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**Cover Note for the UNCEEA Working Group on Implementation and Statistical Capacity
Building (Area D)**

Draft paper prepared by KNBS, ESCAP/SIAP, and UNSD

(for discussion)

UNCEEA WORKING GROUP ON IMPLEMENTATION AND STATISTICAL CAPACITY BUILDING (AREA D)

The current activities of Area D include the coordination implementation initiatives and statistical capacity building activities for the SEEA in countries, as well as administration of the Global Assessment of Environmental-Economic Accounting and Supporting Statistics.

The UNCEEA at its meeting in June 2021 recognized the role of the Regional Commissions in delivering capacity building and helping countries build programmes on SEEA implementation. Since April 2022, Christine Magu of the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) and Sokol Vako of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific / Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP/SIAP) serve as co-chairs of Area D.

Area D members, including regional commissions and international agencies providing technical assistance on the SEEA implementation, met on 12 May 2022, where they discussed the priorities for the next biennium, 2022-23, and provided updates on their activities related to capacity building and implementation. Members agreed on the priorities centred around (1) coordination of capacity building and implementation activities; (2) updating of the SEEA implementation guidelines; and (3) the global assessment. Below, this note describes progress in the area of implementation over the past year and outlines the three priorities identified by the area members for the programme of work for 2022-23.

Advancing Implementation

There is a need and strong interest to focus on capacity building and advancing the SEEA implementation, particularly of the newly adopted SEEA EA. Demand also remains high from countries for support in implementing SEEA CF, considering the upcoming launch of the energy and air emission data collection to support climate change initiatives including the Data Gaps Initiative.

The adoption of SEEA EA has generated considerable interest and momentum. As a result, the need for coordination in capacity building activities is increasingly important. The ARIES for SEEA tool has been developed and is being piloted in a number of countries to advance the compilation of ecosystem accounts. In March 2022, Statistical Commission adopted the SEEA EA Implementation Strategy,¹ which outlines the principle for SEEA EA implementation and sets the overall objective of at least 60 countries to implement at least one account of the SEEA EA by 2025. This is an ambitious, but also a realistic, target to achieve from the current 34 countries as identified in the 2021 Global Assessment.²

¹ See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/53rd-session/documents/BG-3I-implementation-strategy-for-the-SEEA-ecosystem-accounting-E.pdf>.

² See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/53rd-session/documents/BG-3I-Global-Assessment-E.pdf>.

Recent years have seen the continued interest for regional Communities of Practice (COPs) for the SEEA / NCA, bringing together practitioners and users from different areas and similar countries in their respective regions. These COPs have provided regular opportunities for NSOs and other national agencies to share experiences within their regions and with regional and international partners. Various modalities, including webinars, newsletters, WhatsApp/Telegram groups, have shown to be extremely useful for knowledge and information sharing.

In Africa, there is a very active COP which includes more than 250 participants from African countries and regional/international organisations and is supported by 11 partner organizations.³ The COP has been financially supported by the World Bank, but these resources are available only until the end of 2023 which poses the sustainability question for the COP after 2023. The COP will need to identify alternative sources for funding and prepare a sustainability strategy.

In Latin America and the Caribbean there are two related COPs. The Red Regional de Estadísticas Ambientales (Regional Network on Environment Statistics) is formalized under the leadership of ECLAC and deals with topics related to both environment statistics and accounts. It communicates through a website and a WhatsApp group.⁴ At the same time, there is also an informal network of NCA practitioners called Comunidad Latinoamericana de Contabilidad del Capital Natural (ComLAC, Latin-American Community for Natural Capital Accounting), that is an informal initiative of individual practitioners and is also communicating through a WhatsApp group.

Priority 1: Coordination of capacity building and implementation activities

The primary purpose of Area D is to coordinate capacity development and implementation activities at the global and regional levels, as well as ensure lessons learned from these activities are shared widely. In order to realize this priority, Area D members have decided to work on a number of initiatives and documents that can serve the community to improve the global and regional coordination of capacity building and implementation activities.

Members acknowledged that the flow of information on the capacity building and implementation activities is crucial for successful coordination at both regional and global levels. They welcomed the increased interest from a wide number of partners, including from regional and international organizations, as well as a variety of NGOs and other players, working in the field of the SEEA implementation. Hence, they agreed that a more systematic and coordinated approach to information sharing on the various activities and best practices needs to be established. It was agreed to:

- schedule regular quarterly meetings of members of Area D with the objective of members providing regular and timely updates on their activities and other initiatives they may be aware of;

³ For more information see <https://ecastats.uneca.org/ncacop>.

⁴ See <https://comunidades.cepal.org/estadisticas-ambientales/es>.

- develop and regularly update (at least quarterly) an online spreadsheet outlining the capacity building and training priorities, focus countries and requests for technical assistance received, and list of project and activities undertaken;
- maintain regularly updated lists related to the status of SEEA implementation in countries, an updated list of SEEA focal points for every country and a spreadsheet with the current state of SEEA implementation in countries, initially based on the Global Assessment; and
- develop and maintain a list of consultants with SEEA implementation experiences, which would, in turn, serve other partners to draw upon their experiences for their capacity building projects.

Priority 2: Update of the SEEA Implementation Guide and Diagnostic Tool

The SEEA Implementation Guide and Diagnostic Tool⁵ were developed in 2014 and were mostly focused on the implementation of SEEA CF. Since then, several new developments have taken place, most notably the adoption of SEEA EA and the advancement in the use of global data and earth observation methodologies in support of the SEEA compilation. In addition, several aspects for SEEA implementation have changed and many lessons were learned through the experiences with implementation in the past 8 years.

As such, Area D members recognized that the Implementation Guide and Diagnostic Tool would need to be updated to reflect advances in SEEA implementation, expanded to include the new SEEA EA implementation strategy, enriched with various lessons learned from past implementation experiences, and updated with the new data sources, including the global datasets and earth observation technologies. Hence, members have agreed to undertake the task to update this document over the next year, for it to be presented to the UNCEEA for review and endorsement at its 2023 meeting.

Priority 3: Global Assessment of Environmental-Economic Accounting and Supporting Statistics

Before 2021, the Global Assessment was administered every 3 to 4 years in a comprehensive format. The UNCEEA recognized that due to monitoring needs for the two Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicators focusing on the SEEA (12.b.1 and 15.9.1)⁶ and the rapid pace of implementation of environmental-economic accounting, there was a need to gather information on implementation on an annual basis. It was hence agreed in 2021 that a shorter questionnaire (named the Global Assessment “light”) be administered on an annual basis, in-between the benchmark years.

The Global Assessment light was first administered in November 2021, when UNSD contacted all 2020 respondents of the Global Assessment. Countries which indicated they were compiling the SEEA in 2020 were asked to update an excel workbook indicating which SEEA

⁵ See https://unstats.un.org/unsd/envaccounting/ceea/meetings/ninth_meeting/UNCEEA-9-6d.pdf.

⁶ These two indicators measure the implementation of tools to monitor sustainable tourism and the mainstreaming of biodiversity values into policy and accounts, respectively.

CF and SEEA EA accounts they currently compiled. In addition, UNSD requested an update from countries which indicated they did not yet implement the SEEA in the 2020 Global Assessment. The results were summarized in a report that was presented to the Statistical Commission in March 2022⁷ and detailed country-by-country information was published on the SEEA website.⁸

Area D members recognized that the Global Assessment light provide adequate and timely information on the current state of implementation, which serves as a useful tool to develop and design capacity building and implementation activities in countries and regions. Hence, Area D members agreed to support another around of the Global Assessment light in 2022. The 2022 global assessment and will be administered by UNSD with the support of Area D members in November 2022 following the same modality as in 2021. The results will be summarized and presented to the Statistical Commission in March 2023.

Questions to the Committee

The Committee is requested to provide its views on:

- 1) Priorities for the workplan of Area D as outlined above.
- 2) Tasks for priority 1, namely regular quarterly meetings and development of spreadsheets and other documents helping the partners to better coordinate capacity development and implementation activities?
- 3) Proposed task for priority 2 to update the SEEA Implementation Guide and Diagnostic Tool by 2023?
- 4) Proposed task for priority 3 to undertake the Global Assessment light in 2022 in a similar way as for 2021?
- 5) What are the capacity building and implementation areas of particular interest for countries that the Area D should focus on?

⁷ See <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/53rd-session/documents/BG-3I-Global-Assessment-E.pdf>.

⁸ See <https://seea.un.org/content/2021-global-assessment-results>.