

From a System of National Accounts to a Process of National Wellbeing Accounting

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Paper Abstract:

There are repeated calls for measures of wellbeing and progress in addition to those that the System of National Accounts (SNA) is designed to provide. This is often presented as a need to go 'Beyond GDP'. In this paper we draw out some key issues that can help build on the rigour of the SNA whilst fitting the measurement of economic performance within a broader assessment of national wellbeing and progress. Such assessments are already leading to a proliferation of indicators and accounts, including the development of non-monetary measures of, for example, social capital and natural resources. We note that there are significant measurement challenges and touch on the question of whether or not a single, overall measure or index of wellbeing is valid. But measurement, per se, is one thing: in our view, a more critical issue is whether the measures will actually be used. We propose a dynamic and multi-staged approach for developing the SNA into a process for accounting for national wellbeing, embracing the production and the use of measures. This would start by identifying users and their requirements for wider measures, and provide the basis for national and cross-national developments in wellbeing accounting. We envisage greater branding and marketing of national wellbeing concepts to promote new measures and to support their use. We call for outreach by producers, so that there is dialogue about the development and the use of new measures.