

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Third Meeting of the 2012/2013 Bureau
Luxembourg, 5-6 February 2013

For decision

Item 3 (c) of the Provisional
Agenda

**SUMMARY OF THE CONSULTATION ON THE REPORT ON MEASURING
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Prepared by the secretariat

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This note summarizes the comments on the draft *Report of the Joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Task Force on Measuring Sustainable Development (TFSD)*, resulting from the electronic consultation conducted by the secretariat in December 2012-January 2013.

2. The CES Bureau reviewed the draft Report at its 5-6 November 2012 meeting. The Bureau supported the Report and the conceptual framework for measuring sustainable development. The Report was considered a major step forward and a timely contribution to the discussion on Sustainable Development Goals and related targets and indicators in follow up to the Rio+20 Summit. The Bureau asked the secretariat to circulate the Report for a wide consultation to all CES members. Subject to positive outcome of the consultation, the Report is planned to be submitted to the CES 2013 plenary session for endorsement.

3. The report was sent out for electronic consultation on 10 December 2012 with a deadline for replies on 25 January 2013. Countries were asked to comment in particular on the following aspects:

- (a) the structure of the Report,
- (b) the proposed conceptual framework,
- (c) the proposed sets of potential indicators defined based on existing indicators and data availability,
- (d) proposals for future work.

4. A total of thirty four replies from were received. The following countries and organizations replied: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Moldova, Montenegro, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovak Republic, Sweden, Switzerland, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, and Eurostat and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Ms. Barbara Fraumeni, an independent expert and a member of the Task Force also provided comments. Chile and Montenegro replied that they have no comments on the Report. Australia informed that they will reply later.

II. GENERAL COMMENTS

5. All responding countries and organizations support the Report. Many countries highlight the Report as an important achievement and provide positive comments on its structure and clarity.

6. Denmark “congratulates the Task Force with a very impressive outcome of a very difficult task”, Mexico “endorses the conceptual framework presented for measuring sustainable development and considers that the structure of the paper is clear and logical”, Iceland finds that “the draft report is based on solid background materials and reaches an acceptable compromise for sustainable development indicators”, Germany considers the Report “very valuable and a significant step forward regards clarification of the difficult and complex theme of measuring sustainable development”, Portugal says that “the report is very complete and informative”, Eurostat describes the Report as “a nice and very informative piece of work” and the IMF considers the Report “explains and structures well the conceptual framework for sustainable development, integrating the relevant statistical standards, including the System of National Accounts”.

7. A number of detailed comments on the text were also provided. These concern editorial suggestions for making the text more precise, streamlining the Annexes, corrections to references to specific countries and literature, etc. All technical comments will be forwarded to the Chair and the Editor of the Task Force to be taken into account when updating the Report.

8. Finally, some countries informed about their work in the area of sustainable development and about the availability of data on indicators listed in the Report (Armenia, Mexico, Russian Federation, etc.). This additional information will be also provided to the Chair and the Editor of the Task Force.

III. COMMENTS ON THE STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

9. Most of the countries consider the structure of the Report good. Bulgaria states that the Report is “a well-structured and balanced material that successfully provides a synthesis of current knowledge and presents different measurement concepts”. Similarly, Hungary states that the Report is “well-structured, clear and logical”. New Zealand describes it also as “well structured, the language clear and concise”.

10. Special appreciation is expressed by some countries on specific parts of the Report, e.g. Mexico considers of great relevance section 9.2 on communication and visualization.

11. A number of comments suggest additional references or correct references. There are also proposals to move the abbreviations and the glossary to the end of the Report, and to combine the Annexes dealing with the selection and availability of indicators. It is noted that some sections of the Report are more detailed than others.

IV. COMMENTS ON THE PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

12. Overall, the presented framework and set of indicators is considered a good starting point for harmonisation. Countries support the basic framework with the definitions of the

three dimensions: ‘here and now’, ‘later’ and ‘elsewhere’. It is noted that themes and dimensions should be used together to guide the users. In particular, the inclusion of the intra-generational aspect of sustainable development into the framework is welcome.

13. Several countries emphasise the importance of the proposed flexible framework. The link between the conceptual and thematic categorisations is believed to make the Report relevant for both statisticians and policy makers. The international dimension is considered crucial and further work in this area is encouraged.

14. Countries appreciate that the framework can easily incorporate indicators on the key “policy drivers” for each theme. Several countries consider the indicators on “policy drivers” to be useful tools for policymakers as they can provide detailed information on how to reverse negative trends or sustain positive ones.

V. COMMENTS ON THE PROPOSED SETS OF POTENTIAL INDICATORS DEFINED BASED ON EXISTING INDICATORS AND DATA AVAILABILITY

15. The countries in general assess the selection of indicators as adequate and a good basis for harmonising the measurement of sustainable development. Some respondents note that not all indicators can be produced by the countries. It is found useful to present indicator sets based on indicators that are already produced and disseminated in international databases. On the other hand, it is pointed out that the lists of indicators can provide an impetus for further work to reduce data gaps.

16. Sweden emphasizes that the work on choosing indicators and providing a framework is important and adds that analysing the indicators one by one to investigate how they impact on one another is also vital. Finland considers that “the proposed small set of indicators is feasible on global scale”.

17. Brazil suggests a brief description of the proposed indicators, because some of them are not common and countries may not be used with some of the concepts such as bird index, land assets, competencies and educational attainment.

18. Some countries propose to remove or include certain indicators based on different reasoning. Denmark, for example, remarks that certain indicators are complex (e.g. gender pay gap) with either no internationally agreed definition or difficult to explain to the public both in terms of level or trend.

VI. PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE WORK

19. Most of the countries agree with the directions for future developments proposed in the Report. Some countries, in particular Iceland and Mexico express willingness to participate in further work on specific topics in the future. Italy proposes to test outputs deriving from the framework with a subset of voluntary countries.

20. Portugal stresses the importance of the measurement issues, in particular the focus should be on (1) assuring international comparison...which may depend on the integration of already existing specific surveys; (2) linking subjective and objective indicators...; and (3) measuring sustainable development at the regional level.

21. Finland notes that it is important to promote the harmonisation of international indicator sets in line with the proposed sets and to give a priority to the use of the small set. On measuring border-crossing effects, Finland recommends the use of input-output based methods.
22. Sweden proposes a new area for future work: sustainability accounting.
23. New Zealand considered important the cultural aspect in the chapter on social capital and saw this as an opportunity to take a lead in the future development of this area.
24. Israel suggests that it would be helpful if the Report recommends specific practical steps for moving forward, such as surveys needed (time use) or administrative data that can be collected.

VII. NEXT STEPS AND DECISIONS

25. Following the electronic consultation:
 - a) The Report will be updated to take into account comments by countries and organizations. The updated Report will be presented for endorsement to the CES plenary session in 2013.
 - b) The summary of the electronic consultation will be updated to reflect comments that are still to be received, and will be presented to the CES 2013 plenary session for information.
26. **The CES Bureau decided to submit the Report to the CES 2013 plenary session for endorsement.**

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