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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

REPORT

OF THE REGIONAL MEETING ON ENVIRONMENT STATISTICS AND ACCOUNTS AND EVALUATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT STATISTICS, INDICATORS AND ACCOUNTS PROJECT (ESIAP) BEIRUT, 7-9 APRIL 2010

Summary

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held a Regional Meeting on Environment Statistics and Accounts and Evaluation of the Environment Statistics, Indicators and Accounts Project (ESIAP) at United Nations House, Beirut, from 7 to 9 April 2010. The meeting, which was held in coordination with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), was organized to discuss the progress made in environment and water accounts in the ESCWA region and to delineate the way forward. It was attended by 43 participants, representing ESCWA member countries, Austria, Mexico, MEDSTAT (the regional statistical cooperation programme between the European Union and 10 Mediterranean partner countries), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Islamic Development Bank and the League of Arab States.

Discussions focused on regional and international activities in environment statistics, indicators and accounts; the outcome of project activities; and the problems faced in developing environment statistics and water accounts in the ESCWA region. Participants addressed the issues in two working groups and discussed the ways in which further development of a comprehensive, sustainable, nationally-coordinated and relevant programme of environment statistics and accounts could be achieved in order to assist policymakers in the region.

A five-stage short- and long-term workplan for developing environment and water accounts was proposed, including specific time frames, as well as recommendations for the funding and coordination of the workplan both within and between ESCWA member countries and with other organizations.

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Introduction

1. The Statistics Division of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in coordination with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), held a Regional Meeting on Environment Statistics and Accounts and Evaluation of the Environment Statistics, Indicators and Accounts Project (ESIAP) at United Nations House, Beirut, from 7 to 9 April 2010. The meeting was attended by 43 participants (34 men and nine women) from national statistical offices (NSOs) and the ministries of environment and water in 13 ESCWA member countries, experts from Austria, Mexico, the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), the League of Arab States, ECLAC, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and UNSD.
2. Experts discussed a number of topics related to the status of environment statistics and accounts in the ESCWA region and the progress on implementation of the ESIAP project. The experts from Austria, ECLAC and Mexico shared their experience in Austria, Turkey, the Latin America and the Caribbean region, and Mexico. Country representatives and experts agreed on the importance of creating a strategy and framework for developing a comprehensive environment statistics and accounts programme that is sustainable, nationally-coordinated and relevant to policymakers.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

3. A set of recommendations for improving environment statistics and accounts was proposed through a workplan to help countries in the ESCWA region to implement and improve the status of environment statistics and accounts. These recommendations are divided into five phases, supplemented by a funding section. The workplan and time frame are set out in detail in annex I and may be summarized as follows:

Phase 1: Institutionalize and coordinate national statistical information on environment and water for integrated resource management and evidence-based environmental policy. Establish or activate a national working team that includes representatives from the national statistical office, ministries of environment and water, and any other relevant sectors. The task of this team is to coordinate and follow up on environmental indicators and accounts according to national priorities, following a pre-agreed institutional order and a documented mode of operation that should focus on the role of national statistical offices.

Phase 2: In close consultation with NSOs and relevant stakeholders, develop a strategy for environment and water statistics, indicators and accounts, supported by legislation.

Phase 3: Develop water accounts in accordance with the System of Environmental and Economic Accounting for Water (SEEA-W) framework in parallel with the Strategy for Environment and Water Statistics and the National Information System for Environment and Water Statistics.

Phase 4: Support and training.

Phase 5: Dissemination and exchange of experience.

Funding: The groups discussed possible ways of funding such a programme with technical assistance from the IDB.

II. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

4. In accordance with the adopted agenda, the meeting was divided into five sessions, focusing on the following topics:

- (a) International and regional activities in environment statistics, indicators and accounts;
- (b) Reports on the activities of ESIAP between September 2007 and June 2010;
- (c) International examples of environment statistics, indicators and accounts;
- (d) Breakout session;
- (e) Plenary session.

5. The presentations and documents related to the meeting are available at: <http://www.escwa.un.org>.

A. INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL ACTIVITIES IN ENVIRONMENT STATISTICS, INDICATORS AND ACCOUNTS

6. The session was chaired by Mr. Mehdi El-Alak, Director General of the Iraqi Central Organization for Statistics and Information Technology. It started with an overview of the coordination between ESCWA, UNSD, MEDSTAT – Plan Bleu (the regional statistical co-operation programme between the European Union and 10 Mediterranean partner countries), the League of Arab States, ECLAC and UNEP on environment statistics, indicators and accounts. A representative of ESCWA emphasized the importance of integrating environment and economy statistics and linking such information through the System of Integrated Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA) for the ESCWA countries. She also stated that the coordination of activities between international and regional organizations in this sphere had resulted in a more efficient implementation of the project activities and outlined the results achieved.

7. The UNSD representative presented an overview of SEEA, including the revision process due in 2012. He then defined the relationship between data items and frameworks, the International Recommendations for Water Statistics (IRWS) and SEEAW, and concluded with a brief description of the information system for water, focusing on the countries which are currently working on water accounts.

8. The MEDSTAT – Plan Bleu representative briefly discussed the purpose, mission and activities of Plan Bleu in the Mediterranean region and explained the Euro-Mediterranean Information System on Know-how in the Water Sector (EMWIS), its core functions and outputs. She set out the results of Plan Bleu activities in the region and its strategy for the future, and highlighted the importance of each institution creating its own strategic plan, objectives and indicators at the national level. These plans will be incorporated into the follow-up of the MEDSTAT project by the European Environment Agency.

9. The UNEP representative gave a presentation on environmental information networking in the Arab region, during which he cited examples of frameworks in Africa (the Africa Environment Information Network) and Arab countries (Kuwait and Jordan) and highlighted the lessons learned in the process of developing these networks. He concluded by emphasizing the importance of publishing the Environment Outlook for the Arab Region, despite the difficulties and challenges posed by its preparation.

10. The representative of Saudi Arabia asked about the problems faced by countries when using information networks and the possibility of coordinating with Plan Bleu countries to benefit from their technical and capacity-building expertise in this area. The representative of Palestine enquired first about the nature of accounts other than water accounts and secondly about the status of waste accounts, in particular why they are not used in ESCWA member countries. He also requested clarification on the outputs of water accounts, the methodologies used and the beneficiaries of the environment information network. The representative of Bahrain posed a question about the updated standards (the reclassification of assets in the System of National Accounts (2008 SNA), ISIC Revision 4) and whether they are taken into account in drafting new revisions.

11. The representative of ESCWA stressed the fact that member countries should be willing to work on environmental accounts and thus benefit from such capacity-building activities as advisory missions, study visits and methodological documents, tailored to the specificities of each country. In response to the enquiries made by the representative of Palestine, ESCWA indicated that all related institutions (including

ministries of water and environment, and national statistical offices) should be partners in the environment information network. Water accounts are a vital component of integrated water management in the region and are therefore considered a priority; the absence of waste accounts is primarily the result of a paucity of data on waste.

12. The UNSD representative confirmed that UNSD takes updated standards into account when drafting new revisions. He highlighted the importance of effective cooperation in environment statistics, making optimal use of the data sources available, including documentation on environmental accounting on the Internet, and underlined the need to focus on other environmental accounts. In the same context, the MEDSTAT – Plan Bleu representative clarified that since 2009, environment statistics have fallen under the mandate of the European Environment Agency. She also expressed the concern of Jordan regarding coordination with EMWIS on data processing and sharing, and highlighted the extensive coordination between MEDSTAT – Plan Bleu, regional organizations and national authorities, in addition to its new strategy of coordination with countries that are not part of Plan Bleu. She explained Plan Bleu's new waste management accounts activities, its efforts to create a water information system, and related activities based on national priorities and needs. She concluded her presentation by explaining that while Plan Bleu has completed some mapping, MEDSTAT still lacks geographic information system maps.
13. The UNEP representative emphasized the role of the public in empowering the information network and stressed the difficulties of creating a network arising from a lack of collaboration and the unavailability of data. He pinpointed the importance of sharing information that is beneficial to all parties, the coherence of the network structure, problems related to lack of data and information on environment and water policies, and the absence of standards for data sharing and sourcing. He also highlighted the importance of the environment information network and its benefits for institutions on the national and international levels. The representative of Austria explained the difference in priorities between Europe and ESCWA member countries. In Europe, efforts are placed on material flow accounts systems, and environmental protection expenditure and emissions accounts, and on developing legislation on environmental accounting. The Jordanian representative concluded the discussion session by pointing out that Jordan implemented a law in 2008 which mandates all parties to share data and information.
14. The representative of the League of Arab States underlined the importance of an Arab environmental information network and highlighted the efforts made by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment to create such a network. He also discussed the Sustainable Development Initiative for the Arab Region, adopted in 2004 by the League of Arab States, which is jointly coordinated by ESCWA and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). He concluded his presentation by outlining the activities of the Arab Working Group on Environment and Sustainable Development Indicators and the recommendations of the first meeting of this working group (Cairo, 15-17 March 2010) in cooperation with ESCWA and UNEP.
15. The UNSD representative presented the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics (FDES), the revision and its guiding principles, core set of environment statistics, modalities and timetable, along with the decisions of the forty-first session of the United Nations Statistical Commission (New York, 23-26 February 2010). He introduced the UNSD/UNEP Questionnaire on Environment Statistics, setting out details of its content, 2010 data collection and dissemination process, and its consistency with other regional and international questionnaires. He concluded by highlighting international efforts to harmonize environment data worldwide, featuring Internet-disseminated UNSD data.
16. The representative of ESCWA clarified that the preparation of methodologies for environment and sustainable development indicators are at the final stage and that UNEP, ESCWA and the League of Arab States are working together to finalize them. The League of Arab States representative assured participants that the first draft will soon be ready for release.

17. The representative of Yemen initiated a discussion about the problems of data sharing and the issue of putting a price on data, arguing that the insignificant levels of cooperation between institutions result from a number of problems faced during data collection and noting that several authorities charge fees for data sharing. The representative of Jordan said that all data related to development, planning and building strategies should be available to the public free of charge. In addition, he proposed that the private sector be engaged to collect such data. The UNSD representative stressed the first fundamental principle of official statistics, which is that official statistics should be compiled and made available to the public free of charge.

18. The representative of Palestine enquired about countries which have already implemented the Sustainable Development Indicators (SDI) and the representative of Jordan requested methodologies to estimate missing data in the tables and to identify sources of information for the ecosystem approach. The representative of the League of Arab States said that while countries are not yet mandated to apply the SDI, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia are already implementing them on a voluntary basis and efforts are underway for their application in other Arab countries. The representative of ESCWA responded by noting that a number of countries face difficulties in following the various methodologies and frameworks for environment accounting developed by international organizations, and explained that the FDES and SDI are being reviewed, and suggested that SDI should be categorized according to how difficult they are to calculate.

19. The representative of Saudi Arabia enquired about the Arabic translation of the environment and sustainable development indicators, highlighting the large number of indicators involved and asking whether it would be possible to use a summary version of the SDI list. The UNEP representative responded that UNEP is mandated to set the basis for environment-related SDI strategy (methodological sheets), which has already been implemented, while socio-economic indicators fall within the mandate of ESCWA. In response to a question regarding the assistance available to countries in implementing the SDI list, he indicated that assistance has been provided to Qatar and Saudi Arabia to develop their national SDI sets.

20. ESCWA stressed the need for national teams to identify the list of indicators of priority at the national level and collect all related data. The UNSD representative confirmed that the 2010 questionnaire on environment statistics had been sent to all member countries. The representative from ECLAC highlighted the similarities between the Latin America and the Caribbean region and the ESCWA region regarding the problem of institutionalization; spoke about the problems of consistency between UNSD and UNEP in certain indicators, which require clarification by proper metadata (documentation and methodologies); and compared Millennium Development Goal 7, SDI and core indicators from national sources with those from regional and international sources. The Director General of the Iraqi Central Organization for Statistics and Information Technology drew the attention of participants to the slow rate of progress in the implementation of international standards in the region (1993 SNA) and suggested that ESCWA should help to expedite the process.

B. REPORTS ON THE ACTIVITIES OF ESIAP (SEPTEMBER 2007 - JUNE 2010)

21. The second session was chaired by Mr. Mohammad Al-Momani from the Ministry of Water and Irrigation in Jordan. In the session, a representative of ESCWA presented an update on the outcome of various meetings on ESIAP project activities which had taken place between 2007 and 2010, as well as missions and study tours offered to ESCWA member countries to strengthen their capacity in environment statistics and accounts. Having provided an overview of publications and documents related to the project, including expected accomplishments and indicators of achievement, she highlighted the media coverage received for project activities before concluding her presentation by setting out details of the independent final evaluation of the project.

22. The representative of Jordan said that Jordan has had a national water plan since 1976; the Jordanian Department of Statistics provides related information regarding the water budget and balance. The

representative of Egypt also outlined the availability of data on water quality and the long term national plan for water resources between now and 2025.

23. The MEDSTAT – Plan Bleu representative encouraged countries to strengthen and improve the quality of environmental data. The representative of Yemen suggested that environmental accounting should be discussed by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment and that awareness should be raised through the media.

24. The presentation given by the representative from ECLAC centred on the situation in the Latin America and Caribbean region and the need for a strong environmental profile and environmental concerns in the region. She detailed project conditions, activities and achievements on environment statistics in the ECLAC region and assessed the progress made between 2008 and 2010 towards the end of the project. Having highlighted the insufficiency of funding to meet the increasing number of requests from member countries for the development of statistical capacity, she set out the challenges faced by the region before concluding with a presentation on the future plans in this domain for Latin America and the Caribbean.

25. The ESCWA representative presented the Docubase¹ and the network of experts related to the project. A brief presentation was also made on the ESCWA Statistical Information System (ESIS), with its desktop application and web portal, focusing in particular on the modules related to water and environment.

26. The ESCWA representative proposed that the work of inter-agency working groups should be fully documented, with NSOs serving as coordinators at the country level, their primary task being to set a strategy for the implementation of environment accounts and SDI. Like Latin America and the Caribbean, ESCWA has intergovernmental bodies that are concerned with environment statistics and policies (including the ESCWA Statistical Committee and the League of Arab States), but lacks a regional statistical conference (such as the Conference of the Americas). The absence of a full report on Millennium Development Goal 7 was due to the lack of availability of data in member countries.

27. The representative of Saudi Arabia asked about the revision of the Arabic translation of the SDI methodologies, suggesting that the simplified Arabic version which Saudi Arabia has already produced as part of its exercise in compiling national SDI could be used. The representative of Jordan mentioned the coordination meetings which are taking place between Arab countries to create a regional strategy for water resources for submission to the League of Arab States. He also emphasized the lack of coordination between international programmes in which the impact of water on health and life is significant, relating such impact to climate change and noting that the issue is included in the medium-term strategy of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization for 2008-2013. In response to an enquiry from the representative of Jordan regarding climate change programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean, the representative of ECLAC indicated that the regional commission has created a special unit for climate change studies and assessment, and that while the Statistics Division provides official statistics on climate change, the climate change unit uses valuation and modelling to assess the economic impact of climate change.

28. The representative of Kuwait enquired as to the availability of case studies from Arab countries on the compilation of environmental indicators, assessment of the importance and relevance of such indicators, and the gathering of statistics in order to build accounts. The representative of Oman asked where responsibility for decision-making on SESA priorities lies, to which the representative from ECLAC responded by noting that a number of distinct methodological processes are available on the development of environment statistics using simple methodologies. UNSD and ESCWA clarified that while international and regional organizations may offer guidance to countries on such matters, it is for each country to set its own priorities so that decisions are made at the national level.

¹ The Docubase can be found at: <http://esiap.escwa.org.lb/docubase/?id+14>.

29. ESCWA asked the representative of the IDB about the assistance and funds which it is able to offer, both by country and by region. The ISDB representative said the bank provides grants, loans, and scholarships, and that project proposals are welcomed from any country, group of countries or region; furthermore, he actively encouraged countries to submit proposals, since ISDB encourages statistical capacity in matters in which environment is a cross-cutting issue. He asked ECLAC about its decision to publish environment indicators and environment statistics in two separate publications. The ECLAC representative clarified that ECLAC uses national data from country publications to publish separate and specific indicators and not their entire statistical databases. The representative of Jordan asked about the use of environmentally-adjusted gross domestic product (GDP), to which ECLAC responded that Mexico is the only country in its region to use the adjusted GDP. The representative of Jordan stressed that the components of the environmental accounting framework should include assets accounts, environmental protection expenditure and material flow accounts.

30. The representative of Oman inquired as to the availability of a training kit on the ESCWA Statistical Information System (ESIS). The ESCWA representative confirmed that a kit is available and that training on the database will be provided to member countries upon request.

C. INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLES OF ENVIRONMENT STATISTICS, INDICATORS AND ACCOUNTS

31. The session was chaired by Mr. Zahran Khaleef, Director of Environmental Statistics at the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). The UNSD representative gave a presentation on the key issues of SEEAW implementation and the way forward, which includes promotion of the system; training; the network of experts; and international data availability, collection and quality. He also provided a global assessment of water statistics and water accounts, identified the key findings and lessons learned from that assessment, and presented the outcomes of the Fifth World Water Forum (Istanbul, 16-22 March 2009).

32. Participants discussed the SEEAW implementation strategy at both the ESCWA regional level and the global level. The base for the strategy is the Framework for Environmental Economic Accounting in the ESCWA Region, published in 2009,² which stressed the promotion and institutionalization of environment statistics, indicators and accounts, filled data gaps and created a policy on data dissemination.

33. The representative of Mexico presented the country's experience with the National Water Information System (NWIS). He set the backdrop to his presentation by explaining the importance of water to the country, then explained the components, benefits and outcomes of the NWIS, the stock-flow model adopted and the hybrid tables, before setting out with the way forward for the Mexican National Water Commission (CONAGUA).

34. The following presentation included case studies on Austria and Turkey. The representative of Austria briefly described the problems encountered by Turkey in creating the accounts tables linking data from environment statistics to the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC) and the steps which the country must take in order to develop the remainder of the accounts table. He then turned his attention to Austria, focusing on new policy questions, the indicators adopted and the challenges facing the country in terms of water accounting.

35. The representative of Saudi Arabia asked about implementing water accounts within the sustainable development concept and the representative of Egypt discussed SNA capacity-building, noting that certain indicators conflict. The representative of Jordan responded that since one of the components of environment accounts is macro economy, several sustainable development indicators can be derived from the system. The representative of Iraq stressed that ESCWA member countries should work to improve environment accounts, and since NSOs should be the primary statistical reference, national institutions should coordinate

² E/ESCWA/SD/2009/3.

with their NSO. The representative of Yemen suggested that universities should be involved in promoting environmental principles.

36. The representative of ESCWA commented on the availability of accounts tables and the difficulty of completing them in a single phase. Member countries could also benefit from the experience of countries such as Bahrain, Jordan and Oman, which have already developed partial or full water accounts. She concluded by stressing once again the importance of the accounts tables to policy makers.

37. The representative from the Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics in Egypt began his presentation with an outline of the water information system in Egypt and the water-related challenges facing the Arab region. He set out details of the water resources available in the country, water usage, and flow charts for surface water and groundwater use, and presented the SEEAW standard tables for Egypt. He then tackled the issue of water quality in the country, the institutional measures undertaken to empower the water sector and manage it more effectively, and the difficulties faced in implementing water accounts and statistics, before concluding by setting out the future framework for the country, including a set of recommendations for national and regional cooperation to facilitate its implementation. The representative of Jordan presented a country paper on the purpose of environment statistics in the country, sources of data, inter-institutional coordination and a number of cross-sector indicators. The paper also focused on the implementation status of environment and water accounts; dealt with difficulties, data gaps and data dissemination; and made a number of recommendations.

38. The representative from the Environment Public Authority in Kuwait shared its experience and priorities in estimating air emissions, given the significant levels of air pollution in the country. She highlighted the partnership between the Authority and Kuwait Oil Company for the monitoring and gathering of data related to air emissions, and set out its future plans. The representative of the Central Administration of Statistics in Lebanon presented a country paper featuring its experience with water accounts, ideas to improve water indicators and proposed future national priorities for water. The representative of the Ministry of Environment in Lebanon outlined its experience in environment statistics and accounts, including an improved list of country indicators. He highlighted limitations and data gaps in SEEAW, and proposed a number of recommendations for its implementation. The presentation by the representative from the PCBS focused on the importance and principal activities of the environment statistics section. He explained the methodology for data gathering and dissemination, commented on the quality of available data, highlighted activities related to environment accounts and the limitations encountered in this area, and suggested a number of improvements which would lead to more effective implementation.

39. The representative of Yemen identified the environment statistics and indicators which can feed into environment and water accounts, outlined sources of inter-institutional information and cooperation, pinpointed a number of commonly-faced difficulties, including gaps in data availability, and concluded with a set of recommendations. The representative of Iraq shared the country's experience in water accounts. He provided examples of water accounts tables, set out the status of environment statistics and indicators, and highlighted the importance of coordination between such water-related institutions as the Special Committee for Environment Statistics. He noted that a number of difficulties, including data gaps, are complicating the process of filling the accounts tables, and offered a set of recommendations for improved implementation of SEEAW and other accounts in Iraq.

40. Following the country presentations, the floor was opened for discussion. The ESCWA representative stressed the problems faced by countries in the implementation of international standards; certain member countries have already adopted ISIC Revision 4, while others are still using Revision 3. She also emphasized the importance of coordination at the national level; the maintenance of reliable administrative records; and collaboration with academics and researchers for the mutually-beneficial sharing of knowledge. She noted that ESCWA provides technical assistance for member countries, and that while the Commission is unable to fund surveys, several other United Nations agencies can help in this area.

41. Other topics discussed included the following: (a) the varying levels of advancement in statistics in member countries; (b) a permanent technical committee for water accounts, with members drawn from member countries and ESCWA; (c) simplification of the accounts tables; (d) dividing the tables into three levels (basic, intermediate and advanced), with time limits for completing the tables; and (e) improving the monitoring system.

42. ESCWA proposed supporting member countries through technical assistance, while the UNSD representative indicated that ongoing help would be available for countries in need, although it would be dependent on funding. The discussion session concluded with the announcement that UNSD will be appointing a regional advisor to assist ESCWA member countries who request assistance, whether individually or in groups.

D. BREAKOUT SESSION

43. The fourth session was organized in two groups. Before the groups met, the ESCWA representative made a short presentation on the workplan for environment statistics and accounts for the ESCWA region, divided into five steps to facilitate its implementation, and suggested a number of possible donors. The UNSD representative clarified that UNSD is available to support ESCWA member countries in capacity-building, training courses and workshops. The ECLAC representative contrasted this with the workplan for the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, in which limited resources are available and countries are required to seek funding with technical assistance from ECLAC. The representative of Mexico encouraged member countries to work towards improving their water accounts in order to support decision makers at all levels.

44. Participants then convened in two groups, group A comprising the representatives of Iraq, Kuwait, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen; and group B the representatives of Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman and the Syrian Arab Republic. The groups discussed the workplan for environment statistics, indicators and accounts at the national level, and sought to identify the steps, processes and stakeholders necessary to strengthen those statistics with the help of regional and international organizations.

E. PLENARY SESSION

45. The final session was chaired by Mr. Abdel Aziz Bahgat, General Manager of Environmental Statistics at the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics in Egypt. The session focused on the working group discussions and their recommendations for the plan to develop an environment information system.

46. Group B suggested furthering progress towards the establishment of a national working group before starting to develop a strategy for environment statistics and accounts. It proposed that technical support be provided after environment indicators and pilot water accounts have been set. Other suggestions focused on the inclusion of environment information in the school curriculum; the creation of a technical working group (with assistance from ESCWA) to provide support on technical matters; the adoption of ISIC Revision 4 by all ESCWA member countries; the improvement of accounts tables through the use of software linking them to statistical databases; and the organization of training sessions on SEEAW in conjunction with the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics (AITRS) in Jordan with a view to disseminating knowledge of the subject as broadly as possible.

47. The discussions in group A were broadly similar to those of group B. In addition, group A suggested that ESCWA should first draft the strategy for environment statistics and accounts at the regional level, following which member countries will each constitute a steering committee to discuss, edit and adopt the strategy at the national level. Country representatives also discussed the national environment statistics workplan in Yemen.

48. In closing the meeting, ESCWA encouraged member countries to fill the SEEAW tables for which data are available and which are consequently simple to complete, while leaving the completion of more complex tables till a later stage. The UNSD representative assured member country representatives that UNSD takes into consideration all requests and comments from countries, and encouraged countries to group together to submit combined proposals for assistance. The ECLAC representative suggested classifying data gaps in three groups: (a) data that can be easily calculated and aggregated; (b) existing data that is hidden in administrative surveys and questionnaires; and (c) data that is either not produced or not available and which requires the preparation of specialized surveys and questionnaires. The UNEP representative suggested that proposals for the definition of environmental priorities at the national level and finalization of the guidelines for environment indicators and SDI should be sent to United Nations country teams. UNEP would then distribute the Arabic version and countries submit their comments on it. He also indicated that UNEP would be interested in working on environment accounts with ESCWA and UNSD, and proposed that funding should be sought from the United Nations Development Assistance Framework.

49. Expressing her appreciation of the meeting and the opportunity that it provided for the sharing of experience, the MEDSTAT – Plan Bleu representative highlighted the water strategy for the Mediterranean area that is shortly due to be adopted, the progress made to date, and the energy that is required and available for the journey ahead. The representative of Mexico turned the focus once again to the issue of data accuracy and availability, highlighting the importance of providing data to assist policymakers, even if the precision of such data is less than optimal. Turning his attention to water accounts tables, he encouraged countries to provide approximate figures to policymakers as an initial step and then to work on improving the quality of the data supplied. In conclusion, Mr. Juraj Riecan, Director of the Statistics Division at ESCWA, underlined the importance of information to policymakers, arguing that sustained achievements are needed in this field, and encouraging all member countries to continue their hard work, not only during, but also between formal meetings.

III. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

A. DATE AND VENUE

50. The Regional Meeting on Environment Statistics and Accounts and Evaluation of the Environment Statistics, Indicators and Accounts Project (ESIAP) was held at United Nations House, Beirut, from 7 to 9 April 2010.

B. OPENING OF THE MEETING

51. Ms. Wafa Aboul Hosn, Senior Statistician in the Statistics Division at ESCWA and manager of the ESIAP project, opened the meeting by welcoming participants, speakers and representatives of regional and international organizations to the meeting.

52. Ms. Maral Tutelian, Director of the Lebanese Central Administration of Statistics, welcomed participants to the meeting. She stressed the importance of environment statistics in the path towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals; the role of ministries in supplying data to NSOs; the need for collaboration between producers of data, the importance of respecting country specificities and the need to introduce a list of comparable indicators at the regional level. She recommended the formation of cross-institution working groups; the discussion of priorities and methodologies of cooperation between statisticians and experts; further work on statistical definitions; the creation of a framework for environment statistics; assistance in solving difficulties with environment statistics; and emphasized once again the importance of SEEA tables and official data sources. She concluded by encouraging activities to help member countries to strengthen their capacity in this regard, including the development of a timeframe and the creation of a steering committee with members drawn from NSOs and the ministries of environment and water.

53. Ms. Rayén Quiroga, ECLAC Regional Advisor on Environment Statistics, highlighted the problems and challenges faced by ECLAC in its implementation of ESIAP, which are similar to those faced by ESCWA. She stressed the importance of national coordination, international coordination, and coordination between United Nations organizations. She hoped to share the experience of ECLAC member countries with ESCWA member countries and identify lessons learned from the ESIAP implementation process. Mr. Jeremy Webb, representing UNSD, greeted the participants on behalf of the Director of UNSD and thanked ESCWA for organizing the meeting. He explained that the role of UNSD is not only to set standards and norms, but also to share experience in order to find solutions. He underlined the increasingly important role played by environment statistics globally, and in the ESCWA and ECLAC regions in particular, and stressed the importance of the revision of environmental economic accounts and the work on harmonizing indicators.

54. Mr. Juraj Riecan, Director of the Statistics Division at ESCWA, emphasized the importance of SEEA and environment data for policymakers in terms of shedding light on the negative effects of human activity on the environment. Stressing the particular value of water in the ESCWA region, he highlighted the ways in which proper usage and dissemination of statistics can assist decision makers. He noted that the ESIAP project in the region had strengthened the national capacity of member countries, and developed cooperation and coordination at the national and international levels, as a number of organizations had come together to work towards the implementation of the project. He concluded by encouraging further cooperation in the future to enable member countries to continue to build on the results of the project.

55. Mr. Adam Albagir, Secretary of the Commission, welcomed the participants, stressing the importance of the points raised by the representative of the Lebanese Central Administration of Statistics, the need to unify data sources and the vital role played by member countries as a primary source of data.

C. PARTICIPANTS

56. The meeting was attended by 43 participants representing ESCWA member countries and experts from regional and international organizations. The full list of participants can be found in annex II of this report.

Annex I

WORKPLAN FOR ENVIRONMENT STATISTICS, INDICATORS AND ACCOUNTS FOR THE ESCWA REGION 2010-2013

**(NOTE THAT THE OVERALL TIME FRAME AVERAGES THREE YEARS, BUT
TIME FRAMES FOR INDIVIDUAL PHASES MAY VARY BETWEEN COUNTRIES)**

Phase I: Institutionalize and coordinate national statistical information on environment and water for integrated resource management and evidence-based environmental policy (2010-2012)	Time frame	Geographic frame
Establish or activate a national working team that includes representatives from the national statistical office, ministries of environment and water, and all other relevant sectors. The task of the team is to coordinate and follow up on environmental indicators and accounts according to national priorities, following a consensual institutional order and a documented mode of operation, with a particular focus on the role of national statistical offices. The main tasks of the national working team include the following:	1 year	National, supported by regional and international
1. Preparing and adopting an action plan for the national working team.	1 month	National
2. Assessing the current status on environment and water statistics, and available indicators from all sectors (national data list).	2 months	National and subnational
3. Agreeing on organizational and technical aspects of data management and discussing methodological issues between statisticians, ecologists and water experts.	1 month	National
4. Undertaking an assessment of the current national statistical information system (NSIS) for evaluation and monitoring in support of national integrated resource management and environmental policy. Developing a three-year NSIS plan for environment and water within the framework of a national environmental information network for gradual implementation in accordance with the action plan prepared in accordance with step 1 above.	6 months to 3 years	National, supported by regional and international
5. Comparing the available data with those required for the environmental indicators agreed upon with the League of Arab States and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); using either the English version prepared by UNEP until the full Arabic translation is available or the simplified Arabic version prepared by Saudi Arabia; identifying gaps and taking into consideration the indicators and variables for Millennium Development Goal 7.	2 months	National, supported by regional and international
Phase II: Develop a strategy for environment and water statistics, indicators and accounts in close consultation with NSOs and other stakeholders, supported by legislation (2010-2012)	Time frame	Geographic frame
1. Establishing a high-level committee to set national priorities in environment and water, and provide guidance on strategy.	6-12 months	National
2. Preparing and adopting a national strategy for the development of a system of description, production and dissemination of environmental statistics, indicators and accounts within national statistical systems and related statistical plans.	6-12 months	National
3. Preparing and adopting a national programme for environment statistics, indicators and accounts with appropriate coordination mechanisms for implementation.	6-12 months	National

Phase II: Develop a strategy for environment and water statistics, indicators and accounts in close consultation with NSOs and other stakeholders, supported by legislation (2010-2012) (continued)	Time frame	Geographic frame
4. Analysing mandates and the legal situation, and working towards updating and reinforcing legislation on statistics, including environmental indicators and accounts, particularly those concerning water and environmental protection expenditure.	6-12 months	National
5. Implementing the most recent international classifications within the framework of integrated accounts tables, particularly ISIC Revision 4 and the 2008 System of National Accounts.	6 months to 3 years	National
6. Emphasizing environmental accounts, in particular water accounts, as an important topic to be adopted by the Technical Secretariat of the League of Arab States and the ESCWA Statistical Committee, and to be included in college and university curricula.	1 year	Regional

Phase III: Develop water accounts in parallel with the Strategy for Environment and Water Statistics (SEEAW) and the National Information System for Environment and Water Statistics	Time frame	Geographic frame																														
	1 year	National																														
1. Determining data needs through consultation with users and producers (mainly NSOs and national water administrations), identifying key water policy questions and comparing the available data with the required SEEAW data list.																																
2. Assessing available data, identifying data gaps and seeking ways in which such gaps may be filled.																																
3. Prioritizing data by data items, geographic region, reference period, industry or household, and the importance of the water source.																																
<table><tr><th colspan="5">Tables of water accounts</th></tr><tr><th></th><th>Availability</th><th>Simplicity</th><th>Technical support required</th><th>Importance of detailed data</th></tr><tr><td>Asset accounts tables</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Supply and use tables</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Emissions tables</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Hybrid tables (physical and monetary)</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table>			Tables of water accounts						Availability	Simplicity	Technical support required	Importance of detailed data	Asset accounts tables					Supply and use tables					Emissions tables					Hybrid tables (physical and monetary)				
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4. Involving specialists, such as academics and researchers, in the interpretation of the data.																																
5. Completing the data tables in accordance with the International Recommendations for Water Statistics (IRWS).																																

Phase IV: Support and training (2010-2012)	Time frame	Geographic frame
1. Requesting support through consultation and direct contact with experts (from ESCWA, United Nations Statistics Division, the European Union and other experts who have visited countries on advisory missions).	3 years	National, regional and international
2. Requesting support from the United Nations through advisory missions by experts in the field of statistics and environmental accounts.	1 year	National, regional and international
3. Checking and validating the data and correcting the tables.	1 year	National
4. Creating a technical team supported by ESCWA to make recommendations and assist member countries in their work on environmental accounts.	1 year	National and ESCWA
5. Providing training for professionals on statistics and environmental accounts in cooperation with the Arab Planning Institute.	1 year	Regional

Phase V: Disseminate and exchange experience (2010-2013)	Time frame	Geographic frame
1. Publishing pilot tables and analysis reports on the use of water accounts in the integrated management of water resources, reviewing any problems and providing solutions.	3 years	National
2. Exchanging experience and sharing case studies between member countries and with other countries such as Austria, The Netherlands and Mexico.	1-3 years	Interregional
3. Sending study missions to the countries that are furthest advanced in this field, including Jordan, Tunisia and Turkey.	1 year	Interregional

Funding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposing a regional project to the Islamic Development Bank to be prepared by ESCWA in cooperation with the United Nations Statistics Division and the United Nations Environment Programme to build capacity in environmental statistics, indicators and accounts for 2011-2013.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparing projects to develop environmental statistics, indicators and accounts at the country level (individual countries or groups of countries) for proposal to the Islamic Development Bank, donor countries and donor organizations. National projects should include national workshops, professional training courses, advisory missions, scholarships, monitoring stations and information technology support.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Including environmental accounts in the development of national accounts capacity in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); this is currently being prepared by Oman and will be provided to the United Nations Statistics Division.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requesting (via the United Nations Statistics Division) individual countries or groups of countries with similar environmental statistics to provide a series of training workshops in cooperation with the United Nations regional commissions, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Development Programme and the European Union.

Annex II*

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Annex III

EVALUATION OF THE MEETING

QUESTIONNAIRE ON OPINIONS OF PARTICIPANTS

The evaluation questionnaire found that 83.4 per cent of the 33 respondents rated the quality of the meeting good or very good, 88 per cent believed it relevant to their subject area and 79 per cent indicated that it had provided them with useful knowledge and skills. The meeting was considered to have provided a forum for the exchange of knowledge by 94 per cent of respondents, while 97 per cent believed it had offered an opportunity to establish new contacts and that the exchange of experience had been useful.

Between 82 and 85 per cent of respondents found the clarity of presentations, the quality of written material and the organizational arrangements to be good to very good. Some 45 per cent would have liked to have extended the duration of the meeting to allow for discussion of technical matters and further exchange of country experience.

Almost 76 per cent of respondents indicated that their work would benefit from the information acquired at the meeting, while 85 per cent would recommend the participation of other experts from their own country in similar meetings in the future. Just under half the participants had previously participated in similar meetings and 97 per cent would like to see follow-up actions to the meeting.

The answers, comments and suggestions made by the respondents are detailed in the following summary.

Please evaluate the following	Very good/Good	Average	Poor	Very poor
1. Evaluation of quality	94%	3%	3%	-
2. What were your expectations of the EGM?				
Comments from participants included the following:				
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Practical means of preparing the accounts- Clear methods for providing data- Benefit from expert solutions to the problems and limitations faced with environment and water accounts- Link environmental statistics and indicators to sustainable development through clear and precise indicators- Exchange experience on environment and water accounts with developed countries, between countries and between regions- Assess the ESIAP project and draw up lessons learned to form a common vision of the way forward for environment statistics and accounts- Presentation of environment accounts tables by those ESCWA member countries which are advanced in the process of filling the tables- Meet others working in the field- Draft an outline strategy on environment statistics and accounts- Practical training on the tables, including linking available indicators and calculating tables- Identify needs for technical assistance and capacity-building in ESCWA member countries- A coordination and cooperation framework is required between United Nations agencies and other international agencies involved in environmental accounting- Benefit from environment accounts more than environment indicators- Enhance knowledge in environment statistics and accounts and the production of relevant indicators				

3. Were your expectations met?	Yes 51.5%	No -	Partially 42.4%		No answer 6.1%	
Please evaluate the following:	Very good/Good		Average	Poor	Very poor	No answer
4. a. Relevance to your work/area of expertise	87.9%		9.1%	3%	-	-
4. b. Knowledge and skills obtained for your future work	78.8%		21.2%	-	-	-
4. c. Providing a forum for exchange with other participants	94%		3%	-	-	3%
4. d. Providing an opportunity to establish new contacts	97%		3%	-	-	-
4. e. Usefulness of exchange of experience between participants	97%		3%	-	-	-

Please rate the meeting as follows:	Very good/Good	Average	Poor	Very poor
5. a. Clarity of presentations	81.8%	18.2%	-	-
5. b. Quality of written material circulated by the organizers	84.9%	12.1%	3%	-
5. c. Organizational arrangements for and during the event	81.8%	18.2%	-	-
6. The duration of the EGM should have been: Shorter <input type="text" value="6%"/> Same <input type="text" value="42.5%"/> Longer <input type="text" value="45.5%"/> No answer <input type="text" value="6%"/> <p>If you believe that the duration of the EGM should have been longer or shorter, please specify which session(s) you feel should have been longer or shorter.</p> <p>Comments from participants included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Allow more time for discussion of technical matters - Allow more time for the session on country experience (presentations and discussions) - Allow more time for all sessions (to give more detail, compare countries, evaluate experience and cover all aspects of the topics discussed) - Allow time to modify environmental indicators and adapt them to the needs of all countries - Increase the duration of the meeting, but shorten the daily working schedule 				
7. Will you be able to benefit in your work from the information acquired at this EGM, or introduce such information to other specialists in your country or community? To some extent <input type="text" value="18.2%"/> No <input type="text" value="-"/> Yes <input type="text" value="75.8%"/> No answer <input type="text" value="6%"/>				
8. Would you recommend that other experts from your country or other colleagues in your profession participate in similar EGMs that may be held in the future? To some extent <input type="text" value="6.1%"/> No <input type="text" value="3%"/> Yes <input type="text" value="84.8%"/> No answer <input type="text" value="6.1%"/>				
9. Have you participated in activities on the same topic in other organizations? No <input type="text" value="45.5%"/> Yes <input type="text" value="45.5%"/> No answer <input type="text" value="9%"/>				

If your answer is 'Yes', please specify the topic, organization, location and date.

Comments from participants included the following:

Topic: Environmental indicators and Arab Information Network; environmental indicators and sustainable development; environmental accounting, including water accounts (SEEAW); environmental statistics workshop; water statistics.

Organization: ESCWA; MEDSTAT; League of Arab States; UNEP; AITRS; Arab Institute of Statistics; ECLAC and Plan Bleu; Council of the GCC; Qatar Statistics Authority; Statistical Office of the European Communities.

Location and date: Austria 2009; Egypt, 2010; Jordan 2007; Lebanon, 1999; Qatar, 2009; Saudi Arabia, 2009; Syrian Arab Republic, 2006.

10. Would you like to see any follow-up action to the meeting?

Yes No No answer

If your answer is 'Yes', please specify the type of action.

Comments from participants included the following:

- Ensure that countries and governmental institutions are implementing the recommendations
- Exchange expertise through periodic meetings and share the experience of countries which have benefited from the meeting
- ESCWA should adopt the proposed plan and send experts on technical assistance missions to evaluate progress made on environmental accounting
- Provide assistance to countries in order to achieve the strategy suggested at the end of the meeting; a helpdesk may be a solution
- Set up a regulatory institutional framework to bolster cooperation with stakeholders
- Prepare meetings on the calculation methods for environmental accounts, including supply and use tables
- Introduce environmental accounting, including an environmental costs component, to national accounts experts for eventual incorporation into their national accounts
- Advisory missions of ESCWA experts could assess implementation at the country level
- Regular communication with countries to measure progress on environment statistics and accounts
- Allow time for environmental indicators and their definitions to be tailored to the needs of all countries
- Offer countries the opportunity to meet with experts to learn how to fill environmental accounts tables
- Place all meeting materials on the Internet
- Communicate and coordinate by Internet after the meeting
- Exchange knowledge and experience on a bilateral level between ESCWA member countries
- Create a specialized unit for training
- ESCWA to assist member countries with the formation of national steering committees on environment statistics and accounts in order to implement the strategy
- Organize more frequent meetings to assist in the revision of national tables
- Provide training sessions for specialists on the correct technical manner in which to collect, process and disseminate data

If your answer is 'No', please state why.

No participants responded negatively to this question

11. Do you have any suggestions to improve and develop similar meetings to be held in the future?

Comments from participants included the following:

- More explanation on the calculation of environmental indicators and accounts
- Provide assistance to countries to achieve the strategy suggested at the end of the meeting
- Provide training workshops on environmental accounts
- Work on raising the capacity of workers on environmental accounts and encourage them to participate in regional and international training workshops
- More technical assistance prior to the meeting and more practical case studies
- Better balance between plenary sessions and working group sessions
- Allow more time for advanced countries (such as Mexico)
- Print fewer materials; only very important documents need to be printed
- Adopt environmental accounts as a framework for determining environmental costs
- Experts in national accounts and international organizations should be available to countries when preparing and filling the supply and demand tables
- Letters of invitation should be sent directly to a named person, as governmental institutions do not record the names of those who have previously attended such meetings
- More interactive setting and fewer unidirectional presentations
- Shorten the speeches and give short, concise comments
- Translate all available materials into Arabic and provide them to NSOs
- The presence of a high official, such as the Director of COSIT, would improve cooperation between experts

12. Would you like to make any observations or comments, or pose any questions to ESCWA regarding the EGM?

Comments from participants included the following:

- It should be made clear to countries that data, indicators and networking are generally the role of environment agencies, and that since environmental statistics are part of the work of statistical agencies, cooperation is essential
- Help is required for Iraq in implementing environment statistics and accounts while the country is in a reconstruction phase
- The meeting was well organized
- Ensure follow-up on the recommendations
- This was an important meeting and it contributes to the enhancement of environmental statistics, accounts and indicators; the efforts made by ESCWA in such meetings are appreciated