
United Nations Statistical Commission 2019

Side Event

Natural Capital Accounting: Connecting the Pillars of Sustainability

The latest developments in ecosystem accounting and using ecosystem accounts for policy

Opening remarks by Elliott Harris, Chief Economist of the United Nations and
Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development

Date: Tuesday, 5 March 2019

Time: 8.15 AM – 9.45 AM

Venue: Conference Room 4

New York

Organizer:

UN Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting (UNCEEAA)

Background

1. Natural capital is one of the key components of wealth in addition to economic and social capital. The statistical community has played an important role in developing tools to measure natural capital in the form of ecosystems / biodiversity and the services they generate using agreed accounting structures, rules, classifications and definitions. The integration of ecosystem accounts with national accounts enables ecosystem accounts to expose critical connections between the three pillars of sustainability.
2. In March 2013, the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) endorsed the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting – Experimental Ecosystem Accounting (SEEA EEA) as an important step in the development of a statistical framework for ecosystem accounting for testing and further development of this new field of statistics. To date, there are currently over 30 countries piloting ecosystem accounting.
3. To move towards a consensus on concepts and methods on ecosystem accounting by 2020, the United Nations Committee of Experts on Environmental Economic Accounting (UNCEEAA) launched the revision process of the SEEA EEA at the 49th Session of the UNSC in March 2018. As part of the revision process, the UNCEEAA has engaged with many experts from statistical, scientific, economic and geospatial communities who are collaborating to addressing the issues on the research agenda.
4. In addition, the European Union-funded Natural Capital Accounting and Valuation of Ecosystem Services (NCA&VES) project being undertaken by UNSD in collaboration with UN Environment and the Secretariat of the Convention on Biodiversity, has launched the testing of the SEEA EEA in five countries (Brazil, China, India, Mexico, South Africa). This work includes the integration of the accounts into policy processes and the advancement of methodologies at the global level, thereby linking ecosystem accounting theory to practice in a concrete way.

5. There is increasing evidence that natural capital accounting based on the SEEA EEA can inform sustainable development policies. In 2020, the Parties to the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) are expected to adopt a new Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2021-2030. The Post-2020 Strategic Plan of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) provides a key opportunity for adopting natural capital accounting and developing indicators derived from the accounts. In addition, the accounts can enable the integration of ecosystems and biodiversity into sustainable development planning, helping to realize a full set of indicators to track progress towards the global targets established by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
6. This side event will present the progress on the revision of the SEEA EEA and its mainstreaming within national accounts and will showcase experiences from selected countries on natural capital accounting. The meeting will also provide an opportunity to discuss how natural capital accounting can contribute to the policy process and support the Post-2020 Agenda for Biodiversity.
7. The Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development and Chief Economist of the United Nations, Mr. Elliott Harris, will provide opening remarks at the side-event, reflecting on the role of natural capital accounting in support of decision making. The event will be chaired by Mr. Bert Kroese, Deputy Director General of Statistics Netherlands (CBS) and Chair of the UNCEEA.

Agenda:

1. Opening remark (5 mins)
 - Elliott Harris, Chief Economist of the United Nations and Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development, DESA
2. EU Strategy on Ecosystem Accounting and engagement with the National Accounts (5 mins)
 - Mariana Kotzeva, Director-General of EUROSTAT
3. Overview of the SEEA EEA and its revision process (5 mins)
 - Bert Kroese, Deputy Director General of CBS and Chair of UNCEEA
4. Experiences from selected countries in Natural Capital Accounting (40 mins)
 - Brazil – Roberto Olinto, former President, Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE)
 - India – Shri Pravin Srivastava, Chief Statistician of India, National Statistical Organization, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation
5. Panel discussion – Natural Capital Accounting for policy and the Post-2020 Agenda for Biodiversity (35 mins, facilitated by Bert Kroese)
 - Canada – André Loranger, Assistant Chief Statistician, Economic Statistics, Statistics Canada
 - Uganda – Dr. Sam Mugume Koojo, Principal Statistician, Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development
 - Speakers from the country presenters