

**16th Meeting of the London Group on
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Options for the structure of Volume 3 of the revised SEEA

UNCEEA sub-group on SEEA Volume 3

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Paper presented to the 16th London Group meeting

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Paper based on discussion within UNCEEA sub-group on SEEA Volume 3

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A. Background

1. Over the past few years the London Group has discussed at its meetings the possible content and structure of a Volume 3 for the revised SEEA. In general terms the volume has been conceived as a way in which the use of the SEEA might be made clear to analysts and policy makers but the precise means by which this would be done has not reached a conclusion.
2. At the meeting of the UNCEEA in June 2010 a long discussion on SEEA Volume 3 took place and again there was no clear conclusion on exactly what such a volume might look like. Thus the meeting agreed that a UNCEEA sub-group be formed to take forward five issues. These five issues are described in section B.
3. A group of 7 UNCEEA members and the Editor of the revised SEEA (the “sub-group”) was formed with the task reporting back to the Bureau of UNCEEA in early 2011 and to UNCEEA in June 2011 for the purpose of making a final decision on the approach that will be taken. As part of this process it was also agreed that the London Group should be consulted and hence this paper to the 16th London Group meeting has been prepared.
4. It is fair to say that there remains considerable scope to consider what SEEA Volume 3 might look like – its purpose, content and structure. This paper is based on the early reflections of the sub-group via email in the past 2 months. The feedback and comments of London Group members at this time will be very useful in helping to frame the conclusions and recommendations of the sub-group.
5. After presenting the five areas of focus provided to the sub-group by UNCEEA the paper is organised to consider the most useful purpose of volume 3, the issue of the status of volume 3 in relation to the other parts of SEEA, and finally a discussion on possible structure.
6. There are four questions for discussion on this issue:
 1. What are the views on the possible purpose of and need for a Volume 3?
 2. Do London Group members agree that Volume 3 should not be an international statistical standard?
 3. What structure is most appropriate for Volume 3?
 4. What other issues might be considered in determining the final content and structure of Volume 3?

B. Areas of focus for the UNCEEA sub-group

7. The UNCEEA sub-group was asked to consider five areas that are documented in the minutes of the UNCEEA meeting of June 2010.
 - a. The focus of Volume 3 – i.e. applications, policy neutrality, etc
 - b. The structure and content of Volume 3 (including the links to the proposed “glossy” publications)
 - c. Timing with target dates for content by February 2012 and February 2013
 - d. The status of Volume 3 in relation to SEEA as an international standard
 - e. The process for endorsement of Volume 3
8. Areas (c) and (e) are issues of planning and clearance process and so they are left aside for the moment as they will depend on the decisions made with regard to the other areas. They are not discussed further in this paper.
9. The early discussion within the sub-group has indicated that the issue of the link to the glossy publications that have been discussed at various times within the London Group is, in the first instance, actually more closely related to the discussion of the purpose of Volume 3 and hence they are discussed in that context in this paper.

C. The Focus of Volume 3

10. The discussion in the sub-group indicates that there seems to be a “market” for two types of product to provide examples of the application and potential use of the SEEA. One product would be aimed at raising awareness of the SEEA and might be of most interest to senior executives (especially in government). The mediums that might be used to meet this purpose could be (i) the developing SEEA “glossies” that give examples of applications of the SEEA and (ii) the development of web pages that might be regularly updated with country examples – effectively glossies on-line.

11. A second product would be aimed at both compilers of statistics and researchers, policy analysts, et al. – people seeking to effectively prepare and use data to answer economically related environmental questions. Such a product would need to be quite technically focused. Overall, the preliminary view of the sub-group is that a SEEA Volume 3 might be the best product to play this role.

12. In preparing either of these products we need to be mindful of the political environment into which we are releasing the information. If the glossies and the web pages provide examples that have been cleared through national processes and present data that is already released and is considered robust, then this may be sufficient to manage perceptions of bias. It will also be important not to be too selective in our choice of examples and hence appear to be favouring particular types of analysis or areas of research.

13. In relation to the second product (henceforth referred to as Volume 3 in this paper) the general preference of the sub-group is towards making the content technically based rather than country based, even if country examples are used. This technical focus would seem to help manage potential issues around policy neutrality.

14. Views of London Group members on the description of potential audiences and the nature and appropriateness of relevant products would be appreciated.

D. Status of Volume 3

15. Presuming that a product entitled Volume 3 is included within the broader structure of the revised SEEA, it is relevant to question the status of this volume relative to the other volumes in the SEEA.

16. The general understanding at present is that Volume 1 of the revised SEEA will become an international statistical standard and that Volume 2 of the revised SEEA will not become a standard as there is insufficient development of the theory and practice of measurement in the areas and topics to be included in Volume 2.

17. The starting view of the sub-group is that a SEEA Volume 3 should be a document focused on techniques, analysis and presentation and not a formal international statistical standard. The views of London Group members on this position would be welcome.

E. Possible structure of Volume 3

18. Over the past few years quite a number of possible models for the structuring of Volume 3 have been proposed. Using a combination of possible models proposed in the London Group paper of three years ago and some structures proposed by members of the sub-group the following list has been drawn together. There may well be other approaches that can be considered.

- Structure of the SEEA accounts/chapters
- Based on classification of natural resources
- Environmental policy issues and analytical areas

- The policy cycle
- FDES or data source related structure
- Techniques/applications based tool box
- Groupings of analyses/applications

19. No single structure seems to easily resolve the question of what structure should be used as all contain elements that seem sensible. The only sense that does seem to come out is that there is a need to present both techniques and applications and relate them to relevant analytical and policy areas.

20. At this stage the preliminary discussion in the sub-group has not reached any clear conclusion and thus four options are presented below. Reactions and comments are welcome.

Structure A: Listing of techniques and applications using examples that cover a range of analytical and policy areas.

Structure B: Structure including examples of applications using a data source type structure such as the SEEA framework itself or the FDES.

Structure C: Group by analytical or policy area.

Structure D: A combination of structures. For example having one section that discusses different analytical areas and relevant techniques and a second section that presents relevant examples of applications.

21. One consideration in making a choice between these alternative structures is to consider what a researcher themselves might find useful. Presuming that a researcher has a question in hand then Volume 3 may be of most use if:

- a. there was consideration of the issue/question that was being investigated
- b. there was a reasonably broad discussion on the data and types of techniques that might be considered in answering the question; and
- c. there was some detail on how to apply particular techniques that could possibly be replicated.

22. These three points might be considered criteria by which the relative merits of different structures can be considered.

References

The Organisation of Part III on applications of the SEEA: Issue paper for the London Group, Rocky Harris, UK Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Paper presented to the 12th London Group meeting, (LG/12/18), December 2007.

UNCEEA meeting, June 2010, Minutes