

**13th Meeting of the Advisory Expert Group on National Accounts,
1-3 October 2019, Washington D.C., USA**

Agenda item: 3.3

Options to consult users for a potential SNA update

Introduction

Following up on the 2018 AEG meeting, this paper proposes an approach to consult users in view of a potential SNA update, based on the use of different channels.

A paper on: Options to consult users for a potential SNA update

Main issues to be discussed

The AEG is invited to give its opinion on the proposed general approach and the individual options to consult users.

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General considerations

At its 2018 meeting, the AEG ‘Highlighted the importance of involving users in the discussion [*on the SNA research agenda*] to assess in advance their reactions to the guidance notes and proposed revisions and the need to reflect on the appropriate resource implications and timing and requested that the ISWGNA to initiate a user consultation’.

Individual ISWGNA and AEG members are in regular contact with their respective key stakeholders and have a good understanding of their needs and expectations. However, the ISWGNA recognises the importance of a broader and more systematic involvement of users in view of a potential SNA update. A series of events to consult users from both developed and developing countries should facilitate the buy-in. At the same time, user consultations should aim at getting useful input on the SNA research agenda and avoid the generation of user ‘wish lists’.

Consultation events would include the users of national accounts (policy and decision makers from government ministries, central bankers, economic forecasters, academic researchers, business accountants, and representatives from the private sector), and also seek to involve economic statisticians from other domains – e.g. balance of payments, business, trade and price statistics – as appropriate.

Different channels to consult users could be envisaged (see next section), depending on the target audience, the topic and the timing of consultation events. In any case, National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) and National Central Banks (NCBs) would play a key role to identify appropriate users in their respective countries/regions and for each different initiative.

Consultation events should have clear objectives and a focus on issues addressed under the three priority areas of the SNA research agenda: *globalisation*, *digitalisation* and *well-being and sustainability*. The consultation events should give users the opportunity to comment on ongoing work in these areas, to improve the understanding of their impact on the structure, dynamics and competitiveness of the national and global economy activity and the potential differences between countries.

Possible channels to consult users

The ISWGNA suggests four ways to reach users: a) existing meetings; b) written consultations; c) local events, and d) a global user conference. These four channels may be used in combination. User consultation events need to be integrated in the timetable towards the next SNA update.

a. Existing meetings

Possible regular meetings in which users may be (more largely) involved include IMF's GFS Advisory Committee and BOPCOM, Eurostat's NAWG meetings (usually in May and in October), the OECD's WPFS/WPNA meetings (usually in November), the workshops and seminars on national accounts and economic statistics, which are jointly organized by the United Nations Statistics Division and the United Nations regional commissions, the UNCEEA or the London Group on Environmental Accounting. Other meetings might also be relevant. Of course, the depth and variety of topics discussed would depend on the nature of each forum.

These meetings are normally conceived to discuss statistical issues from the producers' point of view. However, users may be involved by slightly adapting the meetings' format and content. For instance, in addition to the standard sessions, the meeting agenda could include one or more special sessions where users could present their needs and comment on ongoing work. The involvement of users could have logistic implications, with the need to reserve bigger meeting rooms than usual, at least for the special sessions. To make the consultation global and inclusive, mechanisms to finance participation of users from developing countries may have to be identified.

Other potential events for engagement with users may be the conferences of the International Association for Research in Income and Wealth (IARIW), the International Input Output Association (IIOA), the US National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), etc. Discussions are currently taking place on having dedicated sessions at the 2020 General Conference of the IARIW (Oslo, Norway, August 24 – 28, 2020).

b. Written consultations

Written user consultations have the advantage that they are not restricted by room capacity or budgetary constraints. They could be undertaken at different stages of development of the work on the SNA priority areas. Written consultations may be run by email and/or via a dedicated page on the UNSD website. The consultations would require the preparation of specific questionnaires. Email consultations could be addressed to the existing mailing lists used to consult on manuals, though these may be too 'producer-based' and should be supplemented. These could also be the basis to advertise online consultations. Additional relevant contacts at national level may come from NSIs and NCBS.

c. National and regional events

A third channel consists in organising ad hoc national and regional events, where users and producers of statistics jointly discuss issues and priorities on the SNA research agenda from a national/regional perspective. These events could take place in a range of countries across the world, based on common materials developed under the umbrella of the ISWGNA/AEG in collaboration with regional agencies. These events could be organised where possible back-to-back with existing meetings. AEG members would be best placed to lead the organisation for national events, including logistics and identifying invitees, while international and regional organisations may oversee regional events. Each event could focus on one or several topics in the research agenda, jointly agreed by the organisers.

d. Global user conference

A fourth consultation channel could be a user conference. Such a global conference could be organised in the second half of 2020, to feed into the ISWGNA report to the 2021 Session of the Statistical Commission. By gathering together users from all the world regions and all relevant domains, it could serve to reconcile the different user views and agree on needs and priorities as regards ongoing and future work on the SNA research agenda for the priority areas in conjunctions with research undertaken in other domains of economic statistics. However, striking the balance between making this event broad and inclusive and at the same time focused and useful for actual work on SNA may not be straightforward. Organising such a conference would require a careful consideration of the format, topics to discuss and users to invite. The location should be carefully considered to make it inclusive. The necessary financial resources should be quantified and their source identified. Work would need to start soon to organise such an event in 2020.