

**Economic and Social Council**Distr.: General  
30 April 2013

English only

**Economic Commission for Europe**

## Conference of European Statisticians

**Sixty-first plenary session**

Geneva, 10-12 June 2013

Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda

**Measuring sustainable development in follow up to Rio+20****Statistics for sustainable development – the progress of work  
and plans of Polish official statistics in view of the Rio+20  
challenges****Note by the Central Statistical Office of Poland***Summary*

The paper describes the experience of the Central Statistical Office of Poland in designing a set of sustainable development indicators and its links to the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting.

The challenges faced by official statistics in Poland in fulfilling international requirements related to the development of new modules of environmental accounts are addressed. The paper also describes the achievements in creating new regional and local level indicators on sustainable development in Poland to inform policy making and support progress towards green economy.

The conclusions emphasize the importance of continued international cooperation among statisticians to improve the information basis on sustainable development. They call for further development work to measure the value of ecosystems and the costs of degradation of national resources.

## I. Introduction

1. Achieving sustainable development comprising the social, economic and environmental dimensions is the most pressing challenge of the contemporary world. This global challenge requires integrated action and cooperation of all communities – institutions, interest groups and representatives of various sectors, including the involvement of coordinating authorities. The obligation for effective cooperation for ensuring sustainable development is one of the major conclusions arising from the Rio+20 Summit.
2. Striving for the fulfilment of the obligations undertaken requires the involvement of all stakeholders in the process, with the statistical system playing a significant role. Introducing the concept of sustainable development constitutes a substantial challenge for statistics, the role of which is to provide adequate information for the purpose of monitoring the progress.
3. The need for the support of the statistical community has been emphasised at international level, and it is resulting in new initiatives at national statistical offices.

## II. The monitoring of sustainable development in Poland

4. In Poland the principle of sustainable development has a constitutional standing, provided for in Article 5 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland: “The Republic of Poland protects the independence and integrity of its territory, guards freedom and human and citizen rights and the safety of its citizens, protects its national heritage and ensures the protection of the natural environment, pursuant to the principle of sustainable development”.
5. Continuous and sustainable development is the primary goal of development policy at various governance levels – from the national to the regional and local levels. The concept of sustainable development is reflected in major strategic documents that form part of the effective system governing the country’s development.
6. The principles and goals of national strategic documents form the basis for establishing a national set of sustainable development indicators. International experience and good practices developed by international organizations and national statistical offices served as the starting point to the actions taken in Poland. Taking into consideration the European Union (EU) Sustainable Development Strategy, a review of possible indicators associated with sustainable development was carried out, including the indicators developed by the United Nations, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the European Environment Agency (EEA). The system of sustainable development indicators of the Czech Republic also provided inspiration. A national framework of monitoring sustainable development was established based on this analysis. The framework was later on further specified taking into account the specific conditions in Poland.
7. As a result, a set of 76 indicators was defined for the purpose of monitoring the progress in the various areas of sustainable development in Poland. The identified indicators were grouped into four dimensions reflecting different aspects of sustainable development:
  - (a) The social dimension, encompassing strategic goals, actions and undertakings aiming at the improvement of the quality of societal life;

(b) The economic dimension defining strategic goals and actions generating effective socio-economic development;

(c) The environmental dimension, formulating the determinants and strategic goals for the protection and management of natural environment, aimed at preserving sustainable ecological development;

(d) The institutional and political dimension, relating to global partnership and good governance.

8. The reason for including the distinction between institutional and political dimension was to emphasise the significance of the institutional framework for sustainable development. The institutional framework was also regarded as a substantial element in the national programme documents. The activities of institutions, along with the possibility and willingness of society to participate in the process (the development of civil society), is important for progress towards sustainable development. Thereby, an integrated approach to social, economic, environmental and institutional issues was selected.

9. Within the dimensions, indicators are grouped according to thematic areas. These thematic areas reflect the goals and priorities of sustainable development, identify the areas for monitoring, and systematise the comprehensive set of indicators.

10. The set of sustainable development indicators for Poland was defined with the aim that the work would be carried out continuously. The proposed set of indicators is continuously revised and improved. In the near future, as response to the Rio+20 Declaration, the indicator set will be revised to include the gender equality principle. An important issue for further work is to introduce also measures of the State's financial sustainability into the economic dimension. This is an aspect that has a notable influence to the functioning of society in addition to the indicators related to poverty, such as population groups suffering from exclusion or a difficult financial situation. Moreover, the possibility of a more comprehensive use of subjective measures in the social dimension is worth considering.

### **III. Sustainable development indicators at the regional and local level**

11. Due to the need to monitor the impact on sustainable development of the various actions taken at several governance levels, the feasibility of compiling indicators at the regional and local levels was considered. The actions taken at this level are focused on the needs of regions, and they reflect the specificity and priorities of local communities.

12. The work included reviewing possible data sources (including administrative data) and the feasibility of compiling indicators for regional and local authorities. The indicators selected by Eurostat for the purposes of monitoring the EU Sustainable Development Strategy provided a useful reference for the work.

13. The outcome of the work is a set of indicators for analysing sustainable development at the regional level (NUTS 2). These indicators are disseminated through a public database – the Local Data Bank. The indicators of the reference set are divided into 10 subjects, which are further divided into sub-topics (corresponding to the structure of Eurostat indicators; while excluding the topic "Global partnership" which cannot be directly applied at the regional level). The set includes over 100 indicators, each with a methodological comment (and a reference to the corresponding aspect of sustainable development).

14. At the next stage of work, a set of indicators for monitoring sustainable development at the local level will be published. The set of indicators is created using partially a top-down approach, and in some cases also the participation-based and the bottom-up approach.

15. The challenges of defining a set of indicators at the local level are as follows:

(a) Creating a list of indicators which would take into account local determinants of sustainable development;

(b) Educating local communities to systematically adjust the set of indicators so as to create local sustainable development goals (selecting/supplementing the set with measures optimally reflecting the region's character);

(c) Strengthening the role of official statistics at the regional level as an important partner in the process of monitoring sustainable development (including the participation of employees of regional centres in selecting indicators for the monitoring of sustainable development strategies of regions and local areas).

16. To take into consideration both international (including the conclusions of the Rio+20 Conference) and local needs when defining the scope of sustainable development, the Polish statistical office is planning to undertake the following development actions:

(a) Dissemination of the results of thematic surveys, among others in the area of the labour market, at the lowest levels of spatial aggregation for improving adjustment of development governance to the local potential (Rio+20 priority area: Labour);

(b) Development of regional surveys for the purposes of spatial analysis that make use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS), and strengthening of the spatial aspect in surveys concerning the sustainable development paradigm in cities (Rio+20 priority area: Urban areas);

(c) Informing planning, spatial development and territorial monitoring of risks of potential catastrophes in order to prevent natural disasters and mitigate their effects (Rio+20 priority area: Natural disasters).

17. The plausibility of monitoring sustainable development within regions requires broad discussions among the representatives of official statistics, the scientific community and local authorities. Measuring socio-economic development at the local level is difficult because each area functions and develops as an integral part of a larger area. Many development factors do not balance out at the local level, and the scope of impact of many environmental factors goes beyond borders of administrative regions.

#### **IV. Green economy as a means of achieving sustainable development**

18. The adoption of the Green Growth Strategy by the OECD and the recognition of green economy as an important tool for achieving sustainable development at the Rio+20 Conference require development of statistical data aimed at measuring connections between the socio-economic and environmental dimensions. To this end, a report including a set of indicators describing the condition of green economy in Poland is being prepared. The report aims at monitoring the progress in the transformation towards a more sustainable economic development path. The first challenge in developing these statistical measures is connected to definitions. The concept of green economy has to be defined considering the current socio-economic conditions of the country. Moreover, other key concepts need to be defined, e.g. green jobs, the sectors belonging to green economy etc. No official definitions of these new concepts exist in Poland. For the report, statisticians need to select indicators

for measuring green economy and identify data sources to be used in their compilation. It will be necessary to analyse the possibilities of obtaining data and assess the quality. Working on the report will also enable identification of areas for improvement of statistical data required for the evaluation and monitoring of green economy. An analysis will be carried out to find a sustainable combination of developing new surveys and improving the use of information. The Polish set of indicators will be based on the indicators developed by the OECD for the monitoring of the Green Growth Strategy including country-specific determinants.

19. Green economy is interdisciplinary in that it comprises many thematic areas related to various socio-economic issues. . Analysis of progress towards green economy, therefore, will require closer cooperation among specialists from many institutions, especially among statisticians and the scientific community. Cooperation with researchers and institutions supporting statistics in areas requiring expert knowledge will be reinforced, where the quality of data and statistics is insufficient.

20. As the Green Growth Strategy is based on interconnected elements of economic policy and environmental protection, the recently developed system of environmental-economic accounting (SEEA) is of substantial importance to monitoring green economy. Poland is currently fulfilling its international obligations in this field and developing new modules of environmental accounts. Developing environmental accounts is a great challenge and one of the priority areas for the Polish official statistics. As these accounts provide data on the interactions between the economy and environment, they will enable construction of some of the indicators needed for monitoring the progress towards green economy in Poland. Acknowledging the need for effective management of natural resources and reduction of environmental pressures, it is important to develop physical and monetary accounts of natural capital and ecosystem services. This is consistent with the outcome of the Rio+20 Conference which called for measuring well-being and sustainability in addition to the traditional measures, such as gross domestic product (GDP). Taking into account the growing importance of natural capital accounts and the fact that so far no agreed methodology has been developed for the valuation of natural resources, it is recommended to intensify actions taken at the international level with SEEA and for the purpose of developing such accounts.

## **V. Promoting sustainable development**

21. Planning and strategic management process, taking into account sustainable development principles, requires coordinated actions of all participants. Reliable information on the outcomes of the measures taken and on the progress achieved towards the agreed goals is of key importance to the effectiveness of the whole process.

22. An important element of the monitoring process is to educate the public and provide access to information on sustainable development. To contribute to the implementation of international goals (including Rio+20), the Central Statistical Office (CSO) of Poland promotes social awareness and sustainable development.

23. The CSO's website includes a tab on sustainable development indicators, with the aim of familiarising the users with the concept of sustainable development and presenting the principles of its monitoring. The mentioned tab also features the publication Sustainable Development Indicators for Poland presenting a set of domestic indicators with a methodological description and analysis of the situation in particular areas.

24. Sustainable development indicators at the regional level are made available in the public database as a separate module dedicated to regional and local information. Apart from data series presenting the observed trends, the users will find methodological

information on particular indicators, including their relevance for analysis of sustainable development.

25. Currently, the CSO is working on establishing a public database of key indicators for monitoring and analysing development trends, including sustainable development. Thereby, the users will be able to access visual presentation and analysis tools which will support the monitoring process.

## **VI. Conclusions**

26. Recognising the necessity of intensifying the monitoring of sustainable development, the Polish official statistics are developing and implementing a set of indicators for regular follow-up of sustainable development at the national, regional and local level. The indicator development will be carried out in line with the Rio+20 outcomes in order to facilitate informed political decision making.

27. Discussions at the international level are needed as regards the approach to the monitoring of sustainable development at various territorial levels.

28. The adopted Rio+20 Declaration will oblige countries to take measures towards green economy and form a basis for further statistical development to properly measure green economy. It will be necessary to continue work aimed at measuring the value of ecosystems and the costs of their degradation. Further work for the implementation of the system of environmental-economic accounting should be intensified.

29. Education of the users of statistics and promotion of sustainable development should be continued, with particular attention to disseminating useful statistical information in an approachable and attractive form.

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