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English only

Economic Commission for Europe

Conference of European Statisticians

Joint OECD/UNECE Seminar on SEEA Implementation

Geneva, 21-22 February 2018

Report of the 2018 Joint OECD/UNECE Seminar on SEEA Implementation

Note by the secretariat

I. Attendance

1. Experts from the following countries attended the meeting: Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Mexico, Mongolia, Republic of Moldova, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom and Uzbekistan.

2. Representatives of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), International Labour Organization (ILO), World Bank, European Commission – Eurostat, European Environment Agency (EEA), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Asia Development Bank and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

3. The non-governmental organizations Cadaster Institute, Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC) and Zoi Environment Network were also represented at the meeting.

II. Organizational matters

4. The Seminar elected Mr. Gerard J. Eding (Statistics Netherlands) as its Chair. He will also serve as Chair of the Organising Committee of the Joint OECD/UNECE Seminars.
5. Session Chairs were Mr. Pierre-Alain Pionnier (OECD, session 1), Ms. Jacky Hodges (Australian Bureau of Statistics, session 2), Ms. Viveka Palm (Statistics Sweden, session 3), Mr. Gerard Eding (Statistics Netherlands, session 4) and Mr. Kevin Roberts (Statistics Canada, session 5).
6. The Seminar adopted the agenda.
7. The following substantive topics were discussed at the meeting:
 - a) Session 1: National SEEA Implementation plans
 - b) Session 2: Guidelines for SEEA Implementation and new ways to generate data
 - c) Session 3: Coordination of Capacity building activities
 - d) Session 4: Policy applications of SEEA
 - e) Session 5: Conclusions and recommendations for further work

III. Decisions and recommendations for further work

8. According to the Global Assessment, the regular funding of environmental-economic accounting activities is one of the main obstacles to SEEA implementation. Seminar participants also stressed that limited access to and the quality of underlying data are considerable problems for many NSOs. Strategic implementation plans, institutional mechanisms to bring together stakeholders (users and producers) and effective communication towards policy makers, researchers, users and journalists have a key role to play in order to ensure that the SEEA is mainstreamed in the statistical production process not only of NSOs as well as in the policy decision making process. Leadership by NSOs and the Heads of NSOs is crucial for the implementation of SEEA. Participants of the seminar recommended:
 - a) National chief statisticians need to ensure that all stakeholders (from data providers to final users) are involved in the development of SEEA implementation plans, so that funding, access to data and policy relevance are secured.
 - b) Countries with less experience in environmental-economic accounting need to (1) be pragmatic (i.e. start with the easiest SEEA modules or those for which data availability is (relatively) good), learn by doing and release the results on an experimental basis to demonstrate the relevance of the work; and (2) take advantage of the momentum created by the Paris agreement and the SDGs to ensure that funding and technical assistance is directed towards development of data that can be integrated with economic data using the SEEA framework.

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- c) Future seminars could further illustrate the usefulness of environmental-economic accounts for economic and environmental policies.

9. To prepare national implementation plans the SEEA implementation guide provides a good start. Countries are encouraged to identify existing national initiatives (e.g. SDG, climate change reporting, BIOFIN, etc.) which can use the SEEA and existing data sources to be used to compile the accounts. There is a need to connect with the owners of source data to make them aware of the usefulness and importance of statistical standards, classifications and identifiers. New sources for populating SEEA accounting tables like satellite imagery or sensor data provide new options to answer policy questions, but expertise is needed to manipulate these data and bring them in line with statistical standards and classifications.

10. Successful and sustainable capacity development is usually the result of (a) political will and (b) sustained engagement and projects between those who provide technical assistance and those who receive it. The identified success factors for capacity development are:

- a) Extensive training of staff.
- b) Driving forces such as international requirements (e.g. accession to OECD and EU, data collection, etc.).
- c) Involvement of ministries and users in SEEA. This makes SEEA well-known, creates curiosity and interest to continue statistical development and in turns generate support and funding.
- d) Courageous management is also a success factor. It is important to involve sufficient staff for a resilient working environment. A co-operation has to be established between environmental-economic accountants, environment statistics, national accounts and with line ministries.
- e) Cooperation is important between organisations that 'own' relevant source data and organizations that have the responsibility for compiling SEEA accounts. Also close cooperation between relevant area specialists within the statistical office is essential.

11. The coordination of work between the international organisations is important to avoid duplication of work and ensure synergies. One objective of future seminars could be to find various collaboration partners for capacity development activities.

12. Participants welcomed the discussion on policy applications of SEEA. Showing countries' experiences is useful and should continue in the future.

13. Participants recommended to continue with the organisation of "Joint OECD/UNECE Seminars on SEEA implementation" on an annual basis. The seminar should last for two days and focus on strategic issues of interest for all countries in the region. Proposed topics for the next seminar are:

- a) Using new techniques and data sources for compiling SEEA accounts.
- b) Communication strategies and policy applications.
- c) Challenges related to the implementation of selected accounts, such as air emission accounts, energy accounts, water accounts, environmental taxes and subsidies, and environment protection expenditure accounts.

d) Coordination of work in the region.

14. Participants also recommended that future seminars will be informed about the revision process of the SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting and other related developments.

15. Technical workshops should be organised back-to-back with the seminar where discussions could go more in-depth on a particular selected topic.

IV. Adoption of the report of the meeting

16. The present report was adopted during the closing session.

17. A summary of the discussion in the substantive sessions of the meeting will be presented in an annex to this report, to be prepared by the secretariat after the meeting.
