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**Towards a medium term programme of work
for the UNCEEA**

Paper prepared by UNSD

(for discussion)

Towards a medium term programme of work for the UNCEEA

(Time horizon 2013-2020)

A. Introduction

1. At its 43rd Session in February 2012, the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC) “adopted the SEEA Central Framework as the initial version of the international standard for environmental-economic accounting” and “requested the UN Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting (UNCEEA) to develop a strategy for the regional and global implementation of the SEEA Central Framework”¹. At its 44th session, in February 2013, the UNSC adopted the implementation strategy for the SEEA Central Framework, “welcomed the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting as an important first step in the development of a statistical framework for ecosystem accounting, and encouraged its use by international and regional agencies and countries wishing to test and experiment in this new area of statistics”².

2. From its establishment in 2005 the programme of work of the UNCEEA has focused to a large extent its work on addressing methodological issues and developing standards and methodological publications. Water was the only exception. With the adoption of the SEEA-Water as an interim standard and the endorsement of the International Recommendations for Water Statistics (IRWS), efforts have been placed in the implementation of the SEEA-Water. With the finalization of the SEEA, there is a need to shift the focus on implementation.

3. The discussions on the follow up of Rio+20 and the Post 2015 development agenda present an opportunity for scaling up the implementation of the SEEA in countries and directly link it to policy demands. Learning from past experiences, in particular the SNA implementation programme and the MDGs, it is clear that the implementation process has to take a bottom-up approach with countries taking ownership for the process. The statistical agenda and priorities should be policy relevant and remain policy relevant over time. As such the engagement of different stakeholders from the policy, scientific and academic community is important.

4. The objective of this paper is to initiate the discussion leading towards a medium term programme of work of the UNCEEA. It is organized following the 6 areas of work of the UNCEEA to fulfill its mandate and elaborates on possible activities to be undertaken in the respective areas of work. Section B of the paper recalls the mandate of the UNCEEA as agreed by the UN Statistical Commission at its forty first session.³ Section C provides initial thoughts of possible activities leading to a medium term programme of work for the UNCEEA. Section D provides questions for discussion by the UNCEEA.

¹ <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc12/2012-Report-E.pdf>

² <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc13/2013-Report-E.pdf>

³ <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc10/BG-UNCEEA.pdf>

B. Mandate of the UNCEEA

5. The mandate of the Committee encompasses environmental-economic accounting and supporting statistics. “Supporting statistics” is intended to include relevant environment, energy and other statistics that support environmental-economic accounting. The mandate of the Committee is to (a) provide strategic vision, direction and coordination to mainstream environmental-economic accounting and supporting statistics in national, regional and international statistical systems; (b) develop normative international statistical standards and supporting methodological documents on environmental-economic accounting and supporting statistics; (c) promote the development of databases at international, regional and national level on environmental-economic accounting and supporting statistics; (d) promote the implementation of international statistical standards of environmental-economic accounting and supporting statistics in countries; and (e) promote the use of environmental-economic accounting and supporting statistics in scientific and policymaking communities.“

6. To fulfill its mandate, the programme of work of the Committee in environmental-economic accounting and supporting statistics is organized according to the following six areas encompasses six areas: (a) coordination: to foster collaboration, integration and complementarity of programmes; (b) methodological development for normative statistical standards and other research: to oversee development of standards and other methodological documents; (c) development of databases: to ensure databases are based on international statistical standards and international recommendations; (d) implementation and statistical capacity building: to develop concerted implementation strategies encompassing relevant supporting statistics and their integration in the SEEA; (e) promotion: to mainstream the environmental-economic accounting and relevant supporting statistics in the statistical systems; and (f) formulation of a statistical response on emerging policy issues: to engage prominently in the international agenda in articulating a coordinated statistical response, for example on climate change, sustainability and natural resources management.

C. Towards a medium term programme of work for the UNCEEA

7. This Section provides some thoughts for discussion by the Committee of Experts on the medium term programme of work for the UNCEEA organized by the areas of work of the Committee. In the medium term it is envisaged that the Committee of Experts will focus its efforts in developing a strategy and tools in support of the implementation of the SEEA Central Framework, while continuing to advance the associated research agenda. At the same time, in the response to the increasing demand of information on ecosystem services and conditions and their linkages to economic and other human activities, the UNCEEA will work on the development of tools to assist countries to test the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting and on the basis of lessons learnt from experimentation, it will advance the research agenda associated to the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting. Considering the multidisciplinary nature of the work, mechanisms bringing together the scientific, economic and policy making communities is required.

8. The proposals on the medium terms programme of work are organized are organized on the basis of the 6 areas of the programme of work of the UNCEEA. They include: (a) coordination; (b) methodological development for normative standards and other research; (c)

development of databases; (d) implementation of environmental-economic accounting and supporting statistics and statistical capacity building; (e) promotion; and (f) formulation of a statistical response on emerging policy issues.

(a) Coordination

To foster collaboration, integration and complementarity of programmes.

9. The activities of coordination of the UNCEEA have until present focus on coordination with other groups focusing their work in statistical activities to ensure complementarity of programmes. One notable example has been the coordination with the London Group on Environmental-Economic Accounting and the Oslo Group on Energy Statistics to ensure that the SEEA Central Framework, the SEEA-Energy and the International Recommendations for Energy Statistics are coherent to the extent possible. While the coordination of the groups working on statistical activities within the mandate of the UNCEEA should be continued, in particular For example, the Committee has focused on ensuring the activities on the development of international recommendations for energy statistics be complementary with the SEEA-Energy. It has only recently especially in the context of the development of the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting started to engage with the scientific and policy communities. This has been the case for example with WAVES and TEEB, whose primary objective is the development of policies related to natural capital and ecosystem services.

10. Considering the increasing interest in the development and use of the SEEA, a partnership could be established between the different stakeholders with a view to fit in the work on the broader measure of progress and possibly a partnership on data proposed by the High Level Panel on Post-2015 Development Agenda. The objective of the partnership would be a coordinated approach to the implementation of the SEEA, with a view of stepping up the statistical implementation in countries linked to the policy demands. Possible elements of the partnership arrangement could include the development of common tools (e.g. implementation guidelines, data assessment tools, training materials, E-learning, technical notes), training strategy, capacity building activities, communication strategy and eventually data reporting. As a first step towards defining the roles and responsibilities of the partners, an assessment of on-going activities related to the statistical implementation and application of environmental-economic accounting could be undertaken. Also, a common calendar of events related to both the statistical and policy work of the SEEA should be developed and maintained in the UNCEEA website.

(b) Methodological development for normative standards and other research

To oversee development of standards and other methodological documents

SEEA-Central Framework

11. Several thematic SEEA will be developed or are in the process of being developed following the adoption of the SEEA Central Framework. In particular, the SEEA-Energy is in the process of being completed, the Oslo Group is leading the work on the drafting of the Energy Statistics Compilers' Manual and FAO is leading the work on the SEEA-Agri and other thematic SEEA may be developed in response to increasing demands.

12. The SEEA Central Framework is an outcome of much path-breaking work on extending and refining concepts for the measurement of the interaction between the economy and the environment. Some important measurement challenges remain and are included in the research agenda presented in Annex 2 of the SEEA Central Framework. Regular compilation of environmental-economic accounts in countries as part of a programme of official statistics will foster international statistical comparability, provide policy relevant information at national, regional and international levels, improve the quality of the resulting statistics and understanding of the measurement concepts.

13. Paper UNCEEA/8/7e outlines the priority and the process to advance the research agenda. In particular it suggests that the work on the development of classifications, in particular the classifications of land use and land cover and the classification of Environmental Activities, together with the work on EGSS be given the highest priorities. The other areas identified as part of the research agenda, namely the valuation of water resources, accounting for soil resources and depletion of natural biological resources could be advanced in conjunction with the research agenda related to the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting.

14. With the SEEA being adopted as a statistical standard, it is important that some sort of oversight on methodological development including the development of tools in support of the implementation of the standard (e.g. implementation guide, technical notes, training materials, compilation guidelines, communication materials, etc.) be exercised to ensure compliance with the standard.

15. It is suggested that a Steering Committee consisting of a limited number of members and reporting to the UNCEEA and its Bureau, be established with the task to advance the research agenda and review and advise on compliance with the SEEA of implementation materials/tools that will be developed. The Steering Committee should work in close consultation with the London Group on Environmental Accounting which is the city group having technical expertise on the subject matter.

SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting

16. SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting was considered by the UN Statistical Commission as an important first step in the development of a statistical framework for ecosystem accounting, and encouraged its use by international and regional agencies and countries wishing to test and experiment in this new area of statistics. The Commission further recognized the policy demand for information on ecosystem accounting, and requested the Committee of Experts to set priorities and develop a medium-term programme of work with timelines and deliverables as well as a proper mechanism to address these issues, considering the multidisciplinary nature of the topic.⁴ Paper UNCEEA/8/8 discusses the different research priorities and proposes a mechanism to advance these priority areas.

17. The research priorities may be grouped under 5 streams of work: (1) geospatial, having to do with land classifications, delineation of statistical units, etc.; (2) physical measures of ecosystem services and ecosystem conditions; (3) valuation techniques and approaches to aggregation; (4) Presentation and policy linkages; and (5) integrated accounting issues.

⁴ <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc13/2013-Report-E.pdf>

Addressing these research priorities will require a multidisciplinary approach, it is therefore recommended to engage with existing groups to ensure proper coordination and avoid overlaps. In some cases there may not be necessary to create separate groups and rather ensure that the research priorities of the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting become part of the work programme of existing groups.

18. Advancing the research agenda as well as coordinating the experimentation requires considerable efforts. The following process to advance the research agenda is suggested: (a) establish a steering committee with limited number of experts and reporting to the UNCEEA and its Bureau with the main task to guide and manage the advancement of the research agenda; (b) convene a multidisciplinary forum of experts in ecosystem accounting which meets on a regular basis and links closely with the work of the London Group to ensure that the development of ecosystem accounting is well coordinated with the development of the SEEA Central Framework; (c) Work with established group to ensure that the 5 streams of work are advanced, including the development of tools to assist in the testing of the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting; and (d) organize a Conference bringing together representatives from the different community say every three years.

(c) Development of databases

To ensure databases are based on international statistical standards and international recommendations

19. Efforts are on-going in the development of core tables as recommended by the UN Statistical Commission. Through the drafting of technical notes on various topics, proposal of core tables will be advanced. In addition OECD will start testing a limited number of tables and accounts in countries and Eurostat will establish reporting for selected accounts as per the European Directive. These activities will in due course lead to the development of reporting mechanism on selected SEEA accounts in due course. It is probably too early to set a date, but the UNCEEA may wish to discuss the way forward in this area of work.

(d) Implementation and statistical capacity building

To develop concerted implementation strategies encompassing relevant supporting statistics and their integration in the SEEA

20. The Statistical Commission at its 44th session in February 2013 adopted the implementation strategy for the SEEA Central Framework⁵. The objectives of the strategy are: (a) to assist countries in the adoption of the SEEA Central Framework as the measurement framework for environmental-economic accounting; and (b) to establish incrementally the technical capacity for regular reporting on a minimum set of environmental-economic accounts with the appropriate scope, detail quality. A key element for the strategy is to allow for a flexible and modular approach, recognizing that countries differ in terms of their specific policy issues and their level of statistical development. This approach implies a bottom-up approach by which countries, depending on their policy priorities and statistical development, choose which account to compile and agree on an incremental stage of implementation adding more detail to existing accounts as well as adding more themes or modules to the accounts.

⁵ <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc13/BG-SEEA-Implementation.pdf>

21. The implementation strategy envisages four stages of implementation. Phase 1 is the establishment of an institutional mechanism that will drive the SEEA implementation, including bringing together relevant stakeholders and decide on policy priorities. Phase 2 is the self-assessment of basic data sources, including the identification of relevant data producers and users, periodicity of data compilation, methods for data collection, etc. Phase 3 consists in carrying out a data quality assessment to obtain a better understanding of the quality of the data, data gaps, etc. Phase 4 is the development of a strategic plan for the implementation on the SEEA including a plan for improving data sources.

22. Important considerations for the SEEA implementation strategy are the following:

- (a) Strategic approach to the implementation – strategic planning for national statistical programmes has proven to be a powerful tool for guiding the development of national statistical programmes, increasing financial support for investment in statistics and ensuring that countries will be able to produce the data needed for monitoring their own development plans. Strategic planning frameworks for the development of statistics such as the National Strategies for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) should be linked to strategic planning frameworks such as the National Development Strategies, National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS) and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAP).
- (b) Linking the implementation to policy demands. Supply and demand of information needs to be brought together to ensure sustainable monitoring of policy frameworks. The statistical community has the responsibility to set the statistical agenda in a way that it is relevant and remains relevant with changes in demands and delivers impartial and accurate statistics. The SEEA can serve as the statistical infrastructure in response to existing policy frameworks such as Post 2015 Development Agenda, Natural Capital Accounting and Wealth Accounting and Valuation of Ecosystem Services (WAVES), green economy/green growth, sustainable production and consumption (SPC), etc.
- (c) Bottom-up approach with countries owning the implementation process and agreeing on national implementation strategies and implementation plans. Depending on policy priorities and statistical development, the statistical framework should be designed so that it is achievable within an agreed time frame and it is incremental. The SEEA can serve as an important tool in organizing the existing information and bringing together the various stakeholders using and producing the data and design the statistical framework and, after the assessment phase, define an efficient data development process.
- (d) Sub-regional and regional approach to the SEEA implementation. Using existing sub-regional and regional groupings among countries could be a way forward to step up the implementation of the SEEA in countries. Sub-regional groupings are often established with specific purposes often linked to trade and regional integration. Increasingly issues such as the management of common environmental resources and addressing common problems such as climate change have also come to the forefront in the agenda of sub-regional groups. From a statistical point of view sub-regional organizations have played important

roles in bringing together countries, compiling existing statistics, promoting standards and developing capacity in countries and fostering south-south cooperation. The focus has mostly been on economic statistics. Notwithstanding that some of the groupings have a well-established statistical programmes (e.g CARICOM, ASEAN, SADC, COMESA, etc.), there is an opportunity to build on existing mechanisms and expand the existing programmes, mostly focused on economic statistics to the SEEA implementation. The sub-regional programmes would need to be closely coordinated at the regional level and the regional commissions have an important role to play in coordinating the implementation at the sub-regional level. A lead country, already with some experience on the SEEA implementation, could be identified with the responsibility to providing guidance and support to the other countries in the region and share lessons learned.

- (e) SEEA implementation linked to the SNA implementation and implementation of global programme of agriculture. Considering the synergies between these programmes, it is important, in order to develop efficient data production process that the implementation of these initiatives be closely coordinated to ensure a programmes designed to match the policy priorities and statistical development of countries.

23. To support the SEEA implementation, it is suggested that a number of activities and outputs be developed in a coordinated fashion among the various stakeholders. These include:

- (a) SEEA implementation guide – the draft outline is presented in the paper UNCEEA/8/7a
- (b) Technical notes on key topics – examples of technical notes scope, coverage and structures are the technical notes on land and water (UNCEEA/8/7d and UNCEEA/8/7d)
- (c) Training materials and training the trainers – the training strategy is presented in UNCEEA/8/7f
- (d) Communication materials – the communication strategy is presented in UNCEEA/8/13
- (e) Sub-regional/Regional workshops – planned workshops for 2013 to be developed in cooperation with partners include Apia, Samoa for Pacific Islands (August), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (September), Kuala Lumpur (October), Doha, Qatar (December).
- (f) Forum on SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting to provide recommendations on methods and tools for the testing of SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting. The paper UNCEEA/8/8 provides some thoughts towards a medium term programme of work for the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting.

24. The Partnership would ensure coordination of implementation activities including raising the demand for SEEA, pooling resources and stepping up the efforts to ensure that a core set of tables and accounts are compiled and reported at the global level and more detailed accounts and tables are developed in support of national policies.

(e) **Promotion**

To mainstream the environmental-economic accounting and relevant supporting statistics in the statistical systems

25. The promotion of the SEEA remains one of the high priority of work for the UNCEEA. Although there has been considerable uptake of the SEEA in the recent months in particular after its adoption as a standard there is a need to continue and step up the promotion of the SEEA. Initiatives such as WAVES have been instrumental in bringing the SEEA to the attention of finance ministers and linking the SEEA implementation to policies.

26. A communication strategy to promote the SEEA has been suggested in Paper UNCEEA/8/13. The communication strategy envisages the following steps: (a) the key messages that need to be communicated to promote the SEEA in different contexts; (b) the objectives and principles of the communication strategy; (c) the tools/instruments channels and activities; (c) the audience.

(g) **Formulation of a statistical response on emerging policy issues**

To engage prominently in the international agenda in articulating a coordinated statistical response, for example on climate change, sustainability and natural resources management

27. The UNCEEA should actively engage with the on-going processes at the international level. The on-going discussions on the Post-2015 development agenda present a great opportunity for the UNCEEA to engage at an early stage to ensure that the indicators being proposed are measurable and based on the SEEA. A Friends of the Chair group on the broader measures of progress has been established by the UN Statistical Commission at its 44th session in February 2013 to make recommendations on an international, regional and national programme of work. The UNCEEA should engage actively in the work of the Friends of the Chair.

28. The UNCEEA should also engage with on-going initiatives on for example development of measurement frameworks and indicators for the green economy as well as thematic initiatives and initiatives related to measuring nexuses (e.g. water-energy-land nexuses). The overall objective of this strategy remains to ensure the development of an integrated information system at the country level that can meet the demands of different policy frameworks moving away from the silos approach to develop statistics as well as moving away from ad-hoc studies to a sustainable and efficient data production system.

29. A suggested list of initiatives on which the UNCEEA could be engaged could be developed and updated on a regular basis. A strategy on how the UNCEEA could engage in the different initiatives could also be developed.