



DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION
UNITED NATIONS

**Nineteenth Meeting of the UN Committee of Experts on
Environmental-Economic Accounting
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**Working Group on Implementation and Statistical Capacity Building (Area D)
Summary of activities**

Draft paper prepared by the Working Group on Implementation and Statistical Capacity
Building

(for discussion)

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

1. The regular work programme of Area D focuses on the coordination of implementation initiatives and statistical capacity building activities for the SEEA in countries, as well as the administration of the Global Assessment of Environmental-Economic Accounting and Supporting Statistics. This paper presents the achievements of Area D since the last Committee meeting in section 1, section 2 lays out the work programme of Area D for the next year, and section 3 contains the items for decision by the Committee.

Achievements of Area D in 2023-24

2. The UNCEEA at its meeting in June 2023 agreed to the following work programme for Area D: (1) coordination of capacity building and implementation activities; (2) revitalizing the SEEA Focal Point network; and (3) conducting a benchmark global assessment in 2023. The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific / Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP/SIAP) continued to serve as co-chairs of Area D.

Area 1: Coordination of capacity building and implementation activities

3. Area D members, consisting of members from UN regional commissions and international agencies providing technical assistance on the SEEA implementation, met on a quarterly basis (24 August 2023, 6 December 2023, 14 March 2024, and 30 May 2024). During each meeting, members discussed progress in the three components of the work programme and shared updates on their activities related to capacity building and implementation of the SEEA, ensuring improved coordination of SEEA-related activities at the regional and global level. Members are also regularly updating a shared excel sheet with their regional capacity building priorities and requests.

Area 2: Revitalize the SEEA Focal Point Network

4. At its 18th meeting in June 2023, the UNCEEA recommended updating the Terms of Reference (TOR) of the SEEA Focal Points Network to better reflect the changing landscape around the SEEA implementation. Area D was entrusted to lead the update of the TOR and agree on the responsibilities of the Focal Points, their level and engagement at national and international levels. To facilitate the development of the TOR, a survey on the responsibilities and other aspects of the Focal Point Network was conducted among the currently nominated Focal Points in April 2024.

5. A 39-question survey was administered through an online form and sent to more than 200 Focal Points from 138 countries worldwide. The questionnaire was divided into 5 sections: (1) Information on respondents; (2) Responsibilities of Focal Points; (3) Responding to international requests; (4) National activities and entry point for international organisations; (5) Knowledge sharing and engagement with the Focal Point Network.

6. Responses were received from 95 Focal Points from 84 countries, with the majority of respondents being from national statistical offices (91%), indicating a strong representation within the statistical community. The data revealed a diverse distribution of responsibilities, with 48% of respondents holding technical/expert roles and 45% at the managerial level. Notably, 48% of

respondents work full-time on environmental-economic accounting, with variation across geographical regions. The survey highlighted unanimous support for Focal Points responding to international requests related to the SEEA; most respondents also expressed support for Focal Points playing a key role regarding national activities and knowledge sharing initiatives. While most Focal Points agreed to engage in national activities and serve as entry points for international organizations, concerns were raised about workload and participation barriers in knowledge-sharing platforms.

7. Additionally, respondents expressed varied views on the proposal for two Focal Points per country, with resource constraints and coordination challenges cited as primary concerns. Despite these challenges, there is a strong interest in collaboration with international organizations, with a considerable level of interaction reported. The survey also identified support mechanisms suggested by respondents to enhance the assistance provided by the UNCEEA and Area D, including financial support, capacity building, knowledge sharing, technical assistance, and advocacy. Overall, the findings underscore the importance of coordination, collaboration, and support mechanisms in advancing SEEA implementation efforts at both national and international levels.

8. The Draft TOR was also shared for review and input with the UNCEEA Bureau and several other areas, namely area A, B1 and B2. The results of the survey and the final TOR were reviewed and agreed at the Area D meeting on 30 May 2024. The final version of the TOR which incorporates the feedback from the survey and inputs from Bureau members is attached in the annex to this paper.

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

9. In 2023, a full (benchmark) Global Assessment, which provides a comprehensive picture of the SEEA implementation around the world, was carried out. A few changes to the questionnaire were made, compared to the 2020 version, mostly to accommodate the adoption of the SEEA EA. It was administered to all UN Member States in September 2023 and 152 responses were received. Responses were validated and analysed by UNSD, and a background report was prepared; the report was reviewed by Area D before it was submitted to the UN Statistical Commission's session in February/March 2024 as a background paper.¹

Composition of Area D

10. Area D members thought that increasing the membership in the area was beneficial to better coordinate SEEA implementation and capacity building activities. It was agreed that a few additional organizations would be invited to join Area D, including UNEP, CBD, UNEP-WCMC, IUCN, and GOAP, in addition to the possibility of also inviting the regional development banks to join Area D, i.e., ADB, AfDB, IABD and IDB. Furthermore, it was also suggested that one country per region should also join Area D to bring the country perspective to the discussion. The countries will be identified in cooperation with the regional commissions. The proposed new members will be invited to join Area D by UNSD after discussions at the UNCEEA and, possibly, before the next meeting of Area D that is scheduled for 19 September 2024.

¹ The Global Assessment report can be found at: https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/statcom/session_55/documents/BG-3h-Global_Assessment_2023-E.pdf.

Proposed work programme for 2024-2025

11. The below sections outline the proposed work programme for Area D for the next period (2024-25) structured in three areas: (1) coordination of capacity building and implementation activities; (2) revitalizing the SEEA Focal Point network; and (3) conducting the 2024 Global Assessment light.

Area 1: Coordination of capacity building and implementation activities

12. 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 been meeting regularly and updating each other on capacity development projects, requests from countries, and share experiences in their projects.

13. 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. Area D will continue to hold regular meetings in 2024-2025 to ensure coordination of capacity building and implementation activities at the regional and global levels. Area D will also think of new and innovative ways of organizing and sharing information on the various capacity building and implementation projects.

Area 2: Revitalize the SEEA Focal Point network

14. The work in this area begun already in 2023, when Area D started the discussions on the responsibilities of the Focal Points, carried out a survey among the Focal Points and ultimately developed a TOR for the Focal Point network, which is presented to the UNCEEA in the annex to this paper. The work continues for Area D to disseminate and socialize the TOR with the Focal Point network and their organizations, and engage with the Focal Points.

15. In the short term, Area D proposes keeping the Focal Point Network as a closed and private list of experts available to UNSD, Area D and other areas of UNCEEA only. At a later stage, it may be considered that the Focal Point Network becomes a public list of contacts for the wider community, however, a permission from the Focal Points would need to be obtained and a process for updating the list developed, both of which will require resources. Organization of specific activities for the Focal Point Network is currently not foreseen, but at a later stage Area D will rediscuss this and, depending on resources available, propose activities and/or events may be organized for the Focal Point Network to address specific issues of relevance for focal points and share experiences.

16. Area D will aim to keep the Focal Point Network contacts updated, and the Network members informed of SEEA-related activities, capacity building projects and other relevant information. Further engagement with the Focal Point Network will also be discussed by Area D, in particular how can the Network facilitate bilateral information sharing among focal points.

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

17. The full (benchmark) Global Assessment is administered every 3 years and in the intermediate years a shorter questionnaire (named the Global Assessment “light”) is carried out. The Global Assessment light is intended mainly for the purposes of monitoring needs for the two Sustainable

Development Goal (SDG) indicators focusing on the SEEA (12.b.1 and 15.9.1)² and the rapid pace of implementation of environmental-economic accounting. Since in 2023 the benchmark Global Assessment was carried out, in 2024 the light version will be administered.

18. For the 2024 Global Assessment, countries which indicated they were compiling the SEEA in 2023 will be asked to update a prefilled questionnaire indicating which SEEA CF and SEEA EA accounts they are still compiling and/or if new accounts are being compiled. In addition, countries that indicated they did not yet implement the SEEA in the 2023 Global Assessment will be asked if that has changed in the last year.

19. As every year, Area D members will support this year's Global Assessment light. It is expected that the Global Assessment will be administered by UNSD in September/October 2024, with the support of Area D members in obtaining responses from countries. The results will be analyzed and summarized by UNSD in a report, which will be reviewed by Area D in January 2025, and subsequently presented to the Statistical Commission in March 2025.

Questions to the Committee

20. The Committee is requested to:

- 1) Endorse of the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Focal Point Network as outlined in the annex to this paper.
- 2) Agree to the expansion of membership of Area D as outlined in paragraph 10 above.
- 3) Comment on the priorities for the workplan of Area D for 2024-25 as outlined above in section 2 and centered around 3 areas: (1) Coordination of capacity building and implementation activities; (2) Revitalize the SEEA Focal Point network; and (3) Global Assessment of Environmental-Economic Accounting and Supporting Statistics.
- 4) Provide advice if there are potential new priority areas for Area D to consider.

² These two indicators measure the implementation of tools to monitor sustainable tourism and the mainstreaming of biodiversity values into policy and accounts, respectively.

Annex: Terms of Reference for the Focal Point Network

Introduction

The implementation of the System Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) has greatly advanced since the adoption of the SEEA Central Framework and SEEA Ecosystem Accounting. As the community of experts on environmental accounts expands and the demands for SEEA information increases, the United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting (UNCEEA) set up a SEEA Focal Point Network with the main objectives to enhance coordination, communication and sharing of information among the Focal Points and within the countries. Increasing implementation of the SEEA will rely on enhanced coordination within countries and communication among the various international, regional and national stakeholders. The ability of the UNCEEA, the United Nations Regional Commissions and other implementation partners to effectively monitor and report progress will be instrumental in effectively increasing implementation.

In addition, as the UNCEEA makes progress towards establishing global databases based on national data sets for the SEEA, the UNCEEA will need to regularly communicate with countries in relation to the collection of available national data. Furthermore, communication may be needed to validate data estimated by international organizations. Given the importance of obtaining country consent of these data sets, establishing agreed lines of communication is key. All in all, given the increased communication needs for capacity building and data validation related to the SEEA, there is need to ensure streamlined communication amongst all stakeholders. It is in this context that the UNCEEA Working Group on Implementation and Statistical Capacity Building (Area D) has established country-level SEEA Focal Points network.

Finally, greater coordination in mainstreaming the use of the SEEA for informing policy is needed. At its 51st Session, the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) noted the importance of mainstreaming the SEEA for various initiatives, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), climate change, the circular economy, the ocean agenda, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and sustainable tourism.

Profile of country Focal Points

The Focal Point network is crucial to facilitate the work programme of the UNCEEA, which focuses on increased coordination at the country level, the development of databases, communication of the use of the SEEA for the development of indicators and development and revision of methodologies, in addition to coordinating country-level responses to the international community.

The choice of the level of each the Focal Points (one or multiple persons per country) is at the discretion of the country and organization nominating the Focal Point. However, they should keep in mind that the nominee should be in the position to undertake activities of coordination within the agency/institution and with other agencies/institutions, have broad knowledge of the SEEA and be the person(s) responsible for designing and driving forward the strategy for SEEA implementation and use at a high-level and interacting with stakeholders.

Each country can nominate up to two Focal Points. The Focal Point may be from an agency or ministry of the Government that is involved in the SEEA implementation, but the preference would be for at least one to be from the national statistical office. Depending on the country context, it may be the case that one focal point is from the national statistical office or agency responsible for the accounts, and other(s) from different agencies. Alternatively, a country may choose one Focal Point that is responsible for SEEA Central Framework and the other for SEEA Ecosystem Accounting, from either the same agency or different ones. In some cases, countries may want to choose one Focal Point at a managerial level and the other at a technical level to undertake follow up actions as needed.

Responsibilities of Focal Points

The below list spells out the responsibilities of Focal Points:

- I. Responding to international requests:
 - a) Serve as a point of contact to address requests and questions related to the SEEA, distributing them to the relevant people in the country and ensure follow-up;
 - b) Coordinate national responses to the Global Assessment on Environmental-Economic Accounting and Supporting Statistics and data collection efforts, including on issues such as the data transmission and validation.
- II. Serve as a contact point on queries related to environmental accounts in the country:
 - a) Serve as the national focal point for international agencies and other partners on matters related to the SEEA in the country;
 - b) Support, when feasible and appropriate, the coordination of activities at the national level on advocacy, implementation and/or dissemination of SEEA.
- III. Knowledge sharing:
 - a) Exchange knowledge and information related to SEEA implementation among focal points, including on the links between the SEEA and relevant global processes, such as the Global Biodiversity Framework, land degradation and United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), climate change and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

United Nations Statistics Division together with members of the UNCEEA Area D will moderate the Focal Point network and share information with the Focal Points on developments of new manuals, handbooks, events on environmental accounts and of other updates related to the SEEA. The SEEA Focal Point Yammer community will be one of the platforms used to share information among Focal Points.

The Focal Points will have the opportunity to participate in regional Communities of Practice established to exchange experiences with the SEEA/NCA implementation and any other regional and/or global activities