



17th Senior Officials Meeting of the Environment Management Group

19 September 2011

Preparatory technical segment: 9 a.m. – 13:00 p.m.

Senior officials segment: 14:30–17:30 p.m.

Hosted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Hank Shannon Room, 21st floor, DC-1 building,

1 UN plaza, UN Headquarters, New York

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Distribution: EMG members

Strategic Directions for EMG: Contributions to the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)

Note by the Chair

Introduction

1. Senior officials, under agenda item 4, are invited to consider the overall strategic directions for the work of the EMG, in particular as it relates to contributions to the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), Rio+20, in 2012.
2. The Rio+20 Conference seeks one objective : securing renewed political commitment to sustainable development by (a) assessing the progress and implementation gaps in meeting already agreed commitments, (b) addressing new and emerging challenges. Member States have agreed on the following two themes for the Conference: green economy within the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and an institutional framework for sustainable development¹.
3. Senior officials may want to consider EMG's contribution to the UNCSD. A summary of the strategic discussions can be submitted by the Chair of EMG to the secretariat for the UNCSD preparatory process in response to the invitation from the Second Preparatory Committee of the UNCSD. The submission could highlight the work of EMG on the green economy, drylands and biodiversity and the development of a framework for environmental and social sustainability in the UN system. Attention could also be drawn to a possible contribution by EMG to the institutional framework for sustainable development.
4. Senior officials in their discussion of the strategic directions for EMG, are invited to consider the following three broad key questions:

A. How can EMG's work on green economy contribute to UNCSD?

5. Through its IMG on green economy, EMG is currently concluding its work on the report "Investing in a Green and Inclusive Economy". The IMG has provided a forum for discussion and convergence on key conceptual issues related to the notion of a green economy. The report is unique in the sense that it provides a multi-sectoral perspective on the issue from across some 35 agencies.

¹ UN General Assembly Resolution [A/RES/64/236](#) of 24th December 2009.

6. A progress report on the work of the IMG was made available to participants at the first inter-sessional meeting of the UNCSD in January 2011. Further information on the report's preparation was provided to participants at a side-event at the second Preparatory Committee Meeting of the UNCSD in March 2011. The target time-line for the report's finalization is the second inter-sessional meeting of the UNCSD in December 2011.

7. Senior officials may want to consider how this work could contribute to the UNCSD. They may also want to signal a willingness by the EMG to respond to any follow-up work that may be requested by the Conference to the UN system on the subject of green economy. Strategic directions for continued EMG cooperation in assisting countries in their transition towards a green and inclusive economy could be considered.

8. Senior officials may also want to consider how EMG's work on drylands and biodiversity could contribute to advancing a green and inclusive economy. The EMG report, "Global Drylands, a UN system-wide contribution," sets out a common vision and agenda for UN-wide action on drylands management and its role in addressing climate change and food security through a *positive* drylands development and investment approach. EMG's work on the report, "Advancing the biodiversity agenda – a UN system-wide contribution", has been widely recognised and efforts are now geared towards supporting the implementation of the Aichi Targets of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, that were agreed at the CBD COP10.

B. How can EMG's work on the framework for social and environmental sustainability (including the work on sustainable management) contribute to UNCSD?

9. Senior officials at their 15th and 16th meetings set the directions for a consultative process on environmental and social safeguards. The consultation has explored how the UN system can embody the internationally accepted environmental and social principles in its internal management as well as to support their application by partners and stakeholders. The initiative builds on the Secretary General's determination to lead by example and maintain sustainable development as his top priority. It responds to calls by member states for a more efficient and sustainable UN, and would make the implementation of sustainability measures easier and more efficient for each UN entity.

10. The work of the consultative process is reflected in the report "Advancing the Environmental and Social Sustainability in the UN System". The report includes, amongst other elements, a joint heads of agencies statement and a framework for advancing the Environmental and Social Sustainability in the UN System. The Sustainability Framework, which includes safeguards, is more flexible than a traditional safeguards approach and was found to be more appropriate for the wide-ranging activities of the UN system.

11. By developing a common environmental and social sustainability framework, the UN will strengthen its leadership role and better support Member States to further the global sustainability agenda at all levels. Specifically, the framework allows the organization to:

- (a) ***Lead by example***: by enhancing institutional capabilities and credibility through strengthening the internalization of the environmental and social principles it advocates, thereby contributing more effectively to the achievement of internationally agreed goals and targets related to sustainability;
- (b) ***Work safer and smarter***: by reducing risks and maximizing benefits through an integrated approach to informed decision-making;
- (c) ***Respond more effectively***: by better addressing emerging issues and stakeholder needs in a timely manner, and by being an attractive and trusted implementing partner;
- (d) ***Leverage knowledge and experience***: by improved information sharing and working in a more efficient, coherent, accountable and transparent manner.

12. Senior officials may want to consider how the EMG can best inform the Secretary-General of the initiative and whether to invite the Secretary-General to inform the UNCSD in 2012 about it. Senior officials may also want to discuss the strategic direction for the system-wide implementation of the statement, including how to best advance the following collective actions identified in the framework:

- a) Demonstrate a *system-wide commitment* for the advancement of environmental and social sustainability of the UN system through support for a common approach to the use of environmental and social sustainability measures as outlined in the proposed framework.
- b) Adopt *minimum requirements* for the internalization of environmental and social sustainability measures across the three entry-points.
- c) Keep the advancement of the use of environmental and social sustainability measures under review and continue *the sharing of knowledge and lessons learned* among UN entities to strengthen coherence and leverage efficiencies.
- d) Consider the need for a *shared support function* to assist UN organizations to:
1) internalize enhancement of their environmental and social sustainability measures, 2) build capacity and share learning; 3) centralize accountability, reporting and evaluation.

C. How can the EMG contribute to the institutional framework for sustainable development (IFSD)?

13. The IFSD discussion has highlighted the need to strengthen the integration of the three pillars of sustainable development in a balanced and coherent manner. There is also an intention to focus on pragmatic and practical solutions, because the identification of trade-offs and win-win policies needed to advance sustainable development are already part of mainstream decision-making. EMG is uniquely placed to provide a broad cross-cutting perspective on the matter and its combined environmental expertise represents an important resource for member states.

14. Senior officials may first of all want to consider how to further strengthen IFSD in a manner which ensures a balanced integration of the economic, environmental and social pillars. Secondly, senior officials may want to consider how IFSD can help accelerate the implementation of the sustainable development agenda.

15. In considering the overarching questions, senior officials may want to take into account the EMG experience, including the recognition:

- a) That a focus on the enhancement of human well-being has served as a common denominator of relevance to the mission of all EMG members and as such has functioned as an integration agent;
- b) That close interaction with relevant intergovernmental bodies has helped the EMG support member states in advancing the international environmental agenda in a balanced manner; and
- c) That a predictable, results-oriented and open approach to internal agenda-setting helps facilitate inter-agency cooperation which is flexible, balanced, purpose-driven, issue-focused, and time-bound yet durable.

16. Senior officials may also consider the future role of the EMG in advancing the interagency dimension of the IFSD. Members may wish to explore how EMG's work can be better linked, on one hand, with other environmental sustainability issues, such as those on climate change, forests, oceans, water and energy and, on the other hand, with the economic and social pillars of the interagency structure.