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Items for discussion and decision: environmental accounting

Background document

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Programme of work for the UNCEEA

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

Programme of work for the UNCEEA

Short-term (2010-2011) and medium term (2010-2014)

A. Introduction

1. At its 40^h Session in February 2009, the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC) requested the UNCEEA “to develop a programme of work outlining its priorities and to disseminate it widely”.¹ The UNCEEA at its Fourth Meeting (New York, 24-26 June 2009) discussed a proposal for the programme of work prepared by the Secretariat and requested that the programme of work include the mandate of the UNCEEA and provide a list of outputs and priorities.

2. This paper provides the programme of work of the UNCEEA in the short term (2010-2011) and a medium term (2010-2014). Annex I to this paper provides a list of outputs including timeline, organization responsible for its preparation and priority in the work programme.

B. Mandate of the UNCEEA

1. It is useful to recall that the „mandate of the Committee encompasses environmental-economic accounting and supporting statistics. „Supporting statistics“ is intended to include relevant environment, energy and other statistics that support environmental-economic accounting. The mandate of the Committee is to (a) provide strategic vision, direction and coordination to mainstream environmental-economic accounting and supporting statistics in national, regional and international statistical systems; (b) develop normative international statistical standards and supporting methodological documents on environmental-economic accounting and supporting statistics; (c) promote the development of databases at international, regional and national level on environmental-economic accounting and supporting statistics; (d) promote the implementation of international statistical standards of environmental-economic accounting and supporting statistics in countries; and (e) promote the use of environmental-economic accounting and supporting statistics in scientific and policymaking communities.”²

3. To fulfill its mandate, the programme of work of the Committee in environmental-economic accounting and supporting statistics is organized according to the following six areas encompasses six areas: (a) coordination: to foster collaboration, integration and complementarity of programmes; (b) methodological development for normative statistical standards and other research: to oversee development of standards and other methodological documents; (c) development of databases: to ensure databases are based on international statistical standards and international recommendations; (d) implementation and statistical capacity building: to develop concerted implementation strategies encompassing relevant supporting statistics and their integration in the SEEA; (e) promotion: to mainstream the environmental-economic accounting and relevant supporting statistics in the statistical systems; and (f) formulation of a statistical response on emerging policy issues: to engage

¹ Statistical Commission Report on the fortieth session (24-27 February 2009) Economic and Social Council Official Records 2009 Supplement No. 4 (E/2009/24 E/CN.3/2009/29), Decision 40/104 item (f).

² See paper on the mandate and governance of the UNCEEA.

prominently in the international agenda in articulating a coordinated statistical response, for example on climate change, sustainability and natural resources management.

C. Programme of work for the UNCEEA

4. The highest priority in the work programme of the UNCEEA is the revision of the SEEA and its elevation to an international statistical standard. The international statistical community considers environmental-economic accounting as a sufficiently developed statistical domain to be mainstreamed as part of official statistics. The United Nations Statistical Commission has entrusted the UNCEEA with providing management and oversight to the revision process and requested that Volume 1 of the revised SEEA be submitted to the UNSC for adoption as a statistical standard in 2012. Because of the importance to provide a statistical standard in the statistical domain of environmental-economic accounting, the revision of the SEEA has been accorded the highest priority.

5. In addition to the revision of the SEEA, the short term (2009-2011) programme of work of the UNCEEA includes the preparations of the standard SEEA sub-systems fully consistent with the SEEA standard. They add depth on particular subject matters and provide input in the revision of the SEEA by resolving the issues on the research agenda specific to the sub-modules of the SEEA (e.g. water, energy, waste, etc.), developing a set of standard tables for the specific sub-modules, engaging specialized communities with specific expertise beyond environmental-economic accountants, providing textual input in the drafting of the revised SEEA.

6. The activities of the UNCEEA are organized on the basis of the 6 areas of the programme of work agreed by the UNCEEA. They include: (a) coordination; (b) methodological development for normative standards and other research; (c) development of databases; (d) implementation of environmental-economic accounting and supporting environment statistics and statistical capacity building; (e) promotion; and (f) formulation of a statistical response on emerging policy issues.

7. A table presenting the list of outputs, the agencies responsible for their delivery and the timeline is presented in Annex I of this paper.

(a) Coordination

8. The UNCEEA fosters collaboration, integration and complementarity of programmes. It will continue to coordinate its activities with groups working on environmental-economic accounting and supporting statistics.

(b) Methodological development for normative standards and other research

9. The Committee seeks coherence and consistency to the extent possible for the methodological development of environmental-economic accounting and supporting statistics. This involves managing the revision of the SEEA and its elevation to the level of an international statistical standard. It also involves managing and setting the direction for the preparation of the suite of publications in support of the new SEEA standard. These include publications on specific resources or SEEA modules (e.g. SEEA for Water, SEEA for Energy, SEEA for Material Flow, etc.) as well as related international recommendations for supporting statistics (e.g. International Recommendations for Water Statistics, International Recommendations for Energy Statistics, etc.), compilation guidelines and quality assessment frameworks providing best practices on data collection and compilation.

10. Short term (2010-2011): The UNCEEA will seek coherence and consistency to the extent possible for the development of the following outputs during the period 2010-2011:

- **Revision of the SEEA and its elevation to an international statistical standard**

Volume 1 and the related parts of Volume 3 of the SEEA are expected to be adopted as an international statistical standard by the UN Statistical Commission in 2012 and Volume 2 and related parts of Volume 3 in 2013. The detailed project management framework for the revision of the SEEA is presented in a separate paper.

- **SEEA-Water**

SEEA-Water provides standard concepts, definitions tables and accounts for water. It has been adopted by the UN Statistical Commission at its thirty-eight session in 2007 as an interim international statistical standard. The SEEA-Water will be released after the necessary minor changes are implemented to ensure full consistency with the SEEA.

Lead agency: UNSD in cooperation with the London Group on Environmental Accounting.

- **International Recommendations for Water Statistics (IRWS)**

The IRWS presents a list of recommended and supplementary data items to be collected and reported that are needed for national water statistics, populate the standard tables of the SEEAW, populate international water questionnaires and derive water indicators. It is designed to assist countries in the establishment and strengthening of an information system for water in support of integrated water resources management. In particular, the IRWS (a) supports the collection, compilation and dissemination of internationally comparable water statistics in countries; (b) supports the implementation of the SEEAW; and (c) provides the necessary information for deriving coherent and consistent indicators over time and across countries.

Lead agency: UNSD in cooperation with the Expert Group on Water Statistics under the auspices of the UNCEEA

- **Compilation Material on Water Statistics**

Compilation material on water statistics includes material to assist countries in the compilation of the data items in IRWS and in the population of the standard tables of the SEEA-Water. It will include country examples as well as training material.

Lead agency: UNSD in cooperation with the Expert Group on Water Statistics under the auspices of the UNCEEA.

- **SEEA-Energy**

SEEA-Energy will provide standard concepts, definitions, classifications and tables and accounts for energy. The SEEA-Energy is expected to be submitted to the UN Statistical Commission in 2011.

Lead agency: UNSD in cooperation with the London Group on Environmental Accounting and the Oslo Group on Energy Statistics

- **International Recommendations for Energy Statistics (IRES)**

IRES will cover a broad range of issues from basic concepts, definitions and classifications to data sources, data compilation strategies, energy balances and dissemination. It is expected to be submitted to the UN Statistical Commission in 2011.

IRES and SEEA-E will be two complementary documents and their preparation will be fully coordinated. While IRES will comply to the extent possible with the SEEA-E conceptual structure and data needs, SEEA-E will develop its accounting standards on the basis of the IRES (e.g., using IRES definitions of data items and classifications of energy products and flows).

Lead agency: UNSD in cooperation with the Oslo Group on Energy Statistics and the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Energy Statistics (InterEnerStat)

- **Energy Statistics Compilers Manual (ESCM)**

ESCM will provide guidance on the implementation of IRES.

Lead agency: UNSD in cooperation with the Oslo Group on Energy Statistics and InterEnerStat in parallel with IRES.

- **SEEA-Agriculture and Rural Development – Concept paper**

The concept paper will discuss the use of the SEEA for agriculture and rural development. This paper will provide a clear prioritization of FAO contributions to the development of the SEEA standard. The paper will be prepared for discussion at the fifth UNCEEA meeting in June 2010 and may provide the background for the development of the SEEA-Agriculture and Rural Development in the medium-term programme of work (2010-2014).

Lead agency: FAO.

- **The revision of the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics (FDES)**

The revised FDES will provide the conceptual framework for defining the scope and boundaries of environment statistics and their links with other statistical domains. The revision of the FDES will be undertaken by an Expert Group to be established in April 2010.

Lead agency: UNSD in cooperation with an Expert Group

11. Medium term (2010-2014): The UNCEEA will oversee the development of the following outputs during the period 2010-2014: SEEA-MFA, SEEA-Air Emissions, SEEA-Forest, SEEA-Land and Ecosystems, International Recommendations for Waste, Quality Assessment Frameworks and a programme of work on climate change. In 2011 the UNCEEA will review detailed proposal on the outputs proposed.

(c) **Development of databases**

12. Until recently environment statistics and environmental-economic accounting have developed in separate tracks. The role of the Committee is to ensure that the databases are based on international statistical standards and international recommendations.

13. Short term (2010-2011): In the short term, the activities will focus on harmonizing the international data collection and related databases with the SEEA-Water and the International

Recommendations for Water Statistics. The Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Environment Statistics (IWG-ENV) is expected to lead this activity.

14. Medium term (2010-2014): In the medium terms, activities will focus on harmonizing international data collection on other areas of support statistics, in particular energy and waste.

(d) Implementation and statistical capacity building

15. The anticipated elevation of the SEEA and its sub-systems to the level of international statistical standards and the development of international recommendations (e.g. IRWS and IRES) will require a widespread implementation and statistical capacity building programme in countries.

16. Short term (2010-2011): In the short term, the focus will be on supporting and monitoring the implementation strategy for the SEEA-Water including the IRWS.

17. Medium term (2010-2014): In the medium term, the implementation and statistical capacity building of energy and material flow accounts as well as asset accounts for forest and land and ecosystems may be part of the work programme of the UNCEEA.

(e) Promotion

18. Environmental-economic accounting and supporting statistics are relatively new areas of statistics which often do not enjoy the same priority as other statistics (i.e. economic statistics or social statistics) within the national and global statistical systems. There is a need to mainstream the environmental-economic accounting and supporting statistics in the statistical systems in particular in response to the challenges posed by the users' community in particular with regard to natural resources management, sustainability and climate change.

19. At the same time, the statistical community has a role to play vis-à-vis the users' community represented by policy makers, academia and scientists. It has to raise awareness of the uses of the statistics it produces. SEEA has proven its potential and added value for environmental-economic analysis. Building on existing experiences, the statistical community should take an active role in the promotion of SEEA for environmental-economic analysis and for formulating international priorities based on users' needs. The Committee should start by actively engaging on behalf of the statistical community with the International Panel on Climate Change to promote the use and usefulness of official statistics in climate change policies.

20. Short term (2010-2011): In the short term, activities will focus on the following:

- **Water accounting and statistics**

Demonstrating the usefulness of water accounts and statistics to the users' community³ is necessary to ensure that the SEEA-Water and IRWS are embraced beyond the statistical community. In particular, a dissemination paper (20-30 pages) will cover the main concepts of the SEEA-Water using also country examples to link the accounts to key policy issues such as climate change, water pricing, water efficiency and the MDG.

Lead agency: UNSD in cooperation with the World Water Assessment Programme, ECLAC and ESCWA.

³ See paper UNCEEA/4/16 for further details at:
<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/envaccounting/ceea/meetings/lod4.htm>

- **Material flow accounts**

A short publication (20-30 pages) explaining the usefulness of the SEEA in Sustainable Consumption and Production and Resource Efficiency will be prepared to inform on-going policy debates..

Lead agency: UNSD, DEFRA in collaboration with UNEP and OECD.

- **Climate change**

A paper discussing the contribution of the SEEA to monitoring climate change policies will be prepared.

Lead agency: London Group on Environmental Accounting.

(f) Formulation of a statistical response on emerging policy issues

21. The national and international community has placed several emerging issues related to the environment high on their political agenda. They include cross-cutting issues such as climate change and sustainability. Progressively the statistical community should articulate a coordinated statistical response, based on the international statistical standards. The UNCEEA is well placed to consult with the statistical community in order to formulate such response.

Annex I

Outputs	Agencies responsible	Timeline	Priority
1. Revision of the SEEA	All	Ongoing until 2013	Highest
2. International Recommendations for Water Statistics	UNSD	To be submitted to UNSC in 2010	High
3. Compilation material for water statistics	UNSD	On-going, progressively posting of material on knowledge base	High
4. SEEA-Energy	UNSD	To be submitted to UNSC 2011	High
5. International Recommendations for Energy Statistics	UNSD	To be submitted to the UNSD in 2011	High
6. Compilation manual for energy statistics	UNSD	On-going	High
7. SEEA-MFA	UNSD	To be submitted to UNSD in 2011	High
8. SEEA-Air Emission	UNSD	To be submitted to UNSC 2012	High
9. SEEA-Land and Ecosystem	EEA and UNEP	2013-2014	Medium
10. SEEA-Forest	FAO	2013-2014	Medium
11. SEEA-Agriculture and Rural Development	FAO	2012-2013	Medium
12. Programme of work for climate change	Bureau UNCEEA	Depending on outcome of UNSC	Expected to be high
13. International Recommendations for Waste Statistics	UNSD	2013-2014	Medium
14. Quality Assessment Frameworks	UNSD	2013	Medium-high
15. Development of harmonized questionnaires with SEEA-W and IRWS	IWG-ENV	2010 and onwards	High
16. Development of harmonized questionnaires for waste (TBC)	IWG-ENV	2012-2014	Medium
17. Development of harmonized questionnaires for energy (TBC)	InterEnerStat	2012-2014	Medium
18. Implementation of water statistics and accounts in countries	Regional Commissions/ UNSD	On-going	High
19. Implementation of energy and MFA accounts in countries	Regional Commissions UNSD	2012-2014	Medium
20. Promotion of the SEEA	All	On-going	High
21. Promotion of the SEEA-Water in the users community	UNSD and others	On-going	High
22. Publication of a publication disseminating the usefulness of water accounts and the results of the water accounts compilation	UNSD, WWAP and others	1 st Quarter 2010	High

	in countries			
23.	Publication disseminating the usefulness of the SEEA accounts for Resource Productivity	DEFRA, UNEP, OECD, UNSD	1 st Quarter 2010	High
24.	User-producer Conference on energy	UNSD and others	2011	Medium
25.	Engaging the IPCC and other users and producers of statistics related to climate change	UNSD and Bureau UNCEEA	Depending on outcome of UNSC	Expected to be high
26.	Concept note on the contribution of the SEEA to climate change policies	UNSD and Bureau UNCEEA	Depending on outcome of UNSC	Expected to be high
27.	Ensure that policy frameworks are informed of the activities of the statistical community	All	On-going	High