#### Discussion Note 1: EMG mandate, objectives and Terms of Reference

#### Implementation of the recommendations of the report “Maximizing the effectiveness of the EMG in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”

# Background

The 20thmeeting of the Senior Officials of the EMG agreed to establish a Task Team to consider the EMG’s mandate, Terms of Reference (ToR), effectiveness and fitness for purpose in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In December 2015, the Task Team released the report *Maximizing the effectiveness of the EMG in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* that captures key findings and recommendations on issues related to EMG’s mandate and future focus to maximize its effectiveness in supporting the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The report refers to five potential issues/areas that a revised/updated EMG mandate and TOR could include:

1. Supporting the environmental sustainability dimensions of the 2030 Agenda
2. Supporting the UN System Wide Framework of Strategies on Environment (SWFS)
3. Supporting the environmental sustainability of UN Operations
4. Identification of core thematic environmental areas (such as those under the MEAs) and to review these issue areas periodically to consider possible action for effective coordination
5. The issue of Human Settlements and whether or not it should be activated in the EMG and how this would be implemented in practice (including any needed changes in governance structures.)

In light of the above, the Task Team suggested to the Senior Officials to consider whether or not there is a need to revise the ToR and mandate of the EMG, ensuring that it adequately reflects the EMG of today, the expectations from it in the context of the 2030 Agenda as well as the changes and developments of the EMG since its ToR was approved by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC, since replaced by the CEB) in 2000.

In line with decision VIII of the SOM 22 in September 2016, this issue note is prepared by the Secretariat to stimulate a discussion by the Task Team on the rational and proposals for updating/revising EMG’s ToR. The note lifts, suggests and elaborates issues to be deliberated by the Task Team based on relevant recommendations in the Effectiveness Report and links them to the related sections of the current Terms of Reference. For clarification and to facilitate the discussion, the proposed revisions are incorporated in the document *Updated / Revised Terms of Reference of the Environment Management Group.*

**Current TOR of the EMG**

The current TOR addresses a mix of issues pertaining to mandate, objectives, modus operandi and reporting.

The EMG’s mandate as stated in the TOR includes:

* To provide an effective, coordinated and flexible United Nations system response to and to facilitate joint action aimed at finding solutions to important and newly emerging specific issues of environmental and human settlements concern, through an issue management approach as outlined in the report of the Secretary-General entitled “Renewing the United Nations: A Programme for Reform” [(A/51/1950).](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N97/189/79/IMG/N9718979.pdf?OpenElement)
* To promote inter-linkages, encourage timely and relevant exchange of data and information on specific issues and compatibility of different approaches to finding solutions to those common problems, contribute to the synergy and complementarity among and between activities of its members in the fields of environment and human settlements, and hence act in a complementary manner and add value to existing United Nations system-wide inter-agency cooperation.

The TOR refers to the objectives of the EMG as follows:

* To 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 through securing effective and collaborative involvement of the relevant United Nations system agencies, programmes and organs and of other potential partners, as appropriate;
* To provide a forum for an early discussion and sharing of information on emerging problems and issues in the field of environment and human settlements geared at finding collectively the most effective, coordinated approach to the solution of the new tasks
* To assist UN Environment 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 analytical aspects, in the work of other United Nations system organizations;
* To facilitate, in this vein, the work of UN Environment and Habitat in carrying out their responsibilities as IACSD task managers for a number of environment and human settlements-related chapters of Agenda 21 with a view to enhancing their contributions to the work of IACSD, its subcommittees and task managers system and other related interagency mechanisms, as well as the Commission on Sustainable Development, as appropriate.

# Rational for updating /revising the EMG’s TOR

The Effectiveness Report recognizes opportunities to further maximize the effectiveness of the EMG’s mandate and points to a possible need to consider revising the ToR in order for the EMG to be fit for purpose. While the ToR of the EMG has remained unchanged since its approval in 2000, a number of developments have taken place and become custom during the 16 years of EMG operating. At the same time, the global political framework within which the UN is operating and to which the EMG ultimately aims to contribute, has been renewed, most recently with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Building on the recommendations in the Effectiveness Report, the specific areas for potentially updating/revising the TOR include:

## Linking the EMG ToR and mandate to the environmental sustainability dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and SDGs

Supporting the implementation of the universal 2030 Agenda is a top priority for the UN system. In order to minimize the duplication of effort and generate helpful synergies, UN agencies must identify and build on areas of common concern, cooperate, share information and establish and promote effective partnerships for implementation. An opportunity exists for the EMG to provide coordinated and coherent support in this regard. In addition to the substantive opportunity provided, the EMG, like other UN entities, should align its work and work program with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, making sure that all efforts undertaken support the implementation of the Global Goals.

At their 22nd meeting, the Senior Officials stressed the need for the EMG as one of the main mechanisms facilitating better coordination in the UN system. The increasing scope and importance of the EMG as a platform for interconnectedness, synergies, data sharing and exchange in best practices in the context of the 2030 Agenda was recognized and the willingness to enhance the role of the Group in this regard was expressed. The EMG was seen as a useful hub to explore the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda and to enhance cooperation among partner organizations, bringing environmental issues of cross-sectoral relevance to each other’s attention. Currently there is no reference in the TOR on the role and contribution of the EMG to the 2030 Agenda.

*Relevant recommendation in Effectiveness Report:*

* *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 and mainstreaming of environmental considerations in the work of UN agencies.*
* *Provide analysis on the environmental sustainability dimensions of implementing the SDGs.*

Suggested proposal for discussion:

The Task Team may consider updating current references to Agenda 21 in the ToR with references to the 2030 Agenda, positioning the EMG in the context of providing relevant and effective support to its implementation.

## Including supporting the implementation of the SWFS as a key objective of the EMG

The UN system-wide Framework of Strategies on the Environment (SWFS) was prepared by the EMG as a collaborative framework to achieve greater synergy, collaboration and coherence in the UN system’s work on the environment to support Member States in the delivery of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

The Framework envisages that the EMG Secretariat will serve as the secretariat for the implementation and follow-up of the Framework, aggregating and analysing the information contributed individually by the organizations, helping to identify opportunities for collaboration, linking and/or scaling up of initiatives and organization of relevant partnerships, including fundraising, as necessary.

Relevant recommendation in the Effectiveness Report:

* *Explore the potential for the EMG mechanism to support UN Environment 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.*
* *Provide a consultation and support space for implementation of UN System Wide Strategies on Environment.*

Suggested proposal for discussion:

The implementation of the SWFS is expected to enable the EMG to contribute significantly to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda going forward. The Task Team may consider including in the EMG ToR and mandate a reference to the SWFS.

## Including the work on mainstreaming of environmental considerations in the internal work of UN agencies in the EMG ToR and mandate

The EMG has been at the forefront of support for the greening of the UN system since 2007 by developing the Framework for Environmental and Social Sustainability, providing guidance, and facilitating knowledge sharing on lessons-learning, good practices, etc. Supporting UN agencies in their internal sustainability efforts has become one of the primary pillars of the EMG’s activities, and a much appreciated service by the EMG Members for which there is continuous demand. The Effectiveness Report also recognizes new opportunities 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. The Senior Officials have recently underlined that exchanging information on internal sustainability management would be very important, especially for agencies that do not have a direct environmental mandate supporting the reduction of the environmental footprint of the UN system.

Relevant recommendation in the Effectiveness Report:

* *Discuss if the mandate of the EMG should be refocused to support the environmental mainstreaming of environmental considerations in the work of UN agencies.*
* *Advance the environmental sustainability of UN operations by providing further technical support.*

Suggested proposal for discussion:

The current ToR of the EMG does not recognize the work on environmental sustainability of UN system operations as part of the EMG’s mandate or objectives. Yet, this work has come to form a substantial part of the services that the EMG offers its Members, for which continued or increased demand is expected. The Task Team may consider including a reference to promoting mainstreaming of environmental considerations in the work of UN agencies in the EMG mandate and objectives outlined in its ToR.

## Addressing key thematic environmental areas (such as those under the MEAs) and reviewing these issue areas periodically to consider possible action for effective coordination, as one of the main EMG objectives

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. The Effectiveness Report suggests that the EMG may want to identify core thematic environmental areas, such as those under the MEAs and review these areas periodically to consider possible action for effective coordination.

Relevant recommendation in the Effectiveness Report:

* *Discuss if the mandate of the EMG should be refocused to support the deepening of synergies with MEAs implementation.*
* *Systematically review key thematic areas under MEAs and other international agreements for coordination opportunities.*

Suggested proposal for discussion :

The Task Team is invited to consider adding an element in the objectives of the EMG for it to support the deepening of synergies with MEAs implementation and review systematically environmental clusters under the MEAs for coordination opportunities.

## The human settlements agenda as part of the EMG’s mandate

The current EMG mandate covers both environment and human settlement. The inclusion of the human settlement agenda has its origins in that UN Environment and UN HABITAT were led temporarily by the same Executive Director at the time when the EMG was established. In practice, the EMG has focused on environmental issues while human settlements issues have not been addressed.

The Effectiveness Report recognizes close links between environment, human settlement and urban development issues and suggests that addressing relevant UN coordination issues in an integrated manner within the EMG could have many benefits. No other coordination mechanism has a human settlement focus. Should the EMG activate the human settlement dimension, it may require changes in the EMG’s governance structure, the chairmanship arrangements, and possibly also the name of the EMG.

Relevant recommendation in the Effectiveness Report:

* *Discuss if the human settlement dimension of the EMG should be activated.*

Suggested proposal for discussion :

The Task Team is invited to discuss whether human settlements should remain a part of the EMG mandate, and if so, what that would imply in terms of activities, governance, chairmanship, etc.

## Other possible changes to the ToR

Other additions or changes to the ToR on the sections on membership, modus operandi, participation of non-members and reporting, may be necessary depending on the outcome of the Task Team’s discussion on these topics (see Discussion Note 2). For example, 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.

Relevant recommendation in the Effectiveness Report:

* *E.g. 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.*

Suggested proposal for discussion :

The Task Team is invited to refer to the outcome of its discussion on EMG modalities and consider if and how this requires modifications to the ToR.