International Conference on the Global Implementation Programme for the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting
17-19 June 2013, New York

Minutes

Organization and background

1. The international conference "Global Implementation Programme for the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting" was held from 17 to 19 June 2013 in New York. The conference was jointly organized by the United Nations Statistics Division, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the European Environment Agency, Eurostat, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environmental Programme and the World Bank, under the auspices of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting (UNCEEA). The conference was attended by close to 100 participants from national statistical offices, government agencies (e.g. ministries/departments of environment, planning, finance, etc), scientific, research and academic institutions, non-governmental organizations and international organizations actively engaged in environmental policy and related measurement activities, including United Nations programmes, specialized agencies, regional commissions and various divisions of the Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) of the United Nations. The list of participants, annotated agenda, relevant documents and presentations made at the conference are available on the Conference website[1].

2. The System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) Central Framework is a multipurpose, conceptual framework that describes the interactions between the economy and the environment, and the stocks and changes in stocks of environmental assets. The SEEA Central Framework was adopted as the internationally agreed standard for organizing and analyzing environmental-economic data by the United Nations Statistical Commission at its 43rd session in 2012. The Statistical Commission encouraged Member States, regional and international organizations to initiate compilation activities in accordance with the Central Framework and at its 44th session in 2013 adopted an implementation strategy recommending a flexible and incremental approach that should give full consideration to national circumstances. It called for developing coordination mechanisms for effective management of the implementation activities and to actively seek resources for technical assistance to support the implementation of the Central Framework in developing countries.

Objective

3. The purpose of the conference was to facilitate the implementation and outreach of the SEEA in countries while ensuring that national, sub-regional, regional,

[1] http://unstats.un.org/unsd/envaccounting/workshops/SEEA_Conf_2013/main.htm

and international actions are sustainable, well coordinated and efficient. The conference aimed to discuss strategies to improve the scope, quality and detail of environmental-economic accounts and supporting statistics at the country level in support of national policies and to develop a road map for the implementation of the SEEA. More specifically, the objectives of the international conference included exchanging views and developing recommendations on: (a) promoting international coordination among development partners through strategic planning and programming; (b) developing sub-regional and regional programmes and adopting procedures for coordination, monitoring and reporting on performance through a common programme information structure; (c) strengthening national statistical capacity for environmental-economic accounts and related basic statistics through training and technical cooperation, publication of manuals and handbooks, research and advocacy of environmental-economic accounts and statistics for policy purposes as part of a national statistics development strategy; (d) timing for the stages of implementation of the SEEA and (e) resource identification and mobilization.

4. The conference also had the objective of developing a partnership for the SEEA covering the different communities of statisticians, experts on environmental policy and environmental sciences, considering that the SEEA Central Framework implementation will require collaboration and coordination between a range of government agencies within the countries (e.g., national statistical organizations, environmental, planning and finance ministries), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academic institutions and international organizations. The international conference provided a forum for these various stakeholders to better understand the SEEA Central Framework, discuss ideas for and examples of its implementation and application and clarify the role of national statistical organizations (NSOs), international agencies, and the broader research and academic communities in the implementation process. Participants were requested to share their experiences in setting up the institutional framework for environmental-economic accounts; developing common tools such as the self-assessment tool of institutional arrangements and statistical infrastructure and operations to assist in the SEEA implementation, building capacity and developing training materials for the compilation of the accounts. The objectives of the conference included raising the awareness of participants of the importance of SEEA as an essential source of statistics in assessing progress towards Sustainable Development Goals.

5. Another purpose of the conference was to engage participants in a dialogue to determine research and testing priorities and next steps of work on the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting, facilitate feedback and comments on the proposed research agenda and sharing by participants their plans for testing of the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting.

Main outcome

6. The conference concluded with formulating a set of recommendations on the global implementation and outreach for the SEEA and supporting statistics. The full text of “Recommendations of the International Conference on the Global Implementation Programme for the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting” is attached to these minutes.

Programme and discussions

7. The conference was organized in nine sessions consisting of a series of presentations and discussions over 3 days covering key issues related to the SEEA implementation. After receiving an overview of the policy demands for the SEEA information and of the SEEA Central Framework and the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting, participants were provided with detailed information about the SEEA implementation strategy and asked for feedback on further advancing the implementation.

8. One session of the conference consisted of parallel groups discussing six key areas for the SEEA implementation and reporting back to the conference on the outcome of their discussions focusing on: (1) capacity building, scaling up and associated resources for SEEA implementation; (2) developing the institutional framework and coordination mechanisms for implementation in countries; (3) SEEA diagnostic tools and data evaluation; (4) SEEA coordination at the global level; (5) SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting testing and research agenda, and (6) SEEA outreach and communication strategy.

9. In addition to holding discussions on the implementation strategy of the SEEA Central Framework, participants were also informed about the testing and research agenda for the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting and had an opportunity to express their views related to these activities.

Opening statements

10. Shamshad Akhtar, Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations, welcomed conference participants and stressed the importance of the SEEA to provide tools for capturing the relationship of the environment and the economy. She explained that the lessons learnt from the work with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) reinforced the importance of getting the statistics right in the process of developing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and related indicators. Linkages among the indicators need to be considered integrating the environmental dimension with social and economic benefits. Ms. Akhtar commented that the elevation of the SEEA to a statistical standard allows it to play a key role in this integration across economic, environmental, and social dimensions. She indicated that significant work remains to be done to arrive at implementation, with the need to create partnerships, and mobilize resources for building national capacities for the SEEA implementation. She expressed her strong expectation that the conference will contribute useful ideas for scaling up statistical capacities and strengthening partnerships to implement environmental–economic accounts.

11. Braulio Ferreira de Souza Dias, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), underlined the strong interest of CBD in environmental-economic accounting and, in particular, in ecosystem accounting. He explained that there is urgency in showing progress in implementing the CBD commitments and, consequently, the need for good measurement using reliable and consistent collection of data. Mr. Dias highlighted Aichi Target 2 and its relationship to the SEEA, with increasing awareness of the linkages between biodiversity and social and economic

considerations. He also indicated that moving away from a "silo" approach will be important in implementing policies. Mr. Dias concluded by encouraging the use of emerging policy inroads (e.g., National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans) to foster partnerships and resource mobilization for determination of the best strategies for furthering work at the country level.

12. Olav Kjorven, Assistant Secretary-General and Director of the Bureau for Development Policies with UNDP, highlighted the data revolution that is needed and the role for SEEA in being a strong and positive force for this change. Mr. Kjorven indicated that the measure of progress in many countries is GDP, and recognized that SEEA offers a framework to go beyond GDP. He summarized other approaches that go beyond GDP, such as the UNDP Human Development Index, UNEP Inclusive Wealth work, the OECD Better Life initiative and the Bhutan Gross National Happiness approach. Given the range of existing initiatives, he stated the importance of building on and coordinating partnerships to form a broad coalition without "silos" and ensuring that sufficient funding be available to develop capacity. Mr. Kjorven concluded by reiterating the commitment of UNDP to working with DESA and other partners to support the implementation of the SEEA.

Session I – National and International Initiatives and their links to the SEEA
(Chair: Peter Harper, Deputy Australian Statistician and Chair of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting (UNCEEA))

13. The session began with the presentation of Nojibur Rahman, Secretary of the Ministry of Planning of Bangladesh. He reiterated the role of SEEA in advancing issues of sustainable development related to the post-2015 development agenda. Countries now need to build on the implementation strategy and put the SEEA into practice, using coordination and collaboration to facilitate the process. Capacity development of statistical offices should be given highest priority. He indicated that in Bangladesh the National Strategy for Development of Statistics creates a space for the implementation of the SEEA.

14. Jan McAlpine, Director of the United Nations Forum on Forests Secretariat, presented an overview of forest issues related to ecosystem accounting. Assessments of the contributions of forests to GDP by FAO currently do not present a full picture of the benefits that humans receive beyond provisioning services from wood. Importantly, these non-cash, non-wood forest benefits are most significant for women and children, underlining the important linkage between economic, environmental, and social considerations. The SEEA implementation is particularly important because it facilitates coordination across ministries moving away from working in silos; there is a need to work across sectors and look at the relationships and links of forests to areas such as water, energy, and health.

15. Homi Kharas, Lead Author and Executive Secretary of the Secretariat to the High-Level Panel (HLP) advising the United Nations Secretary-General on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, provided an overview of the findings from the HLP, in particular related to data and linkages with the SEEA. Mr. Kharas described the data revolution indicated in the recently released HLP report and the role of the global statistical community in seizing the momentum created by the attention to the importance of data. He underlined the importance of taking advantage of the political

support that currently exists, as it may be fleeting, and the need to focus on issues including timeliness, accessibility of data, reconciliation of household survey data and national accounts data, data availability and quality. Mr. Kharas concluded that the creation of global partnerships should be accelerated for each goal outlined in the HLP report. In the discussion following the presentation, the issues raised included the challenge of confidentiality and use of private sector data, whether a range of indicators would be preferred to a single, aggregated composite indicator, and how to keep the window open for the statistical community to have input into the post-2015 development agenda process. Mr. Kharas indicated that there are many important data in the private sector and there is the need to determine how to link those private organizations into existing partnerships. Regarding indicators, he explained that, by and large, the HLP had rejected composite indicators because of the associated communication challenges. He reiterated that there is high-level political attention to data for the first time that may dissipate after an agreement on indicators is reached. He expressed the view that significant resources are going into collecting data in inefficient ways and there is a need to develop a coordinated approach to a long-term road map, while also addressing the short-term issue of baseline.

16. Also in this session, two other international agencies and four more countries made presentations followed by discussions on ongoing policy initiatives with linkages to the SEEA. The presenters included Munyaradzi Chenje (Acting Director, New York Liaison Office, UNEP), Juan Pablo Castaneda (Consultant, World Bank), Sandra Silva Paulsen (Advisor, Office of the Minister of the Secretariat for Strategic Affairs of the President, Brazil), Bernard Okumu (Macro-economic Advisor, Ministry of Devolution and Planning, Kenya), Luis Rivera (Project Advisor, WAVES, Costa Rica) and Nguyen van Tai (General Director, Institute of Strategic Policy and Natural Resources and Environment, Vietnam). They mentioned various international initiatives and how they would benefit from the integrated data system provided by the SEEA. These initiatives included the UNEP work on Ecosystems, Green Economy, and WAVES. National initiatives discussed included application of The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) in Brazil, work on a model (T21 model) linking society, economy, and environment in Kenya, work on water accounts and forest accounts in Costa Rica in the context of REDD+ and their National Plan for Integrated Management of Water Resources, and a goal of quantification of key natural resources in Vietnam by 2020.

Session II – Overview of the SEEA

(Chair: Peter Harper, Deputy Australian Statistician and Chair of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting (UNCEEA))

17. Peter Harper, Chair of the UN Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting, Deputy Australian Statistician, provided an overview of the SEEA Central Framework and the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting. He mentioned the need for early engagement of statisticians in the SDG process in providing guidance on relevant targets and indicators and the important role of SEEA to integrate and organize environmental and economic information to provide quantitative basis for policy design. Mr Harper explained that the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting is considered an important first step in developing a framework for linking ecosystem assets and well-being through ecosystem services. He outlined the work ahead focusing on the implementation of the Central Framework

and on advancing the testing and research of the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting.

Session III – SEEA Implementation Strategy and Statistical Capacity Building in Countries
(Chair: Nojibur Rahman, Secretary of the Ministry of Planning of Bangladesh)

18. Ivo Havinga, Chief of the Economics Statistics Branch, United Nations Statistics Division, presented the SEEA implementation strategy. The main features of the SEEA implementation strategy are: (a) flexible and modular approach depending on countries priorities and statistical development: (b) close links to policy; (c) bottom-up approach starting from national strategies and plans then sub-regional and regional; (d) close links with the implementation strategy for the System of National Accounts (SNA) where relevant. Participants supported the approach presented and requested that the SEEA implementation strategy be followed by the SEEA implementation plans. Participants stressed the need to strengthen the coordinating role of national statistical offices and requested that a clear roadmap with timelines be developed to facilitate country implementation. It was emphasized that in order to seize on the challenge of contributing to the post-2015 development agenda, there is the need to accelerate SEEA implementation and have a short-term plan in place for producing data on environmental-economic accounts and strengthening the institutional environment and a longer term plan to improve the statistical infrastructure.

19. The session continued with a panel discussion by 14 countries regarding the topic of statistical capacity building and the SEEA implementation. Panellists were Peter Harper (Australian Bureau of Statistics), Jose Antonio Sena do Nascimiento (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics), Mahmoud Ismail Sarthan (Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs, Egypt), James Matthew (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, India), Buyung Airlangga (Statistics Indonesia), Shelley Winston (Statistical Institute of Jamaica), Raul Figueroa Diaz (National Institute of Statistics and Geography, Mexico), Chaoui Souad (High Commission of Planning, Morocco), Raymundo Talento (National Statistical Coordination Board, Philippines), Andrey Tatarinov (Federal State Statistics Services, Russian Federation), Aliieulua Salani (Samoa Bureau of Statistics), Morrice Oyuke (National Bureau of Statistics, Tanzania), Samuel Echoku (Uganda Bureau of Statistics), and Duong Manh Hung (General Statistics Office, Vietnam). The panellists indicated strong commitment for implementing SEEA. Nevertheless, differing levels of experience in the implementation of environmental-economic accounts and availability of supporting statistics as well as different policy priorities emerged from the presentations. Mexico, Brazil, and Egypt, for example, have worked on the development of water accounts, while Morocco plans to develop coherent accounts for the forestry sector. Indonesia has completed accounts for mineral and energy resources and timber resources, and India has a short-term plan to develop physical supply and use tables for land, forest and timber, and mineral resources. Russia will be working on the development of asset accounts, physical flow accounts, and environmental activity accounts and Vietnam on asset accounts (e.g. water, oil), air emission accounts, and public expenditure accounts. Jamaica, Samoa, Tanzania, and Uganda are in the early stages of planning and evaluation for environmental-economic accounting and overall

emphasized the need for ongoing statistical capacity building. The overall outcome of the discussion was that some countries have already made significant progress in developing selected accounts (e.g., water, mineral and energy resources), at the same time, additional capacity building and technology transfer is needed to support development of sustainable statistical production processes to facilitate the SEEA implementation in a number of other countries. In general, the need for developing a set of consistent training materials and a way of effectively communicating the SEEA was stressed. One of the main challenges in implementation is the consistency in data generated for the same resources across agencies, and communication between ministries/agencies.

20. The SEEA implementation was seen as a government-driven process. At the country level, there sometimes seems to be limited investment in coordination, collaboration and sharing of data between sectors. Since countries are heterogeneous in their structure for management of national accounts (e.g., central banks are responsible for national accounts in some countries); strengthening of the National Statistical Offices (NSOs) as lead coordinators for the overall national statistical system can address challenges associated with data communication and exchange between ministries/agencies. Statistical sustainability was considered important and needs to be reinforced throughout the implementation process so that SEEA should not be viewed as a one-time exercise. It was emphasized that sharing information, training and communication materials are key components of the SEEA implementation.

Session IV – Global implementation of the SEEA, Coordination and Partnership Arrangements

(Chair: Raymundo Talento, Director, Economic Statistics Office, National Statistical Coordination Board, Philippines)

21. This session included a panel discussion by international agencies regarding work on the global implementation of the SEEA and related coordination issues. Panellists were Markus Lehmann (CBD), Jean-Louis Weber (European Environment Agency), Pedro Diaz Muñoz (Eurostat), Sachiko Tsuji (Food and Agriculture Organization), Kimberly Zieschang (International Monetary Fund), Peter van de Ven (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), Xiaoning Gong (Economic Commission for Africa), Pascual Gerstenfeld (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), Tim Scott (UNDP), Pushpam Kumar (UNEP), Tomasz Jusczak (United Nations Forum on Forests), and Glenn-Marie Lange (World Bank). The panellists emphasized the importance of using existing policy frameworks (e.g., National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans, National Statistical Development Strategy, OECD Green Growth Strategy) as inroads for the implementation of the SEEA. They noted the policy demand for accounts to respond to various policy frameworks. The panellists expressed urgency to secure national commitment for SEEA implementation and start to develop real examples of the SEEA accounts for which agreement on a set of core tables was considered crucial.

22. The need to create a strong coordination mechanism among international agencies and organizations through partnerships was considered as an important strategy to assist countries in SEEA implementation. Assessing the mandates and

strength of each agencies and carve out a partnership with clear roles and responsibilities for each international agency was considered an important initial step to strengthen coordination and facilitate the SEEA implementation in countries. Such mapping should be undertaken both at the level of the policy frameworks as well as statistical responsibilities to ensure that a common vision and programme of work in line with the national priorities is developed between the international agencies and the countries. At the same time, bilateral donor initiatives should also be coordinated. One of the main concerns raised during the Conference was the risk that donor driven activities would be undertaken in an uncoordinated manner leading to unsustainable statistical programmes taking away resources from regular statistical production processes.

23. Conference participants requested UNSD to undertake an assessment of national and international initiatives related to SEEA implementation both from a statistical and policy perspective.

Session V – Outreach and Communication Strategy for the SEEA
Chair: Andrey Tatarinov, Director of National Accounts, Federal State Statistics Service, Russian Federation

24. Ivo Havinga presented main elements on the development of a communication strategy for the SEEA emphasizing the importance of a good communication plan for the SEEA that addresses its applicability to environmental, economic, and social dimensions. He explained the objectives and key messages of the communication strategy about raising awareness of the integrated nature of the multipurpose framework and engaging the statistical community as well as demonstrating its usefulness for policy purposes.

25. The session continued with a panel discussion with panellists including Pushpam Kumar (UNEP), Juan Pablo Castaneda (World Bank), Ian Ewing (Australian Bureau of Statistics), and Joe St. Lawrence (Statistics Canada). The panellists provided various examples of their work on communication strategies for their agency/country. Approaches included the development of a clear set of messages, often with a focus on the policy applications and the relevance to the audience of the work done by the agency, targeted engagement of professionals in the field, differentiation of materials based on the audience targeted, and use of dedicated resources to develop and carry out the communication strategy. The definition of the audience (or audiences) and the subsequent development of materials for that audience was mentioned as a critical element of any communication strategy.

26. Linking the SEEA to existing policies is an important part of the communication strategy. At the same time, it was also considered important to demonstrate the merits of the SEEA in its own right rather exclusively in relation to a specific policy objective. Participants considered whether the whole breadth of what SEEA accounting involves should be communicated at once (since that could be intimidating for a country). It was concluded that communication messages should be variable depending on the audience. Potential audiences for the SEEA need to be clarified and defined, and from that relevant messages will emerge. The discussion indicated the need to develop ways to assess impacts of communication strategies. When developing communication strategies, resource constraints need to be

considered in particular in developing countries and how communication fits into priorities. Several comments pointed out that popularizing the SEEA and developing the demand from policymakers is key and will facilitate the process of implementing the SEEA. The main conclusions of this session pointed out that communication of the SEEA is a key element of the SEEA implementation. Dedicated resources and professional communications and marketing experts are necessary to develop and implement a successful communication strategy.

Session VI – Tools to Assist in the Global Implementation of the SEEA
(Chair: Samuel Echoku, Principal Statistician, Uganda Bureau of Statistics)

27. This session was organized as a panel discussion about tools that already exist or are under development to assist in the implementation of the SEEA. Panellists were Carl Obst (SEEA Editor), Peter van de Ven (OECD), Pedro Diaz Muñoz (Eurostat), and Pascual Gerstenfeld (ECLAC). Tools presented included the implementation guide, which provides countries guidance on how to start the SEEA implementation; the diagnostic tool, which allows countries to assess the data available for populating their prioritized SEEA accounts; core tables under development by the OECD; manuals, training materials and courses developed by Eurostat; and the regional perspective at ECLAC on tools for SEEA implementation.

28. It was discussed how the experience of the OECD with developing SEEA core tables may be expanded more broadly. Regarding the core tables, a phased approach may be considered starting with the mapping of existing basic statistics, followed by development of possible tables within 2-3 years, with a target for desired core tables in 5 or more years. Those desired tables reflect tables a country might like to have but may currently not be collecting the necessary data.

29. The importance of translating the tools into regional languages was stressed as well as the need to build a critical mass of practitioners using the tools.

30. Participants commented that there may be a need to use tools that already exist within the SEEA system itself, for example, those developed for SEEA-Water that may be linked with the SEEA Central Framework and manuals, training materials and courses developed by Eurostat. Remote sensing is a tool that should be considered as a source of data for countries where certain datasets are not collected on a regular basis. Related to the core tables, there was some concern about deciding between having tables with specific versus broad uses.

31. The presentations were seen to be helpful in showing the universe of tools available, including training materials, and further effort is now needed to pull those tools into a single package. It was suggested to bring all the available tools together and organize them in an E-platform, which would also provide a forum for practitioners to exchange experiences and discuss issues in implementation. It was considered important to create a depository of practices to support the SEEA implementation.

Session VII – Experimental Ecosystem Accounting Testing and Research Agenda
(Chair: Patrick Birungi, National Planning Authority, Uganda)

32. A panel discussed the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting and approaches planned or underway related to ecosystem accounting following the presentation by Alessandra Alfieri (UNSD) providing an overview on the status and future direction of work of EEA. Panellists included Tonnie Tekelenburg (Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency), Ronald Kaggwa (National Environment Management Authority, Uganda), Rosimeiry Portela (Conservation International), Mark Eigenraam (Department of Environment and Primary Industries in Victoria, Australia), Robert Griffin (Natural Capital Project), Markus Lehmann (on behalf of TEEB), and Tone Solhaug (Norwegian Ministry of the Environment). The panellists presented a range of approaches and tools that are available to support research and testing in ecosystem accounting, including the GLOBIO3 model for biodiversity, InVEST for estimation and mapping of a range of ecosystem services primarily site specific, and several TEEB reports. Field work discussed included a pilot project looking at ecosystem valuation in Peru, InVEST testing in India, Belize, and Mozambique, TEEB national implementation in Bhutan, Ecuador, the Philippines, Tanzania, and Liberia, fishery accounting in Uganda and ecosystem accounting in the state of Victoria, Australia. A potential pilot project to look at the testing of ecosystem accounting for biodiversity and related ecosystem services was also presented.

33. The proposed approach to advance the research and testing agenda of the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting was considered appropriate. The need for a peer review assessment of existing methods to model and assess different aspects of the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting emerged. In particular, the issue of developing a baseline by 2016 to inform the Post -2015 Development Agenda for biodiversity was discussed. It was proposed that a meeting of practitioners takes place in the autumn to discuss different methods currently in use for different aspects of the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting, the data needs for accelerating the testing and to develop a project proposal for testing in 6 to 8 countries.

34. Several practices already take into account an ecosystem approach (e.g. FAO fishery). These initiatives would need to be mapped with the objective of harmonizing methodologies. It was also stressed the need to link the research and testing activities on the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting with IPBES, considering synergies in the work programme.

35. While the focus on physical accounts was stressed, it was noted that for some countries and agencies monetary values are considered important in their ability to affect policy decisions. Notwithstanding the different views on valuation, it remains an important topic for research in the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting research and testing agenda.

Session VIII – Parallel Groups Focusing on Key SEEA Implementation Issues
(Chair: Peter Harper, Chair of the UNCEEA and Deputy Australian Statistician)

36. Conference participants were divided into six groups to discuss six topic areas related to the SEEA implementation in greater detail. The reports back from the

parallel group sessions were used to assist in the development of recommendations of the conference. The group discussions were organized around a set of suggested questions for each topic. The main discussion points from each of the groups were summarized by the moderator of each group.

37. The first group, moderated by Shelly Winston of the Statistical Institute of Jamaica discussed the topic of capacity building, scaling up, and associated funding for SEEA implementation. This group indicated that international coordination is needed for capacity building to avoid putting unnecessary pressure on scarce country resources. Furthermore, international initiatives should be directly linked to national priorities. Participants recommended conducting national stakeholder meetings for coordination and identification of national priorities. Countries should identify a lead agency to oversee national implementation and identify appropriate stages of implementation (e.g., coordination and priority setting in the short term and development of accounts in the medium term). The group also stressed the importance of coordinating the SEEA implementation with the SNA implementation to ensure the development of an efficient and sustainable statistical infrastructure.

38. The second group, moderated by Jose Antonio Sena do Nascimiento, Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), discussed the topic of developing the institutional framework for country implementation. Key points raised by the group included the need to use the national statistical forum to promote and communicate the SEEA and the need to define who is responsible for the accounts and formalize collaboration arrangements. The group noted that lack of transparency and collaboration between different levels of government are the most important obstacles. In addition, standards and protocols would assist in ensuring sharing and accuracy of information between different government sectors.

39. The third group, moderated by Pascual Gerstenfeld of ECLAC, discussed the topic of tools supporting the SEEA implementation. The group suggested that the existing draft diagnostic tool and associated documents are too complex and should be simplified (use the structure of the rapid diagnostic tool). The long diagnostic tool often refers to different types of statistics, namely, emission inventories, water statistics, energy statistics, waste statistics, environment statistics, national accounts, international trade statistics, business statistics, government finance statistics, and other. The group felt that emission inventories, water statistics and waste statistics should fall under the general heading of "environment statistics" as they are not separate disciplines in their own right, so there should be 7 types (energy statistics, environment statistics, national accounts, international trade statistics, business statistics, government finance statistics, and other) of statistics in lieu of 10 currently in the tool. It was recommended to avoid relating SEEA to specific policy initiatives such as green growth; instead it was suggested to be more general about the advantages of the SEEA framework in helping measure progress in environment and development. Group members felt that the tools need to provide some additional guidance on roles and responsibilities of the core group and clarify who the sponsors, promoters, managers and users are. They also noted the need to coordinate SEEA and FDES diagnostic tools and to create networks of institutions within countries for better coordination between the different agencies.

40. Group 4, moderated by Sandra Silva Paulsen of the Secretariat for Strategic Affairs of the President of Brazil, covered the topic of the SEEA coordination at the global level. The participants suggested using existing coordination mechanisms (e.g. UNCEEA) and strengthen them to support implementation. They indicated that the main challenges for global coordination are empowering country-level coordination of local initiatives, strengthening interagency coordination, and donor coordination. For raising awareness of SEEA as a tool for policy analysis, the group suggested creating links to the post-2015 agenda and other global, regional, and national initiatives and policy frameworks. International organizations and countries should also be encouraged to inform UNSD of ongoing activities to allow for mapping of environmental-economic accounts implementation.

41. The fifth group, moderated by Mark Eigenraam of the Department of Environment and Primary Industries in Victoria, Australia, discussed the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting testing and research agenda. Participants highlighted the need to provide case studies to make ecosystem accounting more tangible to decision makers. In terms of prioritization of research items, delineation and classification of land and spatial units, methods for measuring ecosystem services and condition, and biodiversity issues are of equal first priority for SEEA EEA research and testing. Of equal second priority, according to the group, are development of linkages between land accounts and industries to supply and demand of ecosystem services and research into valuation methods for ecosystem services that are consistent with the SNA.

42. Group 6, moderated by Raymundo Talento of the National Statistical Coordination Board of the Philippines, considered the SEEA outreach and communication strategy. The group felt that UNSD should engage communication and marketing professionals for promoting the SEEA. There is the need to develop briefs for the general public and for policy makers, as well as briefs for technical audiences. Different messages are needed for different audiences, focusing on those outcomes from the use of the SEEA that are relevant for a given audience. The participants also highlighted the importance of conveying consistent messages across agencies about the benefits of SEEA and its linkage to monitoring and evaluation of sustainable development. To facilitate communication of the SEEA, they suggested use of existing channels as well as innovative communication approaches, and the need to secure dedicated funding for the various communication activities.

Session IX – Adoption of the Recommendations from the International Conference

(Chair: Peter Harper, Chair of the UNCEEA and Deputy Australian Statistician)

43. The Conference adopted a draft set of recommendations for the implementation of the SEEA subject to additional review and editing. UNSD intends to draft a report providing context around the recommendations for further consideration by the UNCEEA.

Annex

Recommendations of the International Conference on the Global Implementation Programme for the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting

(17-19 June 2013, New York)

Attendees of the International Conference "Global Implementation of the SEEA" held at the UNHQ, New York from 17-19 June:

Preamble

Recognizing the important role of the SEEA to assist in national development planning;

Recognizing that the United Nations Statistical Commission, at its 43rd session, adopted the SEEA Central Framework as a statistical standard for environmental-economic accounting and at its 44th session adopted the strategy for the implementation of the SEEA Central Framework calling for a flexible and modular approach to implementation and entrusting the UNCEEA with the responsibility to take the implementation forward;

Recognizing that countries are at different level of statistical development and progress in the implementation of the SEEA~~;~~

Recognizing the importance of country ownership and of the political will to the implementation of the SEEA Central Framework and the testing and development of SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting; further recognizing the importance of early engagement of policy makers in the implementation process as a key component of driving demand for implementation of environmental-economic accounting;

Noting that the United Nations Statistical Commission, at its 44th session, recognized the role of SEEA as an important measurement framework to inform several policy frameworks, including for example the post-2015 development agenda, green economy, green growth, poverty and environment initiative, etc.;

Noting that the endorsed implementation strategy focuses on a demand-driven approach based on national and international policy needs;

Considering that the implementation strategy highlights the principles of a strategic management approach, using coordination, monitoring and reporting to ensure that the roles of international and regional organizations are clear and their actions complementary, effective, and efficient;

Considering that the United Nations Statistical Commission, at its 44th session, encouraged further research and testing of the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting framework;

Being aware that an explicit communication strategy was seen as vital to continuing to build support for the SEEA and as such is an integral component of technical assistance and capacity building programs to accompany the implementation of the SEEA Central Framework and the testing of SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting;

Provide the following recommendations to the UNCEEA for its consideration;

1. Strategic planning

1. As expressed in the Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda "A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development" , it is important to seize the window of opportunity created by high-level government recognition of the key role of statistical systems in monitoring progress on policies to be developed through the post-2015 agenda. UNCEEA should develop a short-term program of work for SEEA implementation, demonstrating the role of SEEA in monitoring and reporting requirements, including the setting of baselines in post-2015 agenda, as well as a longer-term road map for implementation.

2. To secure resources for the implementation of the SEEA Central Framework and the testing and further development of SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting and as part of its resource mobilization strategy, UNCEEA should explore funding opportunities available through global initiatives, particularly those initiatives that have a strong component on measurement.

3. A strategy should be put in place to ensure appropriate human and financial resources be made available at the global, regional, and national levels to facilitate successful implementation of the SEEA accounts. UNCEEA should develop and provide leadership for a resource mobilization strategy.

4. The SEEA requires a global communication strategy that targets multiple potential audiences (e.g., policymakers, academia, private, general public, NGOs and media) and conveys the key SEEA messages, presented in ways that appeal to various audiences. The strategy would also include tools that would assist countries in raising awareness of the SEEA. Funding and recruitment of dedicated communication and marketing specialists is critical to the development of the SEEA communication strategy.

5. There is a need to provide guidance and assistance on including the SEEA implementation in national and regional strategic frameworks (inter alia National Statistical Development Strategy, National Development Plans, National Sustainable Development Plans, National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans) as critical tools for policy planning and development.

6. While ad-hoc approaches to environmental-economic accounting can provide immediate, important information for policy makers, they should be gradually transformed into coordinated efforts to produce a sustainable programme of environmental-economic accounts and supporting statistics as part of a national

statistical development strategy and for use in policy development, implementation, and review.

1.1 SEEA Central Framework

7. Strategic plans of implementation followed by roadmaps for implementation of the SEEA Central Framework at the regional/sub-regional and national levels should be developed by countries using a flexible and modular approach with statistical and institutional deliverables, including baselines developed for the near term (by 2015/6) using an accelerated approach, medium-term (by 2020), and long-term (by 2030). This approach should take into consideration country priorities and their level of statistical development.

8. Considering it addresses economic and environmental information in an integrated manner, SEEA Central Framework is an important framework for monitoring and accountability related to the post-2015 agenda, reaffirming the importance of mainstreaming the SEEA.

1.2 SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting

9. There is a need for leadership and coordination from UNCEEA in advancing the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting testing and research agenda. This should include developing a project or projects and collaborating with ongoing and proposed projects developed by other institutions (e.g., countries, international agencies, NGOs, academia). This work, which would involve those countries who are willing to participate, should move forward quickly to provide examples of its potential use. One specific early area of testing may be in the development of baseline measures of ecosystem condition, including biodiversity.

10. Testing of the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting by countries that are willing to be involved in this work should commence.

11. In advancing the research agenda and testing of the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting, UNCEEA should establish cooperation with global initiatives related to ecosystem services (inter alia, WAVES, IPBES, TEEB, VANTAGE).

2. Coordination, monitoring and reporting

12. There should be strong coordination and cooperation among international agencies working on activities related to the implementation of the SEEA (e.g., IMF, UNDP, UNEP, World Bank/WAVES and OECD) at the international, regional and national levels. To facilitate coordination and cooperation, a partnership for the implementation and mainstreaming of SEEA should be created with clear delineation of roles and responsibilities of international organizations. The details of this partnership would need to be worked out at the later stage.

13. The SEEA Central Framework implementation and SNA implementation should, where relevant, proceed in a coordinated manner at the country level to ensure efficient development of a common statistical infrastructure and operations. National coordination arrangements, including inter-agency, north-south and south-south

coordination, should assist in establishing continuing and sustainable production of relevant SEEA and SNA data.

14. Multiple mechanisms exist and should be explored to facilitate coordination among the international and regional agencies at the country level (e.g., UN Development Group, UN Country Teams, UNCEEA). UN Regional Commissions and sub-regional organizations should play a key role in the sub-regional and regional coordination of implementation. This coordination will reduce duplication of efforts by international, regional, and national development partners and assist countries in developing a coherent national strategy aligned with the sub-regional and regional strategies.

15. Taking into account the mandate given to UNCEEA by the UN Statistical Commission as the governing body for the overall coordination of statistical matters with regard to implementation of SEEA, appropriate resources should be dedicated to the UNCEEA Secretariat to facilitate the global coordination of the SEEA implementation.

16. UNCEEA should develop a mechanism for tracking progress of countries in the implementation of the SEEA. A single central system for reporting SEEA information to international organizations should be pursued to increase the efficiency of national reporting of SEEA data. International organizations should cooperate to the extent possible when it comes to reporting SEEA information to international organizations, for reasons of efficiency, minimizing countries' response burden and consistency of data.

17. There is a need to develop draft common core tables (such as for water, forest, energy, land cover/use) for guiding countries in the SEEA Central Framework implementation in the short term. In the medium to long term, these draft tables should be progressively developed, in harmonization with reporting requirements from other organizations (e.g. Eurostat and OECD), into national reporting tables and should be aligned with existing and developing policy frameworks (e.g., the post-2015 agenda).

18. To facilitate early implementation of SEEA and drawing on its strength as an organizing framework, existing data – environmental and economic - should be used as appropriate. Standardized approaches for addressing missing data should be developed and used as appropriate.

3. National statistical capacity building

19. The SEEA implementation needs to be a nationally owned and country-led process, with capacity building and coordination from international agencies and within countries as required.

20. National statistical offices (NSOs) or their equivalent, as appropriate, have a lead role in national statistical systems and countries are encouraged to empowered NSO's or their equivalent for the implementation of the SEEA and supporting statistics at the national level. Capacity building and advocacy, supported by relevant international organizations, will be critical in this regard. Countries are encouraged to

define a national coordination mechanism with clear roles and responsibilities for different institutions, including identifying a lead agency or agencies that will champion and coordinate the work.

21. Based on the country priorities for SEEA implementation, additional SEEA implementation tools and materials are to be developed. These materials and tools need to be developed in a coordinated manner and reviewed by UNCEEA and appropriate technical expert and city groups groups (e.g., London Group, Oslo Group) for consistency with the SEEA framework.

22. Countries are encouraged to develop and coordinate their individual SEEA communication strategies using existing channels, where possible, and, depending on the specific national circumstances, innovating with new communication approaches that reach a wide range of potential audiences.

23. Through a collaborative process, international agencies should create and further develop a publicly accessible e-platform, which would include a forum for exchange of environmental-economic accounting knowledge (e.g., expert and user discussions, FAQs, user communities) and a central, accessible repository for existing SEEA implementation materials and tools (e.g., presentations, training materials, technical notes, implementation guides, compilation manuals, simplified diagnostic tools and those tools being prepared in the context of other initiatives such as FDES, etc.). The goal of this e-platform would be to provide easy access to implementation materials and tools by the various potential users as well as facilitate exchange on knowledge, experiences, and lessons learned in the SEEA implementation.

24. UNCEEA needs to prioritize translation of tools and materials into multiple languages in order to facilitate national implementation in non-English speaking countries.

25. Sharing country experiences was considered an important aspect of building capability within countries, including possibilities of South-South cooperation, North-South cooperation, and triangular cooperation.

26. Innovative data sources (e.g., big data, remote sensing data) should be considered, as appropriate, when compiling the SEEA accounting tables. Moving forward there is a need to establish collaboration between the statistical community, the environment community and the geospatial community, including, inter alia, the Global Earth Observation System of Systems and the Global Geospatial Information Management (GGIM).