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High-level segment

Panel B: Sustainable development governance: regional implications and perspectives for the post-Rio+20 institutional set up

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Abstract/speaking points

- The recent meeting of the SG High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda in Bali, Indonesia, 25-27 March 2013, noted that “We need a data revolution. Too often, development efforts have been hampered by a lack of the most basic data about the social and economic circumstances in which people live. [...] Substantial improvements in [...] statistical systems [...] will be needed. [...] This will require substantial investments in building capacity. “(Extract from the official Communiqué of the meeting).
- How can we know whether there is any progress if we do not monitor it? How can we know whether the society is following a sustainable path if we do not measure together all the three dimensions: economic, environmental and social? It is like driving a car without a speedometer and fuel indicator.
- Measurement is not an easy matter. It requires the right methodology, expertise and the necessary financial and human resources. It may seem that data are everywhere – on Internet, automatically created on credit card transactions, mobile phone calls, traffic controls, etc. However, the difficulty is to make sense of this “data deluge”. Also, these data represent only a very small fraction of reality. There are still many countries and statistical fields where even the basic data are lacking or of very low quality. Therefore the official statistics continue to play a major role in our societies in producing data and improving their quality.
- As one politician said not long ago: good statistics are much, much cheaper than wrong decisions. The MDGs were set up without consulting statisticians. It has required tremendous effort and investments over the last 15 years to develop statistical capacity to be able to measure the achievement of the MDGs. Now is the time that statisticians should be involved from the beginning in setting up the goals to make use the experience accumulated with measuring the achievement of MDGs.
- Since the Rio Summit in 1992, many countries and international organizations have created sets of indicators to measure sustainable development. An analysis made a few years ago showed that over a thousand different indicators were used for this purpose in EU countries alone. This leads to duplication of effort, the results are not internationally comparable and it is difficult to say whether countries are on sustainable path or not. To overcome this, UNECE jointly with the European Commission (Eurostat) and OECD have developed a conceptual framework to harmonize the approaches. The Heads of statistical offices of the UNECE and OECD countries plan to adopt the framework and a proposed list of indicators in June this year. This is just in time to contribute to establishing the Sustainable Development Goals and the respective targets and indicators. It is very important that the goals and targets would be measurable – after all, you cannot manage what you cannot measure.