

Tenth meeting of the Expert Group on Environment Statistics (3, 4, 6 and 10 October 2023)

Opening remarks, Stefan Schweinfest, Director, UNSD
(Tuesday, 3 October - 8 am)

- It gives me great pleasure in warmly welcoming everyone to the tenth meeting of the Expert Group on Environment Statistics (EGES). I note that there are 37 countries participating in the meeting with representation from all the regions. I also note that there are about 20 agencies participating, including UN regional commissions. This is a very distinct community of environmental statisticians.
- I would firstly like to thank you again for your excellent contributions. There was the Global Set of Climate Change Statistics and Indicators which was adopted in March 2022 at the fifty-third session of the United Nations Statistical Commission. I think that is something that this group can be very proud of. It is a framework to be used when countries all over the world start preparing their own sets of climate change statistics and indicators, and we will hear a lot about this, how this is working.
- As you know, the Global Set will help countries to introduce and implement their own set of climate change statistics and indicators. This is of course not an end in itself but our information sets support policies, and policies also include contributing to the reporting requirements under the UNFCCC. In this context, I would like to especially express our appreciation to the colleagues of UNFCCC, who have been working closely with us to develop the Global Set which will contribute to the reporting requirements of countries under the Enhanced Transparency Framework and the Global Stocktake of the Paris Agreement - so this is highly relevant.
- I would also like to thank Ms. Ruth Minja, Director for Population Census and Social Statistics Directorate, National Bureau of Statistics of Tanzania who has been very busy with her census and who is presently our Chair of the EGES. Tanzania is one of the first countries that has successfully included climate change questions in a dedicated Environment Section in their Population and Housing Census which is highly remarkable. In lieu of this we thank you for your leadership. With regards to chairing the meeting, it is standard practice in many of our working groups under the Statistical Commission to have Co-Chairs or Vice-Chairs. This is not the case

for the EGES but de facto; Ms. Anjali Kisoensingh, General Bureau of Statistics, Suriname has already helped us out in October 2022 when Ruth was very busy with her census, and she has acted as our chair for that session. I would, therefore, like to propose, if there are no objections, that Ms. Anjali Kisoensingh, be our Vice-Chair and also help in managing this particular session as well as future sessions.

- The main objective of the EGES is of course to support the work on environment statistics and climate change statistics in UNSD, and we are very grateful to all of you for your time, your expertise and your commitment. This group has had a strong focus on the Global Set of Climate Change Statistics and Indicators and this was mainly due to the mandate given by the Statistical Commission in the forty-ninth session. The Commission explicitly recommended the expansion of the mandate of this group, the Expert Group on Environment Statistics, to cover more aspects of climate change statistics and indicators. Based on this fact and the work done by this group I would think it is only natural that out of this meeting you present a proposal to the Statistical Commission to change your name to become the Expert Group on Environment and Climate Change Statistics (EG-ECCS). I am sure you'll discuss this during your meeting because you're also going to discuss your reporting to the Statistical Commission, and I would consider that actually a natural continuation. I would almost call it an ex-post rationalization of what has already been happening.
- This group has been very successful in adopting the Global Set, but the adoption of a norm is not an end in itself. On the contrary it's the beginning and we now have to focus on implementation. We will hear how countries have taken the Global Set further, for example in publishing climate change statistics reports, as well as including climate change statistics in their National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS). We will also hear from the UK about their work on climate change and health. From UNSD we have made an effort related to gender statistics and these will be interesting continuations of the work. We have also been working on tools to help countries implement the Global Set, namely the Climate Change Statistics Self-Assessment Tool (CISAT) and the Implementation Guidelines which were finalized this year. I appreciate your contributions because this would not have been possible without your support.
- The tenth meeting will also focus on the more traditional topics including environment statistics data collection, methodological work related to the

implementation of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics (FDES), and capacity development activities in both environment and climate change statistics.

- I would like to also look at the review process because with every adoption of the norm there is immediately a storm of what we call a research agenda. Generally, the moment you adopt the norm things start to change in every area. It is quite normal to have a regular rhythm of adjusting our norms keeping them standard for over time comparability and giving countries time to implement a standard. However, we have to start working on the review from day one after the adoption and this has been happening. Already there have been interesting developments in various areas such as health, gender and disasters. You will hear about these but a review is of course a complex process that requires resources including financial and human. Therefore, I think that the five-year horizon that has been envisioned in the original adoption seems a very reasonable one and I am looking forward to learn how this work to initiate further methodological extensions and the review have progressed. Of course, you will need to consider all of this in your report to the Statistical Commission which I am quite looking forward to.

- Some of the next steps include the following:

- We are very much focused on the implementation of the Global Set using the CISAT and the Implementation Guidelines. We already see evidence in some countries that showcase good practices, with units, staff, national programmes and publications dedicated to climate change statistics which demonstrate the progress in this new statistical area. One interesting element is the connection between statistics and policy and how these new information sets are being used is relevant to our NSOs. As I mentioned earlier one of the uses is related to the reporting to UNFCCC and I am very glad to know that there is very close cooperation.
- But it's not only UNFCCC that I should acknowledge in terms of international partners. We have many great international partners and we need them not only in the development of the norm but even more so in the implementation. In this regard, we work very closely with UNEP, UNDRR, FAO, OECD, Paris21, Regional Commissions, and other regional entities and organizations such as COMESA, CARICOM and the Pacific Community. I wish to highlight the recent collaboration with Paris21 which

has resulted in an assessment framework for a Climate Change Data Ecosystem, closely related to the assessment tool, the CISAT. We have continued our collaboration with our European colleagues, the UNECE, and their 'Task Force on the Role of NSOs in Achieving National Climate Objectives' and that has led to extensive cross references in their "Guidance on the Role of National Statistical Offices in Achieving National Climate Objectives" referring to the Global Set, CISAT and Implementation Guidelines. This is commendable work because one of the objectives of UNSD is to keep the work from different parts of the international community together and to support national initiatives.

- In conclusion with a very short view and the broader context our Secretary-General often talks about, the triple crises, there was the Covid 19 pandemic, and the threats by climate change that we sometimes feel on a day-to-day basis. This was also discussed extensively at our recent summit in New York on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). There was also concern that in some areas we still do not have the information that is needed and climate change was one of those. Nonetheless, we can be proud that we have been laying the foundations and ground work to change the situation in the second half of the SDGs' implementation so that we will get the information that is needed to accelerate its progress. Looking forward we also have two summits upcoming in 2024, the SIDS Summit and the Summit of the Future. Looking at this as a Director from a political perspective and also in terms of opportunities - I know that SIDS are particularly concerned and affected by climate change. I believe that these are also opportunities that we, as a technical community, need to take advantage of to bring our work to the attention of the highest political level and make sure we get the support in terms of investments that will allow us to produce the data. Thank you, once again for connecting to this meeting and thanks of course to my team under the leadership of Reena and also Emil and everyone one else who has made it possible for you to have a successful consultation over the coming days. Thank you very much.
- I wish you a successful meeting.