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**Cover Note for Session 4.a -
Defining and monitoring targets for 2020 in the implementation strategy**

Session Organizer: UNSD

(for discussion)

COVER NOTE: DEFINING AND MONITORING TARGETS FOR 2020 IN THE IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

In March 2016 the Statistical Commission agreed in principle with the updated implementation strategy and urged the UNCEEA to scale up its implementation activities based on that strategy. The updated implementation strategy aims to better respond to implementation needs by anchoring the strategy in the new policy environment, particularly the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals indicators. The updated strategy also makes deeper links to other policy initiatives, such as natural capital accounting, green economy/green growth, sustainable consumption and production and sustainability reporting by businesses. The strategy also reflects the central role that SEEA plays in emerging statistical initiatives, such as the transformative agenda and the modernization of the statistical system, as well as big data in support of official statistics. In addition, the updated strategy extends coverage to not only include the SEEA Central Framework but also SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting, to reflect the holistic approach of developing an information system in support of sustainable development. That said, the strategy still maintains the recommendation that countries adopt a modular approach to implementation based on national policy priorities.

The updated strategy recommends the following targets for SEEA implementation by 2020;

1. At least **100 countries** with ongoing, well-resourced programmes in SEEA Central Framework accounting; and
2. At least **50 countries** with ongoing, well-resourced programmes in ecosystem accounting to support national decision-making;

The UNCEEA discussed the updated implementation strategy and these associated targets in June 2015, and agreed that while setting specific targets on the level of national implementation is useful to provide ambition, the current targets should be reviewed and progress against set targets should be assessed regularly and reported to the UNCEEA. A Global Assessment on Environmental Economic Accounting and Supporting Statistics was run from November 2014 to January 2015. The report and questionnaire¹ is included as a background document to this session.

For the sake of discussing the global implementation targets mentioned above, the results on the existence of environmental-economic accounting programmes in countries is included in table 1 below. For the purposes of the global assessment, a country was considered to have a programme on environmental-economic accounting *if it compiles any part/module of the SEEA based accounts in physical or monetary terms* - this was clearly explained in the questionnaire. Those respondents which indicated that they did not have an existing programme were also asked whether they had plans to begin the compilation of environmental-economic accounts in the future. It should be noted that the questionnaire did not make the distinction between 'having a programme on SEEA Central Framework' and 'having a programme on SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting'. Overall, 54 countries indicated that they have a programme on environmental accounting, while 15 are planning a programme in the future. Based on this information, meeting the target of roughly 100 countries by 2020 would require a significant step up in implementation, particularly in developing countries.

¹ Note that by reviewing the questionnaire in pdf. format, the functionality which made respondents skip questions depending on previous yes/no answers is not available.

Table 1: Existence of Environmental-Economic Accounting Programmes in Countries						
	Number of Responses (1)	Existing Programme			Planning a Programme	
		Number of countries* without a programme (2)	Number of countries with a programme (3)	Percentage of countries with a programme (3÷1) (4)	Number of countries* planning a programme (4)	Percentage of countries planning a programme (4÷1) (5)
All Member States	85	31	54	64%	15	18%
By Economic Region:						
<i>Developed</i>	40	9	31	78%	3	8%
<i>Developing</i>	45	22	23	51%	12	27%
By Geographical Region:						
<i>Africa</i>	15	10	5	33%	5	33%
<i>Central, Eastern, Southern and South-Eastern Asia</i>	12	5	7	58%	3	25%
<i>Europe and Northern America</i>	37	8	29	78%	3	8%
<i>Latin America and Caribbean</i>	10	4	6	60%	2	20%
<i>Oceania</i>	3	0	3	100%	0	0%
<i>Western Asia</i>	8	4	4	50%	2	25%

**Where countries refers to those which responded to the questionnaire*

The UNCEEA is asked to discuss what it means to have a “well-resourced programme on SEEA”, and consider whether conducting a global assessment of this type is a useful exercise to monitor implementation progress, and assess the existing questionnaire for the usefulness and detail of the information it provides. It is important to note that conducting a Global Assessment is a very time intensive exercise, requiring constant follow up with countries to ensure that responses are submitted. Coordination with regional bodies can help in this regard. Furthermore, due to the multi-agency nature of environmental accounting (e.g. accounts are sometimes compiled in central banks or ministries while the questionnaire is sent to NSOs), responses are often incomplete or inaccurate due to lack of coordination within countries. These considerations should be weighed against the variability of results from year to year when considering the periodicity of conducting future assessments.

The UNCEEA is asked to consider the following key questions:

- *How do we define a country with on-going, well-resourced programmes in SEEA CE, given that the system consists of many tables and the strategy is that countries start implementing according to their own priorities?*
- *How do we define a country with on-going, well-resourced programmes in ecosystem accounting given that the system is still experimental?*
- *How do we monitor the annual progress made by countries? Is the global assessment used in 2014 useful to track progress towards implementation? What kind of information is needed for the global monitoring of the SEEA implementation status?*