

Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting

Virtual; 16 and 18 November 2020

Area B2: SEEA Ecosystem Accounting (Methodological Development for Normative Standards and other Research)

The Committee:

Implementation of the SEEA EA

1. Welcomed the experiences and lessons learned shared by the Australia Bureau of Statistics, the United Kingdom Office of National Statistics, and the India Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation in implementing the SEEA Ecosystem Accounting (EA);
2. Noted how implementation of the SEEA EA requires input from different stakeholders and data providers, thereby motivating national statistical offices (NSOs) to provide leadership and act as data stewards;
3. Emphasized how implementation of the SEEA EA has responded to policy demands in these countries, including for example, by supporting integrated measurement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), providing technical inputs for policy assessments and cost-benefit analysis, and understanding the importance of nature during COVID-19; and
4. Welcomed the recently adopted motion from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), noting the strong support for the motion from Members and partners, and welcoming collaboration to implement the SEEA EA, further development of the SEEA EA for biodiversity at the ecosystem, species and genetic levels, and use of the SEEA EA for international initiatives such as the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

Revision process of the SEEA Experimental EA

5. Applauded the Technical Committee on the SEEA Ecosystem Accounting, serving as the editorial board, and those involved in the revision on the massive accomplishment achieved with the completed draft manual, which is currently undergoing global consultation;
6. Welcomed the inclusive approach taken during the revision process and noted the broad engagement with the SEEA community, but also with the scientific community, global indicator initiatives, global data and accounting initiatives and policy initiatives;
7. Noted the development and finalization of a number of documents and initiatives being prepared which will support the implementation of the SEEA EA, including guidelines on biophysical modelling and valuation as well as data solutions on the ARIES platform; and
8. Stressed the importance of the participation of all members in engaging in the global consultation and providing official comments.

Adoption of the SEEA EA

9. Expressed support for dropping the word “experimental” from the title of the manual, as a testament to the amount of progress made from the SEEA 2012 Experimental Ecosystem Accounting manual;
10. Emphasized the need to take a forward-looking view and provide an agreed statistical framework to answer the current critical policy needs for the SDGs, post-2020 global biodiversity framework, climate change, national policies and more;
11. Agreed that chapters 1-7 of the SEEA EA should be presented as a statistical standard to the 52nd Session of the United Nations Statistical Commission, with the caveat that a few countries had refrained from judgement since they had not yet read the manual in full;
12. Noted the concerns expressed by a significant number of committee members that the valuation chapters had not (yet) reached the level of a statistical standard, as well as the suggestions made to present the valuation chapters either with cautionary language, a provisional status, or in a separate document.
13. Noted, on the other hand, that many committee members supported the valuation chapters and the need to include these chapters as an integral part of the SEEA EA;
14. Requested the Bureau, upon completion of the global consultation, to finalize the presentation of the document and consult the Committee for approval before submitting the document to the Commission; and
15. Acknowledged the importance of a research agenda for future work in this area, which should include unresolved issues on the SEEA EA, for example on biodiversity accounts.

Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework Monitoring Framework

The Committee:

16. Expressed strong support to the proposal shared by the CBD Secretariat to create an expert group on monitoring the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (GBF), to guide the process on indicator development and its implementation at the country level, and supported the Committee’s active involvement in this expert group and its contribution to the post-2020 process;
17. Emphasized the role of the Committee in supporting the monitoring of the GBF in providing the connection between the CBD process and the Statistical Commission, thus providing the opportunity to share the broader expertise of the statistical community including, for example, the groups on indicators and biodiversity accounting that were established in the context of the SEEA EEA revision process;
18. Emphasized the importance of the SEEA EA in supporting the monitoring of the post-2020 GBF, took note of the development of a set of indicators by the SEEA EA indicator working group and encouraged the use of some of the proposed indicators in the GBF monitoring framework; and
19. Commended the effort by UNSD in establishing an entry point for the official statistical community to be involved the post-2020 process, noting the importance of early engagement from the official statistical community to the global monitoring process.

Ocean accounting

The Committee:

20. Welcomed the progress made on the development of the technical guidelines on ocean accounting under the leadership of UN ESCAP and the Global Ocean Accounts Partnership (GOAP) and acknowledged the importance and timeliness of this work, especially in light of the importance of ocean economies for many countries;
21. Supported the proposed plan for the development of the SEEA-Ocean under the auspices of the Committee and highlighted the importance of this framework being fully aligned with the SEEA Central Framework and SEEA EA;
22. Emphasized the importance of SEEA-Ocean in making the environmental values and economic benefits of oceans visible for policy, given the important role of the ocean economy to the livelihoods of societies and economies, particularly in developing countries; and
23. Stressed the cross-cutting nature of the development of the SEEA-Ocean and the need to establish links to other related initiatives, such as global monitoring frameworks for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, post-2020 GBF and for the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism.

Area D: Implementation and Statistical Capacity Building

The Committee:

24. Welcomed the preliminary results of the 2020 Global Assessment on Environmental-Economic Accounting and Supporting Statistics and encouraged countries who have not yet completed the Assessment to do so;
25. Took note of the importance of the Assessment results and of the SEEA focal points for facilitating collection of official national data, including experimental or pilot data which could be collected on a confidential basis, for the development of global databases; and
26. Agreed that UNSD could impute answers to the Assessment if evidence, such as online publications or information gathered from international organizations on SEEA projects, was available, under the condition that this is done as a secondary step after contacting countries.

Area A: Coordination and Communication

The Committee:

27. Welcomed the proposed activities of the working group, namely mainstreaming the SEEA in reporting initiatives, coordinating training and assistance; and developing a

strategy and work plan for collaboration and mainstreaming the SEEA on emerging issues, such as climate change, sustainable finance, biodiversity, circular economy and SDGs;

28. Agreed on the importance of communication with users in guiding strategic engagement, maintaining relevance and meeting future user demand, and noted that sharing best practices and examples could be useful in this regard; and
29. Noted the importance of collaboration and cooperation with the Committee's technical committees in providing guidance in how the SEEA can be used for emerging issues.

Revision of the 2008 SNA

The Committee:

30. Welcomed the work done with respects to the update of the 2008 SNA by the Task Team on Well-being and Sustainability, in particular by the group on environmental economic accounting and noted that one of the objectives of the update of the 2008 SNA is to arrive at a better alignment of the SEEA and the SNA;
31. Stressed the importance of engaging the UNCEEA, in particular the Technical Committee on the SEEA Central Framework, before the global consultation on the draft guidance notes;
32. Noted the importance of engaging the wider SEEA community at the earliest stages of the update, particularly given the need for alignment of the updated SNA and the SEEA Central Framework, and the overlaps in the research agendas in areas such as classifications; and
33. Agreed to discuss the potential update of the SEEA Central Framework during the next Committee Meeting in June 2021.

Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism

The Committee:

34. Welcomed the further development of the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (SF-MST) and collaboration between the working group on the SF-MST and the Committee;
35. Agreed that the SF-MST should be brought to the Committee for consultation before its final version is brought to the UNWTO Committee on Statistics and subsequently the UN Statistical Commission;
36. Agreed that a future area of work for the SF-MST should focus on including the SEEA EA into the framework; and
37. Encouraged Committee members to join or propose experts for the working group on the SF-MST, participate in pilot studies and identify possible funding sources.