



UNITED NATIONS
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION

**Workshop on Ecosystems
and Natural Capital Accounting
Copenhagen, 30 November – 1 December 2006**

Opening Statement

Paul Cheung, Director
United Nations Statistics Division

Dear Colleagues,

It is my great pleasure, as Co-chair of the Workshop, to welcome the experts and representatives from the scientific, academic and national and international statistical communities to this Workshop on Ecosystems and Natural Capital Accounting hosted by EEA and jointly organized by the EEA and UNSD. The diversity of the communities present in this workshop is an affirmation of our belief that a multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholders approach is required to tackle the objective of this workshop: developing an integrated approach to the measurement of ecosystems, including land and natural resources.

We are bringing together statisticians and scientists in a common venue and this is in itself an achievement. Statisticians have to offer an integrated information system, namely the System of Environmental -Economic Accounting, which consists of a sets of tables based on classifications, definitions and concepts thus allowing for the derivation of indicators that are coherent, consistent and comparable across countries. The scientific community brings to the table the scientific knowledge of ecosystems and a broad approach to their measurement, which sometimes can only be measured indirectly and goes beyond the traditional statistical measurement techniques of observation by using modeling techniques.

I would like to briefly describe UNSD's vital role in advancing our joint cause, and in bringing together the national and international statistical community in the domain of environmental statistics. As many of you know, UNSD serves as the Secretariat of the Statistical Commission, the apex entity of the global statistical system where international statistical standards and activities are considered and approved. Given our mandate provided by the United Nations' intergovernmental process, the UNSD is committed to the advancement of the global statistical system including the improved measurement of sustainable development. In addition to compiling and disseminating global statistical information and supporting countries' efforts to strengthen their national statistical systems, UNSD takes a leading role in developing

international statistical standards and norms for environmental statistical domains to enhance the regional, national and global information in policy relevance, reliability and comparability across time and space.

More specifically, our contribution, collectively as the international statistical community, should be the development of a conceptual framework for ecosystems linking the economy and the environment, including the harmonization of methodologies on input data and dissemination series which will ultimately lead to the improvement of a coherent set of statistics on assets, services and analytical indicators for ecosystems.

This workshop is timely because the United Nations Statistical Commission has established the United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental and Economic Accounting (in short UNCEEA) in 2005. With the endorsement of the UNCEEA, the Statistical Commission has given a clear signal that an accounting approach should be adopted in the compilation of statistics on the environment based on the internationally recognized accounting principles of the System of National Accounts used to measure the structure and change of the market economy since the early 50s. More specifically, the UNCEEA was requested to revise the existing Handbook of national accounting Integrated Environmental-Economic Accounting 2003 and to elevate it to an international statistical standard for the preparation of official statistics on the environment by 2010.

This latest decision of the United Nations Statistical Commission should be seen in light of the various conferences and summits since the 1990s starting with the United Nations Conference on Environmental and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 through the United Nations Millennium Summit in New York in 2000, cumulating with the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. This string of high-level meetings repeated the message for the need for a more socially responsible and environmentally sustainable world. The message reflected the international assessment that the current patterns of production and consumption coupled with demographic trends lead to depletion of natural resources and undermine the capacity of ecosystems to contribute to human well-being. Much need to be done to bring about the realization of

Goal 7 of the Millennium Development Goals established by the United Nations in 2000 which calls for “ensuring environmental sustainability” including its target 10 on “the integration of the principle of sustainable development into countries and policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources”.

The most comprehensive response in determining the sustainability of the current patterns of production and consumption and other drivers of change of the ecosystems has been the publication of the The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment in 2005 called for by United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 2000 in his report to the UN General Assembly: “We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century”. Governments subsequently supported the establishment of the assessment and the MA was initiated in 2001. The MA was conducted under the auspices of the United Nations, with the secretariat coordinated by the United Nations Environment Programme, and it was governed by a multi-stakeholder board that included representatives of international institutions, governments, business, NGOs, and indigenous peoples. The objective of the MA was to assess the consequences of ecosystem change for human well-being and to establish the scientific basis for actions needed to enhance the conservation and sustainable use of ecosystems and their contributions to human well-being.

The challenging task in front of us is to translate the conceptual framework and its inter-linkages between land, natural resources, ecosystems and human well-being of the MA in an accounting framework linking the economy, environment and human well-being.

The conceptual MA framework requires integrated presentation of data on a wide variety of ecological services from provisioning (like food and water), regulating (like climate, flooding), cultural (like recreation and ecotourism, inspirational and heritage) to supporting services (like soil formation); their direct drivers (like economic changes in land use and land cover, irrigation, flows of residuals, harvest and resources consumption and natural causes like eruptions of volcanoes) and indirect drivers (like demographic change, economic shifts in production and trade, technological change and social political

development); and their effects on human well being (like safety of shelter, health and material life through access to work and income). Moreover, the MA conceptual framework should generate data with different local, regional and global spatial dimensions and short and long-term temporal dimension.

Also the issue of valuation of the natural assets should be addressed based on an utilitarian concept of use benefits such direct use of sources of materials, energy or space as inputs in human activities and indirect use through bequest and existence benefits. This valuation principle will allow for the assessment of the change in services from the ecosystems resulting from a given change in management.

Furthermore, while forging a common understanding and language for the definition, classification and valuation of ecosystems, the ecosystem services, the drivers of change and the effects on human well-being, an agreed set of indicators should be defined to analyze the state of health or quality of the various ecosystems. For instance, if the ecosystem service is food provision, then a potential indicator of the ecosystem state would be area under cultivation; for the services, the food produced; for human well-being, the rate of malnutrition; and for the drivers, population growth.

During the course of this 2-day workshop, it is expected that we share our perspectives with each other on the state of the art on what has been done in the development of methodologies in measuring ecosystems and their inter-relations with the economic sphere. This learning process should lead to the development of a common programme of work with the objective to convergence our methodologies and practices.

In closing, let me reiterate that I am committed to work with the science community to realize an improved measure of the sustainability of the ecosystems and their services by making available statistics to meet their research. In achieving this objective, I would like to wish you success in the deliberations during the next two days

and I am looking forward to the outcomes of this meeting including a declaration reflecting our joint commitment.

Thank you for your attention.