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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Joint UNECE/OECD/Eurostat Working Group on Statistics for Sustainable Development

First meeting

Luxembourg, 3-4 April 2006

REPORT

This meeting is organised jointly with Eurostat and OECD

REPORT

INTRODUCTION

1. The joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Meeting of the Working Group on Statistics for Sustainable Development (WGSSD) was held in Luxembourg from 3-4 April 2006. It was attended by Australia, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the United Kingdom. The European Commission (Eurostat, DG ECFIN and DG ENV), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, the United Nations Division for Sustainable Development (UN DSD) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN ECE) attended.
2. The provisional agenda was adopted.
3. Mr. Robert Smith (Canada) chaired the meeting.

ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

4. The following substantive topics were discussed at the meeting on the basis of the contributory papers and presentations from the participating countries/organisations:
 - (a) Review of WGSSD terms of reference and draft work;
 - (b) Operating principles of the WGSSD;
 - (c) Roundtable on country experience;
 - (d) Conceptual frameworks of statistics for sustainable development;

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN CONCLUSIONS REACHED AT THE MEETING

5. The detailed minutes of the discussions will be prepared within 2 weeks after the meeting and circulated to all participants. The meeting reached the following main conclusions:
 - (a) Review of WGSSD terms of reference and draft work;

The meeting reviewed the TORs for the work of the WGSSD and the draft work plan. It was agreed that the final product would be a detailed coherent manuscript; therefore a resolution on the conceptual framework need to be agreed on within about 10 months. A revised work plan will be submitted to the CES Bureau for approval.

The meeting was informed of the creation of a Steering Committee composed of representatives of Norway, Sweden, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, UK, UNECE, OECD, Eurostat, WB and UNDSO (TOR adopted by the CES Bureau in February 2006). The TORs of the WGSSD and the Steering Committee will be posted on the UNECE web site.

(b) Operating principles of the WGSSD;

The participants were informed of the responsibilities of the three secretariats that will support the work of the WGSSD. The UNECE secretariat will provide logistics support to the WGSSD including communication with the members of the Group, preparation of future meetings, distribution of documents and maintenance a web site address for the future meetings and other relevant material. All documents concerning the work of the WGSSD will be also posted on the Eurostat CIRCA. OECD will provide secretariat support to the chairman of the WGSSD including drafting the minutes of the meetings.

The WGSSD will meet 4 times during the two years project that will end by June 2008. It is also planned that the Steering Committee meets 5-6 times during the same period: the next meeting will take place in Paris on 9-10 May 2006

(c) Roundtable on country experiences

The meeting noted that a lot of countries, at least in the European context, have developed national SD strategies. The participants expressed interest and general support in developing a conceptual framework for measuring the sustainable development, even though a lot of countries have policy driven approaches themselves.

(d) Conceptual frameworks of statistics for sustainable development

This agenda item was discussed on the basis of presentations by Sweden, OECD and the WB and papers/presentations by Switzerland, Norway and the UK. In the follow-up discussion the following points were agreed:

- There is a great deal of agreement that a common conceptual framework is desirable;
- SD is a normative concept;
- The concept of wellbeing has inspired some interest: however, it needs further discussion; in that context, it is necessary to clarify what we mean by welfare and wellbeing;
- Some consensus emerged that SD is sustaining human development;
- The distinction between the intra- and intergenerational issues; the topic should be on the agenda for future discussion;
- There is need to clarify what the policy implications of the capital approach are; needs further discussion;
- The SD discussion is over burdened of too much content and it risks sinking under the weight of its own success;
- It is important to make the distinction between the current welfare and the determinants of future welfare - consider having 2 sets (categories) of indicators and frameworks; to be discussed at future meetings of the Group;
- The communication of the SD indicators is crucial to their success;
- The value of having the policy makers engaged in the work of measuring the SD;

In concluding the discussion on conceptual frameworks the following points were made:

- From the frameworks discussed so far the Swiss framework for measuring the SD is the closest framework that captures both the short-term and the long-term dimensions in a coherent way. It is important to clearly show to the users which of the indicators are focused on the present welfare and which on the future welfare. The framework also allows the selection of specific indicators but also the rejection of some indicators;
- The Swiss framework already encapsulates many of the indicators related to the capital approach, which is requested by the TOR of the WGSSD, and many policy driven indicators.
- It was proposed to start with the Swiss model as the basis for work and explore it as a possible framework, how it relates to the TOR for the work of the WGSSD and how it fits the notion of sustainability. This does not preclude exploring further other possible approaches. In this context the meeting agreed that the Steering Committee study the framework in greater detail, decide on the next steps and report back to the members of the WGSSD.

RECOMMENDED FUTURE WORK

6. The WGSSD agreed that a second meeting of the joint Working Group would be organised on 2-3 November 2006 in Oslo to be hosted by the Ministry of Finance of Norway. A meeting of the Steering Committee will be held on 31 October –1 November prior to the meeting of the WGSSD.

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