DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
STATISTICS DIVISION
UNITED NATIONS

SEEA Revision
Issue 19a
Cover Note

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Issue #19a: Land use classification

Outcome paper for global consultation

Outcome Paper Issue #19a: Land use classification

Issue description

There is no internationally agreed classification of land use nor land cover. CORINE land cover and the FAO Land Cover Classification System (LCCS) seem to be the most commonly used classifications. Should these two classifications be reconciled and a land cover classifications agreed in the revised SEEA? Should a separate classification on land use be included in the revised SEEA?

Background

Land is a central feature in any discussion of the environment. It provides the basis for plants, animals and ecosystems to operate, it underlies human infrastructure such as buildings and roads and, perhaps, most importantly, areas of land delineate the space in which we live. It is essential that in the revised System of Environmental and Economic Accounts (SEEA) there is a full discussion of relevant concepts and accounting treatments.

Because land is central to so many things the way in which it is considered from an analytical perspective can vary greatly. At times the interest is on how humans use the land surface, at times it is a description of the physical characteristics of the land that is the focus and at still other time it might be the "services" that the land provides that is of main concern.

These varying analytical perspectives may often overlap depending on which area of land is being considered. This has lead to the development of a wide range of classifications of different land areas depending on the specific analytical purpose. Generally speaking there are three concepts around which classifications are developed – land use, land cover and land function – but there are very few examples of classifications that stay true to one particular concept.

The theoretical distinction between land cover and land use is well established**.** Land Use (LU) reflects the total of arrangements, activities, and inputs undertaken in a certain land cover type (a set of human actions). The social and economic purposes for which land is managed (e.g., grazing, timber extraction, conservation) are land use characteristics. Land Cover (LC) refers to the observed physical and biological cover of the Earth's land as vegetation or man-made features.

This issue concerns investigation into a classification for land use. A separate outcome paper has also been distributed discussing a proposed classification for land cover (see Issue #19b: Land Cover Classification). The discussion on land functions and the relationships between land and the measurement of ecosystems will not take place in Volume 1 of the revised SEEA. While work in this area is progressing it is not yet developed sufficiently for inclusion

as part of an international statistical standard. Rather, this work will be incorporated into Volume 2 of the revised SEEA which will focus on accounting for ecosystems.

Summary of outcomes

The investigation of the various available land use classifications at a national and international levels and consideration of the purpose to which a land use classification would be put led to one recommendation regarding the adoption of a land use classification in the revised SEEA.

Recommendation 19a.1: That the revised SEEA should adopt the land use classification presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3 of the outcome paper and the associated definitions and descriptions presented in Annex 2 of the outcome paper.

Questions

1. Do you agree that the revised SEEA should adopt the land use classification presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3 of the outcome paper and the associated definitions and descriptions presented in Annex 2 of the outcome paper?

2. Any other comments?

To submit responses to these questions please complete the accompanying comment form available on the website. You are encouraged to submit a short response to the questions (yes/no/no comment) even if you have no further comments to submit.

Deadline for responses: 17 January 2011