

**Seminar**  
**on**  
**Data for Sustainable Development: India's Environmental Accounts and  
its Role in Policy and Decision-Making**

(in celebration of 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav')

Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India

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**Background**

Natural capital underpins all life, human wellbeing and the functioning of socioeconomic systems. Yet over time, the declining extent and condition of natural assets have threatened to undermine both wellbeing and future economic growth. This is partly because nature is far too often unvalued and goes unnoticed in the economic choices that are made. However, a growing recognition that the health of the environment is fundamental to the determination of global economic outputs and to human wellbeing has led to a range of responses that seek to integrate the value of natural capital into policy and decision-making.

With nature as a common good, an important response has been to recognize, demonstrate and capture the value of natural capital into global and national statistics, through a system of environmental-economic accounting (SEEA) that goes beyond the conventional use of GDP to better reflect the negative or positive environmental externalities. As the benefits from natural capital become recognized and valued through the accounting process, it can benefit economies in wide-ranging areas such as improvement in performances related to the environment, increase in efficiency of natural resource use and introduction of effective strategies in controlling management and operation costs of natural resources.

For India, considerations of the environment have been deeply engrained in the cultural ethos of the country and is also reflected in India's Constitutional guidelines adopted in 1950. As such, India has been proactive in research and action for the environment, ranging from theoretical concepts to its practical applications and internalization within the policies of the Government of India. With regard to the development of natural capital accounts in India, the Expert Group, constituted under the Chairmanship of Prof. Sir Partha Dasgupta, released its report, "Green National Accounts in India-A Framework" in 2013 and recommended compilation of the accounts envisaged in the SEEA-CF in phased manner. Further, with the adoption of the common SEEA framework by the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC), which provides an internationally agreed set of

recommendations for the development of environmental-economic accounts and related statistics, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) has been proactive in developing such accounts under the SEEA Framework. Since 2018, these are now published annually as “EnviStats India Vol 2: Environment Accounts”, providing accounts of ecosystem extent, condition, services and also on thematic and individual environmental assets. Further, during the nascent years of India’s environmental accounting work, the country also participated in the “Natural Capital Accounting and Valuation of Ecosystem Services (NCAVES)” project launched by the UNSD in 2017; the project aimed to assist countries in advancing knowledge on environmental and ecosystem accounting, including the piloting of the SEEA Framework.

As an integrated statistical framework that is fully aligned with the System of National Accounts, the SEEA is uniquely positioned to measure progress toward the SDGs on the economy-environment nexus. The SEEA enables countries to develop sets of statistics and indicators on both natural resources (e.g. timber, water) and ecosystems and how they relate to the economy. The SEEA framework can be used to directly measure several SDG indicators distributed across 9 goals of SDGs and provide supplemental information for numerous others. By eliminating data siloes, the SEEA increases efficiency and provides policymakers with information to design effective strategies and monitor progress toward achieving the SDGs.

In recent years, a thrust area for the Government of India has been to evolve and strengthen its policies and programmatic efforts on India’s Blue Economy, i.e. the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and jobs while preserving the health of the ocean ecosystem. Given India’s unique maritime position and a coastline extending 7517 km across nine states, India holds significant living and non-living resources and sustains over 4 million fishermen and other coastal communities. In recognizing the significant contribution of ocean and coastal resources to India’s economic output, the Government of India’s Vision of New India by 2030 enunciated in February 2019 highlighted Blue Economy as one of the ten core dimensions for growth. Further, the Draft Policy Framework on India’s Blue Economy, released in September 2020 identified seven priority areas in strengthening India’s Blue Economy, where the development of a robust mechanism for a National Accounting Framework for Blue Economy and Ocean Governance is outlined as its first priority.

Till date, MoSPI has led efforts on the development of ecosystem extent and ecosystem condition accounts that include the Wetland Extent Accounts (2006-07), the Water Quality Accounts (2015-16 to 2018-19), Coastal Water Quality Index (2011-2015) and has been leading efforts on developing India’s Ocean Accounts having joined the Global Ocean Accounts Partnership (GOAP). India has also been amongst the first countries to create a Department of Ocean Development (1981) under the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES); new programmes including the “Deep Ocean Mission”, “Oceanography from Space”, “Launching of data buoys” along India’s coastline have strengthened the monitoring of

ocean resources. India also joined the United Nations on the “Clean Seas Programme” to develop strategies for estimating and reducing Marine Litter/Plastic in the oceans, a component of SDG-14. However, in moving forward with India’s vision on its Blue Economy, there is a need identified to strengthen the collection and analysis of data on estimating the value of India’s Blue Economy that will be essential in developing key strategies.

Given the context above and on the theme of **‘India’s Environmental Accounts and its Role in Policy and Decision-Making’** as a part of the celebration of the Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav, MoSPI is organizing a webinar that will discuss the **environmental-economic accounts developed and its linkage with policy & decision making (Session 1)** and will further deep dive into the **development of Ocean Accounts including fisheries and aquaculture (Session 2)**. The webinar will bring in global and national experts to shed light on India’s current work on its natural capital accounts, discuss challenges and the policy relevance of the environment accounts and in moving forward, discuss strategies for enhancing its use in the decision-making process.

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