



DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION
UNITED NATIONS

ESA/STAT/AC.157
UNCEEA/4/

**Fourth Meeting of the UN Committee of Experts on
Environmental-Economic Accounting
New York, 24-26 June 2009
Millennium UN Plaza Hotel – Manhattan Room**

OPENING STATEMENT

**Paul Cheung, Director
United Nations Statistics Division**

Dear Colleagues,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Fourth Meeting of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting (UNCEEA). In particular, I would like to welcome Peter Harper, Deputy Australian Statistician who was elected by you at the last meeting as the Chair of this committee. This is the first time for Peter to chair the meeting and I would like to wish him success.

This fourth meeting marks a shift in focus to the substantive issues of the work programme emphasizing the formulation of a statistical response to emerging issues. In this regard, I am very pleased that UNDP and UNEP have agreed to organize the programme for the first day of the meeting to help the statistical community to understand the users' needs. As indicated repeatedly in the previous sessions of the UNCEEA, reaching out to the users is high on the agenda of the UNCEEA. I believe that this dialogue with UNDP and UNEP will be the first step in establishing a long-term cooperation with the users and in reaffirming the statistical community as a valuable partner on environmental issues. The presentations this morning on UNDP activities on climate change and this afternoon on the various policy frameworks lead by UNEP will prove an excellent basis for discussion on what the statistical community can offer.

Climate change is high on the international, regional and national agendas. The UN Statistical Commission discussed at its fortieth session in February 2009 a programme review on climate change. The global statistical community considered it extremely important to engage, where relevant, in the development of climate change statistics. We need to understand the data demands and data gaps, and to assess how the statistical community can assist to improve the availability and compilation of relevant climate change statistics. We will, and indeed we must, develop a programme of work on climate change statistics for the global official statistical community. This morning's discussion will help us understand how UNDP approaches this important issue.

The session this afternoon will present UNEP activities on the economics for ecosystems and biodiversity, resource productivity and efficiency and the green economy and green new deal. These initiatives are very closely related to the UNCEEA work programme and in particular to the project on the revision of the SEEA. The green economy initiative was launched by UNEP with the objective of promoting a shift towards a “green economy” as a “major strategy to bring economic recovery and sustainable economic growth, create decent jobs, enhance food and energy security, especially for the poor and the vulnerable while addressing climate change and ecosystem degradation.” The green economy initiative calls for a sound monitoring and accounting system and explicitly refers to the standardization and operationalization of the SEEA. A joint Interagency Statement on the Green Economy is being released these days at the occasion of the General Assembly Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impact on Development which is taking place during the same days as this meeting. This meeting will provide an opportunity to understand these issues and discuss how the statistical community can contribute to this initiative.

Now I will highlight a few critical issues that you will discuss at the substantive sessions.

Firstly, the project on the revision of the SEEA was given the highest priority in the international statistical agenda by the UN Statistical Commission. While I am pleased that the work is progressing on schedule thanks to the efforts of the London Group on Environmental Accounting under the chairmanship of Mark de Haan of Statistics Netherlands, I must urge this Committee to work harder to develop the full accounts and to ensure their implementation. The timeline for the revision of the SEEA is very tight. We need therefore to strengthen our commitment to the revision process to ensure its timeliness and success. In this context, I would also like to acknowledge the contributions of the World Bank and UNEP that have agreed to take the lead in developing a list of issues and addressing them on valuation and ecosystem accounting to

be included in Volume 2. The funding of the revision process, as a result of the funding campaign that started during the Statistical Commission, is on track. We have been able to secure approximately \$400,000 for the project. Clearly we need to continue our efforts to raise more funds.

Secondly, I am pleased to note that the implementation of the SEEA-Water in countries is gaining momentum. Since its adoption as a standard by the United Nations Statistical Commission, the number of countries that have implemented the SEEAW has doubled. Many countries have requested UNSD to assess their work both in terms of methodology and data. I believe that the UNCEEAA is the appropriate forum to discuss and review country practices on a voluntary basis.

In this regard, there is an increasing recognition that the basic data on water and its quality is not sufficient and a concerted programme of action among various stakeholders including the statistical community and the water community is needed. I look forward to the discussions on the strategy to improve the availability of data on water and their quality at the country level. This problem is not limited to the area of water statistics; it is a general issue in all areas of environment statistics. I believe that this area has to be reviewed and quick actions taken.

As a response to the request by several countries, UNSD is planning to convene an expert group to develop an overarching framework that will help countries establish a coherent, effective national environment statistics system. This framework will be based on the previous guidelines published by the United Nations. A case study will be presented tomorrow by Statistics Canada. I have no doubt that the successful development of a framework for environment statistics will facilitate the organization and compilation of environmental statistics at the national level. I am pleased to announce that Statistics Canada has volunteered to assist UNSD to draft a preliminary document for

discussion at this expert group meeting. The outcome of this expert group meeting will be submitted to the UN Statistical Commission for discussion.

Finally, let me address an important issue that the UN statistical Commission has asked us to consider. As you know, the broadening of the mandate of the UNCEEA to cover also environment statistics, including statistics related to climate change and statistics to inform other policy frameworks, has not had a unanimously positive reception by the Statistical Commission. Some countries voiced their concern that the main objective of the UNCEEA, namely, the implementation of the SEEA as an international statistical standard for the integration of environmental and economic information, would fall into the background. Others worried that with priority given to environmental-economic accounting the development of those areas of environment statistics that are beyond the framework of the SEEA will suffer.

The Commission has asked us “to review its mandate, terms of reference and governance structure to reflect the focus of its work on environmental-economic accounting and its role in environment and climate change statistics”. The Commission further asked the Committee to submit the revised mandate, governance, and terms of reference to the Bureau of the Commission for review and to the Commission for further consideration.

I hope the Committee will give this serious issue adequate attention. This Committee, I believe, has a very important strategic role in shaping up the international programme of work in environment statistics and environmental-economic accounting. The Global Assessment of Environment Statistics and Accounts has been a successful exercise that was undertaken under the auspices of the UNCEEA. The results of the assessments have provided useful insights in developing the strategy on the implementation of environment accounts and environment statistics. This Committee indeed has great potential as the body representing the global statistical system to speak

on issues related to environment statistics and environmental accounting. We clearly need such a voice. But we need to convince the countries that the present or proposed governance structure is adequate to represent all the diverging views. The expectations of the international statistical community are high and I hope we can find a solution to this..

In closing I would like to wish you success in your deliberations and I look forward to the outcomes of this meeting.

Thank you for your attention.