SEIS ENPI-East project activity 'Feasibility study to help develop regular/sustained data flow for a first set of eight environmental indicators selected from the UNECE core set'

Note by ZOI Environmental Network

Background

The aim of the activity is to identify feasible schemes based on SEIS principles and taking into account national circumstances for sustained data flow for a first set of eight environmental indicators selected from the UNECE core set (see Annex).

In other words, *sustained data flow* means that the data produced at the national level is made available on a regular basis for global, pan-European, ENPI-East regional and other reporting obligations and thematic assessments according to the SEIS principles including the regular assessment process requested by environment ministers in their meeting in Astana in 2011.

Sustained data flow in this regards means that the data should be made available through stable media taking advantage of existing information and communication technologies to allow access to the agreed set of data by different users at any time.

For example, this can be organised by

a) publishing the agreed set of data on national websites regularly (annually, biannually etc.) in a unified/agreed format to allow its harvesting by national and international users;

or

b) by submitting data regularly in a unified/agreed format to an international organisation or convention secretariat(example EEA or UNECE).

The feasibility study is built on the results of the reviews carried by the UNECE Joint Task Force on environmental indicators of the availability and quality of data provided by countries for 36 environmental indictors presented in the UNECE Guidelines on environmental indicators as well as experience gained in the preparation of the pan-European assessment of assessments for the Environment for Europe ministerial conference held in Astana in 2011.

Current situation

From the 2010-2012 UNECE JTF 'snap-shot' reviews of indicators included in the UNECE Guidelines for application of environmental indicators in EECCA countries it has become clear that fully comparable data sets are regularly produced at the national level in EECCA and South-east Europe for at least 8 of the indicators (see Annex and a separate paper from the UNECE Secretariat).

Some these data sets are used to produce national indicators for national assessments, state of environment reports, statistical yearbooks, EPRs and are published on the internet via websites of the national ministries of environment or national statistical offices.

It is however, difficult to use these data at the ENPI-East regional or pan-European level as the published information tends to be fragmented for a number of reasons:
- different countries publish data at different aggregation levels and normalisation levels (for example data is presented as % change from previous year, per capita, per GDP etc.; with 1, 2, 4, or 5 year gaps between reported data; with different aggregations of economic activities or economic sectors, etc.),
- the data is published on websites which are not always known or readily accessible by the international users, it is not easy to find the SOERs on the websites of some ministries, it is not easy to find the data sets in the online databases as data exists only in the national language and/or the database is not searchable etc.
- the data is published in different formats (word, pdf, html, excel) which is very time intensive or difficult to harvest to use for comparisons or assessments at the regional level,
- usually when data is published there is no information about the quality of the data, update periods, original sources (in the SOERs sources of data are usually not stated), responsible organisations and contact details,
- websites in many counties are not maintained up-to-date and/or links to reports and datasets are not maintained.

How

The feasibility study will build on the results of the JTF on environmental indicators investigating further how data availability problems could be addressed at the national level focusing on a first set of eight indicators selected from the 36 indicator core set on the basis of the proposal from the UNECE JTF secretariat and endorsed by the JTF at its meeting in July 2012.

The specific activity will be carried out by Zoi Environmental Network together with the EEA through the SEIS ENPI project 'Towards a Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) in continuation of the UNECE JTF work.

It will work closely with JTF members, National Focal Points of the ENPI-SEIS project (most of whom are JTF members) and members of the ENPI-SEIS IT working group. The project will focus on identification of feasible data flow schemes for individual data sets underpinning the selected indicators by:
- analysing in each ENPI-SEIS country the existing data production processes, data policy rules, practices of reporting to the international organisations, and technical capacities,
- taking into account existing good international and national practices for making data available for international legally binding and voluntary reporting according to the SEIS principles (a number of examples of good practice are described in the SEIS COOKBOOK which is due to be published and made available to JTF members).

Analysis of the existing national data production processes and possible problems with making data available according to SEIS principles is proposed to be done based on the metadata questionnaire developed by the EEA and introduced to the SEIS-ENPI countries during the SEIS ENPI-East IT working group (18-19 April, 2012).

The metadata questionnaire provides specific questions regarding the sources where data is made available, their formats, rules of data access, reasons for collection of specific data sets, existing data flow for reporting to international organisations, organisations involved in data verification, data aggregation, data owners and other data policy issues. Responses to the questionnaire help to understand the data production processes for each data set required for the development of the selected indicators, analyse the common problems, identify ways to address them, propose feasible approaches for regular data flow. Responses also provide the metadata that will be needed by users to discover the data/indicators, be clear on what information they provide and decide if they are fit for their purpose.

Timing

The metadata survey will be presented as part of the Agenda item 6 of the JTF meeting (on 6 July 2012). It will be distributed immediately after the meeting for completion by national representatives with the deadline of the first week of September (by 7 September).

The metadata survey template and several filled examples will be provided to the members of the JTF one week prior to the meeting of the JTF in July 2012. The detailed instruction about completion of the questionnaire will be given to the countries during the JTF. A help desk will be organised to support the countries in conducting this work.

The results of the analysis of the metadata questionnaires and identified feasible dataflow schemes will be discussed at the one of the regional meetings of ENPI-SEIS NFPs/and or IT specialists prior to the next JTF on environmental indicators in November 2012 (possibly in Skopje back-to-back with the next meeting of the IT working group).

Annex

Indicators from the UNECE core set of indicators selected by the UNECE Secretariat for the sustained data flow

Based on the Note of the UNECE Secretariat

Indicator 1: **Emissions of pollutants into the atmospheric air**

Indicator 2: **Ambient air quality in urban areas**

Indicator 3: **Consumption of ozone-depleting substances**

Indicator 6: **Greenhouse gas emissions**

Indicator 13: **BOD as concentration of ammonium in rivers**

Indicator 14: **Nutrients in freshwater**

Indicator 17: **Protected areas**

Indicator 33: **Waste generation**