

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Second meeting of the 2004/2005 Bureau
Geneva, 10-11 February 2005

Item 5(e): Preparations for
the 2005 plenary session and
the two seminars

SEMINAR ON MEASUREMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Note prepared by Statistics Sweden

BACKGROUND

1. At the meeting of the CES Bureau on 12-13 February 2004, it was proposed that one of the seminars in June 2005 would deal with measurement of sustainable development. Statistics Sweden volunteered to be the organiser. In December, an Organising Committee was set up with the following countries/organizations¹: Canada, Estonia, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Eurostat, OECD, UNSD and UNECE.

THE ISSUE

2. Sustainable development was definitely accepted as a priority principle for future work of the UN at the World Summit in Johannesburg 2002. Several countries have implemented Sustainable Development Strategies, and the work with measurement and Sustainable Development Indicators (SDI) has become an important tool to follow up the strategies, as well as for policy decisions. SDIs involve data from the environment, economic and social dimensions. The use of indicators depends on the availability of high quality data, which is an important issue to address. Furthermore, the clarification of the role of statistical offices is important. Another output from the seminar is to clarify the future needs and recommendations for further work.

3. Following the practice of previous years, members of the organising committee will chair one session, present one of the invited papers or take the role of discussant. All invited papers and discussants will be identified by the beginning of 2005.

DRAFT PROGRAM OF THE SEMINAR ON MEASUREMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

4. The chair of the seminar will be Mr. Svante Öberg, Statistics Sweden.

Key note speech about sustainable development by a politician²

Time: around ½ hour

¹ The key ABS (Australia) people involved in this statistical field are unavailable for most of the period between now and the end of January. However, Mr Dennis Trewin will personally comment on proposals from time to time.

² Gro Harlem Brundtland has been asked but could not attend. Sven Auken, Denmark's former Environment Minister, has been asked but has not yet replied.

Session 1: The role of official statistics

5. The chair of session 1 will be Mr. Dennis Trewin, ABS, Australia.
6. Official statistics should take the lead of the work on SDI. SDI presupposes long-term time series and continuity - which are key tasks for the statistical system. High quality data on SDI should be provided. The work also requires integration between the three dimensions of sustainable development: ecological, economic and social. Ultimately, the countries should profit by having the bulk of statistical data within their respective statistical organizations. Among other issues that must be addressed are questions of financing the production of SDI, as well as integrating other sources external to official statistics.

Proposed invited papers from Sweden and Eurostat.

Discussant: UNECE

Time: around 1 hour

Session 2: Frameworks and analytical tools

7. The chair of session 2 is proposed to be Mr. Svante Öberg, Statistics Sweden.
8. Conceptual frameworks are central to the issue, since they define the scope and object of measurement. Without agreement on frameworks, countries may head in divergent directions with their measurement efforts; this is an interesting topic to discuss.
9. A great number of SDI sets include many indicators, which makes these sets difficult to handle. In particular, decision-makers need a small number of indicators to be able to follow the development. GDP is a well-known aggregated economic indicator, which has become one of the most important economic indicators. There are also examples of aggregated measurements in the social area (welfare indices) as well as in the environmental field (the ecological footprint). The demand for a small number of indicators could motivate aggregated indicators. However, the question of feasibility of an aggregated measurement must be addressed.

Proposed invited papers from Estonia and Canada.

Discussant: the Netherlands

Time: around 1 hour

Session 3: Case studies

10. The chair of session 3 is proposed to be Mr. Vladimir Sokolin, FSSS, Russia.
11. As mentioned earlier, one of the main issues for the work with SDI is how to integrate the ecological, economic and social dimensions. An example of this can be found within integrated frameworks or decoupling indicators³. Here, countries will present their different frameworks and the various processes by which the sets of indicators are selected. Some countries have based the indicators on the main goals of their national strategies for sustainable development. So far, work on SDI has mainly involved environmental experts, while interest has been limited among social and economic

³ Decoupling indicators compare the economic and environmental development (sometimes even the social development) through index time series. Decoupling aims at breaking the connection between economic growth and environmental pressure. For example, GDP should rise at the same time as carbon dioxide emissions decline.

statisticians. Concerted action is needed to create a better balance between the three dimensions within the official statistics.

Proposed invited papers from Switzerland and Spain.

Discussant: Germany

Time: around 1 hour

Session 4: Future needs and recommendations

12. The chair of session 4 is proposed to be Mr Ivan Fellegi, Statistics Canada.

13. In the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, areas like global partnership⁴, good governance⁵ and production and consumption patterns were highlighted as important for future work. These areas, as well as the environmental area, may need other types of data and new statistics. The promotion of new statistics in the light of limited resources and the need for reduced response burden is essential. Another issue connected with future work is to engage countries that have not yet built up a system of measurement for sustainable development. Support should be provided to these countries to build up a SDI System. Recommendations for future work should be discussed.

Proposed invited papers from UK and OECD.

Discussant: Eurostat

Time: around 1¾ hours

NEXT STEP

14. Statistics Sweden welcomes comments from the Organising Committee on this proposal. Contact person at Statistics Sweden is Mrs. Eiwor Höglund Dávila, former Head of the Environment statistics unit, now Head of Social welfare statistics (eiwor.hoglund@scb.se).

* * * * *

⁴ Global partnership mainly refers to how industrial countries affect developing countries.

⁵ Good governance covers, among other things, questions of democracy.