INTRODUCTION

Nothing helps to focus the mind more than numbers. Good decision-makers, advocates and activists, therefore, consistently search for numbers. Unfortunately, a good database on environmental statistics has been missing for a long time. Unlike many other developing countries, India's environmental research base is relatively stronger, so we have some information. Though one must hasten to add, it is only relatively stronger; in reality its quality is far below the scale of the environmental challenge we face. But even the limited information we have is scattered. As a result, it is difficult to access statistical information when we need it.

To try and deal with this problem, we have tried to put together some statistics under one cover, and we hope to bring out such a publication every year so that, over the years, we have a ready reference on environmental statistics, which is as comprehensive as possible. But such an exercise will become easier to do if our readers are prepared to turn this into a ***participatory exercise****.*

As a reader you can help us in several ways:

- Please send us ideas on what statistics we should include in the future. Even better, if you come across any interesting statistics, please send them to us together with a photocopy of the full reference, especially if it is a paper.
- If you doubt the veracity of any data that has been published in this volume – after all, there is a common saying that there are lies, white lies and statistics – please don't hesitate to write to us. We will include all valid comments in footnotes in future publications, and also in any newsletter we produce for the readers of this publication. This knowledge will greatly help all our readers to appreciate the true value of these numbers.
- Similarly, if you come across any discrepancies between the different data sets we have published, please do not hesitate to draw our attention to this fact.
- If you come across any errors, again please let us know immediately so that we can prepare an errata and mail it to our readers.
- Finally, if you can help us to collect data that we need or prepare data sets of your interest, please do let us know. We would love to work with you.

The more we empower ourselves with numbers, the better will be our work. But we must not forget that often we will run into problems. We will, therefore, consistently bring to your attention those recalcitrants in government or private agencies, who refuse to share information with us. Top on the roll of honour for this year is the **director of the National Malaria Eradication Programme**, who refused to give us any data on pesticide use under the programme. Pesticides used for public health are sprayed right near our homes, and it is everybody's right to know which pesticides are being used, in what quantities and where. But don't expect recalcitrant officials to be very helpful. We have, therefore, provided you with an alternate source for pesticide use in public health, and will continue to do so in other cases, too.

It was amazing to find that the **India Meteorological Department** could not even readily provide data for normal and actual rainfall of its various meteorological sub-divisions. All that can be said is that the government's data collection and dissemination exercises are in deep disarray.

Please do not forget to let us know that you have become a buyer of this publication so that we can constantly keep you informed. As we said, let us make this a participatory exercise so that we can really build up a good database and also knowledge of its weaknesses and strengths.

Finally, we must give our sincere thanks to all those who have helped us to collect data sets included in this publication, and several government officials who have gone further to help us understand them.

Anil Agarwal
Sunita Narain
Srabani Sen