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# A draft work plan for the London group 2016-2018

22nd meeting of the London Group, Oslo,

Session A, Agenda item 5

# Summary

This paper outlines a draft work plan for the term 2016-2018 in order to enhance the transparency and the direction of the work that the London Group can contribute with in the field of environmental-economic accounting. It is based on the evaluation done in 2015 by the London Group at the 21st meeting in The Hague. It has been made available to the 11th meeting of the UNCEEA held in June 2016. The London group is now welcome to contribute to this development of the future work plan.

The strength of the London Group lies in the technical capabilities of the experts attending the meetings thus enabling, among other things, a harmonised approach for quality assured statistics under the framework on environmental accounting.

The current objectives of the London Group are at a technical level to:

* 1. support the further methodological development of the SEEA-CF;
  2. support the promotion and implementation of SEEA-CF;
  3. contribute to the further development of SEEA and the Experimental Ecosystem Accounting (SEEA-EEA);
  4. provide a forum for the sharing of national and international expertise and experience.

With the push for more data on environmental-economic accounting that are seen globally, regionally and nationally, synergies between different groups that are established in the field, such as the UNCEEA and the Technical committees can provide high potentials for success. The London group can provide assistance to this end.

The tentative work plan could follow this process:

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| January 2017/18 | Preparing next LG meeting | Calling for issue papers |
| March 2017/18 | Drafting agenda of the LG meeting | The LG Bureau draft and circulation to LG members |
| June 201718 | UNCEEA meeting | Input from the committee on draft agenda |
| Autumn 2017/18 | LG meeting | The meeting outcome provides direction for next year(s) |
| Late autumn 2017/18 | UNCEEA bureau | LG chair reports back to UNCEEA |

# Introduction

The London Group was created in 1993, as a UN City group[[1]](#footnote-1), to provide an informed forum for practitioners to share their experience of developing and implementing environmental satellite accounts linked to the economic accounts of the System of National Accounts.

Originally, the objectives of the London group were to:

* play a leadership role in defining international best practices in the theory and practice of environmental accounting within the framework of the System of National Accounts
* provide a forum for the sharing of national and international expertise in this field
* encourage the adoption of best practices in the field by promoting the results of the Group's efforts via concepts and methods manuals, operational manuals, material on websites and other means

Prior to the adoption of SEEA Central Framework by the UNSC in 2012, the London Group was instrumental in pushing the area forward, evaluating methodologies and verifying new achievements, all of it being fed into the SEEA CF. After the completion of the SEEA CF the London Group has focused on exchanging experience and best practices and has started to dedicate significant attention to help further advance ecosystem accounting.

In order to further advance in the area, three components for the programme of work of the London Group may be highlighted.

a. **Methodological research**

b. **Implementation advice and best practices for SEEA**

c. **Development and sharing of uses, applications, and extensions of the environmental-economic accounts**

Broadly speaking, the topics covered by the Group to date have included (see annex 1):

* 1. Physical flow accounts (air emissions, materials use, water use and energy use);
  2. Asset accounts for natural resources such as fossil fuels, forest, fish and land;
  3. Environmental activity accounts (environmental sector jobs and trade, environmentally related taxes and subsidies, emissions trade);
  4. Ecosystem accounts;
  5. Applications and extensions of environmental accounts (e.g. environmental pressure from consumption through input-output analysis, social data in the accounts);
  6. Training and implementation material.

1. The current objectives of the London Group are to:
   1. support the further methodological development of the SEEA-CF
   2. support the promotion and implementation of SEEA-CF
   3. contribute to the further development of SEEA: Experimental Ecosystem Accounting (SEEA-EEA)
   4. provide a forum for the sharing of national and international expertise and experience;

# The strength of the London group

The participants of the London group are experts in the field of compiling, presenting and disseminating data on environmental accounts. They are not necessarily connected with a certain organisation or authority, but participate in the capacity of knowhow in environmental accounting.

They are often as a community strengthening the knowledge in the technical aspects of compiling data linking environmental statistics to economic accounts and extracting from the economic accounts data that are useful for environmental analysis. Best practices in compilation can be identified. They are also highly experienced in application of the data often working closely with the user community.

As such it is reasonable to consider the London group to enhance the work further and look into the areas that e.g. did not find a place in the SEEA CF or have been developed at a minimum level in the SEEA CF.

As the area becomes more visible and more countries apply the techniques of SEEA in the compilation, dissemination and analysis of data more experts will become available. The group has grown already from around 20-30 colleagues in the early days to up to 70-80 in more recent meetings who are interested in participating.

However, as other groups and compositions are available to meet and exchange information and knowledge through it can be time to re-evaluate the composition of the London group in particular.

# In cooperation with the SEEA community

It was highlighted in the evaluation of 2015 that the London group asked for a clearer path of communication between the other groups in the field. This so that duplications of work can be avoided and that the groups draw on each other’s expertise.

Of high priority to assure good communication and cooperation lies with three groups in particular. The UNCEEA, the Technical committee on SEEA CF and the up-coming Technical Committee on SEEA Experimental ecosystem accounting.

**The proposals and way forward:**

* **London group chair participates at the UNCEEA meetings**

It was proposed by the London group that the chair partakes in the annual meetings of the UNCEEA. This has been done in 2016.

* **Clarify communication between UNCEEA and the London group**

It was requested to clarify the path of communication between the UNCEEA and the LG. The proposal from the Chair of the UNCEEA and the Chair of the LG is to invite the LG chair to one of the meetings of the UNCEEA Bureau shortly after the LG meeting has taken place for a brief up-date of the outcomes.

As the UNCEEA sets out the strategies and umbrella functions of environmental economic accounts it is reasonable that tasks or ideas are picked up or appointed to the London group. It is therefore also proposed that the London group provides feedback to the UNCEEA about the plausibility of the ideas or if they are returned to the UNCEEA for other parties to pick up the work.

* **Clarify communication between other groups involved in environmental economic accounting**

The number of groups involved in environmental economic accounting directly, either at technical level or more policy oriented are growing steadily year by year. To some extent the people based community in environmental economic accounting are not plenty. It means that it is a high likelihood that one or more members of the London group is also a member of the other international initiatives in the field, may it be through the World Bank, the OECD, Eurostat or the UNSD or UNECE.

There is no specific financial budget accompanied the post of chair so it is not plausible to expect the chair to ensure full and transparent communication.

However, if the UNSD continues to provide an overview of which groups are active in the field as they did for the 11th UNCEEA meeting it might be sufficient. The document was titled: *An overview of the international groups related to the SEEA*

<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/envaccounting/ceea/meetings/eleventh_meeting/BK-11-5-3.pdf>

With regards to the technical committees under the UNCEEA, the following are participating in this work, some of which are also London group members:

* **The Technical committee on SEEA CF:** Chair Sjoerd Schenau (CBS Netherlands), Carolyn Cahil (Statistics Canada), Joe St Lawrence (Statistics Canada), Josef Schmidhuber (FAO), Suzanne Vancliffe Toresi (FAO), Francesco Tubiello (FAO), JP Castaneda (World Bank), Sofia Ahlroth (World Bank), Mark Lound (ABS, Australia), Pierre-Alain Pionnier (OECD), Anton Steurer (Eurostat), Carl Obst (IDEEA), Nancy Steinbach (Statistics Sweden), Viveka Palm (Statistics Sweden), Alessandra Alfieri (UNSD), Sokol Vako (UNSD), Leila Rohd-Thomsen (UNSD), Julian Chow (UNSD)
* **The Technical committee on SEEA EEA:** has not yet been formed, but the UNCEEA in June 2016 asked the editorial board of the Technical Recommendations on SEEA EEA to continue its work until the Technical Committee on the SEEA EEA is operational. The members of the SEEA EEA editorial board were: Carl Obst (IDEEA), Michael Vardon (ANU, Australia), Warwick McDonald (Bureau of Meteorology, Australia), Michael Bordt (ESCAP Bangkok), Bram Edens (CBS Netherlands), Per Arild Garnåsjordet (Statitistics Norway), Lars Hein (Wageningen University, Netherlands), Jawed Khan (ONS, UK), Jock Martin (European Environment Agency), Anton Steurer (Eurostat), Glenn-Marie Lange (World Bank) and Alessandra Alfieri (UNSD).

It is anticipated that through these people the knowledge and information flow will be sufficient. In addition, meeting information from the different groups are available to some extent on-line. The technical committees do not publish any minutes.

Below follow a brief summary of the prioritized groups

**The UNCEEA**

The United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting was established through the UNSC 36th session in 2005. The committee has an umbrella function in providing overall vision, coordination, prioritisation and direction in the field of environmental-economic accounting and related statistics (ToR UNCEEA[[2]](#footnote-2)).

**Groups established by the UNCEEA**

In more recent years the UNCEEA has created topical groups

**Technical committee SEEA CF established in 2014 with the mandate to:**

* Advance the research agenda for the SEEA Central Framework;
* Advance the development of the implementation materials/tools, including the development of core tables and accounts and associated technical notes, in support of the implementation of the SEEA Central
* Framework and ensure consistency with the SEEA Central Framework;
* Lead the development of the communication strategy for the SEEA Central Framework.

**Technical committee SEEA EEA**

* Advance the research agenda on ecosystem accounting within the general framework provided by SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting;
* Identify and recommend best practices related to the testing of the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting in countries in particular concerning the use of models and tools as well as testing of methods for measuring ecosystem services, ecosystem conditions and ecosystem capacity;
* Promote the SEEA framework and the associated research and ensure sound relationships with other similar initiatives and projects;
* Assist the Steering Committee in organizing relevant meetings and conferences to advance the research agenda.

**Expert Forum on Experimental ecosystem accounts**

* Showcasing advances in research and testing on the SEEA-Experimental Ecosystem Accounting;
* Highlighting to the potential for more definite methods and guidelines;
* Providing recommendations for the revision of the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting.

**Other groups and conferences**

The UNSD has for the 11th UNCEEA meeting in 2016 made a summary of which groups work with topics that touch upon SEEA.

These are groups established by e.g. the World Bank, the OECD, the UNECE and Eurostat

<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/envaccounting/ceea/meetings/eleventh_meeting/BK-11-5-3.pdf>

# A three year tentative work plan

Establishing a work plan facilitates the communication with other groups that work in the field. A work plan has not been available before in the London group but each meeting has evolved and developed with the items currently on the global agenda.

It is not the intention to specify and lock down the topics and tasks but to provide a direction of work and the process involved.

The evaluation of the London group showed that opinions were split on focusing each meeting on a specific topic or cover the full range of topics each meeting.

For the next three years it is proposed to cover these headlines:

* + 1. **Introductions and UNCEEA up-date**
    2. **International work and capacity building**
    3. **Methodological work**
    4. **Implementation and extensions**

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| **Year** | **Topic** | **Milestones** | **Achievement(s)** |
| 2016 | UNCEEA meeting | Input from the committee | The UNCEEA may give the LG tasks |
| LG meeting | The meeting outcome provides direction for next year(s) | **Methodological work**  Providing technical input to:  - current state of play on the research agenda  -thoughts on international data collections  **Implementation and practises**  - capacity building  - issues arising when compiling of data for SEEA Agriculture  **Development and sharing of uses, applications and extensions**  - new emerging areas e.g. on speeding up the access to more up-to date data, and on bio economy  - development of ecosystem accounts  - sharing knowledge and strengthening the capacity in providing policy useful data. This includes best practices on bridging SEEA data and policy via indicators and how SEEA data could feed into analytical tools (IO, SAM, CGEM). |
| 2017 - Spring | Preparing next LG meeting | Calling for issue papers | Based on the outcome of LG 2016 topics in need of further discussion to be picked up  These could be (e.g.): any testing done on SEEA-Energy? Any testing done on tables as specified in the Technical notes? Any progress on environmental economic instruments? |
| Drafting agenda of the LG meeting 2017 | The LG Bureau draft | A final draft to be circulated to the UNCEEA and the LG for additional input |
| 2017 – summer | UNCEEA meeting | Input from the committee | The UNCEEA may give the LG tasks |
| 2017 | LG meeting | The meeting outcome provides direction for next year(s) |  |
| 2018 - Spring | Preparing next LG meeting | Calling for issue papers | Based on the outcome of LG 2017 topics in need of further discussion to be picked up |
|  | Drafting agenda of the LG meeting 2018 | The LG Bureau draft | A final draft to be circulated to the UNCEEA and the LG for additional input |
| 2018 – summer | UNCEEA meeting | Input from the committee | The UNCEEA may give the LG tasks |
| 2018 | LG meeting | The meeting outcome provides direction for next year(s)  New chair elected |  |

# Potential discussion questions:

* + - 1. Is the work plan a step forward in transparency of what the LG can contribute to? And can this reduce the risk of double work of the different groups existing today?
      2. Can the transparency between different groups be sufficient with the participants of one or more LG members in each group? Can you suggest alternative means for moving information if you require more information?
      3. Should the LG keep expanding in terms of participants or be limited to experts for in-depth discussions about methodologies, best practices and policy applications? If expanding, how do you foresee the group to deliver suitable output?
      4. Any other issues?

# Annex 1: Topics covered in past London Group meetings

**Table 1: Topics covered in past London Group meetings**

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| Topics | 1999 | 2001 | 2003 | 2004 | 2006\* | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 |
| SEEA manual 2003, 2012 | X | X |  | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |  | X | X |  |
| Country up-dates |  | X |  | X | X |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | x |
| EPEA, taxes, subsidies, permits, REMEA | X | X |  |  |  | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Physical flows (air, energy, waste) | X | X |  |  | X | X | X | X |  | X | X | X | X | X |
| Asset accounts incl. subsoil | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |  | X | X |  |
| Valuation | X | X |  |  | X |  | X | X | X |  |  | X |  |  |
| Applications (incl IO) and policy use | X | X |  | X | X | X | X | X |  | X | X | X |  |  |
| Water accounts |  |  | X | X | X | X |  | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| **Topics** | **1999** | **2001** | **2003** | **2004** | **2006\*** | **2007** | **2008** | **2009** | **2010** | **2011** | **2012** | **2013** | **2014** | **2015** |
| Agriculture, Fishery and Forestry |  |  | X |  | X | X | X | X |  |  | X | X |  | X |
| Land and ecosystem |  |  | X |  | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Social dimensions |  |  |  | X |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| MFA |  |  |  | X | X | X | X |  |  |  |  | X |  |  |
| Research agenda |  |  |  |  |  | X |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | X |
| Sustainable development, wealth accounting |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | X | X |  |  |  | X | X |
| Training and capacity building |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | X | X |  |
| Timeliness/  nowcasting |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | X | X | X |

\* New committee UNCEEA meet for the first time

1. http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/citygroup/index.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/envaccounting/ceea/documents/torunceea_final.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)