



United Nations

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs



System of
Environmental
Economic
Accounting

PRESS RELEASE

UN launches the first artificial intelligence tool for rapid natural capital accounting

New tool will make it easier for countries to measure ecosystems

New York, 29 April – An innovative artificial intelligence (AI) tool that will make it easier for countries to measure the contributions of nature to their economic prosperity and well-being was launched today by the United Nations and the Basque Centre for Climate Change (BC3).

Developed by the Statistics Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and BC3, the new tool can vastly accelerate implementation of the new [ground-breaking standard](#) for valuing the contributions of nature that was adopted by the UN Statistical Commission last month.

The tool makes use of AI technology using the Artificial Intelligence for Environment and Sustainability (ARIES) platform to support countries as they apply the new international standard for natural capital accounting, the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) Ecosystem Accounting.

The new open-source and user-friendly digital tool, called the ARIES for SEEA Explorer, enables, for the first time, rapid and standardized yet customizable ecosystem accounting anywhere on Earth.

“The ARIES for SEEA Explorer is a game changer for governments that want to implement the recently adopted SEEA Ecosystem Accounting standard,” stressed Stefan Schweinfest, Director of the Statistics Division. “This application allows countries to jump-start accounts compilation from global data sources, which they can refine with national data or model parameters.”

The ecosystem accounts produced by countries will track the extent, condition and services provided by nature’s ecosystems – such as forests and wetlands – in the form of physical and monetary accounts and indicators. The adoption of the SEEA Ecosystem Accounting has been heralded as a historic step forward for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to move beyond GDP in tracking global progress.

Bert Kroese, Deputy Director for Statistics Netherlands and Chair of the UN Committee of Environmental-Economic Accounting said, “The ARIES for SEEA Explorer will give countries a much-needed tool to make progress with the SDGs and the monitoring framework of the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. Its low barrier to entry will ensure that no country is left behind when it comes to ecosystem accounting.”

Risenga Maluleke, Statistician-General of Statistics South Africa and Chair of the UN Committee of Experts on Big Data and Data Science for Official Statistics said, “The launch of the ARIES for SEEA Explorer on the UN Global Platform is an important step to mainstream the measurement of ecosystems and their contribution to the economy and wellbeing into global, regional and domestic statistics that will feed into policy and decision making. Better measures of nature will contribute to better policies to save our planet.”

Building economic systems that value nature as a central source of human wellbeing, environmental health and economic prosperity in the post-COVID-19 world is essential, according to Susan Gardner, Director of UNEP’s Ecosystems Division. “Having technology that incorporates and integrates the latest data, models and understanding of nature’s contributions through natural capital accounting will facilitate well-informed nature positive decision-making from businesses and governments – driving tangible action on biodiversity loss and climate change and a sustainable future for all,” she said.

The new platform could lead to greater collaboration. Ferdinando Villa, Ikerbasque Professor and Lead Investigator of ARIES at BC3, added, “There is a growing global demand for sustainable management of our natural resources, and to achieve this, scientists and decision-makers need to collaborate more and more. AI-based tools like the ARIES for SEEA Explorer hold the key to a future where open integration and reuse of knowledge, by both, is possible.”

The ARIES for SEEA Explorer is available on the UN Global Platform: a cloud-service environment supporting international collaboration among all countries in the world by sharing scientific knowledge, data, methods and technology.

A number of countries have already started using the ARIES for SEEA Explorer. The Explorer will continue to be expanded in the near future, by adding the functionality to derive indicators that allow to assess progress towards SDGs and the emerging post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

For more information:

ARIES for SEEA: <https://seea.un.org/content/aries-for-seea>

Ecosystem Accounting: <https://seea.un.org/ecosystem-accounting>

ARIES for SEEA factsheet:

https://seea.un.org/sites/seea.un.org/files/aries_for_seea_factsheet.pdf (English)

https://seea.un.org/sites/seea.un.org/files/aries_for_seea_factsheet_spanish.pdf (Spanish)

ARIES for SEEA video: <https://youtu.be/UwxQ7bHANvU>

NCAVES project: <https://seea.un.org/home/Natural-Capital-Accounting-Project>

Image stockshots on ARIES for SEEA: <https://seea.un.org/content/aries-seea-stock-photos>

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