

MINUTES OF THE 1ST MEETING OF THE SEEA EEA INDICATOR WORKING GROUP

23 September 2020, Zoom

Meeting minutes

- **Present:** Bhanumati (MOSPI India, chair); Francois Soulard (Statistics Canada); Shi Faqi (NBS China); Alvarado Quesada Irene (BCCR, Costa Rica); Etjih Tasriah (BPS, Indonesia); Sjoerd Schenau (Statistics Netherlands); Gerhardt Bouwer (Statistics South Africa); Ken Bagstad (USGS, USA); Nic Bax and Simon Ferrier (CSIRO Australia); Ouyang Zhiyun (CAS, China); Jillian Campbell and Kieran Noonan Mooney (CBD Secretariat); Trond Larsen (Conservation International); Anton Steurer (Eurostat); Mike Gill and HyeJin Kim (GEOBON Secretariat); Katia Karousakis and Myriam Linster (OECD); Steven King (UNEP-WCMC); Juan Pablo Castañeda (World Bank); Alessandra Alfieri, Elsa Begne De Larrea, Jessica Chan, Julian Chow, Bram Edens, Marko Javorsek and Kebebush Welkema (United Nations Statistics Division); Carl Obst (UNSD consultant)

1. OBJECTIVES OF THE SEEA EA INDICATOR WORKING GROUP

- Alessandra Alfieri (UNSD) introduced the objectives of the working group. The short-term objective is to support the drafting of Chapter 12 of the revised SEEA EEA, whereas in the medium term the objective is to link the SEEA EEA indicators to the existing monitoring frameworks, in particular the Post 2020 biodiversity monitoring framework. The focus of this working group is technical. There is a proposal to create another indicator-related working group focusing on the governance of Post 2020 biodiversity monitoring framework.
- WG members were comfortable with the objective of the working group. Members of the working group are encouraged to send comments on the TOR by 2 October 2020. The comments raised during the meeting will be addressed in the revised draft.

2. DISCUSSION ON THE DRAFT WORKING PAPER ON SEEA EEA INDICATORS

- Julian Chow (UNSD) introduced the draft working paper on SEEA EEA indicators, whose purpose is to serve as an input for the drafting of Chapter 12 in the revised SEEA EEA. Working group members were asked to provide comments on the following questions.

Does the current paper address all the topics in the outline? Are there any missing topics, or topics that should not be addressed in the chapter? Your thought on the purpose and scope of the work both with respect to Ch 12 and its relation to the wider indicator process is welcome

- Add some text to highlight the usefulness of the accounts as an integrated system consisting of various components that can be combined to generate a range of indicators depending on emerging policy demands.
- Suggested additional topics to be addressed in Ch.12
 - Early/flash estimates which can be generated quickly – these estimates may be generated using the accounting framework but are not generated from the accounts themselves
 - Stress the importance of basic data to populate the accounts
 - Describe the value added of the accounting framework – linking data/statistics/variables to aggregates
 - Data Quality assessment of the accounts
 - Linking indicators to the social dimension, if applicable
- The role of indicators for communication was underlined. It was suggested that the focus of Chapter 12 should also be on how to communicate the data to a wider audience through the accounts and indicators from compilers perspective
- It was suggested to differentiate indicators that are measurable and available from the conceptual indicators that are more aspirational. The importance to identify a limited set of indicators which is feasible for countries to compile was stressed.
- While emphasizing the requirements at the international level, the usefulness of the accounts at national level should also be highlighted. The use of the inverted pyramid, presented in SEEA Applications and Extension, showing the demand side of the indicator was also suggested.
- The value to link the chapter to SDGs and post-2020 biodiversity framework was stressed, because the investment of statistics and capacity development effort are largely driven by global framework. Need to highlight the national relevance of the global frameworks which will drive investment in national statistical system to derive national indicators. It was suggested to keep indicators that are ambitious and aspirational for long term investment and development of the system.
- The importance to have high-level indicators that are feasible was stressed. It was also stressed the need to keep aspirational indicators, that cannot be calculated globally at this time, but countries should strive to develop the information system towards their calculation.
- It was noted that the draft paper is not clear on the definition of headline indicator and the criteria in identifying them. Also some of the terms were not fully explained in the draft paper. It was suggested to address these issues as well as to clarify the issue on defining ecosystem and further classification in aggregating information.
- Though certain paragraphs and text may be of relevance for the working paper, during chapter drafting, care would need to be given to avoid repetition across chapters – like on the SEEA framework, quality assessments, etc.

The current paper follows the structure of the Ch.12.4 and 12.5 by first reviewing how ecosystem accounts can contribute to the global monitoring frameworks before discussing the potential headline indicators that can be derived from the core and thematic accounts (i.e. start from policy). Should the

paper be organized in another way, that it should start around indicators from the core and thematic account before discussing how such indicators can contribute to the indicator monitoring framework (i.e start from the accounts)?

- Majority of the working group members agreed with an inductive approach, where the chapter should start from identifying various types of indicators derived from the ecosystem accounts, and then move on to link the SEEA EA based indicators to various indicator monitoring frameworks.

The current scope of the document focuses on post-2020 global biodiversity framework and SDGs. Should it be extended to cover indicators for other environmental reporting (e.g. RAMSAR, UNFCCC, IPBES support) and economic reporting (e.g. wealth accounting, inclusive wealth, degradation adjusted GDP)?

- It was agreed that while links to the post-2020 biodiversity framework, IPBES and the SDGs should be discussed in detail, connections to other environment and economic reporting frameworks and multilateral environmental agreements should also be recognised in the chapter, highlighting the ability of the accounts to address the requirements.
- While SEEA EA based indicators would be able to support multiple frameworks, it was recognized that there might be a challenge in reconciling indicators across frameworks if there are varying indicator definitions for similar themes.
- There was a discussion on the linkage of this chapter with the SEEA Application and Extension. It was suggested that the focus on Chapter 12 will be on SEEA EEA indicators but not the indicators coming from the SEEA Central Framework.
- It was suggested to include indicators that could be compiled by NSOs and those that can be compiled by the users outside NSOs.
- It was suggested that a couple of paragraphs could be added in Chapter 12 on the potential of the accounts and the possibility to use alternative classification to define new indicators.
- It was suggested to include in an Annex to this Chapter also the indicators emerging from the thematic accounts in Chapter 13.
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It would be useful to reach a common understanding of the term “indicator” and “aggregates”. Your thoughts on the definition used in the paper is welcome. Would it be useful to distinguish between aggregates and indicators in the paper, and to highlight aggregates that can be derived from each of the core and thematic accounts in order to provide information at a broader level?

- The scope of the chapter should include both indicators and aggregates. The importance to distinguish aggregates and indicators was noted. It was pointed out that aggregates could also be useful indicators.
- The importance to apply consistent terminology across the chapters was noted. It was suggested composite index is different from aggregates, and the use of the term ‘composite index’ is clearer in some cases. Chapter 5 on conditions provide useful definitions on composite index and aggregates.
- It was suggested the chapter can focus on aggregates in the beginning and link them back to the System of National Accounts (SNA). It was also suggested that indicators can be separated into

management-type indicators, monitoring indicators and analytical indicators. The need to have a more structured framework to describe/group the indicators was noted and this would support a link back to the indicators from the SNA and SEEA Central Framework.

- Aggregates (that is data that can be generated directly from the tables and accounts) could also be presented in the relevant chapters as was done in the SEEA Central Framework.

One of the important criteria on headline indicator selection for post-2020 framework is based on measurability and availability. Any suggestion on the SEEA EEA indicators that can meet these criteria? Additional suggestion of headline indicators for each of the core and thematic accounts are welcome

- Accuracy could also be considered as an additional criterion for indicator selection

There is a strong demand to identify indicator for “natural” ecosystem in the global indicator framework, but natural ecosystem is not currently defined in SEEA EEA. How to bridge the gap?

- This issue is considered important but may be difficult to resolve given the tight timeframe for the SEEA EEA revision process. Working Group 1 could consider adding some text in the way ecosystem types are defined in IUCN GET to help take the matter further after the release of the SEEA – EA.

3. NEXT STEPS

- WG members to send their comments on the working paper as well as relevant reference materials and examples on indicators to support the drafting process to UNSD by 2 October
- The importance of the SEEA EEA revision working group to propose indicators in their respective area was stressed. UNSD to communicate with the Area Lead of the working groups to follow up on the indicator agenda, requesting each working group to propose a short list of suggested indicators for their respective area.
- UNSD to follow up with those drafting the thematic accounts for their inputs and suggestions for indicators.
- The SEEA EEA Editor, Carl Obst, to draft the indicator section in Chapter 12 based on the working paper and input from working group members, in the first two weeks of October.
- It is expected another working group meeting will be convened once the draft chapter becomes available.
- A dedicated session on indicators in the 4th session of the virtual SEEA EEA Forum to be held in early November was proposed.