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**Second Meeting of the UN Committee of Experts on
Environmental-Economic Accounting
New York, 5-6 July 2007
United Nations Secretariat, Conference Room 8**

**Project Management Framework
Revision of the SESA-2003**

(for decision)

Project Management Framework Revision of the SEEA-2003

A. Introduction

1. The United Nations Statistical Commission at its thirty-eighth session in February 2007 “commended the work of the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting and stressed the importance of the work of the Committee in elevating the level of the *Handbook of National Accounting: Integrated Environmental-Economic Accounting 2003* (SEEA-2003) to that of an international statistical standard based on an agreed issues list and taking into consideration consistency with the revision of the *System of National Accounts, 1993* and other revised macroeconomic standards.” It further “requested the UNCEEA to develop and submit to the next Statistical Commission a project management framework for the revision of the SEEA-2003 and to report on progress” and “called upon the UNCEEA to continue, within its mandate, to coordinate the city groups and other expert groups working in environmental-economic accounting and related statistics”¹.

2. In response to the request of the UN Statistical Commission to develop a project management framework for the revision of the SEEA-2003, the paper outlines a draft proposal for the framework. On the basis of the discussion at the next meeting of the UNCEEA on 5 to 6 July 2007, the paper will be revised and an agreed paper will be submitted by the UNCEEA to the UN Statistical Commission in March 2008.

3. The main thrust of the Project management framework is to detail the elements and phases of the revision process of the SEEA-2003 in order to ensure smooth and transparent process that has a broad support in the international statistical community and beyond. National statistical organizations need to be engaged and consulted in all phases of the Project. The consultation process is an important component of the work programme and calls for active involvement of national, regional and international organizations.

4. The paper is organized as follows: Section B of this paper discussed the guiding principles for the SEEA-2003 revision and criteria for inclusion of issues in the research agenda. Section C presents the governance arrangements and discusses the management, roles and responsibilities of all groups/organizations involved. Section D discusses the decision-making process and coordination among the different groups involved. Section E outlines the work programme, including deliverables, timetable and finance. At the

¹ Statistical Commission Report on the thirty-eighth session (27 February – 2 March 2007). Economic and Social Council, Official Records 2007 Supplement No. 4. 38/107.

end of the paper in Section F a list of questions has been included to facilitate the discussion.

B. Issues for review

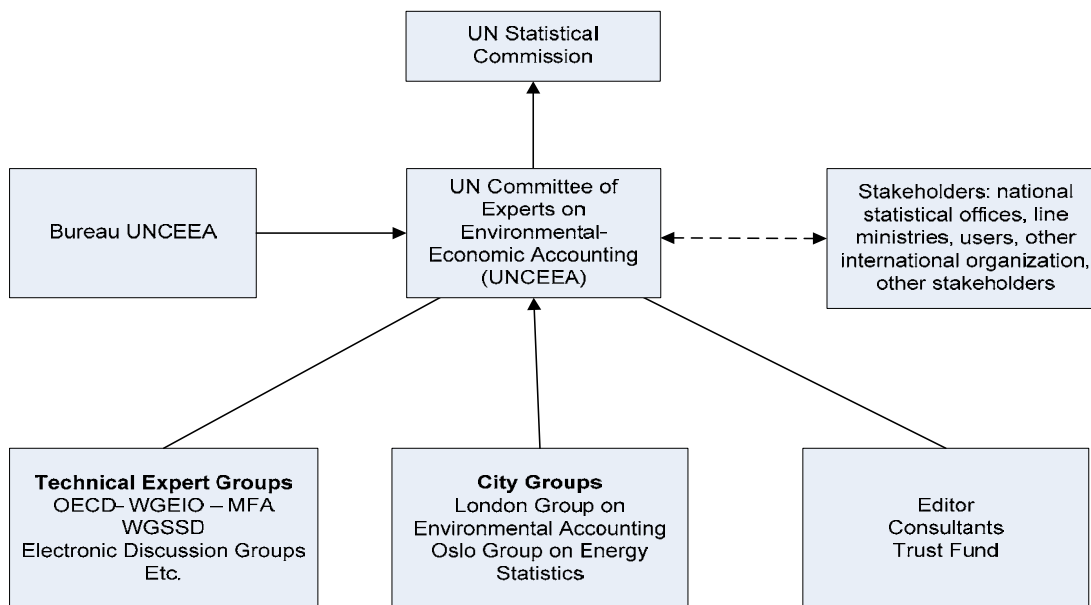
5. The criteria for including the issues in the research agenda for the revision of the SEEA-2003 include the following:

- (a) There should be no fundamental changes to the SEEA-2003, however further development and standardization of classifications may be warranted (e.g. classifications of physical flows);
 - (b) A broad base demand exists by users;
 - (c) A significant number of country experiences exists and consensus on its resolution is expected;
 - (d) Any recommendation should be assessed for consistency with the *1993 SNA Rev.1* and consistency with other macroeconomic statistical standards such as the *Balance of Payments Manual Rev.6*, the *Government Finance Statistics Manual*, *International Standard Classification of all Economic Activities Rev.4* and the *Central Product Classification version 2*, etc. Similar considerations on consistency should also apply to the business accounting standards;
 - (e) Any recommendation should take into account the feasibility of implementation and not compromise international comparability.
6. In addition, for those issues for which no methodological consensus is expected, the following criterion should be added:
- (f) Policy relevance has been demonstrated and country practices are well advanced to warrant further elaboration.

C. Governance arrangements

7. The major elements of the governance arrangements are shown in the attached diagram in **Error! Reference source not found.** The description of the governance follows the diagram and it covers the management, roles and responsibilities of all groups/organizations involved. The key (lower left) shows two relationships between the units: reports to and consults/liaises with.

Figure 1. Governance - Revision of the SEEA-2003



Key

- ← - - → = Consults, liaises
- ← = Reports to

1. UN Statistical Commission

8. The United Nations Statistical Commission mandated the Project and is the entity that will adopt the Project’s final output _ the revised SEEA as an international statistical standard. More specifically, the Statistical Commission is the entity that will approve the work programme and governance of the Project, a consolidated set of recommendations and the final revised draft of the SEEA. Further it is expected that the Statistical Commission will adopt the work on the Project outcomes including the implementation of the new manual in member countries with the assistance, as needed, by a number of international and regional organizations.

2. Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting

9. The United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting (UNCEEA), as delegated by the Statistical Commission, is the entity responsible for managing and coordinating the revision process assisted by a Bureau².

² See paras 11 to 12.

The UNCEEA is also responsible for reporting the progress of the Project to the UN Statistical Commission.

10. Specific activities and tasks of the UNCEEA are as follows:

- (a) Agree on the governance arrangements for the Project and support the thrust of those arrangements for the duration of the Project;
- (b) Set the strategic direction of the Project (within the parameters agreed by the UN Statistical Commission);
- (c) Deliberate on the solutions of the issues submitted by the various technical expert groups;
- (d) Ensure appropriate inputs and outputs for the Project and agree on desired outputs and outcomes with agreed timeline with the various technical expert groups working under its guidance;
- (e) Develop and ratify the overall work plan, schedule, communication strategy and budget of the Project;
- (f) Assign (in respect of reporting relationships) or negotiate (in respect of guidance and oversight relationships) tasks of the technical expert groups working in environmental-economic accounts and related statistics;
- (g) Address Project resource issues and raise funds as needed to support the Project;
- (h) Receive and act upon as needed, regular reports on progress toward outputs and outcomes, budgets, and stakeholders views and concerns, including any matter (for example, on the scope of the Project) that puts the agreed outcomes at risk;
- (i) Report to the Statistical Commission;
- (j) Liaise with stakeholders, managing their expectations and gaining their support.

3. Bureau of the UNCEEA

11. It is proposed that a Bureau of the UNCEEA be established. The Bureau consists of members of the UNCEEA at the senior level in national and international statistical offices: It will include the Chair, the Secretariat, senior officials from four to five countries/international organizations elected by the UNCEEA from among its members for a period of 3 years on the basis of expertise in environmental-economic accounting.

12. The Bureau will assist the Chair of the UNCEEA by carrying out the following activities and tasks:

- (a) Approve the agenda of the UNCEEA meetings;
- (b) Decide on behalf of the UNCEEA on those matters for which it has received authority from the UNCEEA;
- (c) Review and confirm overall work plan, prepare schedules for intermediate outputs and activities, track progress and take appropriate action as needed;
- (d) Develop a communication strategy consistent with transparency, sequenced to stay within the time constraints and supportive of successful outputs and outcomes;
- (e) Fund raising and prepare and monitor cash and in-kind Project budget;
- (f) Track progress on tasks and note completion of tasks of the technical expert groups and consultants contributing to the Project;
- (g) Liaise widely, most especially with stakeholders to manage their expectations and gain their support;
- (h) Participate in the UNCEEA meetings and in other technical consultations as needed (e.g. London Group, Oslo Group, etc.);
- (i) Ensure adequate and effective review of technical matters;
- (j) With the Editor, provide oversight of the overall internal consistency of the revised SEEA-2003 and consistency with other macroeconomic statistical standards (including 1993SNA Rev.1, BOP, ISIC, CPC, etc.);
- (k) Bring to the attention of the UNCEEA contentious issues or any other issues that it deems appropriate;
- (l) Consider the response to proposed changes from countries and/or regional and other expert meetings.

4. Editor

13. During the First Meeting of the UNCEEA in June 2006, it was decided to engage a designated editor in the revision process of the SEEA-2003. The Committee identified the following profile of the editor: (a) high standing in the area of environmental-economic accounting and national accounts; (b) capable of reaching consensus, (c) impartial; and (d) native English speaker.

14. The Editor has the following tasks and responsibility:

- (a) Progressively draft recommendations for change and clarification and prepare drafts of the text of the revised SEEA-2003, according to the Project schedule;

- (b) Carry through the preparations of the revised SEEA-2003 to the camera-ready copy (or its equivalent);
- (c) Participate in technical discussions as needed;
- (d) Participate in UNCEEA meetings and participate in other technical considerations and consult with moderators of expert groups;
- (e) Provide oversight of the overall internal consistency of the revised SEEA-2003 and of the consistency with other macroeconomic statistical standards.

15. The editor will be selected by the UNCEEA from among internationally respected senior statisticians with recognized expertise in environmental-economic accounting and/or national accounts. The terms of reference of the editor are attached in Annex II. A letter with an invitation for nominations will be dispatched by the Secretariat to Heads of National Statistical Offices to identify suitable candidates. In addition, a call for candidates will be placed on the UNCEEA website, and placed in the soon-to-be launched UNCEEA Newsletter.

5. Secretariat

16. The Secretariat of the Project is UNSD because of its role as permanent Secretariat of the UNCEEA. It is the main source of logistical and administrative support for the Project and receives guidance for this support from the UNCEEA and its Bureau. Among the tasks that the Secretariat undertakes are the following:

- (a) Circulate decisions to countries and/or regional and other expert meetings for discussion;
- (b) Management of the Project website;
- (c) Preparation of the Project correspondence with the Statistical Commission members and national statistical offices;
- (d) Preparation of reports to the Statistical Commission on behalf of the UNCEEA;
- (e) Logistical and other support to the Project.

6. City Groups and other Technical Expert Groups

17. The city groups and other technical expert groups that may be created contribute to the revision of the SEEA-2003 by identifying issues to be included in the research agenda for the revision of the SEEA-2003, solving those issues included in the agreed research agenda by the UNCEEA and submitting recommendations for change to the UNCEEA for its final decision.

18. Specific tasks and responsibilities of the city groups and technical expert groups will be agreed with the UNCEEA. Terms of reference for the tasks related to this project will be formulated with every expert group. They will include deliverables, timelines and a chair to monitor the discussions and to write the recommendations to be submitted to the UNCEEA.

D. Decision-making process and coordination

1. Decision making process

19. As approved by the UN Statistical Commission, the UNCEEA is responsible for managing and coordinating the revision process of the SEEA-2003 as well as for liaising with senior-level representatives of countries and international organizations. The UNCEEA is assisted by a Bureau to carry out its activities. Moreover, the United Nations Statistics Division, as the Secretariat of the UNCEEA, provides secretarial support to the revision process.

20. The UNCEEA takes decision on the scope of the revision and on technical and conceptual issues assisted by its Bureau. The list of issues to be considered for revision will be discussed at the next meeting of the UNCEEA in July 2007 and approved at the end of 2007.

21. Issues are first deliberated by various existing city group or other technical expert groups, such as the London Group on Environmental Accounting and its Subgroups, the Oslo Group on Energy Statistics, regional commission meetings, electronic discussion groups (EDGs), and possible new expert groups. The terms of reference of the contributions of every city group or other expert group will be formulated with an agreed timeline and a chair to monitor the progress of the discussions and to write the recommendations to be submitted to the UNCEEA. The recommendations of these city groups and other technical expert groups will then be considered by the UNCEEA for discussion and final recommendation. The chair of the city group and other technical expert group is responsible for the preparation of recommendations of the group. The UNCEEA might refer back to technical expert groups for further consultation and deliberation on the recommendations submitted to the UNCEEA. The UNCEEA will strive for consensus to the highest extent possible. There will be voting, if necessary, through written consultations or during meetings. Those entitled to vote include UNCEEA members. The recommendations of the UNCEEA will be circulated by the Secretariat on behalf of the UNCEEA to countries and/or regional commission meetings for discussion and the final results of the consultation will be consolidated by the Bureau and presented to the UNCEEA, which will make the final recommendations to the UN Statistical Commission.

22. The recommendation for changes, which may include clarification beyond disputes, interpretation and real conceptual changes, should be formulated by a clear agreement of a majority of experts and applicability should be considered feasible in a number of countries.

23. The recommendations by the city groups and other technical expert groups should indicate whether the recommendation warrants the inclusion in the statistical standard or should only be considered an improvement to the treatment of the issue in the SEEA-2003.

24. Throughout the revision process of the SEEA-2003, the UNCEEA assisted by the Bureau will assess and evaluate the consistency with other international macro-economic standards, in particular the 1993 SNA Rev.1, Balance of Payments Manual Rev.6, International Standard Classification of all Economic Activities Rev.4 and the Central Product Classification version 2.

2. Coordination

25. The UNCEEA should ensure coordination among various city groups and other technical expert groups. A deliberate coordination mechanism will have to be put in place consisting of (a) coordination within the international organizations and countries; (b) bringing issues of the various groups (e.g. London Group, Oslo Group, etc.) to meetings on environmental-economic accounting; and (c) inclusion of these consistency and coordination issues in the agenda of the UNCEEA meetings. Coordination between the London Group on Environmental Accounting and the Oslo Group on Energy Statistics should also ensure parallel progress on the consistency of methodology between stocks and flows of energy statistics, including their classification. To this end, a project management framework for the drafting of the *System of Environmental-Economic Accounting for Energy* (SEEA-E) has also been submitted for discussion by the UNCEEA. Attention should also be paid to the relationship between the SEEA and business accounting standards.

26. To ensure country involvement and general transparency, all documents for discussion in the meetings of the UNCEEA will be publicly accessible through the UNCEEA website. These documents include preparatory papers, minutes of the meetings, and conclusions. After each meeting, conclusions on proposed changes will be circulated to all UN member countries for review, with a 60-day response period. To ensure smooth progress, issues on which general agreement has emerged will not be further discussed, unless inconsistency with other decisions on other issues requires further deliberation.

27. The Bureau and Secretariat will assist the UNCEEA in managing the revision process including drawing up of time schedules, monitoring resource use and needs, liaising with and coordinating the contributions of the various expert groups, etc. UNSD on behalf of the Bureau should prepare progress reports to the UNCEEA on a regular basis. The recommendations for change will be submitted by the UNCEEA to the UN Statistical Commission and the rewriting of the revised SEEA-2003 will be the main responsibility of the editor. In the earlier part of the revision process, the editor will oversee conceptual consistency of the various emerging proposal and contribute to the technical discussions. The editor will work under the responsibility of the UNCEEA.

E. Work programme

1. Deliverables

28. The **final output** of the Project is the revised SEEA-2003.

29. **Intermediate outputs** are recommendations of the technical expert groups and the UNCEEA. Recommendations of the UNCEEA are produced after each of its meeting and will be circulated to countries for information.

2. Timetable

30. The UN Statistical Commission upon recommendation of the UNCEEA in March 2005 identified 2010 as the target date for the publication of the revised SEEA-2003. However, the coordination of the various groups involved in the revision process of the SEEA-2003 as well as the development of a work programme for these groups is taking longer than expected. Further, different schedules and timetables of different parallel processes as well as a closer evaluation of the work programme, lead to the consideration that the target date for the publication of the SEEA-2003 should be moved to 2012. This is also the target date of the delivery of outputs by the Oslo Group on Energy Statistics as well as the Subgroup of the London Group on Land and Ecosystem Accounts.

31. The timetable for the revision of the SEEA-2003 is presented in Table 1 below. A table outlining the work schedule by the main actors of the SEEA-2003 revision process will be developed after the meeting of the UNCEEA in July 2007, when an agreed list of issues and the city groups and technical groups responsible for addressing and solving the issues will be finalized.

3. Finance

32. The updating process will be financed partly from contributions in kind by members of the UNCEEA and partly from a trust fund.

Trust fund

33. The trust fund will be set up to mainly finance the participation of experts from the developing countries in the meetings of the UNCEEA as well as in the meetings of city groups and other technical expert groups, the activities of the editor, some consultancies and the electronic version and index of the revised SEEA-2003. Member States are encouraged to contribute to the trust fund to complement contributions by the international agencies.

34. The resource requirements to be financed by the trust fund is estimated in excess of US\$ 1,250,000, taking into account meetings of the UNCEEA, outreach programme, editor and consultancies.

F. Questions

- 1) *Do you agree with the criteria for including issues in the research agenda [paras 5-6]?*
- 2) *Do you agree with Figure 1 presenting the governance of the revision of the SEEA-2003?*
- 3) *Do you agree with the tasks and activities of the UNCEEA [paras 9-10]?*
- 4) *Do you agree with the creation of a Bureau of the UNCEEA [para 11]?*
 - a. *Do you agree with its composition and duration of appointments of its members [para 11] ?*
 - b. *Do you agree with the activities and tasks of the Bureau [para 12]?*
- 5) *Do you agree with the tasks and responsibilities of the editor [paras 13 and 14]?*
 - a. *Do you agree with the Draft Terms of Reference for the editor [Annex II]?*
 - b. *Do you agree with the proposal that the UNCEEA select the editor [para 15]?*
- 6) *Do you agree with the task and activities of the Secretariat of the Project [para 16]?*
- 7) *Do you agree with the decision-making process for the revision of the SEEA-2003 [paras 19 to 24]?*
- 8) *Do you agree with the coordination mechanisms [para 25 to 27]?*
- 9) *Do you agree with the work programme [paras 28 to 34]?*

Table 1. Timetable for the revision of the SEEA-2003

	2007	2008-2009	Mid 2010	End 2010	March 2011	Mid 2011	End 2011	End 2011	March 2012
Establishment of the scope and governance of the Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion on the list of issues in the technical expert group and the UNCEEA meeting • Selection and start appointment of the Editor • Recommendations on selected issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed final list of issues to be submitted to UNSC (2008) • Agreed TORs, including deliverables and timeline, of the technical expert groups (2008) 							
Recommendations by all technical expert groups		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Management Framework is submitted to UNSC for approval (2008) • Recommendations of the city groups and other technical expert groups are circulated to the UNCEEA for approval as soon as they are ready • Recommendations of the UNCEEA are sent to countries for comments as soon as they are ready 							
Consolidated recommendations of the UNCEEA			Recommendations are reviewed for consistency by the UNCEEA and circulated to countries for review	Consolidated recommendations are submitted to UNSC for approval	UNSC meeting				
First draft revised SEEA						Complete draft sent to countries for comments on consistency and readability	UNCEEA review		
Final draft revised SEEA								UNCEEA approval	UNSC approval

ANNEX I

TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON ENVIRONMENTAL-ECONOMIC ACCOUNTING

- 1) The United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting was established by the United Nations Statistical Commission at its 36th Session in March 2005. Its overall objectives are (a) to mainstream environmental-economic accounting and related statistics; (b) to elevate the *System of integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting (SEEA)* to an international statistical standard; and (c) to advance the implementation of the SEEA in countries. To achieve these objectives, the UN Committee programme of work will focus on the following:
 - (a) Ensure coordination, integration and complementarity among programmes in environmental-economic accounting and related statistics among international organizations and countries;
 - (b) Encourage the use of environmental-economic accounting in countries in support to decision making through technical recommendations on the compilation, harmonization and dissemination of the accounts, linking the accounts to indicators and developing a closer relationship between the users and producers of environmental-economic accounts and related statistics;
 - (c) Further methodologies in environmental-economic accounting and statistics through identifying, and prioritising issues that need to be addressed, establishing appropriate mechanisms to address those issues, monitoring progress made, reviewing proposed solution and submitting recommendations to the United Nations Statistical Commission for approval;
 - (d) Advance the implementation of the *SEEA* in developed and developing countries;
 - (e) Work towards the harmonization of data collection activities of environment and related statistics with concepts and definitions of environmental-economic accounting including the assurance of data quality.
- 2) The Committee will bring to the attention of United Nations Statistics Division and United Nations Statistical Commission new developments that impact the compilation of environmental-economic accounting and work on developing standards and, whenever this is not possible, best practices.
- 3) The Committee has an umbrella function in providing overall vision, coordination, prioritisation and direction in the field of environmental-economic accounting and related statistics. The Committee will ensure that existing or new groups working in environmental accounting and related statistics will work in a complementary fashion with the Committee.

- 4) The selected members of the Committee comprise high-level experts from national governments and international organizations with a broad range of experience in statistics and in the uses of environmental-economic accounts. Members would also be selected so as to ensure equitable regional representation.
- 5) The Committee will elect a Chair who will serve for a 3 year-period renewable for once for an additional 3 years.
- 6) The United Nations Statistics Division will serve as the permanent Secretariat of the Committee. It will provide the day-to-day management and coordination and undertake all internal and external communication on behalf of the Committee. In cooperation with the Chair, the Secretariat will coordinate, monitor, and report on the activities of the various expert groups, organize meetings, develop the agenda for the meetings, maintain the Committee website and issue the Newsletter.
- 7) The Committee will prepare an annual report for presentation to the Statistical Commission. It will report progress made in its activities, including progress made by the various city groups, inter-secretariat working groups and other groups working with the Committee within its mandate.

ANNEX II

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Editor of the Revised SEEA-2003

DRAFT

Reporting and working relationship

The editor reports to the UN Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting (UNCEEA). On a day-to-day basis, he/she works with the UNSD as the Secretariat of the UNCEEA.

Responsibility:

The editor is responsible for:

- Preparing progressively drafts of the text of the revised SEEA-2003, drawing on textual inputs from the London Group, Oslo Group, EDGs and other technical expert groups that will be created as needed as well as the recommendations of the UNCEEA;
- Consulting with authors of the substantive reports of the expert groups to clarify ambiguities and rectify substantive errors;
- Ensuring internal consistency and integrity of the revised SEEA-2003 and consistency with *1993 System of National Accounts* (1993 SNA) and its update 1993 SNA Rev.1, as well as consistency with other macroeconomic statistical standards like the *Balance of Payments Manual Rev.6*, the *Government Finance Statistics Manual* and the *Monetary and Financial Statistics Manual*, the *International Standard Classification of all Economic Activities Rev.4*, the *Central Product Classification version 2* and international (business) accounting standard;
- Participating in the expert group meetings related to the revision of the SEEA-2003;
- Participating in the regional consultation meetings on the revision of the SEEA-2003;
- Preparing the master copy of the revised SEEA-2003 by revising the text of the SEEA-2003 and consolidating and integrating the recommendations of the UNCEEA in the text to be submitted to the UNCEEA for clearance by May 2009 and finalizing the draft by October 2009 for approval by Statistical Commission in 2010.

Qualifications:

The editor must be an internationally recognized expert on national accounts who has a thorough understanding of the 1993 SNA and its updating issues, of environmental-economic accounting and proven experience in international coordination work on

national accounts and environmental-economic accounting. Excellent drafting skills in English are required. The candidate must have advanced university degree and at least 10 years of experience in research in economic statistics particularly national accounting, environmental-economic accounting and related statistics.

Remuneration: Remuneration is negotiable but commensurate with standards of international organizations.

Duration of services: **3 person-years starting end 2007.**

ANNEX III

Statistical Commission

Thirty-sixth session

5 January 2004

Item 5 of the provisional agenda*

Natural resource and environment statistics

Report of the Interagency Working Group on Environment Statistics

Note by the Secretary-General

Summary

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-fourth session,** the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the newly established Interagency Working Group on Environment Statistics. The Commission may wish to review the proposed terms of reference and plan of work of the Interagency Working Group.

^a *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2003, Supplement No. 4 (E/2004/24), chap. IV, para. 2(h).*

Report of the Interagency Working Group on Environment Statistics

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I. Introduction

1. The Statistical Commission at its thirty-fourth session agreed that the United Nations Statistics Division should set up an interagency working group on environment statistics, with a special focus on the development and harmonization of methods, concepts and standards, coordination of data collection and training. The present document is the report of the first meeting of the Interagency Working Group on Environment Statistics, at which the topics for the consideration of the Working Group were its objectives, its terms of reference, plan of work, as well as plans for the period 2004-2005.

2. The first meeting of the Interagency Working Group was held in Paris, on 18 December 2003, at the invitation of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), back-to-back with the meeting of the OECD Working Group on Environmental Information and Outlooks. The international organizations/ agencies participating in the meeting included the United Nations Statistics Division, OECD, the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

3. It was recognized at the meeting that despite significant developments in international environment statistics, much work, both methodological and practical, remained to be done. Progress in work on environmental indicators, indicators of sustainable development as well as work on integrated environmental and economic accounting is still hindered by the lack of sufficient good-quality, relevant and timely basic environmental data.

4. Some of the major reasons behind this situation are the lack of harmonized and globally relevant methods, concepts, definitions and classifications; insufficient information and guidance on best practices; insufficient training and capacitybuilding; and problems of coordination at both the national and the international level.

5. The creation of the Interagency Working Group should enable the enhanced coordination of international work in the field, by helping to establish cooperative working relations in the areas where the avoidance of unnecessary duplication and the pooling of resources can provide faster progress. Against this background, the Group agreed on the following objectives, terms of reference and programme of work.

II. Objectives, terms of reference and plan of work

6. The main objective of the Interagency Working Group on Environment Statistics is to firmly anchor environment statistics as part of official statistics by improving and strengthening basic environmental data, and thus to make an important contribution to the development of environmental indicators, indicators of sustainable development and integrated environmental and economic accounting.

7. The Group intends to accomplish its objective by enhancing cooperation and by the pooling of knowledge bases and resources in the areas of methodological work, data collection and dissemination, training and capacity-building, and the organization of joint events.

8. The Interagency Working Group will take fully into account relevant work of other international networks and forums, and give priority to the specific areas set out below.

Improvement of methodological practices in international environment statistics

9. The Interagency Working Group will focus on consolidating work in those subject areas that are fairly advanced, through the dissemination of international recommendations on definitions and methodologies, guidelines and best practices. It will identify priority areas for further methodological work and initiate work in those areas by organizing subgroups and providing a regular forum for discussion and exchange of expertise.

Harmonization of international environmental data collection

10. The Interagency Working Group will review international data collection mechanisms in priority areas of environment and sustainable development information and, where appropriate, will draw up proposals to streamline and to further harmonize international data collection through the application of joint data collection activities such as questionnaires, the establishment of shared responsibilities and distribution of work among its members at both the geographical and the subject-matter level.

Technical cooperation, training and capacity-building

11. The members of the Interagency Working Group will participate in each others' technical cooperation activities as appropriate and feasible and undertake joint technical cooperation projects to make better use of the knowledge base and resources available at each international organization.

Organization of joint events

12. The Interagency Working Group will organize, when appropriate and feasible, joint events (seminars, workshops) to enhance communication about and raise the profile of environmental data issues, promote the exchange of information, particularly concerning best practices in important subject areas, and further discussions on selected issues in environment statistics.

III. Organization of work

13. The permanent members of the Interagency Working Group on Environment Statistics are in principle those international organizations or agencies that have a well-established international programme on environment statistics including direct and regular collection of comprehensive environment statistics from countries. The initial members of the Group are the United Nations Statistics Division, OECD, Eurostat, ECE and UNEP. The Interagency Working Group can extend membership to other interested organizations with international environment statistics programmes.

14. International organizations or agencies that have programmes focusing on specific areas of environment statistics as well as countries with outstanding experience should be associated with the work of the Interagency Working Group as required and feasible and will be invited on an ad hoc basis to join the subgroups set up by the Working Group on a geographic or subject-matter basis.

15. The Interagency Working Group will maintain strong collaboration with other groups active in related fields, and in particular with the London Group on Environmental Accounting, as well as with groups working on indicators of sustainable development.

16. The Interagency Working Group will propose topics and subgroups for action and will be responsible for overall coordination of these subgroups.

17. The Secretariat of the Interagency Working Group will be provided by the United Nations Statistics Division. The Division will report annually to the United Nations Statistical Commission on the work of the Group. Tools to facilitate communication and exchange of information among members of the Interagency Working Group will be developed.

18. The Interagency Working Group on Environment Statistics will meet regularly, at least once a year, preferably back-to-back with convenient international meetings.

IV. Plans for 2004-2005

19. In its methodological work the Interagency Working Group will focus on the joint development of consolidated guidelines for international water statistics based mainly on work carried out by Eurostat, the United Nations Statistics Division, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and earlier by ECE. Land use is an area where there is a rapidly growing demand for reliable and coherent statistics, and work on definitions and methodologies is urgently needed. It is therefore proposed to consider land use as a priority area for further work.

20. In data collection and dissemination, the Interagency Working Group will draw up an inventory of major official international environmental data collection activities and will prepare a consolidated data collection calendar for the participating organizations. It will continue to develop a core set of variables to be jointly collected for international purposes, without prejudice to specific data collection by the different organizations to satisfy their special needs.

21. In the area of technical cooperation, the workshops to be held by the United Nations Statistics Division in the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and Economic Community of West African States regions, the ongoing environment assessment and capacity-building activities of UNEP in the developing regions under the Global Environmental Outlook (GEO) and related projects, Eurostat's environment statistics project in the Mediterranean countries organized through the UNEP-supported Plan Bleu, and the work of OECD on environmental data to support environmental performance reviews in non-OECD countries offer possibilities for joint activities.

22. A training workshop on material flow analysis in 2004 (organized by Eurostat together with the European Environment Agency) and a seminar on concepts, methods and best practices in water statistics in 2005 are the proposed joint events. The revitalization of the working sessions on methodological issues in environment statistics (organized in the past by ECE, later jointly by ECE and Eurostat) could be considered under the aegis of the Interagency Working Group.

V. Points for discussion

23. The Statistical Commission may wish to review the suggested terms of reference and plan of work of the Interagency Working Group on Environment Statistics.