Maximizing the effectiveness of the EMG in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

(December 2015)

Executive Summary
Key Findings and Recommendations

In light of opportunities created by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to strengthen the coordination of environmental sustainability dimension of sustainable development, resolution 11 of the First Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) of UNEP invited the Executive Director of UNEP as Chair of the EMG, to identify possible measures to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of the Group in consultation with the Secretary-General and the Chief Executives Board, to submit a report with recommendations to the UNEA for consideration at its second session.

The 20th meeting of the Senior Officials of the EMG (SOM), held on 25 September 2014 in New York, considered this issue and agreed to establish a Task Team composed of designated focal points of UN agencies to consider the EMG's mandate, Terms of Reference (ToR), effectiveness and fitness for purpose more broadly, including its contribution to the post-2015 development agenda.

The Task Team engaged in a process of reviewing the effectiveness of the EMG, including its Terms of Reference, modalities of work and fitness for purpose more broadly. A series of semi-structured interviews with EMG member organizations were conducted during April and May 2015. Consequently, this report was developed, including key findings and recommendations for further consideration of the EMG Senior Officials.

At their 21st meeting in September 2015, after considering the draft report, the Senior Officials decided to extend the mandate of the Task Team to "finalize the report taking into account the comments of the Senior Officials upon which the final report should be made available for the Executive Director of UNEP for his/her consideration for inclusion in the Executive Director's report to UNEA-2 in response to UNEA Resolution 1/11".

This report is therefore issued by the Task Team for submission to the preparatory process of the Second Session of the UNEA. The Task Team will continue its consideration of the report's recommendations and findings to identify their implications as well as the short and long term measures for enhancing the effectiveness of the EMG in supporting the 2030 development agenda.

This report captures key findings and recommendations by the Task Team covering procedural issues related to EMG's modalities of work as well as substantives issues related to EMG's mandate and future focus to maximize its effectiveness in supporting the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Key *findings* and **recommendations** of the report on procedural issues include:

I. *EMG processes that are initiated or fully supported and monitored by senior officials (or handed down by top management in the UN) are likely to generate more engagement and interest at the technical level*.

II. **Each Issue Management Group (IMG) or IMGs collectively should be periodically reviewed against their ToRs and expected outputs to ensure that work is progressing well and to allow for adjustments in the ToR, should that be necessary to reflect the new developments.**

III. An important benefit of the EMG is that it can mobilize organizations beyond the core agencies collaborating on a particular issue.

IV. Effective communication and coordination within EMG agencies is considered a key determinant of effective collaboration among agencies and is critical for institutional buy-in and implementation of EMG initiatives by members.

V. EMG activities are likely to be effective if they enjoy full and joint ownership of concerned EMG Members, are aligned with the mandates of EMG members, and can help members in achieving objectives in line with mandates provided by their governing bodies.

VI. **Explore use of other modalities such as, focus group discussions, strategic policy dialogues, and more substantive deliberations at the SOM to discuss strategic issues and opportunities.**

VII. **Complement the current EMG issue-based approach with a more regular strategic review of key environmental themes (e.g. chemicals, biodiversity) in order to identify, in a timely manner, opportunities for strengthened coordination and potential EMG contributions.**

VIII. **Identify in advance the outputs and intended results of each IMG in consultation with relevant bodies that may use EMG outputs to sharpen the focus of EMG activities and facilitate an evaluation of results achieved.**

IX. While the main focus of the EMG is on coordination among its UN agency members, there may be value in considering systematically how EMG efforts and products may be made available to the Member States.

X. **Ensure more senior-level engagement, including through: 1) Ensuring that Senior Representatives have an active role in the SOM as chairs, moderators, panelists, etc. and are included in the programme 2) Minimize discussion on technical issues and draft decisions, unless final matters need to be clarified taking into account their strategic and political impact; and 3) Use the SOM to discuss issues of strategic relevance and to explore issues for possible future action of the EMG.**

XI. **Explore more flexible and innovative ways to engage all EMG members in the process of identifying issues for EMG action, recognizing that this is critical to their buy-in and active participation in the EMG's work plan.**

XII. **Identify EMG issues in a more structured way through a set of criteria developed in**

consultation with EMG focal points and their senior officials.

XIII. **Clarify the expectations of the EMG members when an IMG is established, through Terms of Reference to be agreed by all members.**

XIV. **Determine systematically which issues addressed require consideration by the CEB and Strengthen and maximize use of existing channels of communication to interact with the CEB and its subsidiary bodies.**

XV. Opportunities exist for the EMG to contribute to the work of ad hoc and time bound inter-agency mechanisms such as the Technical Task Team (TST), or the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators.

XVI. **Strengthen joint ownership of the EMG, by systematically exploring joint chairing arrangements, sharing of in-kind resources to support EMG activities, etc.**

Key *findings* and **recommendations** on maximizing the effectiveness of the **EMG's mandate and future focus** in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs include:

I. Discuss a) if the mandate of the EMG should be refocused (i.e. to support the environmental sustainability dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and SDGs, mainstreaming of environmental considerations in the work of UN agencies, deepening synergies with MEAs implementation, etc.) b) if the human settlement dimension of the EMG should be activated and c) how this would be implemented in practice (including any needed changes in governance structures.)

II. Explore the potential for the EMG mechanism to support UNEP in formulating and following up on a UN System-Wide Framework of Strategies on the environment (SWFS). The EMG's engagement in this exercise would facilitate the buy-in to the Framework of the member agencies and enable closer coordination and collaboration among individual agency strategies on the environment and their alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 development Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The analysis also identified some substantive opportunities and areas of contribution for future EMG engagement, including:

I. Provide coordinated analytical input from an environmental perspective to capture the interface and coherence between existing global environmental goals and MEAs on the one hand, and implementation of the SDGs and their environmental sustainability dimensions on the other. Such analysis may be of value and could support, as appropriate, the work of other relevant bodies or processes, such as the UNDG, or the HLPF review process.

II. Provide analysis on the environmental sustainability dimensions of implementing the SDGs.

III. Systematically review key thematic areas under MEAs and other international agreements

for coordination opportunities.

IV. Provide a consultation and support space for implementation of UN System Wide Strategies on Environment.

V. Advance the environmental sustainability of UN operations by providing further technical support.

The key findings and recommendations point to a need for the SOM to consider revising the original ToR of the EMG, in order to build future EMG work on lessons learned and to ensure that it can effectively implement its mandate in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

1. Introduction to the EMG

1.1 Origin of the EMG

The Environment Management Group (EMG) is a UN system-wide inter-agency coordination mechanism that identifies issues on the international environmental agenda that warrant cooperation, and finds ways of engaging its collective capacity in coherent management responses to those issues. The EMG has 50 members consisting of specialized agencies, programmes and organs of the United Nations system, including the secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).

The EMG was established in 2001 pursuant to the General Assembly resolution 53/242 in July 1999. The resolution supported the proposal of the Secretary-General to establish an environmental management group "for the purpose of enhancing United Nations system-wide interagency coordination related to specific issues in the field of environment and human settlements" as suggested in his report on Environment and Human Settlements (A/53/463). The EMG would enable the UN bodies and their partners to share information, consult on proposed new initiatives, contribute to a planning framework, and agree on priorities and on the respective roles of agencies in the implementation of those priorities in order to achieve a more rational and cost-effective use of resources. The EMG was envisaged to provide a forum and a mechanism to enhance complementarity between the analytical/normative activities and the operational role of the UN system agencies through adopting a problem-solving, results oriented approach. It was further envisaged that the reports of the Group would be made available to relevant intergovernmental bodies to enhance intergovernmental policy coherence.

The Terms of Reference (ToR) of the EMG were approved in 2000 by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), which has since been replaced by the Chief Executives Board on Coordination (CEB). The adoption followed a process of consultation carried out through the ACC's Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD) and UNEP's Committee of Permanent Representatives in Nairobi.[1] The ToR was presented in a report from the 8th Special Session of Governing Council of UNEP to the General Assembly. The EMG eventually started functioning in January 2001 with a secretariat established in June 2003 in Geneva, Switzerland.

1.2 Mandate of the EMG

The EMG's mandate covers a range of areas, including support of coordination, information exchange, and promotion of joint action by United Nations agencies, as well as synergy development among and between the activities of the United Nations agencies on environment and human settlement issues.

According to its ToR, the EMG should:

- Provide an effective, coordinated and flexible United Nations system response to important and emerging issues of environmental and human settlements concerns through an issue management approach;[2]

[1] The ToR were endorsed by IACSD at its 15th session (ACC/2000/1), and subsequently by the ACC at its first Regular Session of 2000 (ACC/2000/4).

[2] As outlined in the SG report "Renewing the United Nations – A Programme for Reform".

- Promote inter-linkages, encourage the timely and relevant exchange of data and information on specific issues and the compatibility of different approaches to find solutions to those common problems;

- Identify, address and resolve collectively specific problems, issues and tasks on the environmental and human settlements agenda requiring enhanced inter-agency cooperation in a given time-frame;

- Assist UNEP and Habitat in carrying out their functions related to the promotion of coordinated approaches to environmental and human settlements issues in the United Nations system and to enhance the environmental and human settlement perspectives, in particular their normative and analytic aspects, in the work of other United Nations organizations.

1.3 **EMG Membership**

In line with its mandate and objectives, EMG's ToR states that members of the Group shall be the specialized agencies, programmes and organs of the United Nations system, including the secretariats of multilateral environmental agreements. Representatives of relevant sectors of the civil society and of international non-governmental organizations can be invited to participate in meetings upon the request of Group members.

1.4 **Senior Officials Meetings (SOM)**

The ToR of the EMG sets up a "senior level decision-making body, entitled the Environmental Management Group, chaired by the Executive Director of UNEP and being comprised of senior-level officials from member organizations of the Group". Senior Officials are usually Heads of agencies or their designated senior staff responsible for environmental programmes, mainly at the D1, D2, and in some cases at the ASG level. Executive Heads of agencies participate in the SOM, for example, when an organization is co-chairing the SOM, or when the topic under discussion is of strategic interest to the organization.

1.5 **Issue Management Groups**

In accordance with its Terms of Reference, the EMG works mainly through technical meetings, Issue Management Groups (IMGs) and task forces, to which representatives of intergovernmental bodies, civil society and international non-governmental organizations can be invited to contribute.

Issue Management Groups have been the backbone of EMG activities in recent years. IMGs are time bound groups established by the SOM of the EMG that bring together a sub-set of EMG members interested in working on a specific issue. IMGs usually have a TOR, defined membership and produce a knowledge product or guidance for endorsement by the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM). IMGs normally exist at least for one year, but may have extended mandates of several years.

UNEP will normally be the lead agency and chair the ad hoc IMGs. However, an ad hoc issue management group may nominate by consensus a lead agency other than UNEP if this is found appropriate in light of the specific task. The lead agency is responsible for preparing the documents, organizing and chairing the meetings, and preparing the report on the results of the group's deliberations, with organizational and substantive support from the Secretariat of the Group.

1.6 Roles and Functions of the Secretariat

Based in Geneva, the EMG Secretariat is provided by UNEP and is composed of a Director (based in New York serving at the same time as the head of the UNEP New York Office), a Senior Program Officer, a Junior Program Officer and an administrative assistant. The Director of the EMG reports on EMG issues to the Executive Director of UNEP as Chair of the EMG. The Secretariat serves all EMG members on an equal basis. It is hosted, administered and financed by UNEP, with occasional in-kind support from the EMG Members. The Secretariat provides support in preparation, facilitation and reporting of the EMG meetings and those of its Issue Management Groups and Consultative Processes in line with the EMG plan of work approved by the EMG Senior Officials. The Secretariat also houses and works closely with the UNEP Initiative on the Sustainable UN (SUN) in its support to UN agencies in 'greening' their activities and becoming climate neutral.

1.7 Reporting and linkages to other UN Mechanisms and Bodies

EMG reports on its cooperation and achievements to the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) and may also inform other intergovernmental bodies for specific issues, as appropriate.

The progress reports of the EMG have been regularly provided by its chair to the Governing Council of UNEP (now UNEA) and through UNEP to the UN General Assembly. Some UN agencies have expressed interest in making these reports available also to the governing bodies of their respective agencies to ensure follow up and commitment to implementation of commonly agreed actions.

1.8 EMG Effectiveness Review

Mandate Provided by Senior Officials

In light of opportunities created by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to strengthen the coordination of environmental sustainability dimension of sustainable development, Member States invited the Executive Director of UNEP to examine if the EMG, after having functioned for 14 years, is fit to respond to today's coordination challenges in the field of environment. Resolution 11 of the first session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, invited the Executive Director of UNEP as Chair of the EMG, to identify possible measures to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of the Group in consultation with the Secretary-General and the Chief Executives Board, and to submit a report with recommendations to the UNEA for consideration at its second session.[3]

The 20th meeting of the senior officials of the EMG, held on 25 September 2014 in New York, considered this issue and agreed to establish a Task Team to consider the EMG's mandate, Terms of Reference, effectiveness and fitness for purpose more broadly, including its contribution to the post-2015 development agenda.

Summary of the Review Process

The Task Team was established in January 2015, composed of focal points nominated by EMG members. It has thus far held three virtual meetings. The EMG Secretariat provided support in organizing the meetings of the Task Team, collecting and compiling information, liaising with stakeholders, preparing data analysis and progress reports, and issuing the final report.

[3] A similar review had already been conducted in March 2004 upon the request of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (decision SS.VIII/6). At that time a study was prepared to identify successes and challenges of the Environmental Management Group, offer lessons learned, and make recommendations on how to strengthen the work of the secretariat.

A series of semi-structured interviews with EMG member organizations were conducted by UNITAR on behalf of the Task Team during the months of April and May 2015.[4] The interviews elicited views of EMG focal points on maximizing the effectiveness of the EMG in the context of the post-2015 sustainable development agenda. The interviews were held under Chatham House rules and followed a set of questions that were shared with respondents in advance, but with the flexibility to discuss other issues of particular interest to respondents. A note capturing preliminary findings from interviews was prepared and shared with the Task Team for comments in May 2015.

The interviews provided constructive feedback about the EMG. EMG focal points participating in the interviews expressed appreciation in particular for the tangible and quality outputs of various IMGs, the effective and efficient services provided by the EMG Secretariat, and UNEP's leadership and support for the EMG. The observations and suggestions shared below confirm the commitment of all partners to explore opportunities for strengthening the EMG in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

2 A Snapshot of Recent EMG Outputs and Results

Type of EMG Processes and Contributions

Throughout its existence, the EMG has produced a number of system-wide reports on different environmental topics that have served as examples of the role the EMG can play in facilitating coordinating UN system work on issues on the international environmental agenda. The EMG's activities can roughly be divided into the following two categories of work.

Processes contributing to specific substantive environmental issues

This area of work focuses on coordination issues related to specific environmental topics, such as biodiversity, drylands, green economy, and, at present, the sound management of chemicals. It often entails the programming and mainstreaming of the environmental considerations across the UN system, including those arising from the MEAs. Annex 2 provides a list of examples of EMG work and outputs in this area.

Processes contributing to advancing internal environmental sustainability of UN operations

This aspect of the EMG's work has an internal focus and seeks primarily to advance the environmental sustainability of UN operations. At present, the issues under consideration include advancing the environmental and social sustainability of UN operations, facilities, programs, projects and policies; and improving the environmental management of UN agencies. Annex 3 provides a list of examples of EMG work and outputs in this area.

3 Key Messages Originating from the Review Process

The following sections are based on the findings of a series of semi-structured interviews conducted with EMG member organizations. The interviews provided constructive feedback about the EMG's activities

[4] Interviews have to date been held with the following organizations and bodies: UN DESA, UNECE, UNEP, UNDP, UN Women; Specialized Agencies: IMO, UNESCO, WMO, World Bank, MEAs Secretariats: CBD, UNFCCC; Secretariats of UN coordinating bodies: CEB, HLCM, EMG.

and effectiveness, and confirm the commitment of all partners to explore opportunities for strengthening the EMG in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

3.1 Determinants for EMG effectiveness

During the review process, a number of determinants contributing to the effectiveness and success of EMG processes and work streams were identified. In particular, these include the following.

Senior level support

EMG processes that are initiated or fully supported and monitored by senior officials (or handed down by top management in the UN) are likely to generate more engagement and interest at the technical level. For example, the commitment of the SG to make the UN climate neutral provided important leadership for the IMG on Environmental Sustainability Management.

Clear definition of the initial objectives and outputs

Ensuring clarity up front about the objective and specific deliverables of an EMG process helps to provide structure and focus to it. For example, the purpose of the IMG on Green Economy was to prepare a report that consolidated the perspectives of more than 30 UN organizations into one single report in advance of the Rio+20 Conference in 2012. The report was seen by many as a great achievement in providing a One UN perspective. By contrast, the purpose of the follow-up activity to capture green economy activities of UN agencies was not clear, and this exercise was thus considered less successful. As another example, while the work by the IMG on Chemicals and Wastes on chemicals-related indicators in support of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) process was clear and focused, the purpose and value added of the broader survey/synthesis report prepared at the later stage was by some considered less evident.

Each Issue Management Group (IMG) or IMGs collectively should be periodically reviewed against their ToRs and expected outputs to ensure that work is progressing well and to allow for adjustments in the ToR, should that be necessary to reflect the new developments.

Relevance of EMG action for and support by Member States

Although the EMG focuses on internal UN coordination, feedback and political support from Member States can provide direction and momentum to its work. In the area of biodiversity, for example, the co-chairs of the IMG on biodiversity participated in the SOM and encouraged action of the EMG related to the development the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

Shared commitment and leadership of EMG members

The active engagement of EMG members in IMGs, for example as co-chairs, or by providing technical support adds creditability and facilitates joint ownership. For example, the active engagement of the World Bank as co-chair of the Green Economy IMG helped the group to develop a system-wide perspective.

Ensuring participation beyond core agencies

An important benefit of the EMG is that it can mobilize organizations beyond the core agencies collaborating on a particular issue.

For, example, both the EMG work on biodiversity and chemicals were successful in engaging a broader spectrum of UN agencies than the traditional inter-agency coordination mechanism have been able to engage (e.g. the IOMC or the Biodiversity Liaison Group).

Effective intra-agency coordination

In a number of cases, issues addressed by the EMG require and benefit from input and commitment from several divisions in the EMG member organizations. This applies, for example, to EMG efforts to advance internal environmental sustainability of UN operations, an area of work that has enjoyed productive relations between EMG/SUN and admin/management personnel.

Effective communication and coordination within EMG agencies is considered a key determinant of effective coordination among agencies and is critical for institutional buy-in and implementation of EMG initiatives by members.

Joint communication of outputs and results

The work of the EMG on a particular issue does not stop with the publication of a report or guidance document. Effective ex post communication is equally important for achieving results. Of particular importance is that the communication efforts of the EMG Secretariat acknowledge the joint nature and ownership of the work.

In conclusion, *EMG activities are likely to be effective if they enjoy full and joint ownership of concerned EMG Members, are aligned with the mandates of EMG members, and can help members in achieving objectives in line with mandates provided by their governing bodies.*

3.2 Exploring Modalities beyond IMGs?

The ad-hoc and time-bound issue management group concept followed by the EMG during the past years has resulted in a sound track record of high-quality and widely accepted outputs. This modality should remain at the core of EMG action, but it is mainly effective for addressing topics requiring in-depth deliberation and technical analysis. It is also often time -and resource-intensive.

Recently, the SOM has initiated other modalities of work in addition to IMGs, such as consultative processes, task forces, or task groups. Consultative processes have been initiated to develop system wide frameworks or strategies in consultations with the EMG members. An example is the consultative process to support development of system wide strategies on the environment. This differs to IMGs that are established to address system wide contributions to specific environmental issues and possibilities for synergies and cooperation.

The implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the mandate coming out of the UNGA to strengthen international environmental governance may benefit from other modalities of interaction in the EMG complementary to IMGs. **It is therefore recommended to explore use of other modalities, such as, focus group discussions, strategic policy dialogues, and more substantive deliberations at the SOM to discuss strategic issues and opportunities.**

The current ad hoc nature of IMG/EMG engagement and "moving from one IMG to the next" **could be complemented with a more regular strategic review of key environmental themes (e.g. chemicals,**

biodiversity) in order to identify, in a timely manner, opportunities for strengthened coordination and potential EMG contributions.

If the EMG continues to use modalities of engagement other than IMGs (e.g. task forces), **it is recommended that the ToR of the EMG should define such processes and provide clarity for which types of cases these complementary modalities should be initiated, within the mandate of the EMG.**

3.3 Clarifying the EMG Results framework

The review of various EMG outputs revealed that the EMG produces different types of outputs and results. Results can be roughly grouped in four categories, characterized by an increasing degree of complexity and ambition. **Identifying in advance the outputs and intended results of each IMG in consultation with relevant bodies that may use EMG outputs would help in sharpening the focus of EMG activities and facilitating an evaluation of results achieved.**

Stocktaking of existing activities

Under this type of activity/results area, IMGs compile in a systematic way existing activities of EMG members on a given issue into one single document or platform. Examples of this include stock-taking of the EMG in the areas of biodiversity, chemicals management and green economy. This type of activity may be the basis for a more advanced analysis and coordination that is at the core of the EMG mandate. Although a relatively straight forward undertaking, stock-taking and sharing the information on relevant UN activities widely can be valuable in itself, both for the UN agencies engaged and external stakeholders, as it provides an overview of work being conducted and may elucidate areas where synergies and collaboration is possible, or where gaps exist.

Synthesis of knowledge and development of common perspectives

This type of activity goes a step further. It involves analysis of existing activities and views of EMG members with the objective to synthesize existing knowledge and prepare a consolidated perspective. It requires, therefore, an openness of EMG members to consider perspectives of other members, as well as effective chairing. If successful, the resulting product of the IMG is more than the sum of perspectives of individual EMG members. For example, the EMG Green Economy Report provided multi-sectoral perspectives on the green economy concept in advance of the Rio+20 Conference. It also shaped and contributed to activities of EMG members, for example the Green Economy e-Learning Course developed by UNEP and UNITAR.

Guidance development and knowledge-sharing to support organizational change

The third, most ambitious activity undertaken by the EMG, and perhaps the most important from a results perspective, is the development of common guidance and knowledge sharing with the objective to catalyze organizational behavior change. For example, the guidance and support provided by the SUN team and the IMG on environment management systems in the area of climate neutrality is widely recognized by UN agencies as valuable in supporting and strengthening internal sustainability processes. Similarly, the peer review of environmental and social sustainability safeguards supports agencies in improving their environmental performance through mutual learning.

Considering the impact of EMG activities in Member States

While the main focus of the EMG is on coordination among its UN agency members, there may be value in considering systematically how EMG efforts and products may be available to the Member States.

This impact can be achieved through different approaches or mechanisms, e.g. by providing analysis or guidance to other UN coordinating bodies, as appropriate by developing analytical outputs that are of potential interest to a wide range of audiences (including decision-makers); and/or by avoiding duplication of efforts, including those undertaken by other coordination bodies, and exploiting synergies that may stimulate effective implementation action in Member States, recognizing the cost implications this may have.

4 Review of EMG Governance and Modalities of Work

4.1 Introduction

An important component of the review focused on assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of EMG governance structures and modalities of work, and how they could be strengthened in order to make the EMG "fit for purpose" to effectively implement its mandate in the new post-2015 development context. The following sections present in more detail specific aspects of the EMG's governance structures and modalities of work.

4.2 Senior Officials Meeting

Participation of Senior Level Representatives in the SOM

Over the past years, the senior officials have met for half a day in the margins of the opening of the UNGA preceded by a meeting of the EMG Focal Points ("Technical Segment") in the morning. The current focus of the SOM to review and adopt in the afternoon draft decisions prepared at the meeting of the technical segment prepared in the morning of the same day is usually not enough to ensure the participation of senior officials. As a result, SOM decisions may not be consistently "owned" by heads of agencies and organizations, which could create challenges for implementation.

Opportunities to ensure more senior-level engagement could include the following:

- **Ensure that Senior Representatives have an active role in the SOM as chairs, moderators, panelists etc., and are included in the programme.**
- **Minimize discussion on technical issues and draft decisions, unless final matters need to be clarified taking into account their strategic and political impact.**
- **Use the SOM to discuss issues of strategic relevance and to explore issues for possible future action of the EMG.**

Timing of the SOM

The predictable and stable scheduling of the SOM has worked better than the ad hoc arrangements of prior years, but given the busy schedule during the opening week of the GA and the fact that not all agencies participate with senior staff, alternatives could be explored. Ensuring high-level participation in a separate meeting during the year would be challenging, unless it could be scheduled alongside a meeting where Executive Heads and their senior advisors are participating in any case.

As an alternative, the EMG might consider to hold a half day SOM session just prior to the semiannual CEB meetings in April and November. However, a number of other inter-agency meetings customarily take place the day prior to the meeting of the CEB (e.g. UNDG, UNAIDS). In addition, CEB's membership is limited to the Executive Heads of UN funds, programmes and specialized agencies and does not include the secretariats of environmental conventions and MEAs.

Whichever timing option is pursued, the dates for the SOM and key agenda items need to be determined long in advance in order to engage and block the calendar of senior officials (i.e. April/May in case the meeting continue to take place in September in NY).

Preparation of SOM by EMG Focal Points

The current practice to hold a meeting of technical EMG focal points in the morning of the SOM was seen to constrain the preparation of decisions and does not allow EMG focal points the time to brief their respective senior officials before the SOM. A virtual meeting of the EMG focal points could be held 2-3 weeks in advance of the SOM to review and finalize draft decisions. This would provide valuable time for EMG focal points to engage senior level decision-makers within their organizations in advance of the SOM. The EMG focal points could fine-tune and adopt decisions *ad referendum* in the technical segment of the SOM, which should ideally take place the day prior to the senior segment meeting (and not in the morning). This approach would allow the senior officials to take note of and formally endorse the decisions, creating space for discussion on strategic issues and suggesting new areas of work for the EMG. The suggestions could be reviewed and further explored by EMG focal points before a final decision for new activities is made.

4.3 Chairing Arrangements

The Executive Director of UNEP is the Chair of the SOM and UNEP provides the Secretary of the EMG. Issue Management Groups are often led by UNEP, but another lead agency can be designated to support and/or co-chair a Group. For example, the SOM meetings is New York in the margins of the GA have been co-chaired by DESA and UNDP on an alternating annual basis. By contrast, the Chair and Vice-Chair (and Chief Executive Officer if applicable) of UN Water and UN Energy are appointed by the Secretary General while their vice-chairs are elected by Members.

Full ownership of an interagency coordination mechanism could usually be more easily achieved by sharing chairing arrangements through rotation (e.g. in the IOMC). Alternative options may include to:

- Elect an EMG vice-chair from one of the EMG organizations for a period of 1-2 years.
- Systematically identify a vice-chair from other organizations than UNEP at the level of IMGs.

4.4 Identification and selection of issues for EMG Action

The members of the Group meet at least once a year on the invitation of the Chairman to identify the specific issues to be addressed by the Group and to establish an ad-hoc issue management group. In the current practice, the majority of suggestions on topics to be addressed by the Group are proposed by UNEP. **Exploring more flexible and innovative ways to engage all EMG members in the process of identifying issues for EMG action would therefore be critical to their buy-in and active participation in the EMG's work plan.**

Having robust mandates from a governing body, or from senior leadership provides guidance and organizational support in the identification of possible themes for engagement. Identifying issues

through bottom-up approaches has also merit, but may result in an "uphill battle". The SOM should therefore play a strong role in the identification of strategic issues (which would still require support from EMG Focal Points prior and post the SOMs).

The way the JIU selects its review themes may serve a good example for a more structured approach for the EMG to identify issues (e.g. collecting proposals from UN bodies, making a synthesis, then asking the same to give priorities and deciding on its work programme eventually based on this assessment). In addition, **developing criteria in consultation with EMG focal points and their senior officials for selecting EMG issues in a more structured way may also be valuable**. A simple checklist could be developed to support the review of potential issues, such as the following:

- Is the proposed action of strategic nature and importance?
- Does the issue have system-wide relevance, does it require coordination among UN agencies, and is there a critical mass of interest?
- Are some agencies interested and committed to facilitate the action?
- Are the expected outputs and results clear and SMART?

4.5 EMG Secretariat and Role of UNEP

The current Head of the EMG Secretariat (located in New York) has a double function as Director of UNEP's New York Office and Head of Secretariat, UN EMG. It was proposed that to avoid a double function (and related possible perceptions of conflict of interest), the position of head of the EMG Secretariat could eventually become a full-time function with clear lines of accountability, as it was the case in the past. Given that the post of Head of EMG Secretariat is currently funded by UNEP alone, costs implications of considering such change would need to be examined.

The UNEP EMG Secretariat is provided by UNEP. The location of the technical and professional staff of the EMG Secretariat in Geneva was thought to facilitate the interaction with the many UN bodies located in Geneva that are engaged in technical and operational activities of relevance to the EMG. UNEP's commitment and its contribution of core resources to run the EMG Secretariat effectively is well recognized among EMG members. Cost-sharing or rotating arrangements to support the r Secretariat or for specific processes may also be considered. Due consideration should, however, be paid to the implications of such arraignments. For example, possible challenges in ensuring efficient communication and effective services provided should be addressed. institutional memory should also be secured.
Role of EMG Focal Points and Intra-Agency Coordination.

Focal points for the EMG are nominated by EMG members and provide an interface with the EMG Secretariat. They also coordinate EMG matters internally within the agencies, e.g. when specific expertise is needed, or when comments are requested that reflect the views or holistic activities of the agency. Questions have arisen about the exact role and functions of the focal points, and how to maintain institutional continuity in cases when agency staff other than the focal point participates in an EMG/IMG meeting. **The expectations of the agencies' designated focal points for EMG/IMGs should be clarified when an IMG is established through Terms of Reference to be agreed by all members.**

4.6 **Linkages with Other UN Coordinating Mechanisms**

CEB and its Main Subsidiary Bodies

EMG also interacts through its Chair with other Interagency Bodies especially the CEB and its subsidiary bodies. As an independent inter-agency coordination mechanism, no formal linkages or reporting structures exist between the EMG and the CEB and its three main subsidiary bodies (i.e. HLCP, HLCM, and UNDG). Since EMG focal points do not usually also represent their agencies in the CEB and its three subsidiary bodies, effective intra-organizational communication and coordination is a key factor in bringing specific issues in the field of environment and human settlements to the attention of CEB and its subsidiary bodies (HLCP, HLCM, and UNDG) and to avoid any duplication of work that may exist or arise in the work of the different coordinating bodies.

A number of opportunities already exist to bring EMG topics and decisions to the attention of the CEB. These include:

- The Executive Director of UNEP is a member of CEB and may bring EMG issues or SOM decisions to the attention of the Board, in his/her capacity as chair of EMG.
- Membership of CEB and EMG is largely identical with all but two CEB member organizations being represented in the EMG. EMG member organizations may, individually or collectively, bring issues in the field of environment and human settlements to the attention of the CEB and the HLCP, HLCM, and UNDG.
- The Secretariat of the EMG can bring issues to the attention of the CEB Secretariat.

Vice versa, these bodies may identify environmental issues for which the EMG may be in a position to provide analysis and support. In any case, close consultation between respective bodies would ensure that work of the EMG creates value added and has an impact.

To clarify linkages with the CEB and its subsidiarity bodies, **each IMG process should determine systematically which issues addressed require consideration by the CEB and its subsidiary bodies and strengthen and maximize use of existing channels of communication.**

In doing so, it should be considered that the CEB seeks to strengthen policy coherence and coordination on issues of system-wide concern. The Board meets only twice a year to engage in high-level considerations and discussions of broad, strategic topics. It does not develop, implement, monitor, or "follow-up" on system-wide policies or strategies.

The potential synergies and overlaps between EMG and UNDG[5] with regard to environmental issues have not been fully explored and a reflection about the role of both groups concerning environmental issues and how to best complement and support each other would be valuable. Possible support of the EMG for UNDG could include, for example, an analysis relevant to UNDGs work from an environmental perspective.

[5] The mandate of the UNDG is to deliver more coherent, effective and efficient support to countries seeking to attain internationally agreed development goals; design system-wide guidance to coordinate, harmonize and align UN development activities and increase the impact of UN programmes and policy advice; ensure that operations are conducted in accordance with mandates from UN governing bodies; and make operations more efficient and reduce transaction costs to governments.

Linkages with other Coordinating Bodies

Other coordinating mechanisms have been put in place to address specific sectoral or thematic issues, i.e. UN Water, UN Energy and UN Oceans. Joint activities and communication between those bodies and the EMG might be valuable when specific environmental aspects need to be considered, or the engagement of the wider membership of the EMG would be beneficial. *Opportunities also exist for the EMG to contribute to the work of ad hoc and time bound inter-agencies mechanisms such as the Technical Task Team (TST), or the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators.*

4.7 Other Institutional and Governance Considerations

Joint ownership of the EMG could be strengthened by systematically exploring joint chairing arrangements, sharing of in-kind resources to support EMG activities, etc. As established by the GA, the EMG has a specific reporting line to UNEA, via the Executive Director of UNEP. This reporting line distinguishes the EMG from the CEB and its main subsidiary bodies, as well as from other coordination mechanisms, such as UN Oceans and UN Energy. The perceived "hybrid" nature of the EMG (i.e. UN coordination function coupled with fixed chairing arrangements and reporting line to one governing body) may affect the degree EMG decisions can be implemented in some cases, as well as the degree of joint ownership of the EMG.

5 Review of Mandate and Future Opportunities

5.1 Review of Mandate

The current EMG mandate covers both environment and human settlement. It originated in the late 90's when UNEP and UN HABITAT were led temporarily by the same Executive Director. In practice, the EMG has focused on environmental issues and has spent less time on human settlements.

Nonetheless, environment and human settlement and urban development issues are closely linked and addressing relevant UN coordination issues in an integrated manner within the EMG could have a lot of benefits. This would require close interaction between UNEP and UN Habitat and might require changes in the governance structure, the chairmanship arrangements, and possibly even the name of the EMG.

It is therefore recommended to discuss if the mandate of the EMG should be refocused (i.e. to support the environmental sustainability dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and SDGs, mainstreaming of environmental considerations in the work of UN agencies, deepening synergies with MEAs implementation, etc.) if the human settlement dimension of the EMG should be activated and how this would be implemented in practice (including any needed changes in governance structures.)

5.2 Environmental Sustainability Dimension of the SDGs

Environmental sustainability considerations are an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs, and constitute one of the five core elements of sustainable development proposed in the SG's Synthesis Report on the post-2015 development agenda. Environmental sustainability considerations are dispersed through several sustainable development goals and targets, reflecting a wide range of linkages and synergies among them, and relative to the MEA implementation frameworks. An opportunity exists for the EMG to support the integration of environmental

considerations in the work of UN entities on the one hand and into the planning and implementation of the SDGs on the other. Furthermore, an analysis of the implementation of the SDGs in relation to the implementation of existing global environmental goals and MEAs may be of value and could contribute, as appropriate, to the work of other relevant inter-agency mechanisms, such as the UNDG, or feed into the inputs prepared for the HLPF reviews.

5.3 EMG Focus Areas Linked to MEAs and Other International Agreements

The EMG has provided analytical support and engaged a wide range of UN actors in key thematic environmental clusters covered by MEAs, most notably in the area of biodiversity, chemicals and waste management, drylands and land degradation. In the area of climate change, the EMG has not played as active a role, given that the HLCP established a Working Group on Climate Change with a membership virtually identical to that of the EMG. The EMG may therefore want to identify core thematic environmental areas and review these areas periodically to consider possible action for effective coordination.

5.4 UN System Wide Strategies on Environment

The EMG could play an important role in supporting UNEP in formulating and following up on the UN System Wide Framework of Strategies on the Environment .[6] The EMG's engagement in this exercise would facilitate the buy-in to the Framework of the member agencies and enable a closer collaboration and coordination among individual agency strategies on the environment and their alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 development Agenda for Sustainable Development.

5.5 Environmental Sustainability of UN Operations

The EMG has been at the forefront of support for the greening of the UN system by developing guidance, facilitating knowledge sharing on lessons-learning, good practices, etc. Opportunities exist for the EMG to accelerate the momentum to advance environmental sustainability of UN system operations, e.g. by supporting sound waste management in field level operations.[7]

[6] Cf : The Future We Want alinea 88 (c) – A/CONF.216/L.1

[7] Procedurally, only the Chair of EMG can represent EMG in meetings of other inter-agency bodies while individual organizations can speak on and raise particular issues (environmental etc.).

Annex 1: TOR of the EMG
http://unemg.org/images/emgdocs/about/emg_tors.pdf

Annex 2: Examples of EMG contributions on substantive environmental issues

Harmonized System of Reporting on Biodiversity-related issues

An issue-management group was established under UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre to consider streamlining the requests for national reporting under the biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements in an efficient and coordinated manner in support of Parties to the conventions. UNEP initiated pilot projects in four countries to test the possibilities of harmonized reporting. The issue-management group presented its final report in December 2003, recommending further liaison meetings between secretariats, national-level approaches and collaborative workshops. The Environmental Management Group decided that its own members should implement the recommendations of the report and report back to the Group in 2005.

Environmental aspects of fresh water, sanitation and human settlements

At the fifth meeting of the Environmental Management Group, in September 2003, the above issue was discussed in the context of the preparation of the Group's contribution to the meeting of the Global Ministerial Environment Forum in Jeju, Republic of Korea in March 2004 and to the twelfth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. At the sixth meeting, in February 2004, the secretariat provided a survey of major programmes and activities across the United Nations system giving details of the partners involved, their objectives and their outputs. That study contributed to the discussions of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum in March 2004 and to those of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its twelfth session.

A system wide contribution to the mid-term review of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets

The EMG contributed to the preparation of the Strategic Plan by providing the UN system perspectives on the post 2010 biodiversity challenges and their relevance to human well-being and social and economic development goals, including poverty reduction in the Report "Advancing the biodiversity agenda: A UN system-wide contribution". The report was welcomed by CBD's 10th Conference of the Parties (COP10) in Nagoya, Japan, in October 2010. A UN system-wide Mapping Tool was prepared containing key functions, tools, indicators and decisions of the UN system agencies in support of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and submitted to the 17th meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Technical and Technological Advice of the Convention on Biological Diversity (SBSTTA) in October 2013. The Mapping Tool was transferred to the CBD Secretariat for integration in the CBD's clearing-house mechanism for further use and maintenance. Finally, a UN system guidance note on integration of biodiversity into UNDAFs was prepared to support mainstreaming of biodiversity at country level plans and processes.

UN-wide Report and Action Plan for Coordinated Actions in Drylands

A UN system wide Report on Coordinated Actions in Drylands, as well as an Action Plan, were presented to the 10th and 11th Conferences of the Parties of the UN Convention on Combating Desertification (UNCCD) in 2011 and 2013, respectively. The Action Plan was submitted to the UNCCD to facilitate the follow up on its implementation with interested UN agencies and other partners in selected pilot regions.

UN Green Economy Report and the Stocktaking of UN system-wide green economy toolkits

A report entitled "Working towards a Balanced and Inclusive Green Economy: A United Nations System-wide Perspective", as well as joint statement from the participating EMG agencies, was prepared as a system-wide contribution to the preparatory process for Rio+20 Conference in 2012. This was followed

in 2013-14 by a stocktaking/catalogue of the existing green economy toolkits/methodologies in the UN, and a proposal of including options for making these accessible to Member States and other stakeholders. There were also consultations on enhancing coordination of UN activities on green economy, including through initiatives such as the Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE).

Sound Management of Chemicals and Wastes

In close cooperation with the *Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals* (IOMC) an Issue Management Group on Sound Management of Chemicals has prepared a report mapping the contribution of 25 UN entities to the sound management of chemicals. The report includes recommendations for further cooperation and synergy, both in response to the WSSD 2020 Goal, and with a view to contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Annex 3: Examples of EMG contributions to advance environment sustainability of UN operations

Sustainable Procurement

Following consideration of sustainable procurement issues at the seventh meeting of senior officials in April 2004, the EMG established an issue-management group to work on developing supplier codes of conduct, prepare an inventory of sustainable procurement policies and practices, and consider issues of training.

Consultative Process on Environmental and Social Sustainability (ESS)

The Senior Officials of the Environment Manager Group (EMG) established at their 15th meeting in September 2009 a consultative process which initially prepared a report outlining options for a common United Nations System approach to "environmental and social safeguards". This was followed by preparation of "A Framework for Advancing Environmental and Social Sustainability in the UN". The 18th SOM agreed that the Consultative Process on Environment and Social Sustainability needed to continue its work to further define the provisions of the Framework on common principles and minimum requirements as well as preparation of an implementation road map of the Framework for UN entities. From the 19th SOM, UN entities have been encouraged to move ahead in implementing the Framework. An Interim Guidance for Implementing the Framework was published in 2014 to help agencies in the implementation of the Framework. Seven volunteer agencies are presently piloting the integration of the Framework, on the basis of the Interim Guide.

Environmental Peer Reviews

A peer-review process was launched in 2013 to review the environment portfolio and management procedures of UN agencies, building on the accumulated international experience in organizations. The process started on a pilot basis with the review of the environmental management profiles of WMO, UNIDO, and UNEP, and the sharing of lessons learned. The decision was taken at the 20th SOM in September 2014 to continue the peer review process into a second phase, beginning with the review of the IMF in 2015. The peer review mechanism provides multiple benefits for the UN system. In addition, it is expected that the process will promote the achievement of environmental, social and economic sustainability objectives and greater resource efficiency.