

The potential of a staff exchange mechanism to support capacity development for environmental accounting

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Introduction

1. At the 18th London Group Meeting in October 2012 (Ottawa, Canada) how to build capacity to implement System of Environmental Economic Accounts (SEEA) was discussed¹. Exchanges of staff between statistical agencies were raised as one possibility. Since then a broad SEEA implementation strategy has been developed², mostly focused on the needs of developing countries. The strategy does not specifically mention staff exchanges although they could fit into *Section IV Activities for the Implementation of the SEEA Central Framework* of the document.
2. Exchanges of staff can benefit the implementation SEEA around the world as well as the on-going development of the SEEA by ensuring that national statistical offices can continue to develop and retain staff with the high levels of knowledge needed to produce and refine environmental accounts.
3. The number of staff involved in environmental accounting in national statistical offices is small, especially when compared to the economic and social statistical programmes of these offices. How to develop and retain the staff needed to produce environmental accounts is an issue for all countries and international organisations. In particular, retention is a key issue given the present limited career paths in environmental accounting. Compounding the national level issues is the increasing international demand for staff skilled and knowledgeable in environmental accounts.
4. This paper examines briefly how a more structured programme of staff exchanges between statistical agencies could benefit both individuals and organisations. Exchanges could take a number of forms and in many (most) casts would not involve a direct “swap” of staff (e.g. it is unlikely that two staff members from two agencies can do a direct swap of jobs for a defined period of time). Several different types of exchanges are identified and how these exchanges could work in practice, including what barriers exist and how they could be addressed, are presented.
5. It is important to note that the focus of the paper is primarily on exchanges between statistical offices with established accounting programmes that are looking to improve production processes, expand the range accounts produced and provide development opportunities for staff, which has received relatively little attention compared to the attention given to countries just beginning accounting programmes.

Background

6. While there is no formal mechanism of staff exchanges, the activity has been occurring. Staff from national statistical offices frequently move to

¹Sjoerd Schenau and Bran Edens (2012). Implementation Strategy for the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA)
[http://unstats.un.org/unsd/envaccounting/londongroup/meeting18/LG18_p26_Implementation%20Strategy%20for%20the%20System%20of%20Environmental-Economic%20Accounting%20\(SEEA\).pdf](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/envaccounting/londongroup/meeting18/LG18_p26_Implementation%20Strategy%20for%20the%20System%20of%20Environmental-Economic%20Accounting%20(SEEA).pdf)

² United Nations (2013) Implementation Strategy for the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting.
<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc13/BG-SEEA-Implementation.pdf>

international statistical organisations, typically for 1 to 3 years. These movements are part of a recruitment processes and not done for the purpose of capacity building but to fill identified jobs. For example, Eurostat recruits staff from European statistical offices.

7. There has also been movement of staff between national statistical offices, generally for shorter periods of time, up to one year. In these movements the reasons and objectives have varied. For example, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has benefited from an assessment of the accounting programme by Statistics Canada and from the expertise in Statistics Sweden to help set-up programmes of environmental expenditure and environmental taxes and subsidies accounts. In these cases, the movement has been initiated by individuals and the objectives have been tailored to suite the skills and knowledge of the individuals and the needs of the organisations to which they go.
8. While not easily quantified, in both the movements between statistical offices and between the international agencies and statistical offices, the individuals and organisations benefited from an exchange of knowledge and expertise. The development of more formal mechanisms for exchange could increase the number of people involved in exchanges and increase the benefits to national statistical offices.

What purpose would exchanges serve?

9. The purpose of the exchanges is to increase the spread of knowledge between individuals and national statistical offices and other agencies involved in the production on environmental accounts. In this the exchanges should benefit all parties involved in the exchange, namely:
 - a. The individual
 - b. The agency to which the individual goes
 - c. The agency from which the individual comes
10. The individual will benefit by increasing their knowledge and experiences of environmental accounting, and in particular production processes (e.g. data compilation, estimation and publication systems, consultation processes, etc.). More broadly the individual benefits from increased experience of the national statistical system and the culture of the country to which they go.
11. The agency from which the individual goes benefits during the exchange from the knowledge and skills that the individual brings. This could be account specific knowledge (e.g. Environmental Goods and Service Sector) or production skills (e.g. methods for estimating certain parameters). This can be used to improve existing accounts or expand the range of accounts produced. Post the exchange links between the agencies are strengthened through the personal relationships that are established or deepened. Also post the exchange there is likely to be a commitment of the individual to a career in environmental accounting.
12. The agencies from which the individual comes benefits on the return of the individual by the knowledge of the other agencies accounts and systems,

which may be used to improve or expand their own accounts. Again the links between the agencies are strengthened through the personal relationships that are established or deepened.

What are the constraints and barriers to exchanges?

13. For the exchanges to work a number of constraints have to be recognised and barriers overcome. They include:
 - a. Language – individuals will need to be able to work in a common language (a particular challenge for the typically monolingual Australians)
 - b. Timing – statistical offices typically have a production cycle with peaks and troughs in workloads. Agencies will have to find the “right time” for both the agencies and individuals involved.
 - c. Costs – salary payments, travel and accommodation costs all need to be considered exchange.
 - d. Administrative procedures and in particular the visa requirements of countries

14. For the costs, it is important to recognise that for salary payments there are likely to be differences in the salary ranges of different agencies for equivalent work as well as in the cost of living of different countries. How to deal with the cost of family members travelling with the staff member will have to be considered. In general, it is likely that these costs will not be covered by the statistical agencies.

How could it work?

15. Exchanges can only work with the good will and cooperation of the statistical offices and individuals involved. In all cases close coordination between agencies and the individual will be essential to success of the exchange.

16. Exchanges could work in a number of ways, depending on the initiator of the request as well as the length and objective of the exchange. Table 1 provides 3 examples of the types of exchanges considered and how the costs might be covered.

17. It is suggested that for each exchange the initiator of the exchange makes a formal proposal that can be considered by either a specifically identified agency or a range of statistical agencies. The proposal should clearly set out the objectives of the exchange, including the expectations of the staff member and the proposed arrangements for costs.

Questions to London Group

18. The questions are:
 - a. Which agencies would be interest in taking part in an exchange programme?
 - b. What would be the next steps for establishing such a programme?

Table 1. Example of exchanges

| Initiator | Objective | Typical duration | Salary payment | Travel expenses | Accommodation | Visas and admin |
|------------------------|--|------------------|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Agency receiving staff | Review of programme or specific processes and accounts | <3 month | By agency receiving staff Could be done as an exchange of time if both agencies would like reviews | By agency receiving staff | By agency receiving staff | By agency receiving staff |
| Agency sending staff | Study of programme or specific processes and accounts | <3 months | By agency sending staff Could be done as an exchange of time if both agencies would like to study each others work | By agency sending staff | By agency sending staff | By agency sending staff |
| Agency receiving staff | Development of specific processes or accounts | Up to 1 year | By agency receiving staff | By agency receiving staff | Individual | By agency receiving staff |
| Individual | Professional development | Up to 1 year | By agency receiving staff Could be done as an exchange of two individuals | Individual | Individual | Individual |

