

Statistical Commission
Fiftieth session
5 – 8 March 2019
Item 3(1) of the provisional agenda

Background document
Available in English only

Items for discussion and decision: environmental-economic accounting

**SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting
Planning Note for 2020 Revision**

Prepared by United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental-
Economic Accounting

SEEA EXPERIMENTAL ECOSYSTEM ACCOUNTING

REVISION 2020

REVISION PLANNING NOTE

Background

This document describes the current plans for the operation of the revision process for the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting (SEEA EEA). It builds on original material provided for discussion to the June 2017 UNCEEA meeting and incorporates subsequent discussions at SEEA EEA Technical Committee meetings, the June 2018 UNCEEA meeting and other discussions; and reflects proposals for activities in 2019 and 2020 based on the current state of development of research and discussion papers across the five working groups.

Main roles in the revision process

There are four main roles in relation to the work. Many of these roles are filled by in-kind contributions from relevant organizations with the support of one or two consultants. The main roles are:

- A lead/chair for each of the research areas, each of whom is a member of the SEEA EEA Technical Committee. The selected area leads are:
 - Research area #1 – Spatial units: Sjoerd Schenau (Statistics Netherlands)
 - Research area #2 – Ecosystem condition: Joachim Maes (EU JRC)
 - Research area #3 – Ecosystem services – concepts and measurement issues: Lars Hein (Wageningen University)
 - Research area #4 – Measurement and valuation of specific ecosystem services: Rocky Harris (UK DEFRA)
 - Research area #5 – Valuation concepts and accounting treatments: Juha Siikamaki (IUCN)
- Working Groups of around 5-7 members each (including the chair) with the selection of members to ensure appropriate involvement of experts from the relevant communities of interest (see Annex 1 for the current membership)
- Consultants to prepare materials and documentation (consultants appointed would become members of the relevant Working Groups)
- Broader expert review groups

In addition, there will be an overarching support and co-ordination role played by the UNSD Secretariat and the Editor of the SEEA EEA working in conjunction with the SEEA EEA Technical Committee. In practice, each working group will be supported by (i) the Editor (Carl Obst), (ii) a UNSD staff member, and (iii) a representative of the chair of the SEEA EEA Technical Committee. Membership of a Working Group, including as lead/chair, does not imply appointment as a consultant.

Operation of the Working Groups

In terms of the operation of the working groups:

- Initial work focused on extensive clarification and description of the revision issues and engagement of an appropriately broad network of associated experts with the aim of producing a detailed work program and action plan covering how to address the issues.
- Initial drafts of the programs and plans were completed in September 2018 following discussion at the Forum of Experts and were discussed by the SEEA EEA Technical Committee whose primary role is to ensure appropriate coherence and co-ordination across the work programs. The Technical Committee will review and provide inputs on the work of the subgroups on a regular basis.
- In cases where the issues are well understood, work has commenced on drafting discussion and issue papers.
- Revision issues will be progressively advanced in line with the work program through to May 2019 and will be presented at the Forum of Experts on Ecosystem Accounting scheduled for late June 2019.

It is proposed that the working groups operate until June 2019. At that time, an alternative structure, including an Editorial Board, will be established with a specific focus on ensuring integration and coherence of the standards. It is likely that groups focused on specific research topics will also be established at this time and hence there will remain a role for those involved in the Working Groups beyond June 2019.

Expert review groups

Those involved as broader expert reviewers would be expected to provide reviews of relevant research papers and draft chapters, and to attend forums and workshops as invited. With respect to the involvement of these additional experts, a process to engage experts and communities of interest commenced in December 2017 via consultation on the revision issues to be considered in the process. As part of this consultation, people were asked to express an interest in participating actively in the revision process and through this a range of relevant experts were identified.

To broaden this network of experts, members of the Working Groups will nominate particular experts and the community established through the Forum of Experts in June 2018 will also provide an important group of experts and links to networks.

Expert review groups will be established more formally in the first half of 2019 for each of the research areas. We would therefore expect to be able to establish broader review groups with whom each working group can engage to seek input and feedback. It would further be expected that the experts participating in these review groups would be invited to ongoing participation in the revision process and are also likely to be involved in the discussion of issues beyond a specific research area.

Editorial Board

As for the drafting of past SEEA documents, it is planned to establish an Editorial Board that will provide oversight and direction to the revision process under the auspices of the UNCEEA. The breadth of technical material encompassed by the SEEA EEA makes establishing the composition of the Editorial Board a challenging one. In addition, it is necessary to consider the effective representation of the statistical community as well as the involvement of those agencies who are likely to be the publishers of the final document.

Given these considerations, the proposed composition of the Editorial Board is an extended membership of the current SEEA EEA Technical Committee. It would be formally extended in

two ways (i) by the inclusion of the five chairs of the SEEA EEA revision working groups and (ii) by allowing for existing members to co-opt one additional expert for participation in meetings of the Editorial Board. All members are welcome to involve all relevant experts from their networks outside of the meetings. The proposed membership of the Editorial Board based on the current composition of the SEEA EEA Technical Committee is shown in Annex 2.

It is expected that the Editorial Board will meet formally for the first time in June 2019 at the time of the Forum on Ecosystem Accounting in New York and remain operational until the completion of the document for submission to UNSC at the end of 2020. Regular meetings of the Editorial Board will be held as the draft chapters are developed ahead of their release for global consultation. The first round of global consultation is expected in around November 2019. A Terms of Reference for the Editorial Board will be developed for consideration by June 2019.

Meetings and workshops

The broad coverage of topics in the research agenda of the SEEA EEA revision makes it challenging to hold meetings and workshops that cover the full breadth of material while at the same time having the detailed conversations that are required to make substantive progress on technical matters. With this in mind, it is anticipated that a number of smaller, topic specific workshops will be held through the course of the revision process so as to allow smaller groups of experts to discuss issues in more depth.

Subject to further discussion and consideration of funding arrangements/logistics, the following meetings may be held.

Completed meetings

- April 2018 (Bonn): Expert workshop on valuation for ecosystem accounting
- 18-20 June 2018 (New York): Forum of Experts on ecosystem accounting
- 1-4 October 2018 (Dublin): London Group meeting
- 28 & 29 November 2018 (Paris): Expert meeting on spatial areas and ecosystem condition
- 30 November 2018 (Paris): Strategic meeting on accounting for biodiversity and ecosystems
- 22-24 January 2019 (New York): Valuation and measurement of specific ecosystem services

Forthcoming meetings

- 26-28 June 2019 (New York area): Forum of Experts on Ecosystem Accounting
- 28 & 29 June 2019 (New York area): Technical Expert Meeting

Ensuring coherence

A particular area of concern in the management of the revision process is ensuring ongoing coherence in the advances made within each working group. There are six means by which maintaining coherence will be supported:

- Each working group commenced their consideration of the issues from the two source documents the SEEA 2012 EEA and the recently completed Technical Recommendations in support of the SEEA EEA. Both documents reflect relatively high levels of coherence among the different elements of the ecosystem accounting system and hence all working groups will be starting from a relative coherent base.
- The Editor and UNSD will be participants in each Working Group and will be involved in the development of discussion and issues papers, thus providing a single set of eyes over the discussions.
- The lead/chairs of each research area will meet regularly via teleconference together with the Chair of the SEEA EEA Technical Committee, the Editor and the Secretariat to ensure ongoing awareness and alignment of progress and connect all parts of the project to the wide range of meetings, forums and related developments.
- The SEEA EEA Technical Committee will meet on a regular basis to consider progress in the different research areas and highlight issues of coherence.
- Regular technically focused meetings, including the expert forums and London Group meetings, will provide opportunities to identify issues of coherence.
- As noted above, it is anticipated that the model of working groups for each research area will operate only until June 2019 at which time an alternative structure will be adopted with a specific focus on coherence. This will limit the potential for significant drift among the research areas.

Also, in relation to coherence some specific aspects are noted as of particular importance. These are:

- Alignment with the SEEA Central Framework, especially in relation to land use and land cover
- Alignment to the SNA with respect to the production boundary for defining ecosystem services and the conceptual basis for valuation
- The development of classifications, especially for ecosystem types and ecosystem services
- Accounting for marine and coastal areas
- Accounting for urban areas

In each of these areas, it is recommended that the development of the work programs in each research area discuss and incorporate particular activities to support the development of consistent outcomes.

Engagement approaches

The Forum on Ecosystem Accounting in June 2019 will be important in terms of continuing to raise awareness and secure participation from a wide range of stakeholders. Design of an appropriate agenda is now under consideration.

The London Group on Environmental Accounting will support the revision process by providing general feedback on the revision issues and papers and provide a forum to share experiences that will serve as input into the conceptual development.

In advancing the work on the SEEA EEA revision, serious consideration was given to expanding the range and number of people involved in the process to ensure that technical matters are as well founded as possible and to build as broad a consensus as possible around the

accounting treatments. The relevant experts may be from a range of sectors including the academic community, government and international agencies, non-government organizations, the private sector, including consultants specialising in SEEA and ecosystem measurement, and those involved in related international processes and networks such as IPBES, IUCN, TEEB, GEO EO4EA, Ecosystem Services Partnership (ESP), A Community of Ecosystem Services (ACES) and associations of environmental and resource economists.

In addition, it will be important to take advantage of the expertise and experience of those involved in testing the SEEA EEA at various scales. There are many such projects now in operation, including in particular the UNSD led project NCAVES and relevant experts are being connected to the revision process to the greatest extent possible.

Establishing connections to natural capital assessment activities at the corporate level may also provide useful avenues for engagement. Both the UNSD led NCAVES project and the World Bank WAVES partnership have identified corporate engagement as an important aspect.

A separate but important matter for discussion is how best to engage with the user community. The appropriate strategy in this area will be developed in line with the work of UNCEEA.

Through 2019, it is expected that based on the results of the working groups and expert forum meetings draft chapters of the revised SEEA EEA will be developed for global consultation with all national statistical offices and broad consultation with experts in various communities. This is in line with the usual processes for the development of international statistical standards.

Also, consideration is being given to holding an ecosystem accounting based conference in the first half of 2020 to further embed the large range of technical and policy relationships that are being established and to promote the developments and potential of ecosystem accounting.

Timelines for key tasks and outputs

There has been substantive progress in a number of areas in particular clarifying the substantive issues to be the focus of the revision and in establishing the proposed working group structure to take forward the first phase of research. This section provides a proposed timeline of key outputs and tasks to support ongoing planning of the revision process.

Beyond the Forum of Experts in June 2018, key milestones in the revision process will be:

- The Forum of Experts planned for June 2019 and April 2020 which will bring together developments across the four research areas and resolve technical aspects
- Rounds of consultation on draft chapters from July 2019 to November 2020
- Final draft of the revised SEEA EEA by December 2020.

The following key outputs and tasks are described from the perspective of the overall management of the project. There will be numerous associated tasks and events surrounding ongoing governance (e.g. meetings of area leads and the SEEA EEA Technical Committee), the development of discussion papers by working groups, and consultation with wider expert review groups that are not documented here. The timelines for these tasks and events will be managed to work within the key outputs and tasks listed here and are also the subject of ongoing planning discussions.

Timeline for the revision of the SEEA EEA @ February 2019

Date	Key outputs	Key tasks and events	Status
2018			
Jun	Preliminary outline	Forum of Experts, New York (18-20 June) UNCEEA (21-22 June)	Complete Complete
Jul	Forum of Experts summary report	Establish broad expert review groups for each research area	Complete
Aug			
Sep	Revised outline		Complete
Oct		London Group meeting, Dublin	Complete
Nov	Draft discussion papers on spatial units and ecosystem condition (1.1-1.3 & 2.1-2.3) Draft research papers on individual ES	Workshop on condition and spatial units	Complete
Dec	First, "internal" revised SEEA EEA draft – core framework chapters Synthesis of individual ES papers		Complete

2019			
Jan		Workshop on valuation & measurement of specific ecosystem services	Complete
Feb	Final discussion papers spatial units and ecosystem condition	Synthesis report of workshop on specific ecosystem services	
Mar	Draft discussion papers on valuation and accounting research topics	Complete Expert Review Group (ERG) engagement for WG#2	
Apr	Draft discussion papers on ecosystem services topics	Complete Expert Review Group (ERG) engagement for WG#2	
May	Draft position papers on spatial units and ecosystem condition Revised discussion papers on ecosystem services and valuation and accounting topics	Complete Expert Review Group (ERG) engagement for WG#3 and WG#5	
Jun		Forum of Experts Establish SEEA EEA Editorial Board UNCEEA meeting	
Jul	Forum of Experts summary report including research priorities Complete first tranche chapter drafts	Release first tranche chapter drafts for consultation with experts	
Aug	Complete second tranche chapter drafts		
Sep	Complete third tranche chapter drafts	Workshop on classification of ecosystem services (tbc) Release second tranche chapter drafts for consultation with experts Finalise discussion papers on remaining research priorities	
Oct	Complete final tranche chapter drafts	Release third tranche chapter drafts for consultation with experts London Group meeting	

		Workshop on classification of land cover and ecosystem types and the measurement of ecosystem condition	
Nov	Complete first set of SEEA EEA chapter drafts	Release final tranche chapter drafts for consultation with experts	
Dec	Complete second set of SEEA EEA chapter drafts	Commence global consultation on first set of chapter drafts	

Date	Key outputs	Key tasks and events	Status
2020			
Jan	Complete third set of SEEA EEA chapter drafts	Commence global consultation on second set of chapter drafts	
Feb		Commence global consultation on third set of chapter drafts	
Mar	Summary report on global consultation	Workshop on recording degradation and other accounting treatments	
Apr			
May	Complete consolidated SEEA EEA (v1)	Forum of Experts	
Jun		Commence global consultation on consolidated version UNCEEA	
Jul			
Aug	Summary report on global consultation		
Sep	Complete consolidated SEEA EEA (v2)		
Oct		Commence final round of global consultation London Group meeting	
Nov	Summary report on global consultation		
Dec	SEEA EEA Final draft for UNSC		