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**Cover Note for Session 4.c -
SEEA and SDGs**

Session Organizer: Chair of the UNCEEA

(for discussion)

COVER NOTE: PROMOTION AND USE OF THE SEEA FOR SDG MONITORING

The Statistical Commission recognized SEEA as an important statistical framework for the post-2015 development agenda and the sustainable development goals indicators at its 45th Session in 2014ⁱ. The Statistical Commission then created the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG indicators (IAEG-SDGs) at its 46th session in 2015. The group was mandated to propose a global indicator framework (and associated list of indicators) to monitor the SDG targets. The Statistical Commission also requested the Committee of Experts (UNCEEA) to closely collaborate with relevant groups to promote and advocate that SEEA be properly reflected in the formulation of these sustainable development goal indicatorsⁱⁱ. The list of SDG indicators was presented by the IAEG-SDGs to the Statistical Commission at its 47th session in 2016. The accompanying report of IAEG-SDGs to the Commissionⁱⁱⁱ detailed an overall plan for implementation, with the stated intention of grouping the indicators into three tiers based on their methodological development and overall data availability;

- Tier 1 indicators where an established methodology exists and data are already widely available;
- Tier 2 indicators where a methodology is established but for which data are not easily available;
- Tier 3 indicators where an internationally agreed methodology has not yet been developed.

The report stated that “the Expert Group will agree on the classification of the indicators in the three tiers. It will also develop a work plan, in consultation with the respective specialized agencies and experts in the relevant areas, for the establishment of adequate methodology for the indicators in tier 3 and discuss available data sources and methodology for an improved coverage of tier 2 indicators. This work will have to be accompanied by capacity-building efforts”. Based on the report of the IAEG-SDGs, the Commission “agreed, as a practical starting point, with the proposed global indicator framework for the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development...subject to future technical refinement”. The Commission also recognised that “the development of the indicator framework is a technical process that will need to continue over time” and “agreed with the proposed programme of work ... including in particular the establishment of the tier system for the indicators”.

The IAEG-SDGs is made up of 27 member states, with international organizations acting as observers. Fourteen of these member states are also members of the UNCEEA. The Chair of the UNCEEA submitted a number of documents to the IAEG-SDGs on behalf of the UNCEEA which aimed to make the case that the SDG indicators should be defined according to the SEEA standard where relevant. The documents which were submitted included both ‘high level’ explanations of how and why the indicators should be SEEA based, as well as detailed indicator-by-indicator set of metadata to guide the IAEG-SDGs on defining the relevant indicators according to SEEA standards^{iv}. The list of documents which were submitted^v, and which are included as background documents to this meeting, is as follows:

1. *‘The System of Environmental Economic Accounts (SEEA): A Statistical Framework to Support the SDG Indicators’* is a high-level two-page summary document which lays out what the SEEA is, its level of development and implementation, and the advantages of aligning SDG indicators with the SEEA standard. This was submitted to the IAEG-SDGs on 7 September 2015.
2. The paper *‘The SEEA as a Statistical Framework to meet Data Quality Criteria for SDG indicators’* reports on how integrated statistical frameworks such as the SEEA can facilitate the production of statistics and

indicators that are of enhanced quality. This paper was first presented to the UNCEEA in June 2015 (see UNCEEA/10/3b) and was submitted (after comments) to the IAEG-SDGs on 7 September 2015.

3. The paper '*SEEA and Transforming Global and National Statistical Systems for Monitoring SDG Indicators*' considers the integration of economic and environment related statistics, and the role of the SEEA as a necessary conceptual framework. It discusses establishing integrated economic and environmental statistics at the national level, and corresponding benefits accruing to national and global policy-making and the SDG monitoring process. It also lays out a transformative roadmap for aligning SDG monitoring mechanisms with the SEEA, and provides an example for the case of water. This paper was first presented to the UNCEEA in June 2015 (see UNCEEA/10/3a) and was submitted (after comments) to the IAEG-SDGs on 7 September 2015.
4. A *Broad Brush Analysis of all the proposed SDG indicators* assessed if and to what extent each proposed indicator could be informed by the SEEA and was submitted to the IAEG-SDG on 7 September 2015.
5. Based on the indicators identified as 'SEEA relevant' in the broad brush review, a detailed *Analysis of SEEA-relevant SDG Indicators* was submitted which provides detailed recommendations on how to define the identified indicators in a SEEA compliant way, providing definitions of terms, data items and explanation of corresponding classifications where relevant. A high-level *overview of these technical recommendations* also accompanied this work, which was submitted to the IAEG-SDGs on 20 October 2015. This metadata was subsequently revised to assess whether any changes to the indicators had been made since October 2015. A number of indicators were changed by the IAEG-SDGs, so the metadata will need to be updated if resubmitted for further consideration.

The process of deciding on the list of indicators has been quite complex with agencies and countries having their own priorities and agendas. Despite the submission of these documents, the SDG indicators which were presented to the Statistical Commission in March 2016 were only partially aligned with the SEEA and did not fully reflect the suggestions of the UNCEEA despite the Statistical Commission's request. In particular, the SEEA was not comprehensively used as the underlying statistical framework to define environmental-economic indicators in a systematic and coherent way. The list of indicators at this stage constitutes the name of each indicator, and more work is expected over the course of the next year to develop their associated metadata and build data bases for tier 2 and tier 3 indicators. As such, it is important that the UNCEEA reflects on why the SEEA based input for the IAEG-SDGs was not reflected in the final list of indicators, and consider whether and how to continue to push for the use of the SEEA in future work of the IAEG-SDGs, in particular on the development of metadata and global and national capacity building.

The UNCEEA is asked to consider:

1. *What are the reasons why the SEEA has not been taken up as much as was hoped for in the definition of the SDG indicators. How can we address these issues?*
2. *How do we promote the use of SEEA in the development of Tier 2 and Tier 3 indicators?*
3. *How do we promote the use of SEEA in the development of metadata for the SDG indicators?*

ⁱ Report link: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/45th-session/documents/statcom-2014-45th-report-E.pdf> . Refer to pg. 15

ⁱⁱ Report link: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/46th-session/documents/statcom-2015-46th-report-E.pdf> . Refer to pg. 22

ⁱⁱⁱ Report link: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/47th-session/documents/2016-2-IAEG-SDGs-E.pdf>

^{iv} Technical input in the preparation of this metadata was provided by a number of UNCEEA members, including Canada, Denmark, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Eurostat

^v Some of the documents were posted on the IAEG-SDG website: <http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/meetings/iaeg-sdgs-meeting-02>, while some of the earlier documents were posted on the closed IAEG-SDG collaboration platform.