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Session 3 : Beyond GDP, searching for composite indicators - Taking into account environment and sustainable development (thursday 5 June morning)

Accounting for Ecosystems and their Services

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An expansion of ecosystem accounting is foreseen in the current revision of the UN System of integrated Economic Environmental Accounting (SEEA2003). Currently, environmental accounts are fairly well integrated with the System of National Accounts (SNA) and address issues related to pressures from production and consumption. Ecosystem accounting aims at completing the picture by measuring the impacts of these pressures on ecosystems functions and the subsequent consequences on the services that they supply to the economy and human well-being in general. Ecosystem accounting is an attempt to answer a few basic questions related to the sustainability of the economy-nature interaction:

- Is the renewable natural capital (the ecosystems, their functions and services) maintained over time?
- Is the full cost of maintaining the natural capital covered by the current payments for goods and services?
- Is the price of imported goods and services covering the full cost of ecosystem maintenance and restoration in originating countries?
- Is the total of final use goods and services developing over time, would they be supplied by the economy (market and government institutions) or for free by the ecosystems?

Accounts of ecosystem services have been published in India. The European Environment Agency has computed land accounts based on satellite imagery in 2006 and is now testing ecosystem accounts in support to its assessments of biodiversity (as part of the European response to the Potsdam initiative of G8+5), ecosystem services (in Eureka!, the European section of the Second MA or in relation to the UNEP initiative on international payments for ecosystem services – IPES) as well as in its contribution to the “beyond GDP” initiative of the European Commission.