DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION
UNITED NATIONS

System of Environmental Economic Accounting

System of Environmental-Economic Accounting 2012 - Experimental Ecosystem Accounting Revision

Draft glossary of terms

May 2020

Disclaimer:
This draft glossary has been prepared under the auspices of the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting Technical Committee as part of the work on the SEEA EEA Revision being coordinated by the United Nations Statistics Division. The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily represent the views of the United Nations.

Note

This glossary has been drafted to support the global consultation review of draft valuation chapters (Chapters 8-11) for the revised SEEA EEA. This version focuses on terms of most relevance for discussion of monetary valuation of ecosystem services and ecosystem assets. The definitions have been drawn from draft chapters and other supporting materials. However, they are not considered final definitions and revisions are expected as a result of the global consultation process. New terms will be added to the drat glossary as the remaining chapters are being drafted.

B

Benefits: Goods and services that are ultimately used and enjoyed by people and which contribute to individual and societal well-being. Two broad types of benefits are described in ecosystem accounting - SNA benefits and non-SNA benefits.

Biodiversity: The variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems (Convention on Biological Diversity, article 2, entitled "Use of Terms").

C

Capital services: The sum of consumption of fixed capital and the value of the return to capital (SNA2008, 6.245).

Cultural services are the perceived or realised qualities of ecosystems that deliver cultural benefits.

D

Depletion: In physical terms, this is the decrease in the quantity of the stock of a natural resource over an accounting period that is due to the extraction of the natural resource by economic units occurring at a level greater than that of regeneration. (SEEA Central Framework, 5.76)

E

Ecosystem: A dynamic complex of plant, animal and micro-organism communities and their non-living environment interacting as a functional unit (Convention on Biological Diversity, article 2, entitled "Use of terms").

Ecosystem accounting area (EAA) is the geographical area for which an ecosystem account is compiled.

Ecosystem assets (EA) are contiguous spaces of a specific ecosystem type (ET) characterized by a distinct set of biotic and abiotic components.

Ecosystem asset life is the time over which an ecosystem asset is expected to generate ecosystem services.

Ecosystem characteristics are the system properties of the ecosystem and its major abiotic and biotic components (water, soil, topography, vegetation, biomass, habitat and species) with examples of characteristics including vegetation type, water quality and soil type.

Ecosystem condition is the quality of an ecosystem measured in terms of its abiotic and biotic characteristics. Quality is assessed with respect to ecosystem structure, function and composition which, in turn, underpin the ecological integrity of the ecosystem, and support its capacity to supply ecosystem services.

Ecosystem conversions refer to situations in which, for a given location, there is a change in ecosystem type involving a distinct change in the ecological structure, composition and function which, in turn, is reflected in the generation of a different set of ecosystem services and different expected future returns.

Ecosystem degradation is the decline in the value of an ecosystem asset over an accounting period that is the result of a decrease in the condition of an ecosystem asset.

Ecosystem enhancement is the improvement in the value of an ecosystem asset over an accounting period that is a result of an increase in the condition of the ecosystem asset.

Ecosystem extent: The size of an ecosystem asset in terms of spatial area.

Ecosystem functional groups (EFG), third level of the IUCN GET classification, which are functionally distinctive groups of ecosystems within a biome. Ecosystem types within the same EFG share common ecological drivers which promote convergence of the biotic traits that characterize the group.

Ecosystem services (ES) are the contributions of ecosystems to benefits used in economic and other human activity.

Environmental assets are the naturally occurring living and non-living components of the Earth, together constituting the biophysical environment, which may provide benefits to humanity (SEEA Central Framework 2.17).

Exchange values are values at which goods, services, labour or assets are in fact exchanged or else could be exchanged for cash.

F

Final ecosystem services: Flows of ecosystem services between ecosystem assets and economic units

I

Intermediate ecosystem services: Flows of ecosystem services between and within ecosystem assets.

M

Market prices are defined as amounts of money that willing buyers pay to acquire something from willing sellers (SNA2008, 3.119)

N

Natural resources: All natural biological resources (including timber and aquatic resources), mineral and energy resources, soil resources, and water resources (SEEA Central Framework, 5.18).

Non-SNA benefits: Benefits that accrue to individuals or society generally, that are not produced by economic units.

O

Other changes in the volume of ecosystem assets refer to changes in the value of an ecosystem asset, other than those due to ecosystem enhancement, ecosystem degradation and ecosystem conversion, that are not solely the result of changes in unit prices of ecosystem services.

P

Provisioning services: Ecosystem services which represent the material and energy contributions generated by or in an ecosystem (SEEA EEA 2012, 3.4).

R

Regulating and maintenance services: Ecosystem services resulting from the capacity of ecosystems to regulate climate, hydrologic and biochemical cycles, Earth surface processes and a variety of biological processes (SEEA EEA 2012, 3.4).

Revaluations refer to changes in the value of ecosystem assets over an accounting period that are due solely to movements in the unit prices of ecosystem services.

S

SNA benefits: Goods and services (products) produced by economic units (e.g., food, clothing, shelter, entertainment) currently included in the economic production boundary of the SNA.

W

Welfare values are values reflecting the utility associated with an exchange most commonly measured as the sum of consumer and producer surplus.