

Regional Expert Workshop on Land Accounting for SDG Monitoring and Reporting
25-27 September 2017
Bangkok, Thailand

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1. Background

The surface of the earth: the land, freshwater, coasts and oceans, is the space in which most human activities take place. As with business and population registers, coherent and agreed-upon statistics on what exists on the surface of a nation is fundamental to governing and managing it. Land accounting seeks to standardize and integrate the spatial aspects of environmental, social and economic statistics to provide such a foundation.

Monitoring progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development demands spatially-detailed statistics across many dimensions: for disaggregating statistics by urban/rural, for distinguishing areas with access to clean water and roads, for distinguishing catchment, marine & coastal, forest, agricultural, mountain and protected areas, for distinguishing degraded areas and establishing land tenure, just to mention a few.

Statistically describing a nation's biophysical area is treated in the SEEA Central Framework (SEEA-CF) in terms of Land, Forest and Soil Asset Accounts. It is also described in the FDES (United Nations Statistics Division, 2013) as key statistics on land cover, land use, ecosystems and biodiversity. The SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting guidelines (SEEA-EEA, United Nations *et al.*, 2014b) provide further guidance on delineating ecosystem assets, compiling information on their condition, the values of their ecosystem services and linking these values to standard economic accounts. The UN initiative on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) knowledge base on National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI)¹ highlights the experience of countries in integrating spatial information.

Although many countries have been compiling information on their land, few have experience in integrating and standardizing this information from the many sources and methods used. Integrating this disparate information, through land accounting, is essential to provide a comprehensive picture of the environmental state of a country and to guide plans to improve or maintain this state.

Traditionally, producing land information has not been the core mandate of National Statistical Offices (NSOs). However, for at least 30 years, many NSOs have developed the capacity to conduct spatial analysis and to standardize and integrate land data from many sources. This has required close collaboration with national stakeholders such as departments of environment, natural resources, fisheries, oceans, agriculture, forestry, planning, and land registration. The benefit of including NSOs in this process has been their role as broker between the different departmental mandates, disciplines and standards.

ESCAP, in collaboration with partners, have been providing technical assistance and training on environment statistics and environmental-economic accounting to countries individually and through sub-regional workshops. In all sub-regional workshops, participants presented self-assessments of priorities for strengthening environment statistics. Several countries identified land accounts as priorities. Work is in progress in Nepal, Vanuatu and Myanmar (with the WWF) specifically on piloting land and forest accounts, and in Indonesia (with UNSD) on ecosystem accounts.

¹ National Spatial Data Infrastructure, see: <http://ggim.un.org/knowledgebase/KnowledgebaseCategory3.aspx>.

2. Purpose of the workshop

The overall aim of the workshop is to address member States' stated requirements for technical guidance on how to begin or improve their land accounts.

The 3-day workshop will bring together NSOs and natural resource departments with regional experts. The workshop will consist of three main components:

1. Case studies by member States' activities in land, forest and ecosystem accounting, including presentation of objectives, approaches, results and remaining challenges;
2. Focussed training on aspects identified by participants (including links to SDGs, forest accounting); and
3. Guided technical assistance and problem solving labs with regional experts.

Member States which have initiated or have expressed their readiness to initiate land, forest or ecosystem accounts will be invited. Two participants from each selected country will be nominated: one from the NSO and another from a natural resources department, both of whom are responsible for producing land statistics.

Participants will be requested to make a short presentation on their priorities, status of work, challenges of land statistics. If work is in progress, they are invited to bring their data (in GIS, maps and tables) for detailed discussion during the technical assistance and problem-solving labs.

3. References

United Nations, European Commission, Food and Agriculture Organization, International Monetary Fund, OECD, World Bank. 2014a. System of Environmental-Economic Accounting 2012 - Central Framework. United Nations Statistics Division, New York, NY. Retrieved from https://unstats.un.org/unsd/envaccounting/seeaRev/SEEA_CF_Final_en.pdf.

United Nations Statistics Division. (2013). Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics (FDES) 2013. United Nations Statistics Division, New York. Retrieved from <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc13/BG-FDES-Environment.pdf>.

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