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## **Global Implementation Programme for the SEEA 2012**

### **Annotated outline of a SEEA Implementation Guide**

*(for discussion)*

## **Annotated outline of a SEEA Implementation Guide**

### **A. BACKGROUND**

*The Implementation Strategy for the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA)*

At its 44<sup>th</sup> session in February 2013, the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) endorsed an implementation strategy for the SEEA. The strategy was prepared by the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting (UNCEEAA) through the second half of 2012.<sup>1</sup>

Key features of the strategy include:

- Supporting implementation in countries using a flexible and modular approach
- Establishing, incrementally, the technical capacity for reporting on a core set of environmental-economic accounts
- Recognition of differences in the policy issues, the level of statistical development and the environmental circumstances facing each country
- Co-ordination with related international and national initiatives
- The use of a phased approach to implementation involving establishing institutional mechanisms, self-assessment of information needs and data availability and quality, and the development of targeted implementation plans.

The implementation strategy also describes a number of supporting activities. These include direct training and technical cooperation, the development of manuals and training material, ongoing cooperation with the research community and a general role of advocacy, particularly among potential users of SEEA based outputs. Finally, the implementation strategy discusses potential mechanisms for coordination, monitoring progress, facilitating cooperation and funding.

*Style of the SEEA Implementation Guide*

Since the endorsement of the implementation strategy work has continued to progress the various parts of the strategy and it is within this context that the proposal for a SEEA Implementation Guide has been developed. It is intended that the SEEA Implementation Guide provide material that can assist countries in understanding the need for a strategic approach to implementing the SEEA and the steps that can be taken to adopt such an approach. The focus of the document is therefore not limited to steps involved in the compilation of accounts in terms of data sources and methods. Rather, the proposal is to outline the broader requirements of implementation, including, most importantly, engagement with key policy agencies and users and the development of

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<sup>1</sup> The full implementation strategy is available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc13/BG-SEEA-Implementation.pdf>

appropriate institutional arrangements that permit SEEA to grow beyond one-off measurement exercises.

The SEEA Implementation Guide is envisaged to be a summary document that conveys sufficient information regarding the steps for implementation and provides links to relevant, more detailed material as required. One reason for providing such a summary document is that while there are many aspects of implementation of the SEEA that might be considered generic, the modular nature of the SEEA means that there will be different issues that must be considered depending on the specific account that is the focus of implementation. For example, the set of policy agencies, users, and data source agencies will be different for the implementation of accounts for water resources compared to accounts for timber resources or emission accounts.

### *SEEA Technical Notes*

In order to support implementation for specific types of accounts it is proposed to prepare a series of SEEA Technical Notes covering the main aspects of measurement and compilation in various accounts of the SEEA. For example technical notes are proposed for water accounting, land accounting, accounting for energy, etc. First drafts of technical notes for water accounting and land accounting have been provided as background documents. The aim of these notes is to provide a starting point for implementation of specific accounts by summarizing key aspects and linking to relevant material. Thus they are not compilation guides per se. It may well be relevant for countries, as they work through the implementation and compilation process, to generate a country specific compilation guide and advice on how this may be done could be included in the higher level SEEA Implementation Guide.

### *Diagnostic tools*

One specific piece of work that has been advanced in light of the broader implementation strategy is a diagnostic tool. This tool was aimed at providing a framework to facilitate the relevant stages of implementation. It is proposed to incorporate much of the content that has been developed for the diagnostic tool into the Implementation Guide. To provide an indication of the type of material that could be incorporated, advanced drafts of two sections of the diagnostic tool have been provided as background documents.

An associated piece of work has been the development of a rapid diagnostic tool that could be used to lead relevant parties quickly through the implementation process and required steps. Refinement and testing of such a tool may be an important addition to the suite of implementation materials. A draft of a rapid diagnostic tool has been provided as a background document.

### *Scope of the Implementation Guide*

Two areas of implementation, on which work has not yet been advanced in the context of the SEEA, concern the broad question of strengthening statistical systems and the general issue of communication and dissemination. It is suggested that these topics be covered in the SEEA Implementation Guide while being cognisant of the existing work that has been done on these areas in the context of other areas of statistics. Appropriate referencing to this work would be the starting point.

Since the adoption of the SEEA Central Framework by the UNSC in February 2012, work on the conceptual framework of the SEEA has continued through the drafting of SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting (SEEA-EEA). A draft of this work was welcomed at the UNSC meeting February 2013 and they also endorsed the associated research agenda and encouraged countries to test the framework. Although SEEA-EEA is not an international statistical standard and hence there is no expectation of broad implementation, there are many countries that have indicated an interest in testing ecosystem accounting approaches. It has also been supported as a potential measurement approach through a range of international initiatives including the Convention on Biological Diversity.

In this context, it seems relevant for the SEEA Implementation Guide to encompass the testing of ecosystem accounting in addition to the implementation of the SEEA Central Framework. In large part, the required steps of implementation are applicable in all contexts and hence it is not anticipated that the inclusion of ecosystem accounting with the scope of the SEEA Implementation Guide would change the general content, style or length of the document. To support ecosystem accounting work more specifically, separate materials, including a technical note, are envisaged.

### *Structure of this note*

The next section of this note provides an annotated outline of the chapters for the proposed Implementation Guide. All comments on the proposed structure would be welcome. The final section provides a set of questions for discussion.

Associated background papers have been provided covering the two draft sections of the diagnostic tool and the rapid diagnostic tool.

### *Next steps*

It is proposed that an initial draft of the Implementation Guide be prepared in the coming months with broader discussion and completion taking place by early 2014.

## **B. PROPOSED CHAPTERS**

### **I. Introduction - Background/history/context**

The first chapter will provide a brief summary of the background and development of the SEEA. The rationale for implementation of the SEEA and the associated opportunities and challenges will be described, with particular reference to the broader implementation strategy for the SEEA. The overall purpose of the Implementation Guide is to provide general advice, recommendations as appropriate, and step-by-step guidance where relevant, to the agencies that are tasked with implementing SEEA (including national statistical offices) such that they can initiate and carry out a project on SEEA implementation in a country.

#### **Proposed contents:**

- Introduction to the background and historical development of SEEA
- Why SEEA should be implemented
- Opportunities and challenges in implementing SEEA
- The Implementation Strategy for the SEEA
- Scope and target audience of the Implementation Guide
- The purpose and structure of the Implementation Guide

### **II. Implementation programme for the SEEA Central Framework**

This chapter will describe the general programme for the implementation of the SEEA Central Framework. It will describe the proposed coordination and governance at the global, regional and sub-regional levels and describe the links between implementation of the SEEA and various global development initiatives. The links between SEEA implementation and work on other international standards/frameworks/projects (e.g. SNA and FDES) will also be elaborated.

#### **Proposed contents:**

- Relevance and utility of SEEA to global policy
- Relating SEEA to global development initiatives, including the post-2015 UN development agenda, SDGs, WAVES and Natural Capital Accounting, UNDP green accounting, OECD green economy, FAO action plan, TEEB, CBD, etc.
- The links between SEEA and implementation of other international statistical standards/frameworks such as SNA and FDES
- Description of the sub-regional approach to the implementation of the SEEA including roles and responsibilities for different institutions and agencies at the national and international level.
- Mapping sub-regional clusters

### **III. Overview of SEEA implementation at the country level**

This chapter will provide an overview of a generic SEEA implementation at the country level. The seven steps towards implementation will be explained (as described in the draft SEEA diagnostic tools - see background documents). In addition, a general overview of how SEEA has been used and can be used to support national policies will be described. The role of a diagnostic tool will also be discussed.

A key message of the chapter will be that individual country circumstances including institutional arrangements need to be considered and also that any implementation is unlikely to be a simple “walking through” of steps in a linear fashion. Instead there are likely to be various iterations of the different steps over time.

**Proposed contents:**

- Description of seven generic implementation stages
- Overview of how SEEA can be used to support national policies
- Overview of the iterative process involved in advancing SEEA implementation in a country

**Seven steps towards implementation:**

- Getting started: Establishing the core group
- Reviewing the current framework for sustainable development, green economy policies and national statistical development strategies
- Developing a Statement of strategy
- Conducting a draft National Assessment
- Drafting an initial National Implementation Plan
- Establishing an implementation team
- Conducting a detailed National Assessment and producing a final National Implementation Plan

**IV. Strategic planning and priority setting**

This chapter will expand on the overview material of the previous chapter and provide more specific guidance and advice concerning engagement with users and the policy priority setting process. Guidance on assessing and developing a national institutional and legal framework for statistics will also be provided.

This material is seen as particularly important to ensure that the development of SEEA accounts is not simply a statistical or technical exercise but also has a practical focus that can support the longer term institutionalisation of SEEA in decision making. Encouraging informed decision making is a fundamental objective of a statistical system but for this objective to be met the information must be used. Given the breadth of material covered by the SEEA and because of its relatively recent arrival on the statistical horizon, widespread engagement with users will be an important and ongoing element of SEEA implementation.

**Proposed contents:**

- Monitoring and preparing for SEEA implementation
- Developing a statement of strategy for SEEA work and associated communication
- Integration of SEEA implementation with policy priorities including description of links between SEEA based data sets and indicators.
- Guidance on assessing and developing a national institutional and legal framework for the SEEA implementation and strengthening statistical systems

**V. Assessment of data sources and statistical system**

This chapter will provide guidance on assessment of data sources and the statistical system for the SEEA implementation. Both initial assessments and more detailed assessments will be described.

The chapter will also provide guidance and advice on the preparation of a national assessment report.

An important aspect that will be drawn out here is that the SEEA Central Framework is not an international standard that will be implemented in one phase. Rather the SEEA Central Framework consists of multiple modules each having their own data requirements. In some cases relevant data may be available and this may mean that these modules are considered for implementation earlier than for others.

A distinction should also be drawn between initial assessments of data availability and subsequent assessments that are more detailed. In this regard, a balance needs to be found between having sufficient information on available data that permits making decisions on the allocation of resources and actually undertaking the compilation of an account which will provide the most detailed assessment of data. In addition it may be relevant to implement a basic or core account for a specific topic using available data in the first instance and improving or extending the account in due course as data availability and quality improves. Throughout, the issue of fitness for purpose needs to be a central consideration.

**Proposed contents:**

- Guidance on assessment of data sources and the statistical system for the SEEA implementation
- Guidance on preparing assessment reports.

**VI. Compilation and resourcing considerations**

The chapter will consider compilation and resourcing issues and the role of quality assessment frameworks will be discussed. The section will consider resources and capacity requirements for SEEA implementation (recognizing the modular approach to implementation) and suggest short-term and medium-term strategies on resource planning and capacity building. Resources to be considered for these processes include work force, training, equipment, data, etc.

The chapter will also provide guidance on the preparation of implementation plans that bring together information on priorities, information from data assessments and information on resourcing.

Finally, the chapter will suggest ways in which the proposed SEEA Technical Notes might be used as a starting point for specific accounts, including the preparation of more detailed compilation guidance that caters for individual country circumstance. This discussion will extend to the development of dissemination strategies for the accounts and associated outputs.

**Proposed contents:**

- Compilation issues and quality assessment framework
- Assessment of resource and capacity requirements
- Short-term strategies on resource planning and capacity building
- Medium-term strategies on resource planning and capacity building
- Drafting SEEA implementation plans
- Use of SEEA Technical Notes in implementing specific accounts
- Developing dissemination strategies

## **Additional material**

Each chapter will contain references and links to relevant information.

In addition, annexes (updated progressively on-line) will contain information pertaining to particular accounts and themes in the form of technical notes. Technical notes are intended to be short (10-12 page) summaries of the key aspects relevant to developing accounts in particular areas of environmental-economic accounting, e.g. accounting for water, timber/forests, emissions, etc. The technical notes will highlight particular considerations for different themes/areas that are not captured among the more generic advice provided in the chapters of the Implementation Guide. Preliminary drafts of technical notes have been developed for land and water accounting.

Finally, it is suggested that some idealised implementation scenarios covering sequences of events and meetings, use of a rapid diagnostic tool and other structured processes could be outlined to provide a starting point for application at the country level.



### **C. QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. Do you have any comments on the proposed style and focus of the SEEA Implementation Guide?
2. To what extent should the SEEA Implementation Guide discuss the strengthening of statistical systems and the communication and dissemination strategies for accounts?
3. Should the scope of the SEEA Implementation Guide include the testing of the experimental ecosystem accounting framework?
4. Do you have any comments on the relationship between the SEEA Implementation Guide and the proposed SEEA Technical Notes?
5. Do you have any comments on the proposed outline for the chapters of the SEEA Implementation Guide?