country data on the environment. A first version of the site is available on <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/environment/clinks.htm>. Countries are invited to check whether their relevant Web-sites are mentioned on this page, and send updates to envstats@un.org if necessary. Please note that this site should only refer to environmental data and not to projects, studies, environmental laws and other topics with environmental relevance. In a second stage, it is planned to

extend the Web-site to international organizations with relevant environmental data on their sites.

The **Environmental Accounting Group** has established a new Web-site which can be found at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/envAccounting/default.htm>. Please update your bookmarks. For comments, inquires, and information on environmental accounting please contact us at seea@un.org.

Implications of the Commission on Sustainable Development, twelfth session, CSD-12 on statistics, data collection and water monitoring issues (by Jean Michel Chene UNDESA - Division for Sustainable Development)

CSD-12 (14-30 April 2004) focused its work on the analysis of obstacles and progress in three main areas: water supply, sanitation and human settlement. Next year, CSD-13 will have to derive concrete policy recommendations. The Secretary General's report recognized the importance of information on water resources for proper management and noted the lack of reliable information systems in most developing countries which do not adequately characterize either the baseline conditions or the trends.

The Commission stressed the importance of national reports and indicators and noted that the lack of coherent information constitutes a major obstacle for the development of indicators and the implementation of integrated water resource management. There was general support for continuing work towards streamlining the United Nations system requests for national reporting and making more effective use of national reports, while lessening the burden on member countries. To this end it was noted that inter-agency cooperation could be further enhanced for integrated implementation, monitoring and reporting of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and WSSD targets. Training and methodological guidance to develop and implement country-level indicators as well as the development of a coherent and consistent system of information across ministries for national decision-making were considered important. The Secretary General's report cites the pilot project on the implementation of water accountings in Morocco (see *Envstats Issue 13 - 14*) as a success story in implementing integrated water resource management by promoting cooperation between various organizations dealing with water, including the national statistical office.

The lack of basic data and information was also recognized to be an impairing factor to the provision of adequate water and sanitation. The lack of meaningful data impairs decision-making and that there is a need for a more concerted effort to oversee, monitor and report on actual use of facilities, not just on numbers of pumps or latrines installed, in order to gauge progress on the implementation of agreed targets and goals. The need for improved international cooperation, including through the United Nations system, for strengthening information systems and developing capacity building tools was stressed.

One of the recommendations of the Chairman's report in the high level segment is the necessity for strengthening monitoring, assessment and reporting mechanisms to improve decision-making and to enable measurement of progress toward targets while recognizing the need to reduce the reporting burden.

5th Interagency and Expert Meeting on the Millennium Development Goal Indicators

The meeting was held in New York from 29 March to 1 April 2004. It discussed the data sets and storylines for the 2004 MDG Report and related methodological issues. Preparations were made for the main task – a comprehensive report of MDG indicators and analyses in 2005.

The subgroup on the environmental indicators met on 1 April 2004 immediately following the Inter-Agency and Expert Meeting. Discussions were held on performance of indicators, possible additional indicators, improvements to the storyline for target 9, and the possibilities to develop an integrated framework for Goal 7 (Environmental sustainability) for the 2005 report.

The 6th Interagency and Expert Meeting will be held in Geneva from 29 September to 1 October 2004. Subgroup meetings are scheduled to be held immediately before this meeting. The Environment subgroup will meet in Rome from 27 to 28 September. The subgroup will work on recommendations to the inter-agency meeting on the establishment of an integrated framework for the environment goal; on the status and prospects of current indicators; on possible additional indicators; and on a work plan for the 2005 reporting.

REGIONAL NEWS

ESCWA Workshop on Environment Statistics and ESCWA fellowships

UNSD co-organized with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and United Nations Environment Programme-Regional Office for West Asia (UNEP-ROWA) a Workshop on Environment Statistics, within the framework of the capacity-building project in statistics in the ESCWA countries. The Workshop took place in Damascus, Syria from 4 to 8 April, 2004.

The objectives of the Workshop were:

- To train representatives from National Statistical Offices and Environment Ministries in classification, methodology, data processing and dissemination, as well as in filling out the UNSD/UNEP Questionnaire on Environment Statistics, with its four sections on water, air, land and waste;
- To discuss the problems that ESCWA countries face in the field of environment statistics;
- To present recommendations to improve environment statistics in the ESCWA region and strengthen the collaboration between statistics and environmental agencies.

The Workshop was attended by 51 participants. Most countries were represented by experts from both National Statistical Offices and Ministries of Environment. Also present were the United Nations Division for Sustainable Development (DSD), the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Plan Bleu, the Arab Centre for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands (ACSAD), and the Abu Dhabi Global Environmental Data Initiative (AGEDI).

The Workshop covered data collection issues on land, water, waste and air, but also more general topics such as indicators, data processing and dissemination. Discussions on how to strengthen environment statistics led to a set of

recommendations concerning the improvement of national political support to environment and sustainable development, the improvement of coordination on national and international level, and the strengthening of capacities and know-how in countries. The final workshop report is available on <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/environment/damascus.pdf>.

An essential component of the ESCWA project has been the organization and support of study tours for environment statisticians to statistical offices with established and advanced environment statistics within and outside the region. The Department of Statistics of Jordan, the State Institute of Statistics of Turkey and the National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria hosted or will soon host altogether 11 colleagues from the statistical offices of Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Yemen. The fellowships cover a full week and follow an agreed work programme. These visits are considered mutually beneficial both to the host countries and to the visiting countries and help in developing sustained relationships between the offices, thus strengthening the network of environment statisticians in the region.

Fourth Meeting of the CARICOM Advisory Group on Social/Gender and Environment Statistics (Belize, 7-11 June 2004). The CARICOM Advisory Group, established in 2001 to ensure sustainability of the work initiated by the UNSD/CARICOM Project, held its fourth meeting on the CARICOM Programme on Strengthening Capacity for the Compilation of Social/Gender and Environment Statistics and Indicators in the CARICOM region. The Meeting discussed, *inter alia*, the progress, achievements and constraints faced in the implementation of the social/gender component of the Programme. A framework for the activities relating to the development of the environment statistics component of the CARICOM Programme as well as a core list of environmental indicators was also discussed. A resource person from UNSD participated in the Meeting and UNSD will continue to support CARICOM and its Member States in further strengthening regional and national statistical systems in the compilation and dissemination of environment statistics.

ECE - EECCA Workshop on Application of Environmental Indicators (Moldova, 5 - 6 July 2004). The Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) organized a Workshop on environmental indicators in Chisinau/Moldova. The Workshop was attended by all East Europe, Caucasian and Central Asian (EECCA) countries. It prepared draft guidelines on the application of environmental indicators which will help to improve environmental reporting in EECCA countries and to facilitate international data gathering such as that for the post-Kiev assessment report planned for 2007. The guidelines will be made compatible with the UNSD/UNEP Questionnaire on Environment Statistics.

The ECLAC-REDESA project (by Rayén Quiroga and Marcelo Ortúzar, Statistics and Economic Projections Division, ECLAC)

With the collaboration of experts and countries in the region, ECLAC's Statistics Division is carrying out a regional project for the development of environmental statistics (REDESA). Key regional field experts from Colombia, Mexico, Brazil and Chile provide expertise and know-how to the ECLAC team and to the Network, participating substantially in the elaboration of conceptual frameworks and methodologies.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Throughout last year, significant progress was made in developing the experts and institutions directory (currently, 48 experts and 26 institutions are registered) and the document data base (currently 35 documents are abstracted and reside on our site). A database of environmental statistics is in preparation and is expected to be available by the end of 2004. This database draws from the available information from the countries and regional agencies, and is based on a set of selected key variables that can progressively grow in time.

The team is networking with an increasing number of experts and institutions that either lead or participate in the process of producing environmental data for statistics, indicators and environmental accounts in each country. Constant communication and interchange of information, ideas and methodologies is at the core of the project. Most participants in the network find this to be one of the most important strengths of REDESA.

So far, three regional expert meetings were held and eight missions of technical assistance and identifying data sources have been carried out in the region, and four additional missions are planned for this and next year. In the field of capacity building, five programs were designed and developed in a modular fashion to accommodate national needs. Overall, more than 160 participants and six instructors were involved in these courses delivered in Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia and Argentina. Finally, all products will be officially launched at the regional meeting of Environmental REDESA planned for April 2005 (to be announced).

In general, the project received positive feedback, and requests of the countries to sustain the network and provide capacity building and technical assistance are increasing. Therefore, ECLAC is working towards the continuation of these efforts and results in time.

For further information, please visit the web site at www.eclac.cl/redesa. or contact the team at redesa@eclac.cl.

ECOWAS Project

The UNSD/ECOWAS project "Strengthening Statistical capacity-building in support of the Millennium Development Goals in the region of the Economic Community of West African States" aims at strengthening the national statistical system in the 15 countries of the ECOWAS region, and the intra-regional co-operation among these systems. Advisory services, fellowship programmes and a series of sub-regional events (training workshops) constitute the core activities under this project framework. The environment statistics component of this project includes a workshop scheduled to take place in Lomé, Togo from 17 to 21 January 2005. This workshop will focus on frameworks, concepts and methodologies of environment statistics and participants will be invited from all national statistical offices of the ECOWAS region.

Meeting on Environmental-Economic Accounting (Copenhagen, Denmark, 20-21 September 2004). The meeting - organized by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) - will discuss the proposal of establishing a United Nations Committee on Environmental-Economic Accounting whose main tasks would be to coordinate activities in particular on the implementation of the accounts and on the promotion of environmental-economic accounting for sustainable development both at the national and international level. The meeting will discuss the terms of reference of the Committee and develop a plan of action, including identifying priority areas of work. Participants in the meeting will include representatives of international organizations, countries and experts in the field.

9th London Group Meeting on Environmental Accounting (Copenhagen, Denmark, 22-24 September 2004). The meeting will discuss the on-going work of the 4 working groups, namely on water accounting, mineral and energy resource accounting, policy uses of environmental accounting and means of introducing social dimension into environmental accounting, established at the last meeting. It will also provide a forum for exchanging information on country practices in the implementation of the accounts.

EUROSTAT Joint Plenary Meeting on Environment Statistics and Environmental Accounts (Luxembourg, 4 - 6 October 2004).

2nd meeting of the Interagency Working Group on Environment Statistics (IWG-Env)

The meeting will be hosted by Eurostat in Luxembourg on 7 October 2004, immediately following the Eurostat Plenary Meeting on environment statistics and environmental accounts. The IWG-Env will set up a subgroup on water statistics to review existing methodologies, develop data collection manuals and to make preparations for the Seminar on Water Statistics planned for May/June 2005. Joint activities to improve training and capacity building in environment statistics will also be discussed at the meeting.

UN System-wide Earthwatch Meeting (Geneva, 13 - 14 October 2004).

Meeting of the OECD Working Group on Environmental Implications and Outlooks (Paris, 13 - 15 October 2004).

UNEP meeting: 4th Global Environmental Outlook (GEO 4) and meeting of the GEO data Working Group (Nairobi, 10 - 12 and 15 - 16 November 2004).

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
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.