



## Testing SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting in South Africa

Amanda Driver \*

South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI)  
Cape Town, South Africa  
[m.driver@sanbi.org.za](mailto:m.driver@sanbi.org.za)

Dr Jeanne Nel

Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)  
Cape Town, South Africa  
[jnel@csir.co.za](mailto:jnel@csir.co.za)

Fahiema Daniels

South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI)  
Cape Town, South Africa  
[f.daniels@sanbi.org.za](mailto:f.daniels@sanbi.org.za)

Mark Eigenraam

United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD)  
New York City, USA  
[eigenraam@un.org](mailto:eigenraam@un.org)

The System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) was introduced in earlier presentations in this session. The SEEA Central Framework starts from the perspective of the economy and its economic units and incorporates relevant environmental information concerning natural inputs, residual flows and associated environmental assets. In contrast, SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting starts from the perspective of ecosystems and links ecosystems to economic and other human activity. Together, the approaches provide the potential to describe in a complete manner the relationship between the environment, and economic and other human activity. As one of the most ecologically diverse countries in the world, South Africa has put considerable effort into mapping and classifying the wide range of different ecosystem types across the country, at a fine spatial scale, and assessing their ecological condition. The primary aim of this science has been to inform environmental policy, planning and decision-making; however, it also provides a foundation for ecosystem accounting, which can potentially provide a tool for mainstreaming information about ecosystems into policy, planning and decision-making in a wide range of sectors beyond the environmental sector. South Africa began work on ecosystem accounting in mid-2013, and in mid-2014 joined six other pilot countries in a global project on Advancing SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting, led by the United Nations Statistics Division in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), with funding from the Government of Norway. The first phase of Advancing SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting will wrap up in mid-2015. Ecosystem accounting is being approached in South Africa as a multi-partner initiative which spans institutional boundaries and mandates. The lead institutions are Statistics South Africa and the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), a government agency mandated to monitor and report on the state of biodiversity amongst other functions. Other partners include the national departments of environmental affairs and water affairs, Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and one of the nine provincial conservation authorities (Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife). The presentation will give an overview of results to date, focusing on land accounts, river ecosystem asset accounts, and integrated catchment accounts linking land and freshwater ecosystems; discuss how the accounts are beginning to inform development planning and the management of ecosystems; discuss longer term institutional arrangements which are in the process of being established; summarise challenges and lessons learnt to date; and outline the proposed programme of work going forward.

**Keywords:** environmental-economic accounting, ecosystem assets, land accounts, decision-making