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INDUSTRY, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT STATISTICS: ENVIRONMENT STATISTICS

Environment statistics programme, including the methodological
work carried out and progress towards collection and
dissemination of environment statistics

Report of the Secretary General

SUMMARY

The present report describes the progress made in environment statistics since the twenty-third session of the Statistical Commission. It includes information on the methodological work undertaken on a manual of high-priority statistics in the areas of human settlements and natural resources, on the co-ordination of activities within the United Nations system and on the collection, compilation and dissemination of environment statistics. The report also suggests future steps in the programme of work and includes points for discussion by the Commission.

* E/CN.3/1987/1.

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INTRODUCTION

1. At its twenty-third session, the Statistical Commission considered the report of the Secretary-General on standards, methods and classifications of energy statistics and the environment statistics programmes (E/CN.3/1985/10). The Commission reconfirmed the high priority of the development of concepts, methods and classifications for environment statistics and noted with satisfaction the progress that had been achieved since its twenty-second session, in particular the publication of A Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics. ^{1/} The Commission requested that the environment statistics work programme focus on promoting the application of the Framework, preparing a technical manual for the compilation of selected high-priority statistics in the areas of human settlements and natural resources, the gradual development of an international programme of collection and dissemination of selected environment statistics and on providing support for technical co-operation projects. The Commission also requested the Statistical Office to continue to co-ordinate international activities relating to environment statistics. ^{2/}

I. WORK COMPLETED AND IN PROGRESS

A. Methodology

2. The methodological work of the Statistical Office has focused on the preparation of a Manual of Environment Statistics for the compilation of selected high-priority statistics in the areas of human settlements and natural resources. The development and organization of the Manual has been based on A Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics, using the Framework's statistical topics in presenting statistical variables and related concepts and classifications. The Manual is organized in two volumes - volume I: Human Settlements Statistics and volume II: Natural Resources Statistics. The first volume covers the major aspects of the man-made environment; the second volume those of the natural environment, that is, flora, fauna, atmosphere, water and land.

3. A draft of the first volume of the Manual has been completed. It has been prepared in consultation with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and was distributed to the regional commissions, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and selected specialized agencies for comments and suggestions on its format, technical contents and application. It will be reviewed by an expert group meeting organized in co-operation and with the financial support of Habitat. The meeting is planned to be held at Nairobi during the fourth quarter of 1986, and its recommendations will be reported to the Commission. The second volume of the Manual, Natural Resources Statistics, is in preparation. It will be widely circulated to international organizations and experts in the field for comments and contributions.

4. The major purpose of the Manual is to propose concepts, definitions and classifications for statistical variables which describe high-priority environmental issues in most countries and can be compiled by national statistical

services in an environment statistics programme. In selecting the variables, it is attempted to meet the potential data needs of general environmental planners, policy makers and administrators. To the extent possible, statistical variables are also selected with their potential use as baseline statistics for the construction of environmental indicators and indices in mind. Additional criteria used in selecting statistical variables in the Manual are (a) relevance to environmental concerns as reflected by the statistical topics of the Framework, (b) data availability and accessibility by statistical offices, (c) potential international comparability and (d) sensitivity to change in environmental conditions. To reflect national environmental priorities and data requirements it is planned to discuss the Manual at the regional level and to promote it through country projects and technical co-operation to the extent that resources become available.

5. The list of variables presented in the Manual will be neither exhaustive nor the only possible one for the assessment of environmental concerns. Particular environmental situations and priorities in countries may demand a different selection and formulation of statistical topics and related variables. At least, the Manual will provide a starting point for a first selection of appropriate statistical series and will help to determine relevant classifications and data sources. For each statistical topic, the Manual thus provides (a) a description of environmental concerns, (b) a listing of the statistical variables and their classifications and (c) an indication of likely data sources and methods of data collection.

B. Implementation and training

6. A reduction of resources available to the environment statistics programme has caused delays in the implementation of the work programme. Possibilities of stimulating and establishing country programmes in the medium and long term are discussed below in section II.

C. Co-ordination

7. The Statistical Commission at its twenty-third session stressed the need for continued close collaboration between the Statistical Office and other United Nations bodies and international organizations for the implementation of the work programme and urged the Statistical Office to continue to co-ordinate international activities relating to environment statistics. ^{3/} Following that mandate, discussions of work programmes and plans in environment statistics are in progress with the regional commissions and other United Nations organizations in order to avoid duplication of efforts and to develop joint programmes in this field.

8. Various programmes on the development, organization and compilation of environment statistics have been carried out under the aegis of the Conference of European Statisticians. The Statistical Office actively participated in various working groups of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) on methodological questions of environment statistics. Preliminary discussions on the possible

application of the Framework to a topical issue in an experimental compendium for the ECE region were also held. It is planned to provide advisory services to the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) for the further development and implementation of an environment statistics programme in the region, once the necessary financial resources become available.

9. The Statistical Office has assisted in the preparation of the UNEP Environmental Data Report, in collaboration with the World Resources Institute (WRI). The report is prepared as a joint project of UNEP, WRI, the International Institute for Environment and Development and the Monitoring and Assessment Research Centre (MARC). In response to requests by a Workshop on Environmental Accounting, sponsored by UNEP and the World Bank, the Statistical Office has expressed its readiness to co-operate in various research activities and country projects and in particular in a working group which will explore possibilities of integrating environmental aspects in the System of National Accounts (SNA).

10. A complementary programme on the methodological development of the environmental aspects of human settlements statistics has been agreed between the Department for International Economic and Social Affairs and Habitat. The objective of the programme is the revision and publication of the Manual of Environment Statistics, volume I: Human Settlements Statistics, described above. Habitat is planning to utilize the output of the project for the organization of a data bank, the preparation of the Global Report of Human Settlements and possibly for a booklet on the conceptual organization of human settlements statistics, which could be issued on the occasion of the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless.

D. Collection, compilation and dissemination of environment statistics

11. According to a request by the Statistical Commission at its twenty-third session, 4/ an international programme of collection and dissemination of selected environment statistics will be developed gradually. To date, only ECE has been preparing an experimental Compendium of ECE Environmental Statistics. Data collection by the other regional commissions has been considered premature, in view of prevailing resources constraints and data gaps.

12. The Statistical Office will thus develop a comprehensive programme of international data collection only when a sufficient number of developing countries have established an environment statistics programme. In the meantime, the Statistical Office is exploring the possibility of including in its recurrent publications a number of tables on selected series of environment statistics which can be compiled largely from international sources.

II. PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF WORK

13. The Statistical Commission approved at its twenty-third session the work programme of the Statistical Office for the biennium 1986-1987 (as indicated above in the introduction). The Commission attached highest priority to the development of concepts, methods and classifications of environment statistics. 5/ However, since the beginning of 1986, the implementation of the programme has been delayed by a reduction of resources available to the environment statistics programme.

14. It is therefore proposed that in the short term the work programme should focus on the completion of the Manual of Environment Statistics. Once this methodological programme has been completed, its results should be promoted and applied at the regional and national levels. In this context, the Statistical Commission, at its twenty-third session, stressed the need for establishing environment statistics programmes, especially in developing countries, and requested that the Statistical Office's work programme provide support for technical co-operation projects. 6/ Such support could be implemented in collaboration with the regional commissions through ad hoc country missions upon request by interested countries. The purpose of those missions would be (a) to assist in reviewing the status, availability and potential uses of statistics related to the environment; (b) to prepare recommendations to increase the effective use of existing statistics; (c) to advise on new data collection if needed; and (d) to advise on potential projects and possible sources of funding for further statistical work in this area.

15. In the long term, the Statistical Office would address, within the limits of available resources, the other elements of the environment statistics programme, that is (a) updating and translating the Survey of Environment Statistics: Frameworks, Approaches and Statistical Publications (requested by the Commission at its twenty-third session), 7/ possibly focusing on country practices and data availability rather than on theoretical approaches; and (b) developing international data collection and dissemination, in collaboration with the regional commissions and other international organizations.

III. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

16. The Statistical Commission may wish to discuss the following matters relating to the environment statistics programme:

(a) Priorities in the implementation of the work programme in environment statistics, taking into account the availability of resources;

(b) The application of A Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics and the Manual of Environment Statistics at the national level by stimulating country activities through technical advisory services and support to comprehensive technical co-operation projects;

(c) The steps necessary for designing and implementing the programme.

Notes

- 1/ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.84.XVII.12.
 - 2/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1985, Supplement No. 6 (E/1985/26), para. 86.
 - 3/ Ibid., paras. 85 and 86 (e).
 - 4/ Ibid., para. 86 (d) (iii).
 - 5/ Ibid., para. 140.
 - 6/ Ibid., paras. 84 and 86 (d) (iv).
 - 7/ Ibid., para. 139 (b).
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