



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
17 December 2014

Original: English

Statistical Commission

Forty-sixth session

3-6 March 2015

Item 3 (h) of the provisional agenda*

**Items for discussion and decision:
environmental-economic accounting**

Report of the Committee of Experts on Environmental- Economic Accounting

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2014/219, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting. The report describes the progress of work of the Committee, focusing on the work being undertaken to advance the role of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) in the post-2015 development agenda; on progress made in respect of implementing the SEEA Central Framework; and ongoing efforts to advance the research and testing agenda of the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting. It describes the current status of drafting SEEA for agriculture, forestry and fisheries. The report concludes with points for discussion.

* E/CN.3/2015/1.



Report of the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting

I. Introduction

1. At its forty-fifth session, held from 4 to 7 March 2014, the Statistical Commission adopted decision 45/105 (see [E/2014/24](#)), in which it:

(a) Expressed its appreciation for the work of the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting in advancing the implementation of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) Central Framework;

(b) Welcomed the publication of the SEEA Central Framework and the issuing of its preliminary translations in the official languages of the United Nations;

(c) Recognized SEEA as an important statistical framework for the post-2015 development agenda and the sustainable development goals indicators, and requested the Committee of Experts to review the statistical notes prepared for the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals to ensure that SEEA is adequately reflected;

(d) Recognized the importance of mainstreaming SEEA in the national strategies for the development of statistics;

(e) Requested the Committee of Experts to continue its work in the development of technical notes, training material and courses and compilation guidelines in support of SEEA implementation, and requested that attention also be paid to the compilation of basic statistics supporting the accounts;

(f) Urged the Committee of Experts to finalize the core tables and accounts resulting from the SEEA Central Framework to assist countries in the implementation of SEEA;

(g) Agreed to establish a technical committee on the SEEA Central Framework responsible for advancing the research agenda of the SEEA Central Framework, with a focus on the classification of environmental activities and goods and services sector, and supporting the implementation of SEEA through preparing and reviewing technical material ensuring full consistency with the SEEA Central Framework;

(h) Stressed the importance of linking the implementation of the SEEA Central Framework with that of the *System of National Accounts 2008*;

(i) Recognized the need for support in the implementation of the SEEA Central Framework, and requested the Committee of Experts to scale up the programme on SEEA implementation, strengthen the capacity-building programme for developing countries and develop a campaign to raise funds for capacity-building at the country level;

(j) Requested the Committee of Experts to work in close cooperation with existing international initiatives on the development of tools and core tables and accounts as well as in the implementation of the SEEA Central Framework, for example, the Ulaanbaatar Group on statistics for economies based on natural resources, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, on the development of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting for Agriculture;

(k) Reiterated the importance of strengthening the dialogue with different stakeholders at the national level with, for example, representatives from the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Planning, the Ministry in charge of Environment and the geospatial community, first through sensitization and later through the adoption of a modular approach to the implementation of SEEA;

(l) Welcomed the work of the Committee of Experts on the development of a communications strategy for SEEA, and noted the need for allocation of human and financial resources for the development of such a strategy;

(m) Agreed to establish a technical committee on the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting in order to advance its research and testing agenda, prioritizing issues that could be solved in the short to medium term;

(n) Encouraged the Committee of Experts to establish cooperation with the geospatial community and with existing initiatives on the measurement and assessment of ecosystems, such as Wealth Accounting and the Valuation of Ecosystem Services and the Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity;

(o) Requested that the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting and the SEEA Applications and Extensions be issued and translated into the official languages of the United Nations as soon as possible.

2. The present report summarizes ongoing work undertaken to advance the role of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) as a measurement framework for the post-2015 development agenda (section II); describes the progress made in the implementation of the SEEA Central Framework, including capacity development initiatives (section III); provides an update on the progress made with regard to the testing of and research on the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting (section IV), and an update on the progress made in respect of SEEA-Water, SEEA-Energy and SEEA for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (section V); provides information on the status of the publication and translation of SEEA-related documents (section VI); and sets out points for discussion by the Commission (section VII). A summary of the activities of the various groups working within the mandate of the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting is contained in a background document.

II. System of Environmental-Economic Accounting and the post-2015 development agenda

3. SEEA is an important framework for monitoring progress in the context of the post-2015 development agenda. In its decision 45/105, the Commission recognized SEEA as an important statistical framework for the sustainable development goals indicators. On a broader level, it is expected that the SEEA can also contribute to the strengthening of national statistical systems and their adaptation to changing data landscapes.

The System of Environmental-Economic Accounting and the sustainable development indicators

4. The post-2015 development agenda focuses on a multidimensional set of goals, encompassing the economy, the environment, society and governance issues.

The increasing demand for policy to be grounded in evidence and based on a more integrated approach underlines the need for an improved system of information that can support policy decisions by adequately representing all facets of sustainability and their interconnections in an integrated way. The Commission recognized at its forty-fifth session that SEEA should contribute significantly to advancing a multidimensional information system for the post 2015 development agenda. SEEA can provide an internationally recognized and standardized approach to integrating measures of the environment into a system of information fully consistent with the System of National Accounts (SNA) that is used to measure the economy. It can therefore also be used for monitoring the sustainable development goals. The integration of economic and environmental information allows for the derivation of coherent indicators and the use of environmental-economic modelling to develop footprint-type indicators and evaluate the trade-offs and impacts of policies on the economy and the environment.

5. Considering the important role of SEEA in deriving indicators and supporting evidence-based decision-making, the Committee of Experts has expressed interest in offering its services to the soon-to-be-established inter-agency and expert group on the sustainable development goals and the high-level group for partnership, coordination and capacity-building for post-2015 monitoring. Establishment of the groups was proposed by the Friends of the Chair group on broader measures of progress in its report submitted to the Statistical Commission at its forty-sixth session ([E/CN.3/2015/2](#)). The Committee could contribute to the development of the indicator monitoring framework and to the development of strategies and activities for statistical capacity-building, with focus on the economy-environment nexus.

6. A preliminary analysis undertaken by the Statistical Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs shows that indicators derived from SEEA would be of relevance to the measurement of progress made against 13 of the 17 sustainable development goals proposed by the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals. It should be stressed that, in its report entitled “A new global partnership: eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development”, the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda also recognized the relevance of SEEA and the use of accounts. It also recognized the indicator framework developed by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, as described in its report entitled “Indicators and a monitoring framework for sustainable development goals: launching a data revolution for the sustainable development goals”.

7. In order to further illustrate the potential contribution of SEEA in that context, the Committee of Experts discussed, at its 9th meeting, held in June 2014, a paper on the use of the systems approach and SEEA for the derivation of indicators in the context of the post-2015 development agenda. The paper has since been updated to describe a minimum set of criteria, such as policy relevance and utility, analytical and methodological soundness and measurability and practicality, that indicators should meet, and to demonstrate how SEEA can enhance the quality of environmental indicators and descriptive statistics. Once finalized, the revised paper will be submitted for consideration to the Friends of the Chair group on broader measures of progress and other expert groups involved in the formulation of the indicators for the sustainable development goals. The meeting of the expert group on development indicators for the post-2015 development agenda will be held in New York in February 2015.

8. The Committee of Experts, reiterating the main messages contained in the SEEA Applications and Extensions, agreed that:

(a) Indicators derived from SEEA enhance policy relevance and utility since they are supported by organized information using the accounting structure that promotes a detailed understanding of the drivers of change. An important set of aggregates and indicators can be immediately derived from SEEA accounts and tables. The accounts and tables provide information on the composition of environmental assets and the supply and use of environmental flows within the economy. The SEEA framework can therefore facilitate a greater level of understanding of the structural nature of the environment with regard to the economy;

(b) SEEA promotes the analytical and methodological soundness of indicators derived from it, by acting as a vehicle for harmonizing methodological inconsistencies across the environmental data production process, as well as by facilitating the integration of environment data with economic and social data in a methodologically reliable manner. One of the key advantages of SEEA in respect of integration with SNA is its use in economic and other models for the evaluation of tradeoffs;

(c) SEEA can play an important role towards making sustainable development goals indicators attainable and measurable at a reasonable cost-benefit ratio. The implementation of SEEA can create efficiencies in the data production process by consolidating typically dispersed data-collection activities. It can be of particular value in data-poor environments when countries take stock of data available from dispersed collection activities to populate the accounts. By organizing existing data into accounts, countries can identify data gaps and efficiently allocate resources to fill the gaps in order of importance. SEEA can also be of use in the event that data cannot be obtained in a timely fashion since reliable estimates and approximations can be made using coefficients from the accounting structure.

System of Environmental-Economic Accounting and strengthening national statistical systems

9. The proposed sustainable development goals and their 169 targets present a significant challenge for the statistical community, requiring a substantial increase in the data and information needed to design policy and monitor changes. Since the process of mainstreaming SEEA in official statistics is in its beginning phase, statistical offices will need an initial investment that will facilitate efficiency gains in the medium to long term, as a result of their having to integrate data production processes and ensure improvements in data quality. To that end, adequate financial resources will need to be earmarked for SEEA implementation, to respond to the sustainable development goal monitoring requirements and to act as a tool to improve the statistical system. Recommendations on substantial additional investment for monitoring the sustainable development goals are set out in the report of the Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development entitled “A world that counts: mobilizing the data revolution for sustainable development”, as well as in the synthesis report of the Secretary-General on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda, entitled “The road to dignity by 2030: ending poverty, transforming all lives and protecting the planet” (A/69/700).

10. The challenges are accompanied by significant opportunities. SEEA can contribute towards efforts to harness the opportunities in the pursuit of a transformative agenda for the development of national statistical systems. Strengthening the capacity of national statistical systems to respond to the post-2015 development agenda will require the adoption of a more integrated approach to statistical systems, integrating statistics on all facets of sustainability in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of statistical production processes. The Committee of Experts considered it important that a programme be developed to facilitate the role of SEEA as a catalyst for the changes, based on a pragmatic approach that included making incremental progress through a prioritized focus that addressed specific issues. The Committee therefore tasked the technical committee on the SEEA Central Framework with the development of an overarching technical note on the implementation of SEEA and the integrated statistics approach, with the aim of detailing the role of the SEEA within the broader picture of developing integrated national statistical systems.

11. The Committee of Experts reiterated the need to scale up the implementation of SEEA, taking into account the following:

(a) National implementation of SEEA will catalyse the harmonization of the production process, in particular for official environmental statistics. This refers to the application of common concepts, definitions and classifications in all phases of the data production process, from the collection of basic data to the derivation of indicators and its dissemination and use by multiple stakeholders. A first step is to improve the availability and quality of statistics, with special attention paid to basic environment data which will feed directly into environmental accounts;

(b) Integration of emerging information sources with traditional sources to produce more information that is more detailed, timely and of higher quality. This is in line with the report of the Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development, in which the Group proposed experimenting with the ways in which traditional and new data sources could be brought together, in order to develop new infrastructures and support innovations that would improve the quality and reduce the cost of producing public data. The SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting plays an important role in integrating information on ecosystems using a rigorous spatially based approach and therefore provides a conceptual framework for integrating data from a number of sources collected through remote sensing with official statistics;

(c) The Committee recognized the need to partner with other communities and agreed to actively engage with groups such as the Expert Group on the Integration of Statistical and Geospatial Information, established under the auspices of the Global Geospatial Information Management initiative, and the Global Working Group on Big Data for Official Statistics, in particular its task team on satellite imagery. Working with those groups will ensure that the standards and requirements of SEEA are taken into account in the development of statistical-spatial frameworks and remote sensing technology;

(d) The alignment of corporate methods of sustainability reporting with SEEA will produce higher quality data. The Committee has taken note of the various reporting initiatives at the company level and has considered it important to establish a partnership between the corporate sustainability and statistical communities with a view to moving towards harmonization of monitoring and

reporting at the global, national and company levels. In that regard, a meeting will be held in the second quarter of 2015 to discuss the links between corporate sustainability reporting and SEEA.

Coordinating international agency activities in the implementation of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting

12. The Committee of Experts urged that international agencies undertaking activities related to SEEA implementation strengthen coordination and take advantage of their different strengths and entry points to avoid duplication of work and to ensure better coordination at the national level. As a result, the relevant agencies are developing a coordinated implementation programme with agreement on the different leading roles of each agency under the auspices of the Committee. Partnerships are being developed between different agencies to establish clear agreement on the specific roles and responsibilities of each agency and on a common programme of work, with the view to providing coordinated assistance at the national level and a set of internationally agreed public goods, including materials such as training courses, compilation guidelines, a knowledge base and hotlines in support of SEEA implementation.

III. Implementation of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting Central Framework and supporting statistics

13. The strategy for implementation of the SEEA Central Framework was adopted by the Statistical Commission at its forty-fourth session. The Committee of Experts has undertaken several initiatives since then to track the implementation progress of the SEEA Central Framework and to assist countries in its implementation, including:

- (a) Undertaking a global assessment of the implementation of SEEA in order to obtain a baseline for the global implementation of SEEA against which progress will be assessed on a regular basis;
- (b) Establishing a technical committee of the SEEA Central Framework responsible for advancing the research and implementation agenda by preparing and reviewing technical documents that are fully consistent with the SEEA standard;
- (c) Developing technical notes on selected accounts and modules to provide countries with initial guidance on how to compile SEEA tables and accounts, as well as the indicators that can be derived from them;
- (d) Conducting blended training courses to assist countries in building capacity to implement SEEA;
- (e) Providing communication material to assist countries in promoting SEEA as an important framework to organize environmental-economic information in support of integrated policies.

14. The initiatives are briefly described below.

Global assessment of environmental-economic accounting and supporting statistics

15. Under the auspices of the Committee of Experts, the Statistics Division, in collaboration with the regional commissions, conducted a global assessment of environmental-economic accounting and supporting statistics during November and December 2014. The assessment aimed to achieve a better understanding of the current status of national SEEA implementation, including institutional arrangements; country policy priorities and future plans for the implementation of selected SEEA accounts; and country needs in terms of implementation support. The global assessment will help to set priorities and coordinate future capacity-building activities. Individual responses to the assessment will be posted on the website of the Division (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/envaccounting/default.asp>), and a summary of the results will be presented as a background document.

Technical committee of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting Central Framework

16. As requested by the Statistical Commission at its forty-fifth session, the technical committee of the SEEA Central Framework was established in March 2014 under the auspices of the Committee of Experts¹ with the terms of reference provided in a background document related to the present report. The priority of the technical committee, as set out in its 2014-2015 work programme and as endorsed by the Committee of Experts at its 9th meeting, is to advance the work on the technical notes related to select SEEA accounts and modules (see para. 18 below). In particular, the technical committee will provide overall technical guidance on the drafting and finalization of the technical notes by working closely with the editor of the notes to provide technical input and ensure consistency with the SEEA Central Framework. More broadly, the role of the technical committee will be to review documents related to the research agenda of the SEEA Central Framework and its implementation and to provide guidance on methodological issues that might arise during the implementation of SEEA. The technical committee will work in close collaboration with the London Group on Environmental Accounting and the task force of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on SEEA implementation.

17. With reference to the research agenda, the technical committee has prioritized, in its 2014-2015 work programme, work on classification, including the classification of environmental activities and land cover/land use classifications. It will also contribute to the process of harmonizing environment statistics with SEEA and the mainstreaming of SEEA at the national and international levels.

Technical notes on selected accounts and modules of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting

18. Pursuant to decision 45/105 of the Statistical Commission, the Committee of Experts is advancing the drafting of the technical notes. The SEEA technical notes will provide guidance to countries on the steps required for SEEA implementation.

¹ The members of the technical committee are: Statistics Netherlands (Chair); Australian Bureau of Statistics; Statistics Canada; Eurostat; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; International Monetary Fund; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development; and World Bank. The Statistics Division provides secretariat services for the committee.

The technical notes summarize the policy relevance of the SEEA accounts for a given topic, possible indicators that could be derived from them (particularly those linked to sustainable development goals indicators), and data sources and possible issues related to implementation. The technical notes will undergo an extensive consultation process and will constitute the starting point for the development of common reporting tables. Special attention is being paid to the consistency of the suggested accounts and tables with Eurostat data-collection initiatives and the work of the OECD task force on the SEEA implementation.

19. An editor has been recruited to draft and edit the technical notes. The first batch of draft notes, including on water, energy, land, and environmental goods and services sector accounts, and an overarching note on the implementation of SEEA and the integrated statistics approach, are expected to be available in December 2014. The next batch of notes, including on air emission accounts, environmental taxes, natural resources and environmental protection expenditure accounts, is expected to be available by June 2015 for review at the 10th meeting of the Committee.

20. The overarching note on the implementation of SEEA and the integrated statistics approach discusses the role of SEEA within the national statistical architecture and explains how SEEA can act as a catalyst for streamlining the data production process to better meet the needs of users and more efficiently allocate the resources required to compile the accounts. In the note, recognition is given to the fact that the compilation of the accounts relies on basic data with the potential to serve multiple needs and that the compilation of statistics relies on the application of common collection, processing, analysis and dissemination tools. The note contains a call for the modernization of statistical production processes considering that the accounts rely on basic data.

Pilot programme for training of trainers in the worldwide implementation of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting Central Framework and other activities in support of the Central Framework

21. Pursuant to decision 45/105 of the Statistical Commission, in which the Commission requested that training materials and courses be developed in support of the implementation of the SEEA Central Framework, the Statistics Division, in collaboration with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, organized a pilot programme for training of trainers workshops for worldwide SEEA implementation. The training was based on a blended learning format and comprised three phases: a mandatory online training (2-28 June 2014); an in-person seminar (7-10 July 2014); and a follow-up phase.

22. Participants from 15 countries and four international organizations² attended an obligatory online course to ensure a common level of technical knowledge about SEEA. Participants included representatives of national statistical offices and environment-related ministries and agencies to advance the national dialogue on the

² Countries participating in the seminar included Brazil, China, Ecuador, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, Kyrgyzstan Republic, Malaysia, Morocco, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, Samoa, South Africa and Uganda. International organizations participating in the seminar included the Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Bank.

environmental-economic information system. The online course was tutored by an e-learning tutor and accompanied by experts on SEEA from Statistics Canada, Statistics Netherlands and the Statistics Division. The course was developed by GIZ and the Division and was reviewed by the technical committee of the SEEA Central Framework.

23. The in-person seminar provided a unique opportunity for participants who had already acquired an understanding of basic SEEA concepts to improve their knowledge through practical exercises and discussions on issues regarding implementation. The seminar also provided information on facilitation skills, including techniques to manage group dynamics and meet learning objectives. As a follow-up to the workshop, participants held or are planning to hold national seminars on SEEA, bringing together different stakeholders to raise awareness and forge national implementation plans, drafts of which were prepared during the training workshop. Representatives of some countries, including from Brazil, Kyrgyzstan and South Africa, have already held/participated in national seminars/meetings on SEEA.

24. The SEEA training course represents the first step in efforts to develop a community of practice and to share experience among countries facing similar issues in SEEA implementation. The interactive knowledge base on SEEA, which is being developed by the Statistics Division, will facilitate interaction among practitioners.

25. The SEEA training course developed by the Statistics Division and GIZ has been replicated for English-speaking countries in Africa.³ The purpose of the training programme is to enable participants to acquire knowledge and skills to deepen understanding of the accounting principles and basic data needs for compiling environmental-economic accounts in accordance with the SEEA Central Framework; facilitate experience-sharing among African countries; and support countries in setting up a strategy and workplan for SEEA implementation. Participants from 18 African countries⁴ have attended the online phase of the course (October-November 2014), the follow-up to which includes participation at the in-person seminar to be held Addis Ababa from 2 to 5 February 2015.

26. There are plans to replicate the course for countries in regions covered by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific in 2015. The online course will be translated into Spanish in early 2015 in order to better serve the needs of Spanish-speaking countries. In addition, in order to meet the ever-increasing demand for training and increase capacity in countries for specific SEEA accounts, in-depth training courses on water and energy accounts, and an introductory course on ecosystem accounts, are expected to be developed in the first half of 2015. As with the SEEA training course, the new courses will make use of technology and other didactic tools to reach wide audiences in a cost-effective manner.

27. In line with the series of subregional seminars on the implementation of the SEEA Central Framework and supporting statistics, a seminar was held in Castries on 6 and 7 February 2014 for countries in the Caribbean Common Market

³ Training on SEEA only, excluding training on facilitation skills.

⁴ Angola, Botswana, Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Seychelles, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Swaziland, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.

(CARICOM) region,⁵ with participants from national statistics offices, ministries of environment, planning and other agencies using environmental information for policy-setting and policy analysis. The subregional seminar was preceded by a national seminar in which different stakeholders in the country were brought together in order to sensitize users and producers of the SEEA Central Framework and to foster cooperation among the stakeholders. The regional seminar, hosted by the Saint Lucia Government Statistics Department, was jointly organized by the CARICOM secretariat, Eastern Caribbean Central Bank, ECLAC, Statistics Canada, the office of the United Nations Development Programme in Barbados, the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Bank and the World Tourism Organization.

Communication strategy

28. At its 9th meeting, the Committee of Experts discussed the way forward on the communication strategy of SEEA, with the aim of developing core communications materials, such as key messages on SEEA, standard presentations, templates for brochures and newsletters, and national advocacy toolkits; and a new website design, including the knowledge platform.

IV. Testing the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting Experimental Ecosystem Accounting

29. In the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 20 to 22 June 2012 (General Assembly resolution 66/288, annex), the General Assembly recognized ecosystems as fundamental in supporting economic, social and human development. One of the elements of the post-2015 development agenda regards monitoring the condition of ecosystems and their degradation, and the ecosystem services provided to human and economic activity. The SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting, welcomed by the Statistical Commission at its forty-fourth session, provides the statistical framework to measure terrestrial and marine ecosystems and their linkage to human activities and has the potential to mainstream information on ecosystems into statistical operations. As such, the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting can assist in informing the goals set out in the report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals (A/68/970, annex, and Corr.1) related to water (goal 6); climate change (goal 13); oceans, seas and marine resources (goal 14); terrestrial ecosystem, forest, land degradation and biodiversity (goal 15). There is, however, little experience among the official statistical community on how to measure ecosystems and their contribution to human and economic activities. Advancing the research agenda on the basis of experience and lessons learned is at the core of the programme of work of the Committee.

30. In order to assist countries in testing the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting, the Statistics Division, under the auspices of the Committee of Experts, is implementing a project on advancing the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting in pilot countries in collaboration with UNEP and the secretariat of Convention on Biological Diversity. Financial assistance is being provided by the

⁵ Countries participating in the seminar included The Bahama, Barbados, Bermuda, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Government of Norway. The following outputs are envisaged during the period 2014-2015: (a) preparation of national assessments and a programme of work to test the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting for each of the seven pilot countries; (b) preparation of a global strategy towards advancing the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting; (c) development of draft guidelines on the compilation of selected accounts; (d) development of introductory training materials on SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting; (e) development of a communication strategy; (f) organization of a forum of experts on ecosystem accounting; and (g) organization of two regional workshops.

31. The project work conducted in the pilot countries has demonstrated that SEEA helps in organizing and bringing together a number of uncoordinated monitoring initiatives that are ongoing, by using a common framework towards the development of an information system for sustainable development. Efforts have been made to bring together different stakeholders involved with the use of the accounts and the generation of data. Stakeholders include, but are not limited to, national statistics offices, ministries of planning and finance or their counterparts, ministries of environment and sustainable development or their counterparts, mapping agencies or their counterparts, and United Nations country offices. The objective of the project is to develop a national assessment in the seven pilot countries, namely, Bhutan, Chile, Indonesia, Mauritius, Mexico, Viet Nam and South Africa.

32. As part of the project, a global strategy for advancing the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting is currently being developed with the objective of advancing the testing and research agenda of the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting, in the context of the post-2015 development agenda. The strategy would involve the creation of a partnership between the statistical community and the scientific, geospatial, ecological and economic communities. The strategy will also cover such issues as incrementally building capacity in countries for compiling a set of ecosystem accounts with the appropriate scope, detail and quality. The strategy will be reviewed through a broad consultation process, including the statistical community and beyond, and is expected to be submitted by the Committee of Experts to the Statistical Commission for its consideration at forty-seventh session, in 2016.

33. The SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting provides the conceptual accounting framework for ecosystem accounting but provides little guidance on how to collect, evaluate, transfer, scale and interpret data in order to implement the accounts. The draft compilation guidelines on SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting will explain how to compile selected accounts, such as condition, biodiversity, carbon and water; explain, in particular, how to compile the data on ecosystems, including from non-conventional data sources (for example, remote sensing); guide country experts and practitioners in understanding the available options for models and links to policy demands; and assist in prioritizing which tools to use for which purpose. An initial draft of the preliminary guidelines on the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting is expected to be completed by June 2015.

34. In order to respond to the increasing demand for training on the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting, training materials are currently being developed with the objective of increasing the capacity of national statistical offices and other agencies to test the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting, helping practitioners who do not have backgrounds in national accounts to improve their technical

knowledge of SEEA and deepening their understanding of the accounting principles and basic data needs for the compilation of ecosystem accounts. A blended learning format, combining online training and a follow-up phase, similar to that developed for the SEEA Central Framework, is being planned jointly with GIZ. A standard set of presentations for common use will be developed as part of the exercise.

35. A forum where experts will be able to meet in person on a yearly basis will be established. The first meeting of the forum is tentatively scheduled for March 2015. The forum will comprise experts from the statistical, scientific, geospatial and economic communities of Governments, academia and non-governmental organizations. It will include discussions on the draft guidelines and training materials, the research agenda and progress made in testing the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting. The objective of the discussions is to reach a consensus on best practices for selected modules of ecosystem accounts in the medium term. The work of the group will culminate in the convening of an international conference of multi-stakeholders in 2016, when a critical mass of countries will have tested selected modules of the ecosystem accounts.

V. Progress in the development and implementation of the subsystems of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting

System of Environmental-Economic Accounting for Water

36. As part of the implementation strategy of SEEA and the *System of Environmental-Economic Accounting for Water* (SEEA-Water), the Statistics Division, supported by an editorial board comprising experts from the water and statistical communities, completed the development of compilation guidelines for water accounting and statistics. Participants of the expert group meeting, held in New York from 20 to 22 November 2013 to revise the guidelines, included representatives of a number of international agencies (Eurostat, UN-Water, UNEP, the World Bank and the Yale Environmental Performance Index), and a number of experts from national statistical offices (Brazil, Canada, Indonesia, Mauritius, Mexico, Samoa and Uganda) and water agencies (Australia, Brazil and Mexico). The guidelines serve as a tool for the collection and compilation of water statistics, their integration into the accounting framework and the derivation of indicators as part of the development of a monitoring system for water policies, providing national examples from both developed and developing countries.

37. The guidelines were tested at several workshops during the course of their drafting. The final draft was tested at a workshop for countries in the southern Mediterranean region, held in Austria in April 2014. The workshop, organized by the Statistics Division in collaboration with the European Environment Agency, was attended by 60 experts in water accounts and statistics. The Committee welcomed the completion of the guidelines, appreciating their value in respect of building capacity and catering to compilers of SEEA accounts. It was agreed that the compilation guidelines would be maintained as a living document online and would be posted on the knowledge base of SEEA, in order to allow for revisions as experience is gained in the compilation of water statistics and accounts at the national level. The Division has continued to provide technical assistance to

countries in the implementation of SEEA-Water, including Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador Mauritius, Morocco and Peru.

38. The Statistics Division also participated in a task team for the design and implementation of a global monitoring mechanism to track progress on water resources management, including water withdrawals and productivity, addressed in target 6.4 of the proposed sustainable development goals. The task team was initiated by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and was chaired by UNEP. The task team recognized the role of SEEA as the statistical framework for water indicators, although concerns were raised about current data availability.

39. In addition, in the context of the conceptual application of SEEA-Water, the Statistics Division has been collaborating with the World Health Organization (WHO) in an initiative of the UN-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking Water (UN-Water GLAAS Trackfin Initiative). The aim of WHO and UN-Water initiative is to propose and test methodology to identify and track financing for the water, sanitation and hygiene sector in a coherent and consisted manner across countries. The methodology is designed to build upon existing measurement frameworks such as SNA and SEEA. It has been tested in a number of countries and will be refined in accordance with the outcome of the testing. The Statistics Division, with the support of the technical committee on the SEEA Central Framework, plans to review the methodology to ensure coherence with the SEEA-Water.

System of Environmental-Economic Accounting for Energy

40. At its forty-fourth session, the Statistical Commission agreed with the finalization process for the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting for Energy (SEEA-Energy). The finalization process included the submission of SEEA-Energy, upon the recommendation of the Committee of Experts, for adoption by the Bureau of the Statistical Commission on behalf of the Commission.

41. The expert group on energy accounts has since reviewed the draft of SEEA-Energy, and a final draft will be submitted on behalf of the Bureau of the Committee to the Bureau of the Statistical Commission for adoption in early 2015.

System of Environmental-Economic Accounting for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

42. The System of Environmental-Economic Accounting for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (SEEA-AFF) is an application that addresses the concepts and structures of the SEEA Central Framework with a focus on integrating economic and environmental information for agriculture, forestry and fisheries. It integrates data across 10 primary domains, namely: agricultural production, forestry, fisheries, land, water, energy, greenhouse gas emissions, fertilizers and pesticides, soil resources and economic data. SEEA-AFF is fully compatible with the SEEA Central Framework and the standards of national accounting. It captures the complex interactions between production in agriculture, forestry and fisheries and the resource demands (for example, land, water, carbon and biodiversity) associated with those activities. As such, it can serve as a framework that informs

policymakers at the national level and can directly produce the indicators needed to monitor progress towards the post-2015 sustainable development goals and targets. The finalization of SEEA-AFF include close monitoring of the ongoing process to finalize the sustainable development goals indicators.

43. The development of guidelines on SEEA-AFF is being led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and has been supported by resources from within the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics. It is expected that the SEEA-AFF guidelines will be published jointly by FAO and the Statistics Division.

44. The work to develop SEEA-AFF has proceeded steadily through the course of 2014, with some important achievements. The main achievement has been the completion of a draft version of SEEA-AFF, which describes the structure, role and use of environmental-economic accounts for the primary activities related to agriculture, forestry and fisheries. The process of preparing the draft version has shown that SEEA-AFF served as catalyst to bring together the different communities using a common statistical framework. Early drafts were based on inputs from experts within FAO, from four selected countries and four international organizations. Based on those inputs and the discussions held at the expert group meeting organized by FAO in October 2014, a revised draft was circulated for global consultation in late 2014 and a revised version is expected in the beginning of the second quarter of 2015.

45. The role of the four countries has been important throughout 2014. Australia, Canada, Guatemala and Indonesia have participated in various exchanges of draft material and tables, provided assessments of the potential usefulness of SEEA-AFF in their countries and assessed the feasibility of compiling draft accounts. In particular, workshops in Indonesia and Guatemala have confirmed a high level of interest and willingness to engage in the process, and both countries have programmed further development of SEEA-AFF in 2015.

46. Work will continue in 2015 to finalize SEEA-AFF and assess its role in defining relevant indicators; develop appropriate material regarding its implementation, including country case studies and referencing, wherever possible, of existing methodological guidance; seek opportunities to test SEEA-AFF at the country level, especially in Africa; and advance the use of SEEA-AFF to integrate statistical databases within FAO. Connections will also be advanced, as appropriate, with other initiatives, including work on the implementation of other SEEA components, the measurement of greenhouse gas emissions and energy within FAO, and the Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity study on agriculture and food. It is expected that a revised draft of the document will be circulated for global consultation towards the end of 2015 and that SEEA-AFF will be submitted to the Statistical Commission for its consideration at its forty-seventh session.

VI. Publication and translation of the *System of Environmental-Economic Accounting 2012*

47. The *System of Environmental Economic Accounting 2012: Central Framework* has been published in Arabic (reviewed by the Economic and Social Commission

for Western Asia) and English.⁶ The Chinese translation (reviewed by the National Statistics Bureau of China) has been completed and will be printed in early 2015. Draft translations in French, Russian and Spanish have been posted on the project website (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/envaccounting>) and are currently being reviewed by the Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy (France), the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation (ROSSTAT) and ECLAC, respectively; official publications are to be finalized in early 2015 and will be printed during the first half of 2015.

48. The System of Environmental Economic Accounting 2012: Experimental Ecosystem Accounting has been edited and undergone copy preparation and will be published jointly by the United Nations, the European Commission, FAO, OECD and the World Bank in English in the first quarter of 2015. The process of translating the book has commenced; draft translations will be posted on the Division website during 2015.

49. The System of Environmental Economic Accounting 2012: Applications and Extensions has been issued as a “white cover” pre-edited publication. The English version of the text was edited and is being typeset for printing. The publication of the book is scheduled for the first half of 2015. Work on translating the book is scheduled to begin in early 2015 and draft translations will be posted on the Division website as soon as they become available.

50. In 2014, translations of the *System of Environmental-Economic Accounting for Water* and the *International Recommendations for Water Statistics* were published in Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish. Electronic versions of the translations and the draft Arabic version of the International Recommendations are available on the website of the Statistical Division.

VII. Points for discussion

51. The Commission is invited to express its views on the:

- (a) Role of SEEA in the post-2015 development agenda, including the formulation of the sustainable development goals indicators;
- (b) Progress made in the implementation of the SEEA Central Framework;
- (c) Partnerships between international and regional agencies in formulating a common programme of work at the country level and in developing internationally agreed public goods on compilation guidance, training and capacity-building;
- (d) Progress made in testing the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting;
- (e) Ongoing testing and finalization of SEEA Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, and the integration of this work with the Global Strategy to Improve Agricultural and Rural Statistics and other relevant initiatives.

⁶ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.12.XVII.12.