

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

Minutes of the Meeting

(United Nations, New York, 29-31 August 2005)

1. The Preliminary Meeting of the United Nations Committee of Expert on Environmental-Economic Accounting was opened by Mr. Paul Cheung, Director of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD). It was hosted in New York at the United Nations Headquarters from 29 to 31 August 2005 and organized by UNSD, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). It was chaired by Mr. Robert Smith, Secretary of the London Group on Environmental Accounting and Director of Environment Accounts and Statistics Division, Statistics Canada. The agenda and list of participants is included in Annex V and Annex VI respectively.
2. The Preliminary Meeting of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting was organized in response to the request of the United Nations Statistical Commission at its 36th Session in March 2005 to prepare the Terms of Reference of the Committee and to submit them to the Bureau of the Commission for approval.
3. Participants agreed on a Terms of Reference for the Committee (attached in Annex I); formulated its long-term objectives; developed its programme of work; and agreed on its governance structure. Further, the draft handbook of national accounting *Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting for Water Resources* was discussed in the thematic session on water accounting.
4. A set of action items with deadlines to be completed by the Committee members was also identified. This is presented in Annex II.
5. The discussion during the meeting followed the structure of the document UNCEEA/Prelim/5 – Operational Guidelines and the agenda of the meeting. The minutes are also organized following the same structure.

Name and membership of the Committee

6. The name of the Committee was slightly changed to “United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting”. The addition of the words “of experts” is to distinguish this Committee from the Inter-governmental bodies that are established within the United Nations system.

7. High-level representation in the Committee by countries and international organizations alike was recommended as an integral part of the strategic function of the Committee and considered essential for the success in meeting the Committee's objectives.

Objectives

8. In addition to two broad objectives of mainstreaming environmental-economic accounting and elevating the System of integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting (SEEA) to the level of an international standard, the Committee agreed to add the objective of advancing the implementation in countries.

9. Further, it was agreed that a general explanation of what is considered an international standard should be added to the Operational Guidelines of the Committee. In particular, it was mentioned that a standard implies agreement on a framework of definitions, classifications and accounts and tables to be compiled in all countries. Moreover, a quality assessment framework, including the integrity and methodological soundness of the framework of accounts and tables, dissemination standards, documentation of data sources (metadata) could be developed for the SEEA, building on existing framework for other statistical standards like the 1993 System of National Accounts (1993 SNA) and Balance of Payments Manual 5th Edition (BPM5).

Components of the work programme

Coordination

10. The Committee agreed that within its mandate, it has an umbrella function in coordinating and providing vision, direction and prioritisation so as to ensure that existing groups work in complementary fashion. The groups in question are the London Group on Environmental Accounting, the Oslo Group on Energy Statistics, the Inter-Secretariat Working Group (ISWG) on Environment Statistics and the ISWG on Energy Statistics and other expert groups that might be established within the scope of the Committee's mandate. It is expected that the city groups shall accept a significant part of their work programme to be dedicated to the mandate of the Committee taking into account the capacity and terms of reference of the city groups. With regard to the ISWGs, the Committee will actively seek to support the structuring and prioritising of their programmes of work by developing jointly with them a common vision on the international environmental-economic information system.

11. To effect its coordinating and prioritising role, the Committee shall enter into agreements with the various expert groups reflecting agreed terms of reference, composition of expertise and agreed time schedules. In accordance with the agreements, these groups will report to the Committee on their progress. The UNSD as Secretariat of the Committee in consultation with the Chair of the Committee will ensure clear channels of communication with the Chairs and Secretariats of the various expert groups to inform them of the recommendations of the Committee.

12. The Committee will establish close coordination with the various groups working on environmental and related indicators, including the Commission for Sustainable Development, the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on the Millennium Development Goals Indicators, etc.

13. The Committee took note of the presentation by the Federal Statistical Office Germany outlining strategic questions on environmental-economic accounting. It requested the Federal Statistical Office of Germany to elaborate the issues in a paper and submit it to the Committee for further discussion.

Promotion and implementation

14. The programmes of work on the promotion and the implementation of environmental-economic accounting are inter-related. The discussion of the two agenda items took place in a single session during the meeting and this is reflected also in these minutes.

15. The Committee took note of the strategy papers on promotion prepared by UNEP and on implementation of environmental-economic accounting prepared by the Earth Institute at Columbia University and the World Bank Environment Department. It reiterated the importance of the implementation of environmental-economic accounting in countries and its policy uses. It further requested that the programme of work on implementation be further discussed at its next meeting.

16. Although the Committee agreed that the institutionalisation of environmental-economic accounting in countries is in line with its objectives, it found the proposal of UNEP to develop an instrument to engage national governments to apply environmental-economic accounting on a voluntary basis beyond its mandate. Nevertheless, the Committee considered useful the proposal of developing a document, which can be used as promotion material, explaining, for example, what environmental-economic accounting is; why it is necessary; what policy questions it can answer; what are the practices for establishing environmental-economic accounting; and what methodologies are available. Such a document could be used by UNEP, acting independently from the Committee, to forward the implementation of the accounts.

17. The Committee welcomed the initiative of the Earth Institute and the World Bank Environment Department to promote the implementation of environmental-economic accounting through assisting countries in developing the accounts, indicators and policy analyses; building awareness for environmental-economic accounting; and developing a collaborative effort among economists, statisticians and scientists in developing and developed countries. It requested to be kept informed about the progress of this initiative. It further welcomed the offer from the World Bank Data Development Group to support the implementation of environmental-economic accounting in countries through two trust funds on statistical capacity building, which could be used for financing workshops and country projects.

18. The Committee recognized the key role of the UN Regional Commissions and other regional organizations in the implementation and promotion of environmental-economic

accounting in the various regions. It urged the Secretariat to maintain close communication and collaboration with them.

19. In the development of its work programme on promotion and implementation, the Committee endorsed the organization of user-producer dialogues to advance the implementation, dissemination and use of environmental-economic accounts as part of national statistical programmes and their uses. In this context, the Committee endorsed the proposal by UNSD to organize a high level user-producer dialogue on water accounting in 2006 to stimulate the interaction between users and producers of water accounts. The meeting will coincide with the release of the handbook of national accounting *Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting for Water Resources* and will bring together high-level representatives from national statistical offices, water ministries and experts from international organizations.

20. Further, the Committee encouraged UNSD to undertake a benchmark scope and compliance survey in countries to assess the current status of implementation of different environment-economic accounts, priorities and future plans.

21. The Committee considered the paper by Federal Statistical Office of Germany on linking the accounting framework with sustainable development indicators and looks forward to the continuation of activities in this area. At the same time, it reiterated the importance of measurement approaches rooted in the framework of the SEEA. In particular, the Committee requested that the Secretariat communicate with OECD and the leaders of the Norwegian project on Sustainable Development to express the interest of the Committee in collaborating with and contributing to the UNDS, OECD and others (regional initiatives) in developing a conceptual framework for sustainable development indicators. The Committee further requested that the Federal Statistical Office of Germany further develop its paper on linking the accounting to indicators and report back to the Committee.

22. The Committee took note of the presentation on UN Water by UN Division on Sustainable Development (UNDS). It welcomed the invitation extended by UNDS, the Secretariat of UN Water, to present the accounting methodologies and tables of the handbook of national accounting *Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting for Water Resources* at its next meeting. This would bridge the gap with the users' community and contribute to the international discussion on information systems for integrated water management.

Methodological Research

23. The Committee recognized the major international accomplishment of the UN and its international partners in issuing the SEEA 2003 as a "white cover" publication and soon as a joint publication of the United Nations, European Commission, the International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the World Bank. The SEEA-2003 represents a major step forward towards the harmonization of concepts, definitions and classification of environmental-economic accounting.

24. In light of this accomplishment, the Committee endorsed the update of the SEEA-2003 to allow for its release as a statistical standard in 2010. It endorsed the undertaking of a programme of research focusing on refining and clarifying those issues that will permit elevating it to the level of a statistical standard. It stressed the importance of linking the release of the SEEA with the release of other international standards such as the updated 1993 SNA and the revised Balance of Payments Manual. Although priority should be given to the issues that could be solved between now and 2008, it was considered important to also establish a longer-term research agenda.

25. The Committee welcomed the initial issue list organized by the chapters of the SEEA 2003 and presented in document UNCEEA/Prelim/9. The preliminary list was prepared with the objective of identifying those issues that should feed into the update of the SEEA-2003. The Committee requested UNSD to extend the consultation process to a wide range of experts producing and using environmental-economic accounts through a general call for issues so as to develop a comprehensive research agenda by mid-2006. It urged to keep the list of issues manageable so as to meet the deadline of 2010.

26. The Committee urged an early start on addressing the issues in the research agenda and in particular requested the countries and international institutions proposing the issues to take steps towards tackling them.

27. The Committee considered the preliminary list of issues. Its observations and recommendations are summarized below, organized by the SEEA-2003 chapters. The preliminary list of issues has been amended on the basis of the discussion at the meeting and each issue has been classified as “short-term” and “long-term” on the basis of whether it could be solved between now and 2008 or it would need more time for an agreement on a single approach to be reached. The updated list of issues is included in Annex III of this document.

Chapter 3

The issues identified in the document UNCEEA/Prelim/9 were considered clarifications on aspects of the implementation. It was noted that the implementation of physical input-output tables has benefited the quality of national price and volume measures and national accounts statistics, alike.

The Committee took note of the presentation by the OECD on its activities on material flow accounts and requested that OECD report to the Committee progress made on the preparation of two guidance documents – one on methodological and measurement aspects and the other on the use and interpretation of material flow indicators expected to be completed in 2006 - as well as on a simplified set of tables for the compilation of material flow accounts.

Chapter 4

The issues identified in the chapter were considered clarifications on aspects of the implementation. The following issues should be retained in the short-term research agenda, which includes issues that will be solved by 2008:

- (i) Broadening of the discussion on energy and emission accounts, based on extensive country experiences and including new types of energy (e.g. renewable energy);
- (ii) Standardization of terminology on waste and waste products and methodology for compiling waste accounts;
- (iii) Development of standardized tables for the waste and energy accounts;
- (iv) Development of standardized bridge tables linking energy accounts with energy statistics, which may not be compiled using the concept of residence used in the 1993 SNA. This would be very important in linking the energy and emission accounts to the Kyoto protocol information requirements.

The research agenda of chapters 3 and 4 is very closely linked. Statistics Denmark will lead the research agenda in Chapter 3, Statistics Netherlands in Chapter 4 and OECD will lead the research agenda on material flow accounts. Statistics Denmark, Statistics Netherlands and the OECD should closely coordinate their activities. They would also coordinate activities with Eurostat task forces on Material Flow Accounts and NAMEA.

Chapters 5 and 6

The Committee agreed to retain the following issues in the research agenda:

- (i) Definition and classification of environmental taxes;
- (ii) Definition and classification of environmental subsidies;
- (iii) Conceptual development of the treatment of permits (e.g. emission permits, fishing rights, etc.);
- (iv) Development of classification on natural resources management activities and expenditures.

Eurostat and Statistics Sweden will write issue papers on the above for discussion and deliberation by the London Group.

Chapters 7 and 8

The Committee endorsed the list of issues proposed in the paper UNCEEA/Prelim/9. Some of the issues were classified as short and some as long term (see Annex III). Further the Committee endorsed the work being carried out by the Subgroup of the London Group on Mineral and Energy Accounts and in particular the preparation of a handbook on mineral and energy asset accounts. It endorsed the Terms of Reference of the Sub-group, which are attached in Annex IV. Further the Committee considered that maintaining consistency between stocks and flows is important and it urged the Subgroup on Mineral and Energy Asset Accounts to work in close cooperation with the Oslo Group on Energy Statistics.

Chapters 9 and 10

The Committee considered evaluation of those types of non-market valuation that are not within the 1993 SNA principles to be a long-term research issue. However, it considered important to continue to explore valuation within the SNA principles and welcomed the proposal of the Bureau of Economic Analysis to prepare a paper on the importance of economic valuation in environmental-economic accounting grounded in the principles of the 1993SNA. This paper would present an alternative approach from the one presented in the paper prepared by the Federal Statistical Office Germany (UNCEEA/Prelim/9e), which recommends the use of modelling approaches based on physical environmental information as opposed to economic valuation.

The Committee agreed to improve the quality and organization of Chapters 9 and 10 of the SEEA-2003. It further endorsed the proposal of including discussion of valuation of natural assets which are not covered in the 1993 SNA, in order to attempt to achieve a more comprehensive measure of environmentally-adjusted national wealth.

The Committee discussed a proposal of developing case studies in various countries to test the three approaches to measure degradation discussed in Chapter 9 and 10 (i.e. maintenance cost valuation, damage-based valuation and modelling approach).

Other issues

Expansion to social issues

The Committee recognized that the link between social and environmental issues is important. However, it recommended remaining focused on the interaction between the economy and the environment. Nevertheless, the Committee encourages national countries to experiment in integrating social and environmental issues in an accounting framework. It also encouraged the London Group to monitor progress of made at the country level.

Land and ecosystem accounting

The Committee endorsed the notion of land and ecosystems accounting as an area of long-term research. It welcomed the proposal of the European Environment Agency to work towards having land and ecosystem accounting widely accepted. It encouraged the creation of a group bringing together scientists, statisticians and policy makers and requested that the EEA work closely with the London Group to further methodological development in this area, focusing at first on the integration of land and ecosystem accounts within the SEEA framework.

Harmonization of data collection activities with environmental accounting concepts and definitions

28. The Committee recognized that harmonizing data collection activities with environmental accounting concepts and definition is essential for furthering the

implementation of environmental-economic accounting. It also considered dissemination as an important component of data harmonization.

29. The Committee endorsed the preparation of handbooks that would provide practical guidance on how to collect data to populate the SEEA tables.

30. The Committee recognized the important role of the Inter-Secretariat Working Groups on Environment Statistics and Energy Statistics in harmonizing data collection activities and welcomed their suggestion to develop a joint work programme with the Committee. The Committee recognized the work done in the harmonization of the questionnaire on water statistics questionnaire with the water accounting concepts and definitions as being very valuable and urged to repeat this experience in other areas. Other priority areas for which harmonization should be sought include: (a) energy and emission accounts; (b) environmental protection expenditures accounts; (c) mineral and energy asset accounts; and (d) material flow accounting.

Oslo Group and Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Energy Statistics

31. The Committee thanked the Oslo Group and the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Energy Statistics for asking its advice on coordination as well as on the scope of work. Given the synergies between the terms of reference of the Oslo Group and the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Energy Statistics, the Committee suggested that the two groups develop a joint work programme and looks forward to their reporting to the Committee at its next meeting. Further, the Committee urged the Oslo Group to consider expanding its scope to include monetary statistics, to adopt the industrial breakdown in developing methodologies on energy statistics and to harmonize concepts and classifications of energy statistics with the accounting framework.

32. The Committee urged the Oslo Group to coordinate its activities with the Sub-group on Mineral and Energy Asset Accounts, in order to ensure consistency between flows and stocks of energy.

Governance structure

Organization of work

33. It was agreed that the Committee would report to the Statistical Commission on an annual basis. It will report progress made in its activities, including progress made by the various city and other groups working with the Committee within its mandate.

34. The Committee considered important the creation of a website for the Committee in order to ensure information sharing and transparency in the implementation of the program of work of the Committee. The website will serve as a knowledge-base platform and include also an archive of case studies. It will use the 1993 SNA update website as a model.

35. The Committee endorsed the creation of a Newsletter by the Secretariat to be disseminated through the website.

Composition

36. The Committee stressed the importance of have high-level representation in order for it to exercise its strategic role. Users as well as producers of statistics should be invited to be part of the Committee from the outset.

37. While the Committee considered important to be inclusive in order to exercise its strategic functions, it also considered it essential to maintain the number of members small enough to ensure in-depth discussions. The Committee agreed to limit the membership to a maximum of 25 countries and international organizations maintaining adequate regional representation. Flexibility will be exercised to allow a maximum of two representatives per country and international institution.

Chair

38. Mr. Walter Radermacher, Vice president of the Federal Statistical Office Germany, was elected by acclamation as the first chair of the UN Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting.

39. The Committee agreed that the tenure of the Chair will be 3 years, renewable for one term. The role and the functions of the Chair as outlined in document UNCEEA/Prelim/5 were endorsed by the Committee.

Secretariat

40. The Committee welcomed the proposal of UNSD to serve as permanent Secretariat for the Committee. The role and the functions of the Secretariat as outlined in UNCEEA/Prelim/5 were endorsed by the Committee.

Periodicity of the UN Committee Meetings

41. It was agreed that the Committee should meet face-to-face once a year. In special circumstances, ad-hoc face-to-face meetings may be organized. The Committee encouraged organizing the meeting back-to-back to other meetings that are likely to be attended by the high-level representatives of countries/organizations. The next meeting will take place in the second quarter of 2006.

Financing

42. The Committee asked UNSD to take the lead in securing funds for the activities of the UN Committee and welcomed the creation of a Trust Fund at UNSD.

Thematic Session on Water

43. UNSD presented the paper on the handbook of national accounting *Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting for Water Resources*. The presentation outlined the structure of the handbook, reviewed the current state of the drafting and suggested the process to finalize it.
44. The Committee endorsed the structure of the handbook and commended the work of the Sub-group of the London Group on Water Accounting. The Committee recognized that the drafting of the handbook is well advanced and agreed to approve of the handbook electronically, in-between meetings. Once the handbook is finalized, the Committee considered the work of the Subgroup on water accounting completed and requested that it be dismantled.
45. Further, the Committee recognized that with the completion of the handbook, implementation and promotion of the handbook become a priority. In order to advance in these areas, the Committee recommended that a new group consisting of producers and users of water accounts be formed under the aegis of the Committee.
46. The Committee requested UNSD to prepare a strategy paper on the promotion and implementation of water accounts for discussion at its next meeting.
47. The Australian Bureau of Statistics offered its assistance in promoting water accounts worldwide using its positive experience as an example.
48. The Committee welcomed the proposal of UNSD to organize a high-level users-producers dialogue on water accounting in the second quarter of 2006.

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) Promote the use of environmental-economic accounting in countries as a tool for decision making through 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 solutions and submitting recommendations to the United Nations Statistical Commission for approval;
 - (d) Advance the implementation of the *SEEA* in developed and developing countries by means of technical co-operation;
 - (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 Time schedule and tasks

The table below outlines the detailed time schedule agreed at the Preliminary Meeting of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting and the tasks of countries and organizations.

Tasks	Countries/ organizations	Deadline
1. Update the TOR of the UN Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting on the basis of the discussion at the meeting	UNSD/Chair	ASAP
2. Update the document “Operational Guidelines of the UN Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting” on the basis of the discussion at the meeting	UNSD/Chair	ASAP
Coordination		
3. Establish communication with Chairs/Secretariat of other groups (e.g. London Group on Environmental Accounting, Oslo Group on Energy Statistics, Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics, Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Energy Statistics) and United Nations Regional Commissions	UNSD	End of October and on-going
4. Establish communication with Groups working on indicators (e.g. Division for Sustainable Development, OECD and leaders of the Norwegian Project on Sustainable Development, Inter-agency expert Group on Millennium Development Goals Indicators, etc.)	UNSD/Chair	End of October and on-going
5. Report to the Statistical Commission	UNSD/Chair	December 2005
6. Develop the UN Committee website	UNSD	On-going
7. Preparation of a Newsletter	UNSD	To be announced
8. Establish a Trust Fund to finance activities of the Committee and undertake fundraising	UNSD in cooperation with all	On-going
Promotion and implementation		
9. Develop promotion material	UNEP	2 nd Quarter 2006

10. Prepare paper on implementation	Earth Institute at Columbia University and World Bank	2 nd Quarter 2006
11. Prepare progress report on the Global Initiative for Environmental Accounting	Earth Institute at Columbia University and World Bank	2 nd Quarter 2006
12. Prepare a paper on linking accounting and indicators	Federal Statistical Office Germany	2 nd Quarter 2006
13. Participate in the next meeting of UN Water and present the water accounting handbook	UNSD/DSD	4 th Quarter 2005
14. Undertake scope and compliance survey	UNSD	2 nd Quarter 2006
15. Elaborate the note on strategic questions on environmental accounting	Federal Statistical Office Germany	2 nd Quarter 2006
Research agenda		
16. Disseminate a general call for issues to identify issues to be added to the research agenda	UNSD	October 2005
17. Lead research agenda of issues in Chapter 3 of SEEA-2003 (except MFA)	Statistics Denmark	As needed
18. Lead research agenda of issues in Chapter 4 of SEEA-2003 (except MFA)	Statistics Netherlands	As needed
19. Coordinate research agenda on Material Flow Accounts	OECD	As needed
20. Prepare progress report on the MFA guidance documents	OECD	2 nd Quarter 2006
21. Prepare issue paper on issues in Chapter 5 and 6 of the SEEA-2003 for discussion by the London Group	Eurostat/Statistics Sweden	January 2006
22. Prepare a handbook on Mineral and Energy Asset Accounts - Moderate the Subgroup on Mineral and Energy Asset Accounts - Coordinate with the Oslo Group on Energy Statistics	Statistics Denmark/UNSD and contributors	2007
23. Prepare paper on economic valuation	US Bureau of Economic Analysis	Spring 2006
24. Creation of a group on land and ecosystem	European	ASAP

accounts, which will report to the London Group	Environment Agency	
Harmonization of data collection activities with environmental accounting concepts and definitions		
25. Harmonization of water statistics questionnaire with water accounting tables	ISWGES/Subgroup on Water Accounting	December 2005
26. Develop joint programme of work between the Oslo Group and the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Energy Statistics	Statistics Norway/ISWG Energy Statistics	ASAP
27. Prepare progress report of the Oslo Group on and ISWG on Energy Statistics	Statistics Norway/ISWG Energy Statistics	2 nd Quarter 2006
Thematic session on water accounting		
28. Finalize the handbook on water accounting	UNSD/Subgroup on water accounting	December 2005
29. Prepare a strategy paper on promotion and implementation of water accounting	UNSD	2 nd Quarter 2006
30. Organize a high level users-producers dialogue on water accounting	UNSD	First half 2006

Annex III

RESEARCH AGENDA

A PRELIMINARY CONSOLIDATED LIST OF ISSUES

Introduction

With the objective of the Committee to elevate the SEEA to an international statistical standard on environmental-economic accounting by 2010, the advancement of methodologies in environmental-economic accounting is an important element of work for the Committee.

The handbook of national accounting *Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting 2003 (SEEA-2003)* has been issued as a white cover publication and will be published by five international agencies, namely the United Nations, the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the World Bank. The SEEA-2003 represents a major step forward in the harmonization of concepts and methods in environmental-economic accounting. However, it is not a statistical standard. In those cases in which there is consensus, the SEEA-2003 reports best practices. In those cases in which a variety of approaches exist, the SEEA-2003 presents a list of options, including a discussion on advantages and disadvantages of each option.

Since the issuing of the SEEA-2003, countries have gained further experience in the implementation of environmental-economic accounting. They have expressed the need to reach a consensus on some of the unresolved issues in the SEEA-2003 as well as on furthering research in new and emerging issues (e.g. measurement and valuation of ecosystems, etc.).

As a first step in developing a research agenda, a preliminary list of issues has been compiled on the basis of contributions received by countries and organizations that were the major contributors of the SEEA-2003. Further input will be requested from both producers and users of environmental accounts. National accountants, balance of payments, financial and government statisticians will also be consulted with the objective of ensuring consistency with major standards like the 1993 SNA, Balance of Payments Manual – Fifth Edition (BPM5) and Government Finance Statistics (GFS) which are presently under review as well as of seeking their views on outstanding issues that were not solved during the revision processes because of time constraints. All issues regarding the update of the 1993 and the revision of BPM5 and GFS would have to be solved by the end of 2006.

The present list of issues has been structured by chapters of the current SEEA 2003 and has been further classified on the basis of whether the issue is “short-term”, meaning that the issue is expected to be solved before 2008, in time for the 2010 deadline for the update of the SEEA, or “long-term”, that is the issue will require longer time to be solved. It has been revised on the basis of the discussion held during the Preliminary

Meeting of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting. It should be noted that the list and the classification of issues as short or long term is still under discussion.

CHAPTER 3 - PHYSICAL FLOW ACCOUNTS (Statistics Denmark)

1. Material Flow Accounts – Short Term

Material Flow Accounts concepts are in some cases not consistent with those of the national accounts. Differences between the two approaches should be elaborated and, when possible, consistency with the national accounts principles should be advocated. When it is not possible to achieve full consistency with the national accounts because of specific users' needs, bridge tables showing the differences between the SEEA and MFA should be developed.

2. Economy Wide Material Flow Accounting – Short Term

Economy Wide Material Flow Accounts present two aggregation issues: (a) aggregation across industries; and (b) aggregation over products. Industrial breakdown and thus the use of SUTs and I-O should be advocated for the derivation of MFA indicators. Should a single indicator of economy wide MFA be derived? Should standard aggregation methods of material/physical flows to assess the different impacts on the environment be developed so as to obtain a limited set of aggregated indicators, which would be more policy relevant?

CHAPTER 4 – HYBRID FLOW ACCOUNTS (Statistics Netherlands)

3. Waste accounts – Short Term

The terminology and classification of waste and waste products differ across countries. There is a need for standardizing methodologies to compile waste accounts and for harmonizing concepts and definitions used in waste statistics and waste accounts. The European Union Waste Statistics Regulation could serve as a starting point for developing waste categories, waste treatment methods and industrial classifications for the waste accounts. Standardized waste tables should also be developed.

4. Link between waste accounts and MFA accounts – Short term

Full MFA accounts include implicitly also the amounts of waste generated by the economy. Further, MFA accounts based on physical supply-use tables can be used to estimate the amounts of waste. Experiences with these links are so far quite limited and research into this field could be interesting.

Energy accounts

5. Energy statistics and energy accounts – Short term

The SEEA-2003 does not elaborate in detail the compilation of energy accounts, although it reports the example of the Danish energy accounts. There is a lot of experience in the compilation of energy accounts, which are compiled on a regular basis by many

countries. However, issues of consistencies of definitions and classifications used in energy statistics and accounts need to be addressed. Energy statistics and energy accounts differ, for example, in the following situations: (a) treatment of energy use of non-residents and of residents abroad; and (b) allocation of energy uses by mobile sources. There is a need to elaborate the differences in concepts and definitions between energy statistics and accounting and to reconcile the two approaches. In cases in which both information compiled by the energy accounts and energy statistics is needed by the users, bridge tables should be developed.

6. *Link between SEEA accounts and Kyoto protocol inventories and other policy relevant concepts* (Statistics Norway) – *Short term*

There is a lot of political interest in developing emission accounts, especially of greenhouse gases, to respond to the demands of the Kyoto protocol. The energy accounts use the SNA framework and thus the concept of residence which differ from the concept used in the data needed to monitor the implementation of the Kyoto protocol. For example, emissions from mobile sources that take place outside the territory by resident units (e.g. emissions from ocean shipping by national ships abroad) are not included in the Kyoto aggregates. The energy accounts instead are particularly helpful to allocate the emissions from mobile sources. Users need information according to the SNA concepts and the Kyoto protocol requirements. Some countries already compile such bridge tables and however, standardized bridge tables should be developed so as to ensure that both users needs are met and avoid unnecessary duplication of work.

7. *Renewable energy resources* – *Short term*

Renewable energy resources (e.g. hydropower, solar energy, bio fuels etc.) are becoming increasingly important. Several National Statistical Offices are developing statistics to include renewable energy in their energy statistics. Methodology should be developed to expand the energy accounts to include renewable energy so as to link this information to the economic variables.

CHAPTER 6 – ACCOUNTING FOR OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL RELATED TRANSACTIONS (Statistics Sweden)

8. *Environmental taxes and subsidies* – *Short term*

Environmental taxes and subsidies are broadly defined in the SEEA-2003. Recently OECD and Eurostat have tested a definition of environmental taxes in several countries. There is a further need to standardize the definitions of environmental taxes and subsidies keeping also into consideration the practical implementation of these concepts.

9. *Permits to access the resources (e.g. fishing and water rights) and emission permits* – *Short term*

There is a need for further development and standardization of concepts and methods for the recording of permits within the national accounts and balance of payments manual. The issue has to some extent been discussed by the Canberra II group but it could be useful to collect actual experiences and to add the perspective of environmental accountants and the environmental/physical dimension of permits in the discussion. The

recent introduction of CO₂ emission trading scheme as a result of the Kyoto protocol will without doubt increase the users demand for this type of information, which will be used for making analysis.

10. Classification of natural resources management accounts – Short term

The SEEA-2003 presents the Classification of Environmental Protection Activities (CEPA 2000). CEPA is an agreed classification, which however does not cover natural resources management activities and expenditures, which are very important in particular for sectoral policies.

CHAPTER 7 ASSET ACCOUNTS AND THE VALUATION OF NATURAL RESOURCE STOCKS
CHAPTER 8 SPECIFIC RESOURCE ACCOUNTS

Mineral Accounts (Statistics Denmark and UNSD)

11. Definition of physical reserves – Short term

The terminology and classification used for physical reserves differs across countries. One issue is whether it is possible to aggregate over the different reserves (e.g. proven, probable and possible on the basis of probability of existence, etc.)? Should renewable energy resources be included in the accounts in terms of stocks?

12. Valuation of stocks – Short term

The net present value method has been identified as being the preferred method as compared to the appropriation method. Issues on how to implement the NPV method still remain unsolved. They include, e.g.:

- Calculation of the capital services on natural resources (i.e. resource rent): Should taxes and subsidies be included in the calculation of the resource rent? What rate of return to capital should be used? How to implement the capital service approach in this context by identifying the produced and non-produced assets in production? How should the resource rent be allocated to different products in case of joint production (e.g. in the case of a mine which produces silver and copper)? How to deal with heterogeneity (different quality and costs) of the reserves? How to deal with fluctuations in resource rents over relatively short periods of time? How to deal with negative resource rents (e.g. should a moving average be recommended)?
- Calculation of NPV? What discount rate to choose? How to calculate the lifetime of the reserve?
- How can constant price valuation of assets be obtained (e.g. using GDP deflator, constant rent from base period, etc.)?

13. Valuation of changes in stocks and, in particular, depletion – Short term

The following options have been put forward in the SEEA-2003. They include (SEEA-2003 Box 10.8):

- Option E1 Is consistent with the SNA. This records the value of the depletion in the other changes in asset account.

- Option E2 Partitions the actual payment into two elements. The part which corresponds to the decline in value of the asset is recorded as a capital transfer from the user to the owner as recompense for the decline in the asset's value; the rest is recorded as property income (rent) payable from the user to the owner in the distribution of primary income account.
- Option E3 Maintains the recording of the actual payment from the user to the owner as property income in the distribution of primary income account but treats this as rent gross of depletion. An element for the consumption of natural capital is shown in this account for the owner also to reduce the rent to a value net of depletion.
- Option E4 It is similar to option E3 but assumes that the consumption of natural capital allows for the discoveries made during the year as well as the extraction.

More discussion should take place to reach an agreement on the recording of depletion in the SEEA.

14. Decommissioning costs and recording ownership of mineral-related assets – Short term

The SEEA-2003 suggested more than one option in recording decommissioning costs and recording of ownership of mineral-related assets. The Canberra II group and the AEG have agreed with changing the current SNA treatment of decommissioning costs. The SEEA will have to be updated to reflect the changes in the 1993SNA Rev.1.

15. Extension of the methodology used for oil and gas accounts to other mineral resources – Short term

Most of the methodological work as well as compilation of mineral accounts has focused on oil and gas. Would the methods for, say calculating the resource rent, valuing the stocks, etc. be applicable also for other mineral resources?

16. Confidentiality and the compilation of minerals and energy resources – Short term

Several countries have raised the issue that although information on stocks is often available, it should be treated as confidential. Further international guidelines have to be made on how to deal with confidential information when compiling and publishing mineral accounts.

17. Inclusion of financial wealth related to natural assets in the SEEA asset boundary (Statistics Norway) – Short term

This issue is raised in the context of mineral accounts because in some countries a large portion of the national wealth generated by the extraction of mineral resources is invested in financial assets. For analytical purposes, the changes in wealth of a country from the exploration of mineral assets should reflect non-produced, produced and financial assets (e.g. Norwegian oil fund).

18. Resource rent and “specific” taxes and subsidies (for example on oil extraction) in the national accounts (Statistics Norway) – Short term

There is a question of whether these “specific” taxes should be treated as general taxes and thus excluded from the part of the resource rent that the government captures (as recommended by the SEEA-2003) or they should be treated as royalties. Here consistency with the GFS should be sought.

Water accounting (UNSD)

19. Treatment of water in artificial reservoirs as a produced asset – Short term

Considerable money is spent to build dams to retain the water from flowing downstream to the sea. Also, continuous control and management of the water resources is exercised both in the case in which the water is used for abstraction, purification and distribution, or for other uses such as hydroelectric power generation. Therefore, in line with the definition of cultivated assets in the SEEA and now agreed in the SNA revision process¹, water in the reservoirs should be considered a produced asset. In parallel with the treatment of natural growth of cultivated forest and fish as produced asset, precipitation and inflows of water in the reservoirs should be considered as capital formation. As a result, water in the reservoir should be added to the classification of produced asset.

20. Treatment of illegal tapping – Short term

In many countries, especially developing countries, an illegal connection to the water distribution network from households and industries is frequent. The question is how to treat illegal tapping in the water accounts and, more in general, in the national accounts. The following two options come to mind:

- Water used as a result of illegal tapping could be considered a loss and thus included as part of water consumption. In this case, the flows in the physical supply and use table (PSUT) would correspond to the flows in the monetary SUT, but, for example indicators of water efficiency by industry would be misleading. Also, whom should the water consumption be allocated to? To the industry that collects, purifies and distribute water (ISIC 41)?
- Water used as a result of illegal tapping could be allocated to the end user. In this case, the production of water by (ISIC 41) is a legal activity but consumption is illegal. While the SNA discusses the treatment of illegal production (e.g. drugs), it does not explicitly mentions how to treat illegal consumption. If we allocate the water used as a result of illegal tapping to the users, the following questions arise: what value for the production of water should be used (e.g. imputed at purchasers' price)? Should we impute some type of transfer from say ISIC 41 to the households or industries? How should these transfers be classified? (They cannot be social transfer as they are from a corporation to household)

¹ Cultivated assets are defined as: “livestock for breeding, dairy, draught, etc. and vineyards, orchards and other trees yielding repeat products *whose natural growth and/or regeneration is* under the direct control, responsibility and management of institutional units. (SEEA-2003 para 7.58)

21. Valuation of water – Long term

Water is increasingly a scarce resource. International agreements such as the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, the Water Framework Directive, etc. recognize that water is an economic good. How to value water in national accounts framework? A proposals of valuing water as a mineral asset and, in case this is not feasible using payments for water rights as proxy has been put forwards during the update of the 1993 SNA. The issue of water valuation has to be further considered.

22. Quality accounts - Long term

Quality accounts are still experimental. They are important because water quality limits the use of water by the economy and the economy impacts the quality of water. However there are several measurement issues. Water quality is highly variable over time and space. The question is what aspects of water quality can be meaningfully presented in an accounting framework. How should quality classes be defined? How to aggregate across pollutants to obtain a quality index? How to aggregate over space and over time? What is the link between changes in quality of water and emissions?

Land (Statistics Denmark)

23. Land valuation – Short term

The 1993 SNA recommends, whenever possible, valuing the land separate from the building which lies on it. If the value of the buildings based on the perpetual inventory method calculation is deducted from the value of the combined asset, the land value captures all the market fluctuations and, in the cases in which there are big capital losses, it can be negative.

CHAPTER 9 VALUATION TECHNIQUES FOR MEASURING DEGRADATION CHAPTER 10 MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO THE FLOW ACCOUNTS

(Federal Statistical Office Germany)

24. Valuation of degradation – Long term

The SEEA-2003 presents three approaches for the valuation of degradation, namely the damage cost, the maintenance cost and the modelling approach. The three methods represent different concepts and philosophical approaches to analysis. Although further research in this area would certainly promote a standardization process, which is needed, it does not seem plausible that these approaches can be reconciled. There is very little practical experience in the valuation of degradation in an accounting context. To date only few countries have experimented with the techniques recommended in the SEEA and no country has implemented the three approaches and compared the results in relation to environmental accounting. It is therefore suggested to adopt a pragmatic approach and put in place some pilot studies to experiment with the various approaches.

CHAPTER 11 – APPLICATIONS AND POLICY USES OF THE SEEA (All)

25. Uses of the accounts- Short term

The SEEA-2003 presents examples of how the accounts can be used for monitoring performances and for more analytical purposes. Examples of indicators as well as other ways to disseminate the results of the accounts (e.g. environmental-economic profiles, etc.) are presented. There is a general consensus of the need for developing additional standard dissemination techniques as well as for “educating” the users to the potential of using the accounting approach for analysis and policy making. Linking the accounts to the indicators, including millennium development goals indicators, sustainable development indicators, will increase the policy relevance of the accounts and make them more “visible”. Moreover, there is a need to provide further guidance and examples on how to use the accounts for modelling (e.g. scenario modelling, decomposition analyses, etc.).

OTHER ISSUES

26. Expansion of the SEEA to social aspects (Statistics Sweden) – Long term

The SEEA-2003 addresses the inter-relationship between the economy and the environment. It does not cover the social aspect. It has been argued by some commentators that in order for the SEEA to be considered as the framework to measure sustainable development, it should be expanded to include the third pillar of sustainable development. In particular, the following three issues could be addressed in the expansion of the SEEA to include social aspects:

- (a) Socio-economic issues already included in the national accounts, such as employment, education, gender, income, etc.;
- (b) Socio-economic issues such as sickness caused by environmental degradation, work environment, traffic accidents, number of people with access to safe drinking water and sanitation, etc.
- (c) Social issues that are important to measuring sustainable development in general sense only loosely linked with the economic or environmental spheres such as poverty, sickness, threat of violence, unemployment, etc.

27. Measurement of ecosystems (European Environment Agency) – Long term

The SEEA-2003 in Chapter 8 – Section F describes the land and ecosystem accounts. It presents the basic accounts and supplementary accounts. The basic accounts are a standardized approach to land accounting and describe the interface between land use and land cover. Supplementary accounts are issue-oriented and take into account national and regional consideration and thus do not use standard classifications. At the time the SEEA-2003 was written there was little experience in the compilation of such accounts. However, measurement of ecosystems is becoming increasingly an area of interest by policy makers. The SEEA-2003 can offer the framework for building an information system to measure ecosystems, in particular in terms of bringing together information from different sources and harmonizing definitions and classifications used by different data collection activities (e.g. space agencies, environmental information systems available at the country and international levels, etc.). More practical and methodological work is needed in this area.

Annex IV

Terms of Reference Of the Subgroup on Mineral and Energy Asset Accounts

1. The Subgroup on Mineral and Energy Accounts was created by the London Group on Environmental-Economic Accounting in November 2004 in Rome and its functioning was confirmed by the London Group at its meeting in Copenhagen in September 2004. It was further reconfirmed by the United Nations Committee on Environmental-Economic Accounting at its Preliminary Meeting in August 2005. The Subgroup on Mineral and Energy Asset Accounts is a subgroup of the London Group whose main objectives are to further research in mineral and energy asset accounts and to prepare a draft handbook on mineral and energy asset accounts for consideration and approval by the Committee. Although the focus of the Group will be on asset, consistency with the flows will be ensured.
2. The Subgroup will work in close cooperation with the Oslo Group on Energy Statistics and will take into account the work being undertaken by other groups such as the Canberra II Group, the Advisory Expert Group in National Accounts, the London Group and the Inter-secretariat Working Group on Energy Statistics.
3. The membership of the Subgroup would include experts in environmental accounting, national accounts, energy statistics from selected countries and international organizations.
4. Statistics Denmark will be the moderator of the Group, in cooperation with UNSD.
5. The primary means of communication will be electronic but the Subgroup will meet during the meeting of the London Group on Environmental Accounting, where at least one session will be organized by the Subgroup.
6. The Subgroup will have a limited duration and it will cease to exist once the handbook on mineral and energy accounts has been completed.
7. The Subgroup will submit reports to the Committee, at times determined by its moderator. These might include progress reports, summaries of conclusions, issues and outcome papers and draft chapters of the handbook.
8. To ensure efficient discussions, issue and outcome papers, setting out the results of Group's deliberations and recommendations, will be presented to the Committee according to a standard format (see Annexes 1 and 2).

ANNEX 1: STANDARD FRAMEWORK FOR ISSUES PAPERS

1. Title/name of the issue to be addressed
2. Description of the issue and current situation for the treatment of the issue, including summary of the treatment in the SEEA-2003 and the 1993 SNA and its update, description of selected country practices, alternative treatments and solutions to the issue;
3. Concerns/shortcomings of the treatment of the issue (on practical as well as methodological grounds), including specific countries' concerns;
4. Questions/points for discussion.
5. Annex of the most relevant documents.

ANNEX 2: STANDARD FRAMEWORK FOR OUTCOME PAPERS

1. Title/name of the issue
2. Issue(s)
3. Recommendations by the sub-group including arguments for and against each alternative and reasons for rejections
4. Questions, if any, for the Committee;

Annex V



DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION
UNITED NATIONS

ESA/STAT/AC.108
UNCEEA/Prelim/1

**Preliminary Meeting of the UN Committee on
Environmental-Economic Accounting
New York, 29-31 August 2005
Two United Nations Plaza, Conference Room 23rd floor**

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

Monday, 29 August 2005

Registration of participants (9:00-9:30)

Morning Session (9:30 – 12:30)

1. Opening of the meeting
 - a. Opening statement by Paul Cheung, Director, United Nations Statistics Division
 - b. Adoption of the agenda
2. Operational guidelines and Terms of Reference of the UN Committee– Background document (UNCEEA/Prelim/5)

Afternoon Session (2:00 – 5:30)

3. Promotion of the environmental-economic accounts
 - a. Strategy paper. Paper prepared by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNCEEA/Prelim/6)
 - b. Sustainable Development Indicators and Accounting: Two Separate Worlds or a Dialogue Process by Statisticians, Politicians and Modellers? Paper prepared by the Federal Statistical Office Germany (UNCEEA/Prelim/7)
4. Implementation of the accounts
 - a. Strategy paper. Paper prepared by the Earth Institute at Columbia University and the World Bank Environment Department (UNCEEA/Prelim/8)
 - b. UN Water. Presentation by the UN Division for Sustainable Development

Reception (5:30PM – 7:30PM)

Tuesday, 30 August 2005

Morning Session (9:00 – 12:30)

5. Research agenda – Preliminary list of issues (UNCEEA/Prelim/9 - forthcoming)
Issues have been grouped on the basis of the SEEA-2003 Chapters.
 - a. Chapter 3 - Physical flow accounts. Presentation by Statistics Denmark
(Background paper UNCEEA/Prelim/9a)
 - b. Chapter 4 - Hybrid flow accounts. Presentation by Statistics Netherlands
(Background paper UNCEEA/Prelim/9b)
 - i. Material Flow Accounts. Paper by OECD (UNCEEA/Prelim/10)
 - ii. Material Flow Indicators and Related Measurement Tools. Paper by OECD
(UNCEEA/Prelim/10i)
 - iii. Material Flows and Related Indicators-OECD Approach and Work Plan for
2005-2006. Paper by OECD (UNCEEA/Prelim/10ii)
 - iv. Material Flows and Related Indicators-Inventory of Country Activities. Paper
by OECD (UNCEEA/Prelim/10iii)
 - c. Chapters 5 and 6 – Accounting for economic activities and products related to the
environment and Accounting for other environmentally related transactions.
Presentations by Statistics Sweden and Eurostat
 - d. Chapters 7 and 8 - Asset accounts and the valuation of natural resource stocks.
Specific Resource Accounts. Presentations by Statistics Denmark and UNSD.
 - e. Chapters 9 and 10 - Valuation techniques for measuring degradation. Making
environmental adjustments to the flow accounts. Presentation by the Federal
Statistical Office Germany.
(Background paper UNCEEA/Prelim/9e)
 - f. Other issues
 - i. Expanding the SEEA framework to social aspects. Presentation by
Statistics Sweden (Background paper UNCEEA/Prelim/9f.i)
 - ii. Measurement of Ecosystems. Presentation by European Environment Agency
(Background paper UNCEEA/Prelim/9f.ii)

Afternoon Session (2:00 – 5:30)

5. Research Agenda (Cont'd)
6. Harmonization of data collection activities with environmental accounting
 - a. Strategy paper. Paper by OECD Environment Directorate (UNCEEA/Prelim/11)
 - b. Energy Statistics – the newly established Oslo Group and Inter-Secretariat
Working Group on Energy Statistics. Presentation by Statistics Norway and
UNSD
 - c. Links between Water Accounting and UNSD/UNEP and OECD/Eurostat
Questionnaires on Water Resources – Towards the Harmonization of Water
Statistics and Accounting. Paper prepared by UNSD (UNCEEA/Prelim/12)

Wednesday, 31 August 2005

Morning Session (9:00 – 12:30)

7. Conclusions and recommendations
 - a. Terms of reference of the UN Committee on Environmental-Economic Accounting to be submitted to the Bureau of the Statistical Commission
 - b. Governance and work programme
 - c. Election of the Chair and membership of the Committee
 - d. First meeting of the UN Committee

Afternoon Session (2:00 – 4:00)

8. Thematic Session on Water
 - a. Handbook of National Accounting – Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting for Water. Paper by UNSD.
(UNCEEA/Prelim/13a and draft handbook UNCEEA/Prelim/13b – Background paper)
 - b. Water Framework Directive and its implementation. Paper by Statistics Netherlands (UNCEEA/Prelim/14)
9. Closing

Annex VI

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