

Second Meeting of the 2011/2012 Bureau
Geneva, Switzerland, 2-3 November 2011

For discussion and recommendations

Item 11(d) of the Provisional
Agenda

PROGRESS REPORT ON MEASURING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Prepared by the UNECE secretariat

I. PROGRESS MADE BY THE JOINT UNECE/EUROSTAT/OECD TASK FORCE ON MEASURING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

1. In 2009, the Joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Working Group (WGSSD) published its report “Measuring sustainable development”. The Report contributed to reaching a common understanding of the principles of measuring sustainable development based on the capital approach.
2. The CES Bureau recognized that several issues remained unresolved in the Report and should be developed further. Therefore, the Bureau set up a new Joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Task Force to further pursue the conceptual development of the capital approach in identifying indicators to present the long-term dimension of sustainable development. Furthermore, the work was extended to include the distributional, i.e. quality of life aspects and the international dimension of sustainable development.
3. Since its establishment, the Task Force has held three meetings and prepared a number of issue papers exploring different aspects of sustainable development. On this basis, a final report is under preparation. Progress has been made in the main directions given in the mandate of the Task Force. The work on human capital has advanced in close collaboration with OECD, taking into account their ongoing project on human capital accounts. Progress has been also made on refining the set of sustainable development indicators proposed by the previous working group. The analysed set of sustainable development indicators covers the “needs of the present generation”, the “needs of the future generations” and the “international dimension”. The indicators are based on a clear conceptual framework and aim to respond to the demands of the policy makers.
4. An extended Summary of the Report was prepared by the Task Force and consulted with the CES Bureau and the CES member countries in the beginning of 2011. Short presentation was made at the CES plenary session in 2011. The Conference supported the work and noted the following:

“The Conference appreciated the progress made by the Task Force. It was stressed that the work should take into account other international initiatives in related areas. The final report should be a step forward towards harmonisation of the work in measuring sustainable development and not be considered as guidelines or a manual for official statistics.”

5. The consultations provided useful input and comments to improve the Report being prepared by the Task Force.

6. The Task Force is currently finalising the text of the Report. It is expected to be ready for circulation to the CES Bureau in the beginning of January 2012 (to be discussed at the Bureau meeting in February 2012). The final Report is planned to be submitted to the CES 2012 plenary session.

II. DISCUSSION RELATED TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT AT THE 2011 SESSION OF THE UN ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

7. The 64th session of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) took place in March 2011. The session selected for discussion the topic on sustainable development in the context of the Rio+20 preparations.

8. Three programmes of the UNECE were asked to contribute to a secretariat paper under this topic: Environment, Transport and Statistics. The section of the paper about the work undertaken by the CES and its Bureau covered 3 areas: sustainable development, environmental indicators, and climate change related statistics.

9. The Commission was informed about the work of the Joint UNECE/ OECD/Eurostat/ Task Force for Measuring Sustainable Development. The paper also described some challenges to official statisticians in measuring economic wealth, physical indicators of critical resources, defining and measuring human and social capital, and the international aspect of sustainable development.

10. The Commission welcomed the work undertaken under the umbrella of the Conference on sustainable development and environment statistics and adopted the following decision concerning the statistics sub-programme:

[The Economic Commission for Europe]

“33. Emphasizes the importance of good quality statistical data as a basis for formulation of adequate and evidence-based policies to address the growing concern about sustainable development and environment-related quality of life, and requests the Conference of European Statisticians to develop recommendations and agree, after taking into account existing statistics at regional, subregional and national levels, on a common framework for measuring sustainable development within the realm of official statistics;

34. Supports the work with national environmental experts and official statisticians on addressing methodological discrepancies, data gaps and lack of clear guidance related to the production of environmental indicators in key areas such as clean air, energy, drinking water, waste, forest biodiversity, and sustainable transport;

35. Recognizes the need for robust, timely and comparable statistics on environmental indicators e.g. on climate change, and for strengthening the

capacity of the National Statistical Offices in producing statistics on environmental indicators;”

III. PROPOSAL

11. The CES Bureau is invited to discuss and provide guidance on the UNECE decision concerning the measurement of sustainable development.

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