



DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION
UNITED NATIONS

ESA/STAT/AC.255
UNCEEA/7/13

**Seventh Meeting of the UN Committee of Experts on
Environmental-Economic Accounting
Rio de Janeiro, 11-13 June 2012**

**Initial Thoughts on a Global Strategy for Implementation of the SEEA Central
Framework**

Paper prepared by UNSD
(for discussion)

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UNSD

A. Introduction

The SEEA Central Framework is the international response of the statistical community to meet the policy demands for broader measures of economic growth, well being and sustainable progress of societies. In particular, the framework addresses the ever increasing policy demand for more and better data on the interaction between the economy and environment and the stocks and changes in stocks of environmental assets to evaluate such aspects as productive and efficient use of natural inputs, sustainable patterns of production and consumption, environmental-related production and employment, and depletion and conservation of natural resources.

With the adoption of the SEEA Central Framework at the 43rd session of the Statistical Commission, countries are encouraged to implement the SEEA Central Framework as part of their official statistics programme for environmental-economic statistics depending on their priorities, capabilities and resources. In addition, international and regional agencies and countries with more advanced statistical practices are encouraged to assist countries in establishing statistical and institutional capacity for this domain of official statistics.

This paper sets out the initial thoughts on a global strategy for the implementation of the SEEA Central Framework. It has been prepared to provide the context for a discussion at the UNCEEA on the global implementation strategy and possibly provide the contours of an organisational structure for the formulation of such strategy. The paper is organised around the objective of the strategy, the role of UNCEEA in the coordination and governance of the strategy and the suggested principles of the strategy.

B. Objective

The statistical community could respond with a global strategy with a twofold objective: a) to assist countries in the adoption of the SEEA Central Framework as the measurement framework for environmental-economic accounts and supporting statistics, and b) to establish incrementally the technical capacity for regular reporting on a minimum set of environmental-economic statistics, tables and accounts with the appropriate scope, detail and quality.

C. Role of UNCEEA

The UNCEEA is well placed given its mandate from the Statistical Commission to include in its programme of work the area of “implementation and statistical capacity-building” with the objective “to develop concerted implementation strategies encompassing relevant supporting statistics and their integration in SEEA”. Therefore the UNCEEA should clarify its role in the overall implementation of the SEEA.

D. Principles

Drawing a parallel with the global implementation initiative of the 2008 SNA with the aim to seek synergies between the two global statistical initiatives, the global programme on the SEEA could be based on the same three principles: a) strategic planning, b) monitoring, coordination and reporting, and c) improving statistical systems.

Strategic planning: At international level, it refers to the strategic partnerships coordinated by UNCEEA between international and regional agencies, UN regional commissions and countries. These strategic partnerships extend to the two other principles of monitoring, coordination and reporting and improving statistical systems.

At national level, strategic planning refers to formulation of a strategic vision based on a detailed national assessment of existing capacity and needs followed by the formulation of a national implementation programme.

The international community could develop common diagnostic tools to aid countries to undertake self assessments and common guidelines for the drafting of strategic visions and national implementation plans for the various modules. These diagnostic tools would typically cover the evaluation of the existing institutional arrangements for managing integrated statistics like a) legislative, operation and process management frameworks, b) coordination and governance arrangements like advisory committees, service level agreements and c) human and financial resources. Moreover, tools would include the assessment of the existing statistical production processes which cover the components of: a) the use of agreed standards and scientific statistical methods, data editing, metadata and data warehousing and data quality frameworks, b) business registers and frames, c) use of survey and administrative data sources and d) dissemination and communication practices.

Communication about the environmental economic statistics and indicators should be accorded appropriate attention in the assessment. It relates to raising public awareness and use of environmental-economic statistics for environmental sustainability, which have the interest of the general public and policy makers and analysts. Therefore the communication should be targeted for both audiences. For the general public, the story line should be simple with limited number of indicators related to their (changing) patterns and preferences of production and consumption. More detailed messages from a broader dashboard of indicators should be available for policy makers and analysts to allow for the monitoring of underlying causes of change in indicators and understanding the relationships between the indicators.

Also the national assessment should ascertain how the development of environmental-economic statistics and accounts can be undertaken without increasing response and resource burden by using existing administrative and survey data sources. Moreover, it should evaluate how the existing supply and use table frameworks can be used as developed for compilation of economic accounts by extending these economic accounts to environmental accounts through the inclusion of physical flows of natural

resource inputs. By using the existing supply and use tables and input-output tables frameworks, the generation of policy related indicators will be significantly facilitated as well as other forms of descriptive, decomposition and modelling analysis.

Monitoring, coordination and reporting: This principle covers the actual implementation of the programme of work. It could be envisaged that the global implementation of the SEEA Central Framework and supporting statistics follows three distinct stages in a multi-year programme that takes into account the different levels of statistical development. These three stages could be described as follows:

Stage I: Undertaking national assessments and formulating national visions and implementation programmes;

Stage II: Adapting institutional arrangements and statistical production process;

Stage III. Applying adapted institutional arrangements and statistical production process and release of environmental–economic statistics, tables and accounts.

In order to monitor national progress in the implementation of the SEEA Central Framework, the international community could devise internationally agreed monitoring tools for measuring a) the scope and detail of implementation through the identification of minimum required data sets by specific SEEA modules, b) the compliance with SEEA concepts for specific SEEA modules and c) data quality assurance frameworks for specific SEEA modules.

If the aspiration is to monitor the status of progress on a recurrent basis, the UNCEEA may include in its work program reviews of the status of progress by SEEA modules through global surveys on the aspects of scope and detail, compliance and data quality. These reviews could be done on rotating basis and linked to the international reporting questionnaires for individual modules of the SEEA.

For international reporting purpose of environmental-economic statistics, the UNCEEA could request international agencies and regional organisations to coordinate their efforts in developing core tables for national data reporting on environmental-economic statistics for specific SEEA modules. While the relevance of the SEEA modules will vary between country, priorities for the development of the core tables could be linked to ongoing initiatives of organisations (like for OECD’s green growth strategy and UN’s green economy strategy and work on the post 2015 sustainable development indicators) or legal reporting requirements (as in the case of Eurostat). Also this work on national data reporting by countries could be integrated with the work undertaken by the Inter secretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics to ensure cost effective international collection program and mechanisms with minimum response burden for the reporting countries.

Improving statistical systems: This principle relates to the strengthening of the institutional arrangements and each of the building blocks of the statistical production process for the SEEA modules selected by a country.

The UNCEEA could consider a programme of work in progressively providing targeted training courses, compilation guidance and handbooks for specific SEEA modules. The specific aim should be to focus more on the various stages of the

statistical production process that precede the integration of the data into the environmental economic accounts, namely, the collection and processing of basic source data and the institutional context.

Also guidance should be provided on advocacy and outreach in support of generating political motivation and communicating the policy relevance of the SEEA. Ongoing dialogue among statistical producers and users has been recognized as a critical element in the promotion of the statistical capacity building. For this purpose, the statistical advocacy tool kits maintained by Paris 21 Secretariat could be a point of departure. In general, the tool kits should be instrumental in supporting a dialogue among statistical producers, the various levels of government, the business sector, the academic community, and the general public about the role of official statistics in evidenced based decision and policy making.

A division of work between the international and regional organisations should be worked out based on their strategic interest in specific modules. By way of example UNEP could lead the development of compilation guidance and training courses for Environmental Goods and Services, UNSD for water accounts and statistics and energy accounts and statistics, Eurostat on environmental protection expenditures, air emission accounts and environmentally related taxes and FAO on forestry and fisheries accounts and statistics.

In order to facilitate the easy and centralised access to statistical standards, manuals, handbooks, textbooks, compilation guidance and best practices on the implementation of the SEEA, UNSD could further extend its web-based knowledge base on methods and country practices in environmental-economic accounting, sourced from and hyperlinked to other relevant organizations, to facilitate easy access to statistical standards, manuals, handbooks, textbooks, compilation guidance and best practices on the implementation of the SEEA. Where possible all efforts should be made to make this material available in the official languages of the United Nations.

E. Questions for discussion

Q1. Considering the limited the limited human and financial resources of the national and international statistical community, which priorities for the implementation strategy should be set?

Q2. What are the mechanisms for UNCEEA to coordinate the activities from various international organisations?

Q3. Should a UNCEEA sub-committee be set up to work out further details of the global implementation strategy?