

## **Opening address**

### **Workshop on Environment Statistics**

**Abuja, 19-23 May 2008**

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Dear Colleagues,

I would like to greet you on behalf of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), Department of Economic and Social Affairs. I would like to thank ECOWAS for hosting and UNEP for co-organizing

and co-sponsoring this important workshop on environment statistics.

It has been more than fifteen years ago when the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 declared that the long-term sustainability of economic performance is impaired and future economic and social development is impossible without environmental sustainability. In 2000, environmental sustainability has been declared as integral part of the Millennium Development Goals. Efforts for poverty reduction revealed the fundamental significance of the resources and services provided by the natural environment. Recent assessments of climate change and its possible

impacts played an outstanding role in the now general understanding that environment and development are intimately linked together.

Sound policy and decision making and public participation as well as the monitoring of progress are impossible without accessible and reliable information on the environment.

Strengthening national statistical systems is a crucial component of environment statistics. Ad hoc data collections without the countries' involvement will not provide sustainable statistical programmes. To improve monitoring, it is imperative to bring together

statistical sectors in a unified and coordinated statistical system. This is particularly relevant in the area of environment statistics, where the data come from a variety of different sources.

Setting up such systems takes time and investment, but the payoff is great, especially if these systems have a common framework with other official statistics, so that meaningful inter-linkages can be drawn between the society, the economy and the environment.

Countries should be encouraged to establish robust and coherent national strategies for their data needs

on environment statistics. These strategies should be based on the countries' environmental concerns and the requirements of international commitments. The objective of this workshop is to give the foundation for these strategies by further developing and refining a core set of environmental indicators that combine national and international requirements; and to move forward on a regional strategy for the development of environment statistics.

I hope that the discussions we are going to have during the next five days will be successful and an important step forward in firmly anchoring environment statistics as part of the countries' official statistical systems.

