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## Statistical Commission

### Forty-sixth session

3-6 March 2015

Item 4 (g) of the provisional agenda\*

### Items for information

## Environment statistics

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The present report, which was prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2014/219, provides a summary of developments in the implementation of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics. It covers progress made in the area of methodological work, including the first meeting of the Expert Group on Environment Statistics, the preparation of methodological guidelines for the Core and Basic Sets of Environment Statistics and the finalization of the Environment Statistics Self-Assessment Tool. It provides information about technical cooperation and capacity-building activities and advancement in the application of the Framework in countries. It also discusses the remaining tasks and plans for 2015. The Statistical Commission is invited to take note of the report.

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\* E/CN.3/2015/1.



## **I. Introduction**

1. At its forty-fourth session, held from 26 February to 1 March 2013, the Statistical Commission endorsed the revised Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics as the framework for the strengthening of environment statistics programmes in countries, and recognized it as a useful tool in the context of sustainable development goals and the post-2015 development agenda. It also endorsed the action plan for the implementation of the Framework in countries and the establishment of an expert group on environment statistics, and emphasized the need to support the revised Framework with detailed methodological guidance and training materials that build upon existing methodological resources, where available, and that are coordinated with ongoing methodological work in related fields of statistics. It stressed the need of countries in the early stages of the development of their environment statistics programmes for increased technical assistance and capacity-building, and called upon international organizations for support in that regard.

2. At its forty-fifth session, held from 4 to 7 March 2014, the Statistical Commission took note of the report of the Secretary-General on environment statistics (E/CN.3/2014/28), summarizing the methodological work, training and capacity-building and advocacy activities carried out in 2013 in support of the implementation of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics and plans for 2014-2015.

3. The present report provides an overview of the activities carried out in 2014, including the progress of methodological work, the first meeting of the Expert Group on Environment Statistics, the advancement of the application of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics in countries, and related training and capacity-building. It also discusses the remaining tasks and plans for 2015.

## **II. Activities carried out in 2014**

### **A. Methodological work**

4. The action plan for the implementation of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics included the establishment of an expert group on environment statistics to assist the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in methodological work such as the development of: (a) a methodological manual for the Core Set of Environment Statistics that will provide detailed guidance built upon existing resources where available; (b) an environment statistics self-assessment tool; and (c) guidelines for the establishment and strengthening of environment statistics programmes in countries.

5. The Expert Group on Environment Statistics was established in December 2013. The first meeting of the Expert Group, organized by the Statistics Division, was held in New York from 26 to 28 March 2014. The meeting was attended by 18 experts, from Botswana, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, the Czech Republic, India, Italy, Jamaica, Mauritius, Mexico, Norway, the Philippines, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, the United States of America, the European Environment Agency, Eurostat and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

(ECLAC). The meeting was chaired by Ms. Iva Ritschelová, President of the Czech Statistical Office.

6. The Expert Group's discussions were based on documents and the corresponding presentations prepared by Group members and the Statistical Division. All papers and presentations submitted for the Expert Group as well as the report on the first meeting are available and can be downloaded from the Expert Group's website at [http://unstats.un.org/unsd/environment/FDES/fdes\\_eges1.html](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/environment/FDES/fdes_eges1.html).

### **Methodological Manual for the Core Set of Environment Statistics**

7. The Expert Group discussed the outline of the Methodological Manual for the Core Set of Environment Statistics, as well as the structure and contents of the draft templates and examples drawn up for the methodological sheets by the Statistical Division. It was agreed that because of the strong methodological interdependence among the statistics that belonged to the Core Set and the other two tiers of the Basic Set of Environment Statistics, the scope of the Manual should be extended to the entire Basic Set. Agreement was reached on additional detail needed with regard to the statistics, metadata and definitions. The cluster format of the methodological sheets was adopted. There was discussion among experts about alternative ideas of compilation (e.g., by topic, by subcomponent, etc.). However, owing to the diverse nature of the Basic Set of Environment Statistics and the need for specific expertise in compiling methodology sheets regarding a particular field of environment statistics, it was agreed that the cluster approach was the most suitable. A workplan and timetable were agreed upon, with respect to which members of the Expert Group committed to contributing their expertise towards drafting methodology sheets or participating in teams to review and develop outputs alongside the Statistical Division.

8. After the first meeting of the Expert Group, the Statistical Division finalized the template for the methodology sheets. The template includes the following information items:

- (a) Relevance;
- (b) Methodological sources;
- (c) Classifications;
- (d) Definitions;
- (e) Data collection methods and sources of data;
- (f) Quality assurance;
- (g) Presentation and dissemination;
- (h) Links to the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting Central Framework;
- (i) International sources of data.

9. Since the finalization of the template, groups of experts have been working on the methodology sheets for clusters of selected statistical topics. The first drafts have been circulated within the Expert Group for review and comments. The revised versions will be discussed at the second meeting of the Expert Group, to be held in

New York, from 25 to 27 March 2015, and will be subjected to additional peer review before their finalization.

10. As the extension of its scope to the entire Basic Set of Environment Statistics has significantly increased the resources and time necessary for the preparation of the Manual, it has been decided that the Manual will be published in subsequent volumes whenever a subset of interrelated methodology sheets that constitute a consistent part of the Basic Set are finalized. The first volume of the Manual is planned to be completed before the end of 2015. It has also been agreed that individual methodology sheets should be posted on the Statistical Division website as soon as they become available.

#### **Environment Statistics Self-Assessment Tool**

11. Following the endorsement of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics, work started on the development of the Environment Statistics Self-Assessment Tool (ESSAT). On the basis of the templates that had been used for the identification of the Core Set of Environment Statistics, the Statistical Division prepared the first version of ESSAT (parts 1 and 2, focusing on policy relevance, national priorities, major challenges, main stakeholders, data sources, availability and gaps). ESSAT was successfully applied in a series of regional and national training workshops as well as country projects, and was then refined on the basis of the experience gained in its use. It was presented to the Expert Group for review and discussion, together with a newly developed part 3, on the institutional dimension of environment statistics.

12. The Expert Group discussed and approved in general the structure and content of ESSAT, as presented by the Statistical Division. It was agreed, however, that: (a) ESSAT needed further improvement in terms of clarity of its categories; (b) the depths and details of parts 1-3 needed to be better tailored to the different groups of the target audience; and (c) ESSAT had to be made more user-friendly. It was also agreed that detailed guidance was needed to explain and advise on the process necessary for the application of ESSAT. In response to those suggestions, the Division has been revising parts 1-3 of ESSAT, taking into account additional comments from countries that have used them. The revised version will be submitted to the second meeting of the Expert Group for final approval.

#### **Guidelines for the establishment and strengthening of environment statistics programmes in countries**

13. An outline describing the planned structure and contents of the guidelines was discussed by the Expert Group. It was agreed that the target audience should be management, rather than the statistical practitioner. The role of the guidelines is to facilitate countries' processes towards the development of an environment statistics strategy and programme. A useful way of doing so is to include examples of good practices from countries and regions.

14. In the light of the request to develop a detailed guidance document for the application of ESSAT, the Statistical Division is examining the potential overlap between the contents of such a document and the guidelines. The guidelines could be prepared as a supporting guidance document for the application of ESSAT, rather than as a separate publication, and a live web-based compilation of good national

and regional practices could be developed. This suggestion will be discussed at the next meeting of the Expert Group.

#### **Other methodological work**

15. The Statistical Division carried out an assessment of the correspondence of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics and the Basic Set of Environment Statistics with the potential data requirements in environment statistics that might result from the need to measure and monitor sustainable development goals and targets. The assessment was based on the proposal of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals that had been recommended by the General Assembly as the basis for integrating sustainable development goals into the post-2015 development agenda. The results of the assessment will be submitted to and discussed by the Expert Group at its next meeting.

### **B. Implementation by countries, training and capacity-building**

16. As part of the implementation programme of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics, a training workshop was held in Abu Dhabi for the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council. The Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, given its detailed plans for assisting countries with environment statistics, can make a significant contribution to the implementation of the Framework in the region. The Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics also expressed its support for such efforts, noting that it wished to promote the recommended practices of the Statistical Division in this field.

17. The Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics was presented and promoted in Mexico at the first technical committee workshop of the project entitled “Development and strengthening of official environment statistics through the creation of a regional framework in Latin America and the Caribbean”.

18. In 2014, additional countries and areas started applying the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics to the development of their environment statistics strategies, programmes, publications or environmental indicator frameworks. Examples are Australia, Botswana, Costa Rica, Curaçao, Ecuador, Indonesia, Jamaica, Mauritius, Mexico, Nepal, Nigeria, Suriname, the United Arab Emirates and Viet Nam.

19. A training workshop on the implementation of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics will be held for the countries of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) in Mauritius in January 2015, in collaboration with COMESA and Statistics Mauritius. COMESA is committed to supporting the development of environment statistics using the Framework in its member States.

20. The Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics is being used in a United Nations Development Account project entitled “Supporting developing countries in measuring progress towards achieving a green economy”, which is in progress in the ECLAC and Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific regions and will continue in 2015. The project is being organized by the Statistical Division in collaboration with both regional commissions and selected

pilot countries, and in coordination with the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and other relevant global and regional organizations. The project is aimed at assisting countries in producing data for a regionally adapted set of indicators, emphasizing the basic industrial, energy, environment and agricultural statistics needed to compile and sustain green economy indicators that are suitable and statistically feasible for the two regions, in particular for the pilot countries. Four pilot countries have been chosen in each of the two regions: Bhutan, Malaysia, Mongolia and Viet Nam, in Asia; and Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, in Latin America. Mexico and the Republic of Korea will be contributing as resource countries in their respective regions.

21. Preparatory activities have also been undertaken for the ninth tranche of the Development Account project entitled “Supporting Member States in developing and strengthening environment statistics and integrated environmental-economic accounting for improved monitoring of sustainable development”. The project is aimed at addressing the technical and institutional barriers to the establishment of routinely produced environment statistics and environmental-economic accounts at the national level. The project relies on currently available technical and methodological resources and builds upon national ownership, and, through the construction of national teams and inter-institutional platforms, as well as through regional networking, it contributes to the sustainability of its main achievements and impacts. The project, which will be operational until the end of 2017, is structured in two modules. Module A is aimed at strengthening national capacities to produce environment statistics in five participating countries of the East African Community subregion and will be based on the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics and its tools. Module B is aimed at the implementation of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting for Energy 2012 accounts in four selected countries in two subregions of Africa and Asia. This project is led by the Environment and Energy Statistics Branch and the Economic Statistics Branch of the Statistical Division, in collaboration with the regional commissions, the participating countries and the relevant regional and subregional agencies operating in the different regions.

### **III. Plans for 2015**

22. In 2015, work on the implementation of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics will focus on the following streams:

(a) Finalization of volume I of the Methodological Manual for the Basic Set of Environment Statistics, based on existing methodological resources and ongoing methodological work in environment statistics;

(b) Selection of clusters and preparation of draft methodology sheets for volume II of the Manual;

(c) Documentation of the correspondence between the Basic Set of Environment Statistics and the indicator lists commonly used by international, intergovernmental, regional and subregional organizations, including the mapping of how those indicators can be derived from the Basic Set;

(d) Finalization of ESSAT parts 1-3 and a detailed guidance document for its application in countries;

(e) Development of training materials and platforms in support of the implementation of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics in countries;

(f) Continuation of the two Development Account projects and support for other training and capacity-building activities.

These activities will be carried out in close collaboration with the Expert Group on Environment Statistics.

#### **IV. Action required from the Commission**

23. The Commission is requested to take note of the present report.

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