Shared Environmental Information System and Green Growth

Regional Workshop for the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia

10-11 March 2015, OECD Headquarters, Paris, France

Summary of Discussion

Supported by:

Background

1. Organizing a vast array of environmental, social and economic data for their effective and efficient management and use in promoting green economy is a challenging undertaking. Even more challenging is to make the data and information available for policy analysis so that they can create the solid basis for easily comprehensible, accessible and targeted recommendations to decision makers and the public or for reporting at the country level or internationally in accordance with legal obligations, policy commitments and mandates.

2. Recognizing the challenge, the international community facilitated the discussion and sharing of experience between countries on the management and use of data, in particular those related to the environment. This process led to a decision to develop a Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) in the European region, which would help linking the existing data and information flows, enabling informed decision making in the environmental field, integrating them with the economic policy-making, and informing the public about progress with policy implementation. This work has been supported by the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) through the EU funded project "Towards a Shared Environmental Information System in the European Neighbourhood" (ENPI-SEIS).

3. Many countries, including those in the region of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA), take also steps to advance green growth or the transition to green economy, i.e. to foster economic growth and development while ensuring that natural assets continue to provide the resources and environmental services on which society's well-being relies. While there are no commonly agreed green growth/economy indicators in the pan-European region, a number of countries use as a basis green growth indicators developed by the OECD that support the implementation of its Green Growth Strategy. The OECD also facilitates the exchange of experience and good practice on developing and applying green growth measurement framework in the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, which includes activities under the "Greening Economies in the Eastern Neighbourhood" (EaP GREEN) project funded by the European Union.

Session 1: Workshop objectives and participation

4. The regional workshop for the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia on Shared Environmental Information System and Green Growth, organized on 10-11 March 2015 at the OECD Headquarters in Paris, France, had the following objectives:

- enhance the understanding of green growth or green economy concepts and related measurement frameworks in countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia;
- bring together the national SEIS and green growth/economy networks;
- explore how the SEIS data flows (those underpinning the UNECE environmental indicators) can be used in applying green growth indicators in the region;
- identify how components of green growth measurement that are not covered through UNECE environmental indicators could be addressed in the future under EaP GREEN and ENPI-SEIS projects; and
- advise if SEIS should include additional components of green growth measurement.

5. The meeting was attended by about 60 participants, including officials from the Ministries of Environment and Ministries of Economy as well as from Statistical Agencies active in developing environmental and green growth measurement in countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia and South-East Europe. The meeting was also attended by invited experts from the OECD countries.

6. The workshop was organized jointly by the OECD and the UNECE with the EEA and UNEP acting as cooperating partners. The workshop was implemented as part of the EaP GREEN project financed by the European Union and supported by the governments of the Netherlands and Norway.

Session 2: Concepts of green growth/economy and Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS)

7. The introductory presentations reiterated the importance attached to the promotion of green growth/greening economy concepts at the national and international level. The examples from the OECD work highlighted the key role of the OECD Green Growth Strategy which, since its adoption in 2011, stimulated multi-disciplinary inter-governmental processes at the country level that aimed at catalysing investment and innovation to underpin sustained growth and to give rise to new economic opportunities.

8. The presentations also highlighted the importance of an initiative to develop a Strategic Framework for Greening the Economy at the pan-European level. The Framework, which is expected to be presented at the "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference in June 2016 in Georgia, aims to promote bottom-up approaches to reduce environmental risks and economical scarcities, promote economic prosperity and welfare and improve human well-being and social equity.

9. The speakers underlined that the implementation of such initiatives requires tools to measure progress towards green growth/economy objectives in order to show potential opportunities and risks of green growth and of related trade-offs or synergies. For example, the OECD green growth measurement framework organizes the indicators along four areas:

- *Environmental and resource productivity*, to understand whether production processes are more efficient in terms of resource use and preventing negative impact on the environment.

- *Economic and environmental assets*, to understand whether the asset base is maintained or depleted and at which pace.

- *Environmental quality of life*, to capture how environmental conditions and amenities impact people's well-being.

- *Economic opportunities and policy responses*, to help discern the effectiveness of policies in delivering green growth.

10. In many countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia emphasis has so far been placed on developing and strengthening environmental information systems that support environmental policy-making. This included producing and sharing sets of environmental indicators.[1]

[1] See: Progress in the production and sharing of core environmental indicators in countries of South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia - Updated analysis as of March 2015, UNECE Working paper, March 2015.

The Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) has supported these efforts with the view to enhance the availability of integrated, relevant, high quality, timely and easily accessible national environmental information systems, which could provide the means for assessing the environmental status and the foundation for meaningful and informed environmental governance at the individual country and the international level.

11. The UNECE Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (WGEMA) was mandated, in cooperation with the EEA, to review the progress in establishing SEIS based on the SEIS targets and performance indicators. The UNECE Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators has been providing a forum for the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia to discuss environmental statistics, environmental indicators as well as their production and sharing. Following the decision of the Joint Task Force, the countries were striving in the beginning of 2015 to produce 14 indicators and their underpinning 44 data sets.

12. In the subsequent discussion the participants agreed that the elaboration of green growth/economy measurement should be closely co-ordinated with the development of the SEIS. Such co-ordination should bring multiple benefits to the pan-European region, such as efficiency gain and cost savings, effective and meaningful governance, simplification, innovation and a better informed public.

Session 3: Country experience with environmental and green growth indicators

13. The presentations of country experience on the development of environmental and green growth indicators in Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and the Russian Federation showed an important progress that has been made in creating the measurement framework of green economy. Many of the green growth indicators have been built on the basis of environmental indicators using a wide variety of approaches to their design, application and data flows necessary to calculate them. In many cases, their development has been associated with the elaboration of strategic documents on green growth/green economy or resource productivity.

14. However, many countries indicated problems with the methodological interpretation of some of the indicators, especially those related to economic opportunities and the resource productivity. Several participants reiterated the difficulties in co-ordinating the development of the measurement framework between various agencies, challenges related to their robustness and reliability, the confidentiality of data and lack of resources for creating appropriate data flows for a number of indicators. Countries called for a more detailed methodological support and capacity building activities to advance the development of green economy measurement. Building on lessons learned from the experience of Central European countries was identified as an effective way to overcome some implementation challenges.

Session 4: SEIS and green growth-related data flows

15. This session focused on discussing data flows that are produced and shared within SEIS and on how these can be used for measuring green growth/economy. A background paper “Mapping of the UNECE environmental and OECD green growth indicators and their dataflows” identified matches and differences between distinct indicator sets by comparing their dataflows, metadata as well as the units of measurement.[2]

[2] See: The Shared Environmental Information System and green growth - Mapping of UNECE environmental and OECD green growth indicators and their dataflows, Working paper, Revised version April 2015.

16. During this session a detailed comparison of dataflows, units of measurement and metadata was discussed by the participants. The discussion showed that 11 of 24 OECD green growth indicators can be paired with environmental indicators developed under the UNECE/SEIS:

- Freshwater resources
- Population connected to sewage treatment
- Wildlife resources
- Land uptake and land change
- Soil erosion
- Energy productivity
- Share of renewable energy sources in TPES
- Waste generation

17. Moreover, the comparison showed that in many fields, policy questions for which the indicators were designed are similar for UNECE and OECD. This is true for the fields of air pollution, water, and energy. Units of measurement for the two sets are usually the same or easy to convert in case dataflows are compatible.

18. Of the 13 green growth indicators that cannot be produced with dataflows from environmental indicators, the majority (8 indicators) belong to the area of *Economic opportunities and policy responses*, which focuses on economic measures, which go beyond considerations of the environmental indicators.

Session 5: The ways forward

19. The participants welcomed the joint efforts by UNECE, OECD, UNEP and EEA in preparing and conducting the workshop.

20. Both the SEIS and the OECD green growth indicators were conceived to provide solid knowledge bases to underpin the development of sustainable green growth policies. The participants agreed the synergies should be ensured in producing and sharing meaningful information related to the state of the environment and green growth, i.e. information should be collected once, and when relevant, used for the purpose of environmental and green growth assessments.

21. The participants expressed the need to focus on policy issues that stretch across the economic, environmental and social pillars of green economy. Hence there is a great interest to use indicators, and their underpinning data flows, that help answer policy questions related to (1) carbon, material and resource productivity; (2) risks that may undermine economic development caused by resource depletion; (3) human well-being; and (4) most suitable economic growth paths.

22. The countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia appreciated the advice on how data flows underpinning the UNECE environmental indicators can be used to calculate the majority of the green growth indicators under the areas of *the environmental and resource productivity of the economy*, *the natural asset base*, and *the environmental dimension of quality of life.*

23. The countries welcomed the SEIS as an approach for the production and sharing of environmental data and information. They are interested to expand the approach that encompasses interlinks with economic and social data. For that, countries expressed the commitment to expand their SEIS national networks to include also the Ministries of Economy in addition to the Ministries of Environment, their specialized agencies and statistical agencies. Furthermore, they suggested establishing a platform at international level for discussing the production and sharing of the environmental data flows and their links with environmental and social data flows. The UNECE Joint Task Force, if its mandate was expanded to cover interlinks with the economic and social data flows could serve as such a platform.

24. At the same time, the countries requested that assistance is provided to analyse and interpret the green growth indicators along the support provided for environmental indicators.

Recommendations

25. The participants formulated a number of recommendations based on the discussion and in particular the conclusions of the workshop.

Countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia

26. The SEIS and green economy measurement networks in countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia should be expanded to include Ministries of Economy as well as other relevant ministries so that by applying the SEIS approach, environmental, economic and social data can be shared for relevant policy analysis in particular covering the interlinks between environmental and economic policy development and human well-being.

27. More co-ordination and complementarity should be sought between the ENPI-SEIS and EaP GREEN projects by applying the same data visualization techniques and by using e-services.

28. The countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, should start producing green growth indicators using the comparison of respective data flows.

International organizations

29. The international organizations should strive to identify a suitable platform that can help the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia and other interested countries to work jointly on data and information related to the environment, green growth/economy, and sustainable development.

30. The international organizations should open the platform to attendance of Ministries of the Environment, Statistical Agencies and Ministries of Economy.

31. The international organizations should explore ways to achieve more efficiency and complementarity between the ENPI-SEIS and EaP GREEN projects in the following fields:

- Assistance in data production: capacity building in data production under the EaP GREEN project should focus on data sets not addressed under the ENPI-SEIS project. For the common data sets common sessions should be organized.
- Use of indicators in assessments: joint sessions on how to use the indicators in assessments to prepare informative, concise and user-friendly reports.

32. The international organizations should help the countries in pilot projects to produce green growth indicators with the data flows of environmental indicators. Such pilot projects should also focus on sharing of the indicators online accompanied by relevant indicator interpretation and information on methodologies.