

WORKSHOP ON ENVIRONMENTAL STATISTICS FOR THE ECOWAS REGION, DAKAR, SENEGAL, 28 FEBRUARY TO 4 MARCH 2005

JOINT PAPER BY THE SIERRA LEONEAN PARTICIPANTS

I. Situation Of Environmental Statistics In Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone's environmental information database is poor and widely dispersed among many sectoral agencies. Environmental information is not easily accessible. A number of institutional considerations influence the development and use of the environmental database. First, institutions are reluctant to share environmental data that they may consider to be sensitive. Second, bureaucrats do not like the prospect of parting with data, which they consider the source of their influence. Third, seemingly comparable data generated by one agency may not be acceptable to others as a result of differences in data formats, classification, precision, reporting schedules, or the ultimate purpose the data is designed to serve.

Sectoral agencies are better suited than central agencies to collect and manage resource and environmental information on a sustainable basis. Success depends on the effective coordination and free exchange of information. The private sectors such as industries, factories, companies and national and international NGOs tend to suppress environmental information from government officials, which in their opinion will be detrimental to their operations.

Two main approaches could be followed in establishing environmental information systems. The first is an information center: creation of a single institution that performs all information activities. Supporters of

this approach have argued that the establishment of centers ensure coordination and provides a good environment for application of new technologies associated with information generation and management. The second approach, which recognizes the comparable advantage of sectoral agencies in environmental data collection, is to develop a network involving all agencies in the collection of information and to create incentives for free exchange and open access to the information. Successful networks can promote the use of information in decision – making.

In developing national environmental information systems, institutional and legal issues are even more important than technical issues. Experience has shown that successful implementation of environmental information systems depends on institutional capacity. Another factor for success is to establish a system that can be sustained. Allocations from the national budget are rarely sufficient to maintain the operation, to maintain the equipment, to offer competitive compensation to staff, and to develop human resources. Furthermore, poor management procedures and practices often lead to inefficient use of the resources available. Agencies collecting environmental information, therefore, should be managed in such a way that they recover at least a significant portion of their costs. The problem is how to value the price of environmental information in order to operate these institutions cost-effectively. The ultimate beneficiaries of improved environmental information are the public at large and the environment and development projects, and these beneficiaries should in part share the cost.

II. Availability And Sources For Environmental Data

Data on environmental statistics in Sierra is at the elementary stages. There is little or no information on most of the parameters covered (data requested) in the UNSD/UNEP Questionnaire 2004 on environmental

statistics. There is no data on the sections on air including tables on emissions to ambient air and air quality. Although municipal waste disposal is a very big issue for the capital city (Freetown) there has been no action in the area of quantifying municipal waste disposal. There is no data on waste generation, waste collection and waste treatment.

There is however some data on land and some aspects of water resources.

The Environment Department of the Ministry of lands, country planning and the environment also provides statistics on land degradation. This department recently prepared the third country report to the Committee to Review the Implementation Of The Convention (CRIC III) on the United Nations Convention to combat desertification/land degradation. Data was also available from the Land and Water Development Division (LWDD) and PEMSD; the statistical arm of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security. These two institutions provided data on land and water resources. These are the only two areas of environmental (land and water) statistics that has some amount of data.

III. Difficulties Encountered In Data Collection

Quantifying, collecting and compiling environmental statistics by line ministries and other institutions is a problem in Sierra Leone. Although there are some visible signs of environmental and land degradation in the country; water quality and availability; the huge problem of managing municipal waste, the extent of such impacts are very difficult to quantify and report accordingly. This is as a result of weak institutional capacity. Experience has shown that successful implementation of environmental information systems depends on institutional capacity. Government institutions responsible for produce resource and environmental information are often not maintained.

Even in cases where data may be available, it is very difficult to get the required cooperation of the lead agencies/institution concerned. There are no proper policies and that could be enforced elicit and share environmental data in the country. Even where these policies exist there are weak penalties for violators.

There are little or no trained personnel in the area of environmental statistical data collection. This problem is also exacerbated by the fact other areas of environmental statistics like determining ambient air quality require some instruments/devices which the country cannot access.

IV. Future Plans For Environmental Statistics

In order to enhance the data collection aspects of environmental statistics, it will be of vital importance to have close collaboration with all government agencies, and other institutions in the country together with the support of UNSD/UNEP to develop a framework of collecting, analyzing and reporting environmental statistics. This could be in the form of the following:

- Training of statisticians and environment officers in the collection of environmental statistics
- Establishment of environment desk officers in line ministries (Transport, Lands, Health, Agriculture, mineral resources, etc)/agencies and the private sector
- Collaboration of agencies whose operations are related to aspects of the environment and hence collect environmental statistics from them

- The government in collaboration with UNSD/UNEP to provide the necessary environment for quantifying municipal waste and air quality
- Base line studies be conducted to collect data on water resources, availability and quality
- Sensitization workshops at both national and local levels intimating participants about the relevance of environmental statistics
- The establishment of a database on environmental statistics