

A Framework for Advancing
**ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL
SUSTAINABILITY**

in the United Nations System



UNITED NATIONS

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A FRAMEWORK FOR ADVANCING
ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL
SUSTAINABILITY
IN THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

Prepared by Environment Management Group



United Nations, Geneva, 2012

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Foreword

by the United Nations Secretary-General

The global population has reached 7 billion. In just five years, we will add another half billion people – all needing food, jobs, security and opportunity. Yet environmental, economic and social indicators tell us that our current model of progress cannot be maintained.

Sustainable development offers the best chance to adjust our course. That will mean doing far more to connect the dots among the main challenges the world faces today: water, food and energy security, climate change, poverty, inequality and the empowerment of the world's women.

United Nations agencies, funds and programmes are working to create a sustainable future – the future we want. But even as we dispense aid and advice to others, we have to recognize that we, too, are part of the picture. How we make policy, develop programmes and oversee our facilities must also be viewed through the lens of sustainability.

This report is the product of inter-agency consultations aimed at ensuring greater environmental and social sustainability in our work. The report notes that while many individual United Nations entities have adopted assessment policies and practices, the United Nations System acting together can do even more, including by developing a common sustainability framework and relevant indicators.

A Framework for Advancing Environmental and Social Sustainability in the United Nations System will greatly assist in this effort. It coincides with the run-up to the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, a major opportunity to reinvigorate this cause. And it follows the January 2012 release of the report of my Global Sustainability Panel, which has put forward a wide range of important recommendations, including to strengthen the United Nations System's own sustainable development strategy.

Internalizing environmental, social and economic sustainability practices can make us a more efficient, effective and responsible organization. I am strongly committed to this agenda and look forward to working with all partners within and beyond the United Nations to achieve a sustainable and equitable future for all.



Ban Ki-moon
Ban Ki-moon
 United Nations Secretary-General

Preface

by the Chair of the Environment Management Group

In order to meet the environmental, social and economic challenges of a new century the United Nations needs to find improved ways of identifying the full benefits and costs of the decisions it takes.

The United Nations has a long history of advocating for environmental and social responsibility: this is now evolving into a unifying platform that will strengthen the sustainability of its administrative and operational choices. For the past two years an inter-agency initiative to advance environmental and social sustainability in the United Nations System has been exploring this issue, under the guidance of the Environmental Management Group.

This report backed up by a Sustainability Framework will allow the United Nations to broaden its traditional and sometimes isolated ways of working in order to better understand how the complex suite of activities taken across the organization influence one another in terms of impacts and outcomes.

The Environmental and Social Sustainability initiative will in addition assist the United Nations to collectively measure progress towards sustainability as an institution, and to better see the risks and opportunities. It also allows us to learn from each other's experiences, capture institutional knowledge and work together for the results required. A system-wide approach will ensure a United Nations-wide commitment to integrate simultaneous economic, environmental and social impact assessments in major policy and decision-making processes. No other international institution has put forth an environmental and social assessment initiative as holistic and inclusive as this one.

Rio+20 under the themes of a Green Economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication and an institutional framework for sustainable development is an opportunity for the United Nations to exhibit its commitment and leadership in taking this effort forward.

This is a work in progress. Some of the next steps include the inter-agency process continuing its consultative work. This will focus on evolving the policy-level framework into an implementation phase that all United Nations entities can take forward in a flexible and phased approach.

To be a credible institution, what we ask of others, we must do ourselves. To be a leader, we must go further and support ways in which we can continuously learn from our work and each other.



Achim Steiner
Achim Steiner

Executive Director, Environment Management Group



© UN Photo / Logan Abbasi

Haitian students breathe new life into depleted pine forest, Haiti.

Joint Statement by Executive Heads of EMG Members on Advancing Environmental and Social Sustainability in the United Nations System

We, the Executive Heads of Agencies, Funds, Programmes and Departments of the United Nations,

Are convinced that the promotion of human well-being and global sustainability hinges on environmental protection and social and economic development,

Bear in mind the responsibility of the United Nations System to embody the internationally accepted environmental and social principles in its internal management as well as to support their application by partners and stakeholders; and the need to reduce risks and unintended negative impacts, and maximize benefits to people and their environment in a coherent and integrated way within the United Nations System,

Are conscious of the efforts by those United Nations System entities that have already developed environmental and social safeguards to mitigate the environmental and social impacts and risks of their activities before the adoption of a common approach to advancing environmental and social sustainability in the United Nations System,

Are mindful of the need for the United Nations System to internalize the internationally agreed norms of the sustainability agenda at the level of policy/strategy, programme/project and facilities/operations management through a common framework for environmental and social sustainability, including through safeguards, risk management, institutional learning, capacity-building, simplification, coherence and transparency,

Are recognizing the wealth of experience across the United Nations System to ensure the environmental and social impacts and risks of activities are well managed, which has informed the development and adoption of this common approach,

We hereby commit ourselves, proceeding in a phased manner, to use the Framework for Advancing the Environmental and Social Sustainability in the United Nations System annexed to this statement (see chapter 1) as a means of furthering the organization's sustainability performance, including by:

- Moving our respective organizations towards strengthening environmental and social sustainability in our activities, and endeavouring to find the necessary resources to realize the increased efficiency and operational safety gains of such a common approach.
- Supporting the further development and implementation of a United Nations System-wide framework for environmental and social sustainability including environmental and social safeguards; for monitoring collective efforts; and for reporting back to the Governing Bodies of our respective organizations on progress made, good practice and lessons learned.

We make this commitment with a view to show leadership by increasing institutional accountability for the environmental and social sustainability of our activities. We do this to further enable the United Nations System to work smarter and safer, respond more effectively to emerging issues and stakeholder needs and better harness lessons from shared experience.

Executive Summary

The Environmental and Social Sustainability Framework strives to carry the institution beyond the typical safeguard measures of “do no harm” to identify ways to “do good”. In the spirit of One United Nations, the Framework takes a holistic view of the organization’s work from policy conception through programme implementation and internal operations management, providing a broader base of knowledge for smart decision-making. The initiative looks to build on the internationally agreed sustainability norms and principles of the last 30 years by adapting the best practices of environmental and social assessment procedures and management systems to United Nations System activities.

This effort started when the Senior Officials of the Environment Manager Group (EMG) decided at their fifteenth¹ meeting in September 2009 to undertake a consultative process and prepare a report that outlines options for a common United Nations System approach for “environmental and social safeguards”. The opportunity to explore options for advancing United Nations sustainability was welcomed in response to several requests raised by EMG members in the lead-up to the meeting. The EMG initiative is in the spirit of the 2005 World Summit outcomes on system-wide coherence and actions to strengthen linkages between the normative and operational work of the United Nations.

The Safeguards Working Group focal points subsequently decided to change the terminology from “environmental and social safeguards” to “environmental and social sustainability framework” as the latter encompasses safeguards plus additional measures used in internal management practices and normative activities. In this way “sustainability framework” is more inclusive of United Nations System activities.

The rationale for this work stems from the understanding that the systematic use of an environmental and social sustainability framework across United Nations entities would provide the United Nations System with an important opportunity to demonstrate leadership, and enhance accountability for the environmental and social sustainability of the United Nations System policies and practices.

The framework would therefore improve the quality and results of United Nations supported activities and will help identify opportunities to harness greater efficiencies and cost savings. Operational and technical performance will be measurably enhanced, and upstream (high-level) opportunities to harness efficiencies, for instance at the level of policy and programme design, will be more informed. Unforeseen environmental and social impacts and risks (and associated reputational liabilities and costs) can be avoided, and opportunities to leverage/maximize the positive impacts of policies, programmes/projects and operational activities can be more consistently harnessed.

An inter-agency review, conducted as part of this consultation, found that the application of environmental and social sustainability measures by United Nations organizations is uneven. Several entities within the United Nations System are already utilizing environmental and social sustainability measures such as safeguards. These practices are not, however, consistent or readily comparable.

1 EMG 15 Meeting Report

In the absence of a common framework, United Nations organizations have adopted myriad ways of considering social and environmental impacts. A few organizations have developed comprehensive environmental and social impact assessment procedures. Many use a mix of review committees and staff expertise to examine environmental and social implications. Overall understanding within individual organizations about the relevance (and utility) of environmental and social sustainability measures is highly varied. On one end of the spectrum, some staff members felt that the United Nations is behind the curve and needs to catch up with its sister organizations such as the World Bank, while at the same time setting a precedent for social issues such as human rights that are not well covered by others. On the other end, some staff members felt that environmental and social safeguards were not relevant to their work and that the adoption of a common approach could be a burden to them. The confusion over the term “safeguards” was one of the reasons the approach was reframed as an environmental and social sustainability framework that is more flexible and inclusive of United Nations activities.

The importance of environmental and social safeguards measures was recognized by the senior officials of the EMG, who initially requested the consultative process on safeguards,² and has continued to support the effort. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Governing Council at its twenty-sixth session in February 2011 also encouraged the EMG to put in place a process for environmental impact assessment and the use of environmental and social safeguards in respect of projects taken up directly by the organizations of the United Nations System.

A framework for environmental and social sustainability across the United Nations System has been developed by the safeguards consultative process for consideration. The framework proposes a common vision, rationale and objective; individual actions to be taken by each United Nations entity to internalize environmental and social sustainability measures; and collective actions for the system to undertake, such as a support and knowledge-sharing function, minimum requirements and a centralized reporting structure.

Key benefits of a common sustainability framework fall into the following five categories: capacity-building for all United Nations organizations; increased credibility; minimizing risks and maximizing opportunities; greater simplification and coherence of policies and procedures; and enhanced transparency.

There is still a need to raise awareness and support across United Nations entities for the use of a common environmental and social sustainability framework, and to continue the consultative process to explore implementation considerations further. To be effective, the adoption of a common framework requires high-level institutional commitment and support as set out in the Statement by Executive Heads of Agencies, Funds, Programmes and Departments of the United Nations on advancing environmental and social sustainability in the United Nations System.

Further work is needed to develop the policy-level framework into an implementation plan and operational model that can be adapted and used by individual United Nations entities, including through the EMG work stream currently handled by the Issue Management Group on Environmental Sustainability Management. Some of the elements that require more consideration and consultation include weighing options of flexibility and accountability; common and individual policies and procedures; legal and managerial requirements; and the use of national systems.

Introduction

This report responds to the request made by the Senior Officials of the Environment Manager Group (EMG) at their fifteenth³ meeting in September 2009 to undertake a consultative process and prepare a report that explores options for a common United Nations System approach for “environmental and social safeguards”, now called “an environmental and social sustainability framework”. The opportunity to explore options for advancing United Nations sustainability was welcomed in response to several requests raised by EMG members in the lead-up to the meeting. The EMG initiative is in the spirit of the 2005 World Summit outcomes on system-wide coherence and actions to strengthen linkages between the normative and operational work of the United Nations.

The first EMG consultative meeting on environmental and social safeguards was held in June 2010 in Washington, DC, where further information needs and a roadmap for the consultative process were agreed. To move the process forward, a Drafting Group – comprised of staff from the EMG Secretariat, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNEP and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) – was established, and led to the development of this report and sustainability framework, with the support of a consultant. An EMG website has been established for the consultative process and provides additional background information.⁴

At their sixteenth meeting in September 2010, the Senior Officials of the EMG welcomed the progress made in the consultative process on environmental and social safeguards. The linkage with the ongoing work of the EMG Issue Management Group on Environmental Sustainability Management (which has focused on moving towards a climate-neutral United Nations) was also acknowledged, and senior officials agreed that the work on “sustainability management” was a subset of the broader environmental and social safeguards framework, specifically as a contribution to the operations/facilities entry point. It was felt that the Rio+20 Conference in 2012 provides an opportunity to demonstrate how the United Nations can “walk the talk”, demonstrate leadership, and enhance accountability for the ways in which the United Nations System policies and practices are consistent with internationally agreed environmental and social sustainability principles.

The sixteenth EMG meeting raised the following key issues:

- There is a need for a structured, cooperative and flexible approach both in terms of application and timelines to the work on advancing sustainability in the United Nations System, backed by necessary resources to support agency/entity level implementation.
- The need for flexibility in application of approaches and timelines was heavily emphasized, as United Nations entities operate in very different contexts, with activities ranging from peacekeeping, development assistance and lending, to facilitation of normative international cooperation.

3 EMG 15 Meeting Report

4 www.unemg.org/safeguards

- United Nations entities would tailor minimum standards to the realities of their activities.
- There is a need for the environmental competence held by EMG members to be complemented by the necessary social competence in developing sustainability measures.
- Further progress will depend on the ability of participants in the consultative process to contribute to the endeavour and to share information on their current environmental and social priorities and practices.
- The need to account for political sensitivities among member states was also mentioned.

Recognizing the complexity of the issue before them, the Senior Officials requested the continuation of the consultative process⁵ in close cooperation with the Issue Management Group on Environmental Sustainability Management with a view to:

- Finalize the mapping exercise and gap analysis and refine the conceptual framework for environmental and social safeguards
- Prepare options for a coherent United Nations System-wide (common) environmental and social safeguards framework including a possible input on “Sustainable United Nations” to Rio+20

The UNEP Governing Council at its twenty-sixth session in February 2011 encouraged the EMG to “continue supporting the implementation of the United Nations climate-neutral strategy and advancing the sustainability of policies, management practices and operations in the United Nations System, including sustainable procurement, and the establishment of an agreement to put in place a process for environmental impact assessment and the use of environmental and social safeguards in respect of projects taken up directly by the organizations of the United Nations System”.⁶

In March 2011 the EMG Secretariat hosted in Geneva the second consultative meeting on a system-wide environmental and social safeguards framework, where the Drafting Group presented findings of an inter-agency review; revised the conceptual framework for environmental and social safeguards; and explored options for a common United Nations approach. The World Health Organization (WHO) joined the Drafting Group at this time bringing its recent experience with developing an environmental and social assessment procedure. A key outcome of this meeting was a proposal to change the terminology from “environmental and social safeguards” to “environmental and social sustainability framework” (which includes safeguards as one of several possible instruments that can be used) to more accurately reflect the broad approach being taken.

5 EMG 16 Meeting Report

6 Decision UNEP/GC.26/11

The Drafting Group met again in June 2011 in Rome, with the addition of representatives from organizations developing or revising their institutional safeguards – the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Bank – the Issue Management Group on Environmental Sustainability Management (IMG ESM), to further coordinate the work of the two EMG initiatives. Key outcomes of this meeting included:

- The further development of a broad framework (including safeguards) for advancing environmental and social sustainability in the United Nations System
- Greater support for and mutual understanding of the synergies between the work of the IMG ESM and the work of the environmental and social sustainability group (formerly called the safeguards group), including presenting the work of the two groups under a single Sustainability Framework
- Enhanced awareness of the need for political commitment to move the initiative forward, and for opportunities in the next year to garner that support

Progress Report

This report provides a framework for advancing the environmental and social sustainability of the United Nations System, supplemented by annexes that reveal in more detail the outcomes of the consultative process.

This report provides:

- The elements of a common framework for environmental and social sustainability in the United Nations System
- The context for a common framework based on international good practice and a stock-taking of precedents and expectations internal and external to the United Nations
- Findings from an inter-agency review and mapping exercise to identify examples of current United Nations internal environmental and social sustainability measures, activities and initiatives
- Issues for future exploration in the next phase of developing the framework with a focus on implementation
- Conclusion and recommendations for next steps

Annexes to this document go a step further, and provide a more detailed explanation of some of the sustainability framework elements and a look at how environmental and social sustainability measures are being applied internally and externally to the United Nations, including an in-depth case study of WHO experience to date.



Parked bicycles outside university auditorium, Sapporo, Japan.

© UN Photo / Eskinder Debebe



Biomass used to meet energy needs, Ba Trang, Viet Nam.

Chapter 1:

Towards a common environmental and social sustainability framework

The underpinnings for a common sustainability framework are derived from the core mission of the United Nations System and the findings of the inter-agency review of measures and mechanisms being used to integrate environmental and social objectives into policies/strategy, programmes/projects and facilities/operations. The framework – which aims to provide a common approach for the use of environmental and social sustainability measures – provides a way for the United Nations System to fully align how it performs its work with the environmental and social principles and norms it has pioneered internationally.



Inauguration of UNEP new office low carbon facility by the Secretary General in 2011, Nairobi, Kenya.

© UN Photo / Mark Garten

1.1 Key considerations for the development of a common framework

In assessing the review findings, the consultative process took into consideration the issues raised by the EMG Senior Officials, recommendations from the environmental and social sustainability focal points and lessons and experiences shared by review interviewees. Support was given to the development of a framework that best:

- Balances flexibility and accountability
- Adds value to existing procedures and policies
- Applies to all types of United Nations activities
- Strengthens monitoring, evaluation and transparency
- Enables the United Nations to share knowledge in a more systematic manner
- Operates in the spirit of the 2005 World Summit outcomes and the Delivering as One initiative
- Aligns with wider (current) sustainable development concerns and issues (for example, green economy, climate change and current and post-2015 Millennium Development Goals)

Looking at a continuum of options on how to structure the framework – from least to most prescriptive – the group felt a basic foundation for an environmental and social sustainability framework was first needed. Choices for specific implementation elements would then evolve through further consideration and consultation, such as weighing options of flexibility and accountability, common and individual policies and procedures, legal and managerial requirements and the use of national systems. As some of these elements – such as accountability and transparency – have widespread implications for the United Nations System, more research and consultation on these issues is envisioned for the next phase of development of the sustainability framework.

1.2 Elements of a common framework

The proposed environmental and social sustainability framework begins with a vision, a rationale and an objective as described below.

Vision

The environmental and social sustainability of the United Nations is enhanced, thereby contributing to its mission to promote and protect human well-being in line with internationally agreed declarations, conventions, standards and covenants.

Rationale

The United Nations System has a long history of promoting positive environmental and social outcomes. While many parts of the organization have individually internalized sustainability goals, the United Nations acting as one can do even more.

By developing a common environmental and social sustainability framework, the United Nations 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:

- 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
- Work safer and smarter by reducing risks and maximizing benefits through an integrated approach to informed decision-making
- Respond more effectively by better addressing emerging issues and stakeholder needs in a timely manner, and by being an attractive and trusted implementing partner
- Leverage knowledge and experience by improved information-sharing and working in a more efficient, coherent, accountable and transparent manner

Objective

The United Nations System enhances its sustainability by internalizing internationally accepted environmental and social principles at the three entry points of policy/strategy, programmes/projects and facilities/operations through individual and collective approaches that address associated risks and maximize opportunities.

The next step in the framework incorporates the enabling conditions for each United Nations entity to internalize.

Expected outcomes	Outputs for individual entities
<p>1. Enabling Conditions</p> <p>Enabling conditions are strengthened and established for the internalization of internationally accepted environmental and social principles within United Nations entities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear, coherent vision and policy is established that relates environment and social issues to the mission and work of the organization. • Internal capacities to implement the vision and policy and to raise awareness among staff to ensure environmental and social sustainability are embraced. • Adequate resources are available to achieve the institutional goals of the vision and policy. • Organizations maintain a continuous cycle of improvement by reviewing the effectiveness of outcomes and activities in order to enhance environmental and social performance.
<p>2. Implementation entry points</p> <p>Environmental and social considerations are systematically integrated into service delivery mechanisms to achieve desired results, using the following three management entry points to encompass the work of the United Nations System:</p>	
<p><i>(a) Policy/Strategy</i></p> <p>The United Nations System supports the development of policies and strategies that embed a broad view of sustainability and avoid unnecessary trade-offs or harm to people and the environment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A process for integrating environmental and social sustainability considerations into relevant policies and strategies is implemented, for example, through conducting or supporting strategic level assessment.
<p><i>(b) Programmes/Projects</i></p> <p>Environmental and social considerations are systematically integrated in all programme and project cycles including, for example, through the use of environmental and social assessment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An environmental and social assessment framework (including safeguards) is developed and implemented; it includes screening, review, management plans, monitoring, accountability and transparency. • The consideration of environmental and social performance objectives is integrated into existing management approaches, such as partnerships and networks.
<p><i>(c) Facilities/Operations</i></p> <p>Procedures and practices integrate environmental and social considerations into management practices and support systems for operations, premises, travel, procurement and use of information technology that contributes to sustainable development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sustainability management system is established which encompasses measures for moving the United Nations entity towards climate neutrality. • Sustainable practices in building management, procurement and information and communication technologies are developed. • Sustainable practices to address areas not covered by the Sustainability Management strategy, such as social aspects of facilities and operations management, are developed.

The final section of the framework identifies collective actions to support, apply, manage and monitor and evaluate sustainability measures.

Collective Actions

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

Annex A provides a more detailed examination of the framework elements and considerations.

1.3 Phased approach

The three entry points of a common environmental and social sustainability framework present the United Nations System with a holistic approach that provides a continuum from policy development to programme and project management to facility and operations considerations. While such an approach ensures greater awareness of potential social and environmental impacts and opportunities, it was also noted to be an exceptionally large endeavour to undertake all at once, given the breadth of United Nations activities across the system. It was also noted during the inter-agency consultative process that no other institution addresses sustainability measures across all of the entry points proposed under one sustainability framework. In order to retain the benefits of a holistic and integrated framework, an incremental approach is advised.

Therefore, ongoing work will be required both collectively as well as by individual entities (as described in the framework above) and will be an iterative process that continues to evolve from experience.

In particular, due to the variability in mandates and existing sustainability measures being applied across the United Nations System, each United Nations entity will initiate the process of implementation from differing starting points, thus necessitating a flexible and phased approach. This phasing will vary by entity depending on where gaps are identified and priorities exist. Because there are many United Nations organizations that

are already implementing sustainability measures, these organizations will be initially engaged to identify opportunities to pilot the framework to garner lessons learned relatively quickly for the benefit of the larger system.

Environmental and social assessment was identified as a particular need/gap by many organizations during the safeguards review of the United Nations System. Hence the phased approach is envisioned to begin with the framework's programme/project entry point for United Nations activities, in great part because projects and programmes are generally recognized as having potential environmental or social implications. Phasing of the facilities/operations entry point will be coordinated with the Issue Management Group on Environmental Sustainability Management (IMG ESM), which has already addressed a number of the facilities/operations issues. There are, however, some elements of that entry point that will not be covered by the IMG ESM work – social issues such as labour, for example. In addition to phasing by entry point, phasing by United Nations entity is also suggested. This approach starts with the United Nations organizations most prepared to implement the sustainability framework, thereby providing access to piloting and lessons learned for others. It then progresses from United Nations entities most to least likely to have some form of environmental and social risk associated with their work.



A young girl fills a family water pot from a nearby well, refurbished by UNICEF, Korhogo, Côte d'Ivoire.

Chapter 2:

**Context for a system-wide
environmental and social
sustainability framework**

2.1 Examples of environmental and social risks and opportunities

The proposed environmental and social sustainability framework provides an approach to the management of a wide variety of environmental and social impacts and risks, encourages the identification of benefit enhancement opportunities and can reveal trade-offs that need to be considered. Environmental and social sustainability not only looks at the potential impacts resulting from an activity but also environmental and social risks to the activity.

Examples of environmental considerations include:

- Impacts on and management of ecosystems including:
 - Air and atmosphere, including climate
 - Biodiversity
 - Forest
 - Land and soil
 - Water
- Impacts on and management of non-renewable resources
- Management of hazardous waste (including production, storage, transport, treatment and disposal)
- Management of chemicals (including use and disposal)

Examples of social considerations include:

- Access and equity in the delivery/ receipt of benefits
- Access to basic health, clean water, water resources, energy, education, housing, employment, land rights and other rights (such as political association, information and justice)
- Exposure to pollution of air, land and water and to consequences of climate change
- Absence of involuntary displacement of individuals, groups or communities, and disruption of livelihoods
- Access to safe and decent working conditions
- Absence of use of forced or child labour

In all of the above, there are special concerns for the protection of vulnerable groups including children, women and girls, the elderly, indigenous peoples, disabled people and people at risk of or affected by HIV.



© UN Photo / Christopher Herwig

UNDP-built solar panels aid Liberian communities, Monrovia, Liberia.

2.2 Internal developments and expectations of environmental and social sustainability

At the first consultative workshop to consider a system-wide framework for environmental and social safeguards (June 2010), participants recommended the following basic framework for moving forward:

- Operate in the spirit of the 2005 World Summit outcomes and the Delivering as One initiative
- Provide a coherent, focused set of principles and minimum expectations for United Nations-supported initiatives with enough flexibility to fit respective operational challenges
- Strengthen organizational incentives to develop skills and expertise for advancing environmental and social sustainability
- Provide a common reference point and language for United Nations staff and for country partners and thereby reduce the number and complexity of different agency procedures at the country level
- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation processes, and enable the system to share knowledge, learn together and improve in a more systematic manner
- Demonstrate to donors and other stakeholders that the United Nations has a credible, transparent and coherent approach built on international good practices, and improve the ability of the United Nations to deliver resources to countries

Following on those recommendations, a key purpose of the environmental and social sustainability review of the United Nations System was to determine how different organizations could bring their existing practices into one consolidated framework to address the environmental and social impacts of their work more consistently and comprehensively. Review results demonstrated that there are strong underpinnings in the United Nations System for a coordinated effort in this area.

Growing recognition of the value of environmental and social sustainability is reflected in the many ways United Nations organizations have developed policies and tools to assess the social and environmental impact and risks of their work, and in the policies and initiatives to strengthen sustainable practices and measure results. A common framework for environmental and social sustainability thus provides a mechanism to strengthen the ability of individual organizations to achieve sustained results, identify opportunities and ensure that unintended adverse impacts and risks are avoided or minimized.

The protection and enhancement of human well-being is a common denominator for the United Nations System and the ultimate goal of sustainability practices. The Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Charter, international labour conventions, multilateral environmental agreements, the Law of the Sea and other international agreements such as the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals, the Rio Declaration and the Beijing Platform for Action all build on the protection and enhancement of human well-being.

Taking a leadership role in the implementation of environmental and social sustainability measures is explicit in the normative framework for the United Nations work, from the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, through major summits and conferences, to highly technical standards in legal instruments such as human rights and multilateral environmental treaties. The Convention on Biological Diversity, for example, is a normative environmental instrument that provides important social safeguards related to access to information and remedy, protection of indigenous peoples and other vulnerable groups and benefit sharing.⁷

The use of a system-wide environmental and social sustainability framework helps to enhance transparency and accountability, and strengthens harmonization in the design of initiatives. It also furthers the United Nations System response to the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action, and the 2008 Doha Declaration on Financing for Development as it supports national ownership and use of national systems.

7 Convention Article 8(j): Voluntary Guidelines for the Conduct of Cultural, Environmental and Social Impact Assessment regarding Developments Proposed to Take Place on, or which are Likely to Impact on, Sacred Sites and on Lands and Waters Traditionally Occupied or Used by Indigenous and Local Communities.

2.3 External developments and expectations of environmental and social sustainability

The use of environmental and social sustainability measures, such as safeguards, have become common practice, hence there are many models from which to learn and to assess which approach is best for the United Nations. Additionally, because donors, partners and other stakeholders often require the application of such measures in their partnerships, the common approach adopted by the United Nations needs to be flexible enough to accommodate requirements from these various partners (the potential to apply country systems or partner requirements when consistent with United Nations policy, for example). As the United Nations System continues to advocate for more joint programming and Delivering as One, it will need to continue to harmonize its policies, such as environmental and social sustainability, or risk an inability to progress in these areas.

The following outlines the key sustainability-related developments among United Nations partners and stakeholders:

Government partners. Emerging legislation on environmental and social assessments is becoming international good practice in both developed and developing countries.

Donors (bilateral and multilateral). An increasing number of donors are asking for partners and recipients to have safeguards in place, such as the United States asking for equivalency to its National Environmental Policy Act. In November 2011 the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Governing Council approved a policy on environmental and social safeguard standards that will apply to all its implementing agencies, including a number of United Nations organizations. This will require that all implementing agencies have environmental and social safeguard policies in place for projects.

As more donors ask implementing partners to have safeguards, there is concern that without such a system the United Nations will not be competitive for such projects. This concern runs particularly high in the climate change area, as \$30 billion has already been pledged over the next few years to combat climate change, with \$100 billion per year pledged after 2020.⁸

⁸ Agreed at the Copenhagen Summit in 2009.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

In addition to often having their own environmental and social sustainability systems in place, NGOs and civil society will continue to be vocal watchdogs in how activities affecting the environment and people are designed and implemented. Participation from civil society is a key element in many sustainability systems and is becoming an expected norm, along with access to public grievance mechanisms. The indigenous community, for example, responded proactively to the GEF announcement to require environmental and social safeguards of all existing and future implementing partners, but offered their own guidelines on how their interest could best be considered. Whether or not the indigenous community's guidelines are used, it illustrates the level of engagement from NGOs and affected populations on such issues.

Private sector. Companies that become members of the United Nations Global Compact – currently over 5,300 businesses in 130 countries – commit to aligning their operations and strategies with ten universally accepted principles in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption,⁹ all of which have been developed within the framework of the United Nations.

Similarly, the international investment community developed six Principles for Responsible Investment for the United Nations-backed Principles for Responsible Investment Initiative. They reflect the view that environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG) issues can affect the sustainability of investment portfolios and therefore must be given appropriate consideration by investors if they are to fulfill their duty.¹⁰ Further, sixty-five financial institutions from around the globe have adopted the Equator Principles, a voluntary set of standards for determining, assessing and managing social and environmental risk in project financing.

The private sector is also beginning to look at social criteria by assessing social sustainability in areas such as human rights, environment and labour conditions by using ISO 26000, international guidance on social responsibility.¹¹ Additionally, social labelling for products is being developed – building on existing environmental labelling¹² like Blue Angel and the European Union Ecolabel in Europe and Energy Star in the United States.

10 The Principles, established in 2006, provide a voluntary framework by which all investors can incorporate ESG issues into their decision-making and ownership practices and so better align their objectives with those of society at large. There are currently 857 signatories from more than 45 countries representing asset owners, investment managers, and professional service partners around the world. The process was coordinated by the UNEP Finance Initiative and the UN Global Compact.

11 ISO 26000, developed by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), is intended to assist organizations in contributing to sustainable development. It advises organizations to take into consideration societal, environmental, legal, cultural, political and organizational diversity, as well as differences in economic conditions, while being consistent with international norms of behaviour.

9 As monitoring is based on the companies' self-reporting, the Global Compact has been criticized by some as lacking an effective accountability mechanism.

12 Ecolabel Index is the largest global directory of ecolabels, currently tracking 371 ecolabels in 214 countries, and 25 industry sectors: <http://www.ecolabelindex.com/>.



Secretary-General visits UNDP-GEF power project in Beijing, China.

Chapter 3:

**Key findings from the inter-agency
review on environmental and
social sustainability**

3.1 Review methodology

The EMG Drafting Group for Environmental and Social Safeguards carried out a review in late 2010 to identify how United Nations entities address the environmental and social impact of their work. To date, the review has gathered information from a wide variety of United Nations sources to learn from each other's efforts, understand where the United Nations System can work together, and determine ways to overcome institutional constraints to better environmental and social performance.

A baseline framework was developed for the review to examine how safeguards are applied at three key entry points within an organization's work – policy/strategy, programmes/projects and operations/facilities. The baseline framework was subsequently revised and refined to better encompass the variety of United Nations entities and to consider implementation elements. The framework is presented in Chapter 1.

The methodology for an inter-agency review was originally conceived as a gap analysis, but it became apparent that environmental and social sustainability measures within the United Nations were so disparate and seldom viewed as sustainability systems or safeguards that it was not possible to develop a baseline on which to predicate a gap analysis. Additionally, confusion over what "safeguards" encompassed – traditionally they

are applied only to the project level – was one of the reasons the terminology was changed to "sustainability framework", which is viewed as more flexible and inclusive of various United Nations activities. In light of moving away from a gap analysis, more emphasis was placed on narrative data collection from primary source interviews,¹³ and analysis of United Nations environmental and social sustainability measures in the many forms in which they exist. These data were used to discern where there are commonalities in the United Nations System and how the organization could create a common approach.

Given the breadth of the United Nations System, it was not possible to do a complete survey of sustainability systems in use in the time given. This review therefore provides a snapshot of United Nations sustainability systems at the end of 2010 and is not an exhaustive analysis of what each United Nations agency, fund, programme and department has achieved in this area. Due to the cross-cutting nature of how environmental and social sustainability is addressed, the entry points to discuss this issue with each United Nations entity have at times required interviewing as many as five staff members from one organization – and even then only a partial picture emerged of how such considerations are incorporated into an organization's work.

¹³ Twenty-three interviews with United Nations staff from sixteen United Nations agencies plus two interviews from the Global Environment Facility were conducted between spring 2010 and January 2011.

3.2 Application of environmental and social sustainability measures across the three entry points

The review sought to understand how environmental and social sustainability measures were applied and viewed in each of the entry points outlined in the proposed sustainability framework. As data are not available for all United Nations organizations, conclusions are subject to the current findings. A brief overview of some of the more defined practices used by United Nations entities can be found in Annex B.

Policy/Strategy Management. This entry point found a moderate variety of activities, in great part because many interventions in this category either do not require environmental and social assessment or would require a minimal approach. United Nations organizations focused on normative work, such as the Conventions, had some of the most significant environmental and social assessment activities in this category. Examples of existing procedures include policies on a human rights-based approach; gender equality and gender mainstreaming; advisory missions; the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change Guidance for United Nations Development Assistance Framework Common Country Assessments; the UNDP Environmental Mainstreaming Framework; and the Ramsar Wetlands Inventory and Strategic Assessment, among others. It is anticipated that a deeper understanding of other inter-agency approaches, like the UNDG guidance, will inform the further development of a system-wide sustainability framework so as to build on lessons learned and good practice.

Programme/Project Management. This entry point, traditionally the area where safeguard practices are applied, found a significant variety of environmental and social sustainability procedures in use, in great part because projects and programmes are generally recognized as having potential environmental or social implications. The review of existing United Nations practices found a strong consistency in the application of screening and assessment processes at this entry point, which supports the case for establishing a set of minimum requirements for the framework. Examples of procedures in place include Environmental and Social Impact Assessment; Environmental Risk Identification; guidelines for field projects (including screening, scoping and management for environmental and social aspects); committees for specific thematic issues, such as gender; intra-divisional project review groups that use a mix of economic, social and environmental criteria; Environmental Review in the Programme Cycle; Rapid Environmental Impact Assessment in Disaster Response; Valuation of Natural Assets; and Vulnerability Assessments, among others.

Facilities/Operations Management. This entry point found a small and fairly cohesive variety of procedures in use, particularly in the area of facilities management. A number of entities were in the process of developing procedures in this area, such as risk management systems or sustainability initiatives. An early assumption might be drawn that this category has seen a number of recent procedures put in place – particularly environmental procedures – because of system-wide efforts such as the IMG on

Environmental Sustainability Management, Sustainable United Nations, a system-wide procurement portal (Global Marketplace) and heightened awareness of green building benefits. Examples of procedures in place include safety audits; field mission management procedures; a framework for assessing, monitoring and evaluating the environment in refugee-related operations; and guidance on including environmental considerations into logistics, meetings and offices, among others.



A military officer of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti gives food to a child, Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

© UN Photo / Marco Dormino

3.3 Where we are today

In sum, the review found an ad hoc approach, varied understanding of the purpose and benefits of applying environmental and social sustainability measures, varied expectations of what the measures could deliver and a desire by a number of entities to have the guidance and tools to develop measures that would be relevant and appropriate for their organization.

Ad hoc approach. Without an overarching framework to work within, United Nations organizations have adopted myriad ways of considering social and environmental impacts.¹⁴ The review found that a few organizations have developed comprehensive and integrated approaches to the management of environmental and social sustainability concerns. Many use a mix of review committees and staff expertise to examine environmental and social implications. Some sustainability measures respond to existing agreements within the United Nations System, such as mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes coming out of the Beijing conference, or considerations for HIV/AIDS coming out of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1308 and gender coming from Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1889. A few United Nations entities contacted felt they could not participate in the review because it was not clear to them how environmental and social safeguards or sustainability measures would apply to their work.

This ad hoc approach produces uneven policies with varying levels of information being generated, and makes coordinating with internal United Nations or external partners difficult. It can also mean that risks may be identified by chance as much as design.

Varied expectations. The review found that United Nations staff members have highly varied expectations from their respective institutions on environmental and social sustainability. On one end of the spectrum, some staff feel that the United Nations is behind the curve and needs to catch up with its sister organizations such as the World Bank, while at the same time setting a precedent for social issues such as human rights that are not well covered by others. On the other end, some staff members felt that environmental and social safeguards were not relevant to their work and that the adoption of a common approach could be a burden to them. The confusion over the term “safeguards” was one of the reasons the approach was reframed as a more inclusive environmental and social sustainability framework.

Need for a common framework. Findings from the review support the need for an environmental and social sustainability framework that works across the various mandates and activities of the United Nations System, but also underlines the need for flexibility. A common framework would build confidence through cooperation, shared resources and information, and would make the implementation of a sustainability system easier and more efficient for each agency.

¹⁴ Annex E offers examples of United Nations System sustainability practices, as well as examples of those used by other institutions.

Snapshot:**Who uses environmental and social sustainability measures?**

The following is a brief overview of United Nations and non-United Nations entities that apply environmental and social sustainability measures. A more detailed list and description can be found in Annex B.

In the 1980s, the World Bank was the first major development institution to initiate social and environmental safeguards. The International Finance Corporation (IFC) followed by adopting its Environmental and Social Safeguard Policies and its Disclosure Policy in 1998. In 2006, IFC adopted a set of sustainability standards. Multilateral development banks developed their own safeguards, largely variations on those of the IFC and World Bank. The World Bank is currently revising its safeguards based on a review carried out in 2010.

Additionally, member states have their own national environmental and social policies and systems in place (legal frameworks for environmental impact assessment and strategic environmental assessment, for example). In 2005, both developing and developed countries along with multilateral and bilateral organizations committed to harmonizing approaches to environmental assessment as part of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, and subsequently committed to use national systems (including for environmental and social assessment) to the maximum extent possible in the 2008 Accra Agenda for Action.

Environmental and social sustainability systems come in many shapes in the United Nations System and nearly every United Nations entity interviewed has some form of impact assessment in place functioning as an impact or risk assessment measure. Examples abound. The International Fund for Agricultural Development has had procedures for Environmental Assessment since 1994, and updated its Environmental and Social Assessment Procedures in 2009. The World Food Programme has integrated social and environmental sustainability in its work at the policy, project management and operational levels. The Food and Agriculture Organization employs environmental impact assessment procedures to ensure that its field operations are consistent with its sixteen governing principles. The United Nations Development Group issued a “Guidance Note on Mainstreaming Environmental Sustainability in Country Analysis and the UN Development Assistance Framework”¹⁵ in 2009. The United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations/Department of Field Support issued their “Environmental Policy for UN Field Missions” in 2009 and also employs social policies in child protection, gender and HIV. The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Carbon Facility (at UNDP) has developed, and the UN-REDD Programme (FAO, UNDP, UNEP) is developing, integrated social and environmental safeguards for their work.

Since 2000 the UN Global Compact has asked companies to embrace, support and enact a set of value-based principles. In turn, company membership in the Global Compact has in most cases become a minimum requirement in the United Nations System for engagement with the private sector. In the private sector there are also examples of environmental and social sustainability systems in the context of risk management and corporate social responsibility. Financial institutions took the lead in the private sector in 2003 with the establishment of the Equator Principles.¹⁶

15 UNDAF Guidelines include five interrelated principles, including environmental sustainability, gender equality and human rights based approach. <http://www.undg.org/index.cfm?P=220>.

16 The Equator Principles, developed on the basis of the International Finance Corporation safeguards policies, launched with 10 members and now has over 65 members. The principles serve as a banking industry framework for addressing environmental and social risks in project financing that could be applied globally and across all industry sectors. When adopting the Principles, a financial institution agrees to provide loans only to those projects whose borrowers can demonstrate their ability and willingness to comply with comprehensive processes aimed at ensuring that projects are developed in a socially responsible manner and according to sound environmental management practices. The full text of the Equator Principles can be found at www.equator-principles.com.

3.4 Benefits associated with the use of a common environmental and social sustainability framework

Interviewees and a document review identified that a common framework for the use of environmental and social sustainability measures in the United Nations System could provide the following related benefits:¹⁷

Capacity-building:

- Help United Nations agencies, funds, programmes and departments, and their implementing partners and beneficiaries, to take advantage of environmental and social opportunities, identify and manage risks and avoid or mitigate negative impacts and costly delays and corrections at the implementation stage.
- Address immediate and long-term impacts of services and processes.
- Strengthen organizational incentives to develop relevant skills and expertise.
- Provide a set of minimum requirements for institutional sustainability for United Nations-supported initiatives. This would make a very tangible contribution towards operationalizing a range of normative priorities and frameworks such as human rights treaties and multilateral environmental agreements.
- Provide a framework to facilitate shared learning across the United Nations System.
- Encourage greater engagement with, and capacity development of, country partners such as the Ministries of Environment, Social Affairs, Planning and Development.

Credibility:

- Show that the United Nations is living up to the principles it developed and advocates for.
- Demonstrate to donors that the United Nations has a credible, coherent approach, built on international best practice and standards, and improve the ability of the United Nations to access Multi-Donor Trust Funds.
- Provide countries and stakeholders with practical guidance that reflects United Nations best practice.
- Provide a coherent platform for greater leadership based on the principles of United Nations organizations and provide more consistent communication with stakeholders about the importance of environmental and social sustainability.
- Ensure that interventions and activities take a more holistic approach to sustainability by, for example, upgrading environmental procedures to address climate risk.

Risk reduction and benefit maximization:

- Work safer and smarter through an integrated approach and more informed decision-making.
- Deliver greater environmental protection and promotion of human well-being.
- Be able to better understand and weigh environmental and social trade-offs and identify opportunities.

¹⁷ This is a preliminary list only, on the basis of available information.

Simplification and coherence:

- Harmonize reporting procedures and allow the United Nations System to report coherently on how well United Nations-supported initiatives prevent harm to people and their environments and help advance human well-being.
- Provide an opportunity to agree, as a system, on particular themes and cross-cutting issues (such as indigenous peoples) for environmental and social sustainability, and to address these systematically at the earliest stages of any activity or intervention.
- Improve the coherence of sustainability measures and mainstream them into common United Nations programming and operations procedures, thereby reducing the number and complexity of different, sometimes competing, agency procedures at the country level and helping to reduce transaction costs for country partners and to increase transparency.
- Strengthen harmonization and the Delivering as One approach, currently being piloted in eight countries.
- Clarify and streamline the current mix of United Nations accountability measures, particularly in relation to national laws and procedures.

Transparency:

- Enhance transparency and accountability by providing a platform for the participation of national and local stakeholders in the design of initiatives and by giving order and consistency for organizations to address environmental and social concerns through the allocation of resources,

assignment of responsibility and ongoing evaluation of practices, procedures and processes.

- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation processes, and enable the system to share knowledge and apply lessons in a more systematic manner.
- Provide a clear basis for open assessment and recourse/arbitration.

3.5 The opportunity costs of not developing a common framework for environmental and social sustainability

A few interviewees raised the issue of what opportunities would be lost by not developing a common environmental and social sustainability framework. This perspective was also evident in some of the background documentation used in the review, such as the 2010 review of World Bank Group safeguards. Some of the possible opportunity costs of not having common framework for the United Nations System include the lack of ability to:

- Develop minimum environmental and social sustainability standards for United Nations work
- Identify and manage risks and opportunities
- Identify and strengthen weak practices
- Harness institutional memory/institutional improvement
- Provide consistent implementation
- Assess impacts and trade-offs
- Provide capacity-building for staff

3.6 Synergies between the framework for environmental and social sustainability and ongoing work led by the Issues Management Group on Environmental Sustainability Management

Senior EMG Officials noted that the work on climate neutrality and environmental sustainability management in the United Nations represents a subset of the issue of common environmental and social safeguards, and that this subset is complemented by other sustainability aspects such as those related to internal United Nations policies and operations. The consultative process on the environmental and social safeguards/sustainability was intentionally undertaken in close cooperation with the Issue Management Group on Environmental Sustainability Management.

The EMG Senior Officials meeting in September 2010 welcomed the progress made by the time-bound IMG ESM and the recent attention given to this issue by the Joint Inspection Unit in its report Environmental Profile of the United Nations System Organizations. Given the ongoing nature of the work of the IMG, the meeting decided to extend its time period until the end of 2012. In view of the need to anchor sustainability management in intergovernmental processes and in the internal management and operational structures of the United Nations System, the meeting requested the IMG to prepare a strategic plan for sustainability management in the United Nations System, which was completed in September 2011. The strategy focuses on sustainability at the facilities and operations entry point of the framework proposed in this report.

Therefore, within a wider sustainability framework for the United Nations System, the work of the IMG ESM covers, in great part, the entry point for internal facilities and operations management. The consultative process on the environmental and social sustainability framework has thus identified the need to also develop sustainability measures for the more outward-looking policy/strategy and programme/project management entry points. There may also be an opportunity to share aspects of a common support facility, given that both initiatives propose system-wide elements such as capacity-building, reporting and evaluation.



© UN Photo / Bikem Ekberzade

Children of the Halshoo Village in Sulaymaniyah Governorate participate in the summer programme offered by UNICEF.

Chapter 4:

**Future considerations for a
common environmental and
social sustainability framework**

The following implementation elements of the framework for environmental and social sustainability have been raised in consultation and research, but still require greater consideration to determine the best actions. The next phase of work will elaborate on these implementation issues.

4.1 Roadmap for agency implementation

The framework elaborated in section 1.2 of this report identifies a common environmental and social sustainability vision and objective as well as entity-specific outcomes and outputs. Therefore, it will be up to each United Nations entity to apply the framework within the context of their own organization and identify the most appropriate measures and implementation plan for moving it forward. Those with little environmental and social impact assessment expertise, for example, will require a more robust support and training mechanism. A common starting point for all United Nations entities will be to do a simple assessment to determine which areas of the sustainability framework are already covered by their own policies and procedures, and which areas are not.

This section outlines a basic roadmap, or key activities, to guide each organization through this process. (A more detailed roadmap is to be developed in the next phase of work). This will be used to indicate where each United Nations entity is in the process of implementing sustainability measures. Full implementation is likely to be highly variable and may take between two and five years.

The following activities will need to be conducted by each United Nations organization to implement environmental and social sustainability measures, such as safeguards. A system-wide support mechanism would be available to assist each United Nations entity in its implementation of the sustainability framework.

Identify leadership: Each United Nations entity would have to make a corporate decision to implement sustainability practices, and identify individuals who would be responsible for ensuring the process.

Endeavour to find the necessary resources: A budget should not be viewed as a one-time setting aside of funds, but rather it should be linked to the implementation plan to capture the full costs.

Perform organizational assessment/gap analysis: Determine if minimum requirements are already in place; if not, determine what exists and what still needs to be done to fill the gap. Assess the capacity needs to perform an organizational assessment – resources, staff and training.

Develop a roll-out and implementation plan: It is important that each United Nations entity have its own vision, objectives and targets for advancing environmental and social sustainability. Each entity may also choose to take a phased approach to roll-out (through piloting or a scaling-up process, for example).

Measure progress: Keep track of progress and ensure corrective actions for missed deadlines or inadequate work.

Develop a communications plan: Develop a plan to communicate activities and progress to staff members to ensure a sense of moving forward and an understanding of the value of the process.

Build capacity for organizational learning: Develop a plan to capture and share knowledge and lessons learned for internal and system-wide use.

Documentation/reporting process: An internal review mechanisms is needed, paired with a common reporting and accountability system.

4.2 Elements of costing for implementation

The cost to each United Nations entity to implement environmental and social sustainability measures is not known but is expected to be highly variable. Implementation of a common framework will facilitate further sharing among agencies of costing issues and resource needs, however, and a few United Nations organizations are at the early stages of testing their environmental and social assessment systems. Their experience may generate examples of costs that other United Nations entities will wish to consider.

The elements described in the roadmap above are examples of activities that all need to be fully resourced. At the project level, costs associated with assessing and managing potential environmental and social impacts will also be highly variable, and costs for management measures need to be built into project budgets. Costs related to environmental and social screening at the programme/project level occur before project implementation, so each United Nations entity needs to look at how funding can be provided to do this.

4.3 Legal and managerial considerations

Elements of the environmental and social sustainability framework will require guidance and ultimately approval across the legal bodies of the United Nations System. The issues include, but are not limited to:

- What are the legal and managerial processes and obligations to establish a system-wide framework? How can that be coordinated across different United Nations System legal requirements?
- How is the United Nations sphere of responsibility – where accountability begins and ends – best determined?
- How would a potential common accountability and grievance mechanism work across the system?
- What is the best way to conduct a common sustainability review for the United Nations System?

In the short term the environmental and social sustainability group will continue its consultative process under the EMG. The development and implementation of a common sustainability framework, however, benefits the entire United Nations System and will need dedicated funding for a small staff and a support and knowledge-sharing function.

4.4 Additional considerations

In the course of the review, interviewees raised a number of challenges they felt the United Nations System faced in operationalizing a common framework for environmental and social sustainability. These challenges generally fall into the broad areas noted below. In addition, some interviewees offered lessons from their experiences. Some of the options presented here were drawn from the interviewees' experience, and some from a review of reports and documentation from United Nations and related institutions.

Moving a common sustainability framework forward depends on engaging the political will and leadership necessary. Currently, there is no mandate for United Nations entities to adopt an environmental and social sustainability framework. A coordinated effort to develop and foster alignment with a common framework will require high-level endorsement by the principles of all participating entities, and engagement with their governing bodies. The Statement by Agency Heads is a significant step in this direction.

A successful environmental and social sustainability pilot project that demonstrates the benefits of the framework may generate support for the process. Regular monitoring and reporting will allow the United Nations System to benchmark progress and to show tangible results. Impact assessments, environmental audits and other analytical tools will also provide data from which to determine outcomes and provide transparency.

Integrating a common environmental and social sustainability framework into a United Nations System that already has so many policies, guidelines, frameworks and modes of operation may benefit from an approach that builds on what already works and focuses on commonalities rather than differences. Where possible, environmental and social sustainability procedures should integrate with existing policies and guidance, and make redundant other policies. Hence the framework is not another layer but rather a way to create cohesion and fill environmental and social sustainability gaps. United Nations activities can be broken down into three basic management levels. Choosing modalities rather than themes helps limit the number of different sustainability approaches needed. Within each entry point the environmental and social sustainability measures that are most relevant will be determined based on the degree of United Nations influence over the activity and the scope and type of activity.

The provision of support, guidance and capacity-building activities may be necessary to ensure the effective system-wide adoption of the framework. New policies and practices require time to be fully understood and adopted, and a centralized mechanism for training, monitoring and reporting will be needed to provide guidance and capacity-building to United Nations entities internalizing environmental and social sustainability measures. A common reporting system would allow for monitoring and evaluation of the impact of sustainability measures put in place across the United Nations System. Providing support and building capacity for each organization's reporting is integral to enabling the common reporting framework to be effective.

In the spirit of the Paris Declaration, a common framework would provide flexibility to utilize and develop capacities of national systems and standards to implement the United Nations environmental and social sustainability framework.¹⁸ Options to advance this idea will be further investigated in the next phase. Options for ensuring that comparable social expertise is found to complement the environmental competence held by EMG members will similarly be identified in the next phase.

The findings of the inter-agency review and consultations make a strong case for the further development of a framework for advancing environmental and social sustainability in the United Nations System. This report proposes an outline supported by inter-agency focal points and Heads of Agencies for continued development of such a framework. A number of considerations and issues require additional exploration before the next step – a more detailed strategy for internalizing sustainability measures – can be fully realized.



Urban and peri-urban agriculture to improve nutrition and livelihoods of poor families, Caracas, Venezuela.

© FAO / Giuseppe Bizzarri

¹⁸ The World Bank Group accepts existing social and environmental safeguards in high income Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries as a substitute.



© UN Photo / Eskinder Debebe

Cherry blossoms at United Nations Headquarters, New York.

Annex A:

Minimum Requirements for a system-wide environmental and social sustainability framework

The following is a discussion of minimum requirements envisioned to date for a system-wide environmental and social sustainability framework. The elements discussed here may continue to evolve as more information is gained from the pilot activities of sustainability measures being undertaken by a few United Nations entities.

A.1 Entry point definitions and typical minimum procedures

Policy/strategy. The focus of this entry point is on strategic thinking and planning and how environmental and social issues could be considered at a high level. Policy/strategy interventions will have the lightest approach of the three entry points, but in many cases some work will still be necessary to assess the environmental and social impact of the actions being recommended. Procedures in this area are often referred to as mainstreaming environmental and social issues into agreements, standards and norms. Examples are strategic initiatives under the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF); United Nations entities' support to national policy development; assistance to international conventions and treaties; and the work of the United Nations Secretariat in regard to policy setting.

A specific minimum requirement for this entry point will need to be defined and developed and may be drawn from established management tools and good practice. Typical approaches include strategic environmental and social assessments and environmental and social mainstreaming approaches. If risks are identified through an initial process, further assessments may be necessary as the policy/strategy intervention evolves.

Project/programme. This entry point applies to the management of field projects and programmes over which the United Nations has significant organizational influence, and is the entry point where traditional safeguard procedures are most likely to apply. In practice, many of those procedures already exist and are being used in parts of the United Nations System. The selection of which procedure to use will be based on the extent of the possible impact of the project. In some cases, sustainability measures or safeguards are already required in the project/programme area. The GEF Partner Agencies, for example, are required to meet environmental and social safeguards criteria established by GEF in 2011, and some countries have mandatory national environmental and social assessment processes.

A specific minimum requirement for this entry point will need to be defined and developed. The basic components of the relevant procedures will include an environmental and social screening, an assessment and a management plan. The initial screening will determine if there are risks and impacts that require further action or assessment.

Facility/operations. This entry point applies to the management of United Nations facilities and operations over which the United Nations has significant organizational influence. Facility/operations management applies to buildings, emissions reduction, fiduciary management, human resources, communications technology, meetings, procurement, travel and vehicles, among other areas. Procedures in this category often refer to internalizing sustainable development practices, such as sustainability management systems, sustainable procurement and climate neutrality. Mainly through the IMG on Environmental Sustainability Management, much is already being done in this area, such as advancements in energy efficiency, green building practices, socially responsible financial investment and the Sustainable United Nations initiative "Greening the Blue".

A.2 Minimum requirements

Given that the proposed phased approach in Chapter 1 begins with programme/project management, the focus to date has been on developing a list of minimum requirements for this entry point. As there is well-established practice in applying environmental and social assessment and safeguards at the programme/project management level, the identification of standard measures to be applied for this entry point is based on good practice.

Two activities would be considered common policy for all programmes/projects:

- Screening and categorization (the form of categorization to be determined)
- Environmental and social impact assessment when applicable

Each United Nations entity would develop a policy on when the following was or was not needed, based on the outcome of the first two activities:

- Action plan to address impacts
- Participation and stakeholder engagement
- Legal agreements/covenants
- Disclosure
- Grievance

- Monitoring and reporting (accountability framework)
- Sustainability (environmental and social performance) evaluation

For environmental and social sustainability measures to be credible, the process needs to be transparent. Hence, issues of disclosure, grievance, and environmental and social performance evaluation are raised. The consultative process on sustainability cannot, at this time, define the policies related to these mechanisms, but raises the issue of their importance for the sustainability approach to be viewed as legitimate.

The following are the minimum requirements proposed for each United Nations entity for a common sustainability approach.

Reviewing and categorizing. Programmes/projects shall be reviewed and categorized according to their potential impacts,¹⁹ using environmental and social screening criteria and tools. The need for and form of further assessment will be determined by review and categorization.

Assessing environmental and social impacts. Programmes/projects with potential environmental and social impacts shall be assessed using tools and mechanisms determined by a scoping process.

Planning tool. If negative impacts are identified, a management plan or other similar work planning tool will be used that outlines how management and mitigation measures will be targeted, implemented, monitored and reported.

Participation. Where applicable, affected communities and stakeholders must be able to participate in the screening and review processes. To proceed, an initiative must show it has adequately incorporated the concerns of affected communities, often with emphasis on the role of women.

Covenants and Articles. Covenants or articles make commitments binding. Responsibilities would be spelled out in each United Nations entity's legal agreements, where applicable, concerning compliance of activities with the sustainability measures; harmonization of national social and environmental laws and regulations with United Nations sustainability; and the roles and responsibilities of the agency and implementing partners.

Grievance Mechanism. Accountability to external stakeholders and partners may require United Nations entities to have a grievance mechanism in place.

Monitoring/Reporting. Monitoring and reporting will be addressed within the procedures of each organization, but there will be a common reporting policy and mechanism so outcomes can be assessed and compiled across the system. Sustainability monitoring and reporting procedures and mechanisms will be developed for system-wide use.

A.3 Harmonizing individual United Nations entity practices with common minimum requirements

United Nations entities would each be responsible for the implementation of environmental and social sustainability measures related to their own activities, though system-wide support could be available to assist. Where an entity already has developed environmental and social sustainability measures, common measures only need be applied where they are not already covered by the entity's own existing procedures. In the implementation phase each agency would apply a simple gap analysis to assess what existing agency-level procedures correspond to the common framework. In many cases, entities will already have procedures in place. Where there are none, the agency may create a procedure to address the missing sustainability assessment, depending on the activities of the implementing entity.

United Nations entities may find they already apply all or more assessment procedures than the common sustainability measures require in order to cover issues particular to their activities. In such cases no further procedures need be applied, but the entity would still need to report on how it addresses the environmental and social performance of its activities.

¹⁹ Three categories of potential adverse impacts are common: Significant, Limited or Minimal/None.

Annex B:

United Nations entities and institutions employing sustainability systems

The World Bank was the first major development institution to initiate social and environmental safeguards. In the 1980s, in response to public criticism of its involvement in controversial projects – such as the Polonoroeste BR-364 Amazon highway programme that uprooted indigenous communities, and the Narmada dam in India that displaced 90,000 people²⁰ – the World Bank developed a set of safeguard policies that require clients to consider the environmental and social implications of projects. These policies now require clients to conduct an environmental assessment and consider a project's potential impacts on surrounding communities.

In recent years the World Bank instituted its “country safeguard systems” approach, in which qualifying countries can substitute domestic laws for World Bank policies. This option, however, has raised questions of how well such an approach can be monitored. The World Bank established the Inspection Panel, a permanent body reporting to the Board of Directors to investigate complaints, and a separate Quality Assurance and Compliance Unit in 1999 to provide additional oversight of safeguards in Bank projects.²¹ Currently the Bank is revising its safeguards based on the findings of a 2010 review.

The International Finance Corporation (IFC), the private finance arm of the World Bank Group, adopted its Environmental and Social Safeguard Policies and its Disclosure Policy in 1998. In 2006, IFC adopted a set of “Sustainability Standards” to guide its corporate clients in environmental and social risk management. These standards extend the IFC influence far beyond financing projects, and act as de facto standards for private sector environmental and social risk management in several high impact sectors, such as oil, gas and mining. More than 118 financial institutions worldwide have adopted the Sustainability Standards into their own risk management systems.

The new IFC model has, however, received some criticism.²² The IFC Sustainability Standards are outcomes-based – where IFC clients have to meet broadly defined principles, rather than specific objectives. This approach was meant to give clients more

flexibility so they could choose which tools to use to achieve the desired results. According to NGO critics, this new system has faced implementation problems, as IFC clients fail to meet the outcomes, and IFC staff does not monitor to ensure that outcomes are met. The IFC has a large department focused on safeguard monitoring and has a Compliance Advisor Ombudsman as an additional accountability mechanism.²³

The multilateral development banks (MDBs) have followed suit and developed their own safeguards, largely variations on those of the IFC and World Bank, with some notable differences. Some of the multilateral bank safeguards are more stringent, and the Asian Development Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development include human rights in their safeguards, which the World Bank does not.

In 2006, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) approved a new Environment and Safeguard Compliance Policy that prompted environmental issues to be identified and addressed during the project design. The IDB was the first multilateral development bank to integrate climate change impacts as part of environmental analysis of key sectors. In 2009, it began to limit the greenhouse gas emissions of the projects it finances, and endorsed the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, which seeks greater transparency and accountability in contracts and payments in extractive industries. Additionally, IDB has launched sustainability scorecards for biofuel and tourism projects, approved a new operational policy for indigenous peoples in 2007 and, in 2009, began the process to update its existing Women in Development Policy with the objective of contributing to gender equality and the empowerment of women. Once this policy is approved, IDB will be the first multilateral development bank with safeguards for gender equality.

The European Investment Bank (EIB) environmental and social safeguard policies are based on the European Union approach to environmental sustainability. The principles, practices and standards derived from these policies are highlighted in the Declaration on the European Principles for the Environment, agreed in May 2006 by the EIB and four other European multilateral financing institutions.

20 Herbertson, Kirk, “What is the Future of the World Bank Group’s Environmental and Social Safeguards?” World Resources Institute, January 2010.

21 Independent Evaluation Group, Safeguards and Sustainability Policies in a Changing World: An Independent Evaluation of the World Bank Group Experience, Washington, DC, 2010.

22 Herbertson, Kirk, “What is the Future of the World Bank Group’s Environmental and Social Safeguards?”, World Resources Institute, January 2010.

23 The World Bank began a Safeguards Review November 1, 2010. The IFC Sustainability Standards and ADB PCP are also undergoing review at the time of writing this report.

Global safeguards for humanitarian action are provided under the umbrella of the [Sphere Project](#),²⁴ with a single set of minimum standards and indicators for programme design and implementation, and for four interdependent technical sectors – water and sanitation; food security and nutrition, including food aid; shelter, settlements and non-food items; and health services. Also addressed in the standards are ten cross-cutting issues – children, elderly, gender, HIV and AIDS, people with disabilities, protection, psycho-social, climate change, disaster risk reduction and the environment. The standards are based on the [Humanitarian Charter](#). While widely accepted by United Nations humanitarian organization – WFP and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, for example, have had significant input into their creation and revision – they are not required principles for operating.

An evaluation²⁵ of the Sphere Project found, encouragingly, that implementation of Sphere sustainability measures did not create additional costs for humanitarian organizations. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee²⁶ [policy statements and guidelines](#) complement the Sphere standards with specific guidelines for humanitarian settings that address, for example, protection of human rights, gender and gender-based violence, HIV and internally displaced persons.

Parallel to the sustainability process in international development, the private sector has been developing sustainability systems as a form of risk management and sustainability activities. The financial sector took the private sector lead in 2003 with the establishment of the Equator Principles,²⁷ often viewed as the gold standard for financial institutions to manage environmental and social risk.

24 The Sphere Project: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, 2004. Sphere standards are based on humanitarian principles and law. They are qualitative, universal, and applicable in any operating environment. Indicators are tools to help measure implementation of the standards.

25 Van Dyke, M. and Waldman, R., The Sphere Project Evaluation Report, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University, 2004.

26 IASC is the primary mechanism for United Nations coordination of humanitarian assistance. Together with [Executive Committee for Humanitarian Affairs](#), IASC forms the key strategic coordination mechanism among major humanitarian actors.

27 The Equator Principles are a banking industry framework for addressing environmental and social risks in project financing that could be applied globally and across all industry sectors. When adopting the Principles, a financial institution agrees to provide loans only to those projects whose borrowers can demonstrate their ability and willingness to comply with comprehensive processes aimed at ensuring that projects are developed in a socially responsible manner and according to sound environmental management practices. The full text of the Equator Principles can be found at www.equator-principles.com.

Today the oil/gas/extractive industry sector is also ramping up its efforts to work within an environmental and social sustainability framework.

The United Nations System employs a variety of approaches to environmental and social sustainability:

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) developed administrative procedures for Environmental Assessment in 1994, and has continually considered the linkages between poverty and environment in its operations. The Fund has developed a portfolio of investments devoted to environmental issues and rural poverty reduction and continues to make progress in mainstreaming environmental and social objectives into its operations (such as loans, grants and policy dialogue).

In 2009, IFAD updated its Environmental and Social Assessment Procedures (ESAP) by drawing on lessons learned from past experience on environmental and social issues by IFAD and its partners. At the policy and programme levels, strategic environmental assessments (SEA) are used to identify key environmental and social issues in the earliest stages of decision-making. Project impact assessments address specific environmental and social issues, informed by the considerations raised in the SEA. Prior to loan negotiation and board approval of the country programme, environmental and social assessment stages involve: Environmental Screening and Scoping (ESS); Environment and Social Review Note (ESRN) development; Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) as needed; and ESRN and ESIA review and recommendations. The ESAP works in a complementary fashion with other IFAD initiatives which include environment and natural resource management policy; climate change strategy; quality enhancement guidance notes; risk management of programmes; and accountability and transparency.

As part of the United Nations Development Group, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) adheres to the five integrated principles for United Nations development cooperation and applies related UNDG guidance. In line with this, UNDP has developed a proposal to update its programme and project management policies and procedures with an environmental and social screening and review requirement. The proposal includes a brief overarching policy statement making environmental sustainability, including climate change resilience, a cross-cutting issue for all UNDP programmes and projects; and a complementary environmental and social screening procedure to determine whether a project requires further environmental and social review and management. Additionally, UNDP has other sustainability elements in place – a gender equality strategy, indigenous peoples policy, environmental procurement guidelines and a “Greening UNDP” initiative.

The MDG Carbon Facility promotes emissions reduction projects and improves access to carbon financing. The facility provides technical assistance, helping governments and project proponents design and develop projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and ensures that the projects meet the Kyoto Protocol agreed standards while delivering benefits to the environment and to human development. As of 2010, no project Memorandum of Understanding is signed between the Facility and its partners until an agreement to abide by a set of four environmental and social principles is signed. These principles cover human rights, labour standards, environmental protection and anti-corruption.

United Nations Environment Programme/Global Environment Facility (UNEP/GEF) is currently in the process of developing environmental and social safeguards for GEF-funded projects. The process will include screening checklists for initial project development and appraisal stages. In addition, UNEP has upwards of 20 policies/agreements/decisions that require UNEP to address social issues.

The UN-REDD Programme is currently in the process of developing environmental and social principles. The programme, a joint effort by UNDP, UNEP and FAO, is using existing United Nations policies and standards as a starting point for developing the principles, such as UNDP policies on good governance, gender, human rights and indigenous peoples' rights and the MDG Carbon Facility Due Diligence Tool. By mid-2011, UN-REDD had developed a principles and criteria framework that is being tested on a pilot basis with countries participating in the UN-REDD Programme. The principles and criteria cover concerns related to democratic governance, stakeholder rights (including indigenous peoples' rights), sustainable livelihoods, policy coherence and the protection of forests, biodiversity and ecosystem services. A social and environmental risk identification and mitigation tool, based on the principles and criteria, will be developed next.

Sustainability measures emerge in a number of forms in the United Nations System and do not need to be a list of thematic principles to be effective. While the above examples clearly address a set of environmental and social criteria, other parts of the United Nations have adopted policies and guidelines that offer similar functions. For example:

The United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations/Department of Field Support (DPKO/DFS) issued the Environmental Policy for United Nations Field Missions in 2009. The DPKO/DFS environmental policy²⁸ requires that each United Nations mission establish environmental objectives and operate under a code of environmental stewardship. This would include criteria for environmen-

tal assessments in conflict settings, environmental baseline studies, and EIA procedures. Development and humanitarian partners may also conduct Post-Conflict Needs Assessments with safeguard measures.²⁹ As in the development area, there is no single set of social standards for post-conflict and transition settings, though DPKO/DFS does have separate child protection, gender and HIV policies.

The Food and Agriculture Organization employs environmental impact assessment procedures to ensure that its field operations are consistent with its sixteen governing principles. These principles address various aspects of environmental and social impact, such as management of biological diversity for food and agriculture, management of forests and trees, management of climate change impacts and involuntary resettlement.

The United Nations Development Group issued guidance notes on mainstreaming environmental sustainability and on climate change, in the context of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). This guidance provides sustainability measures at the policy level but highlights the need for each United Nations agency to then implement environmental assessment at the programme and project level. While there is no equivalent compilation of guidance for social issues in development as there is for environmental considerations, there are five cross-cutting programming principles that include gender and a human rights based approach, and a range of thematic issues, for which there are Chief Executive Board or UNDG-approved guidelines. These are not standardized, but they all share a basis in international human rights treaties and instruments.³⁰ Many individual UNDG organizations³¹ are using environmental and social screening and assessment measures based on best practice. While the terminology and content differ, most have or are developing minimum requirements to screen for negative impacts, with recourse to more detailed assessment and modification.

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands administers Ramsar Advisory Missions, which include experts relevant to the issues being addressed, and which assess the situation, look for a solution and make recommendations. A key element to the mission is to set up capacity-building by training local people, local authorities and experts at the national level on how to apply and use safeguards.

29 United Nations, PCNA-TRF Tool Kit, Note on Addressing Environmental Issues, 2009. In particular, see Annex III for examples of environmental integration in recent PCNAs.

30 These include the human rights conventions and instruments of the specialized agencies, such as the International Labour Organization and the World Health Organization.

31 The United Nations Development Group unites the 32 United Nations funds, programmes, agencies, departments and offices that play a role in development.

28 Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and Department of Field Support (DFS), Environmental Policy for UN Field Missions, June 2009.

The World Food Programme (WFP) has integrated social and environmental safeguards in its work at the policy, project management and operational levels, where it becomes a way of operating rather than an additional process to employ. The organization aims for proactive engagement related to social and environmental issues. The World Food Programme is integrating a carbon credit initiative³² into its inter-

ventions, providing fuel-efficient stoves to ensure that beneficiaries have access to cooking processes that do not damage the environment,³³ and is at an early stage of proactive engagement with its private sector partners to create environmentally neutral packaging. In addition, WFP has policies that function as safeguards for gender, children and HIV/AIDS.



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'Greening The Blue – Visions of a Sustainable United Nations'. Photography Competition.

32 WFP has identified climate change as one of the major factors contributing to the vulnerability of populations to food insecurity. The organization views carbon financing as a proactive and innovative approach to encourage resilience-building for community level disaster preparedness, mitigation and adaptation projects that support sustainable livelihoods through regular WFP programmes.

33 The Safe Access to Firewood and Alternative Energy in Humanitarian Settings (SAFE) stoves initiative was rolled out in 2010 and is expected to reach up to 6 million refugees, internally displaced people and returnees located in 36 nations.

Annex C:

World Health Organization case study:

Development of an environmental and social sustainability system³⁴

Sustainability system. The World Health Organization (WHO) environmental management procedure, developed in 2009, is being applied on a pilot basis at the programme and project level.

The WHO definition of “environment” is broad, and includes coverage of both the natural/physical and social/human environments. Therefore social aspects, such as occupational health and safety, are also addressed.

Reason for developing an institutional sustainability system. Environmental factors directly influence health and well-being. An estimated 25 per cent of the global burden of disease is attributed to environmental factors. As a global public health agency, WHO has a mandate to support actions that address environmental threats to health. The fact that WHO is managing the environmental impacts of its own activities demonstrates an important contribution to its core health mandate. It also provides an important opportunity for WHO to demonstrate leadership about how the health sector can contribute to sustainable development goals and objectives.

The introduction of the WHO environmental management procedure was a response to growing demands from countries, donors and partner agencies, some of whom have included provisions for the use of environmental and social sustainability measures in their partnership agreements with WHO.

Overall approach. The initial (pilot) phase was based on a practical learn-by-doing approach. This involved putting in place a procedure that would allow for the environmental assessment and follow-up of technical projects. An environmental services team was also created to provide support to projects as they passed through each stage of the environmental procedure.

The use of an incremental approach has allowed for the establishment of a process that was fairly light while at the same time satisfied donor/partner environmental requirements. In keeping the procedure simple, the environmental services team has been able to work with relevant technical units to promote gradual uptake and buy-in. This simplicity has been key in helping to reduce resistance and dispel perceptions that the application of the environmental management procedure would substantially add to existing heavy workloads.

From the beginning the procedure was designed with the view that it would eventually need to be reviewed and considered for expansion. Following a two-year pilot phase of implementation, a scenario analysis will be undertaken to consider how, if and by what means the organization could scale up the application of its environmental procedure as part of a comprehensive environmental and social sustainability system.

Funding. Costs associated with the administration and delivery of support services (technical advisory services, training and systems development) were shared across all projects that use the procedure.

Costs associated with the implementation of environmental management measures are borne by the respective projects, if required. Following an initial period of negotiation with respective donors, “environmental management activities” was accepted as a budget line item in the projects that were included in the pilot. This was key to allowing projects to have the flexibility needed to reallocate project funds for this purpose if needed.

Priority components. The areas of focus during early stage of development included:

- Putting in place an environmental assessment/management procedure
- Training technical staff in WHO Headquarters and Regions on the use of the procedure

³⁴ The World Health Organization is in its pilot phase of implementing its environmental management procedure and notes that its finding to date may evolve as more experience is developed.

- Establishing a support and knowledge-sharing function to support the screening of projects; the development of environmental management plans, environmental monitoring and reporting; and the running of a helpdesk, training and ad hoc advisory services

The current system in place is a comprehensive environmental assessment procedure that includes:

- Environmental screening/classification
- Environmental management planning
- Monitoring and reporting
- Sustainability evaluation

Project managers apply the procedure with technical support from the environmental services team. Environmental reporting is conducted with regular technical reporting.

Simpler component. As a normative agency, WHO generally does not implement projects that have complex environmental and social management issues such as those generated by large infrastructure development projects (such as resettlement, cultural heritage and safety of dams).

More difficult components. Strategies for dealing with more difficult components include:

- Identifying the limits of the responsibility in managing the environment impacts of WHO projects (in keeping with the normative nature of WHO core functions)
- Understanding the environmental impacts of public health programmes in specific country contexts (such as effects on fragile ecosystems) and understanding indirect versus direct impacts generated by projects
- Developing a system for managing the environmental impacts of population-based health activities

Operational. Adapting the new approach to the WHO business culture entails advancing from the use of an environmental procedure to an environmental and social sustainability approach that is integrated into the organization's core business model.

Status. The environmental procedure is currently being applied to a subset of WHO projects, and a scenario analysis is under way to identify issues and opportunities for potential scale-up and establishment of an environmental and social sustainability approach that addresses other entry points defined in the proposed common framework.

Resources used so far. Four full-time people (P4, P3, two administrative); and budget (travel, training, investment in systems including project/information management system).

Classification: The World Health Organization uses a two-tiered system. The first tier is yes/no/deferral; the second, basic/moderate/comprehensive. The same system is used for reporting. The classification system is currently used to trigger resource allocation and is not tied to disclosure or stakeholder engagement requirements as is the case in some of the development banks.

The comprehensive classification triggers further review, then if deemed relevant, an environmental impact assessment. All projects that are classified as moderate or comprehensive build an environmental management plan. Basic projects can use an environmental monitoring and reporting form in lieu of an environmental management plan. Of 400 projects that have so far been screened, 35 per cent were classified "yes" in the first tier, and 80 per cent of those were classified "basic" in the second tier.

Cost of environmental management measures. The per project costs of mitigating environmental issues have so far been absorbed by existing project budgets.

Institutional support. Overall leadership and management responsibility for the WHO internal environmental assessment activities rests with the organization's general management group. The Public Health and Environment Department is providing technical advice and support services to projects as needed.

Annex D:

List of review interviewees

Department of Field Support

Sophie Ravier, Environmental Officer

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Alemneh Dejene, Team Leader, Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change Adaptation, Climate, Energy and Tenure Division

Global Environment Facility

Sekou Toure, Conflict Resolution Commissioner, Global Environment Facility
Andrew Velthaus, Senior Policy Officer, Global Environment Facility

International Fund for Agricultural Development

Sheila Mwanundu, Senior Technical Adviser-Environment and NRM

The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

Anada Tiega, Secretary General

United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

Emmanuel Chinyamakobvu, Programme Officer, Policy and Advocacy on Global Issues, Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

United Nations Development Programme

Marcel Alers, Principal Technical Adviser, Climate Change Mitigation, Environment and Energy Group, Bureau of Development Policy
Charles McNeill, Senior Policy Adviser, Environment and Energy Group, Bureau of Development Policy
Holly Mergler, Programme Analyst, Environment and Energy Group, Bureau of Development Policy
Matt Spannagle, Technical Manager, MDG Carbon Facility

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Nicholas Bonvoisin, Secretary to the Espoo Convention

United Nations Environment Programme

Sheila Aggarwal-Khan, Officer-in-Charge of the Quality Assurance Section

United Nations Environment Programme/Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch

Julien Aguzzoli, Research Assistant

UN Global Compact

Melissa Powell, Head, Strategy and Partnerships

UN-Habitat

Dorothy Mutizwa-Mangiza, Chief, Programme Planning & Coordination Unit
Mohamed Robleh, Risk Management Focal Point
Raf Tuts, Chief, Urban Environmental Planning Branch

UNICEF

Doreen Lobo

United Nations Industrial Development Organization

Georgios Anestis, Senior GEF Coordinator

United Nations Office for Project Services

Niels Ramm, UNGM Project Manager/ Procurement Officer

UN-REDD Programme

Elspeth Halverson, Consultant
Linda Rosengren, Natural Resources Officer

United Nations World Food Programme

Valerie Guarnieri, Director Programme Division, Operations Department

World Health Organization

Michaela Pfeiffer, Technical Officer, Focal Point for WHO Environmental Management Procedure

Annex E:

Examples of the founding documents and principles of existing environmental and social sustainability systems

Founding Documents for Key Environmental and Social Sustainability Principles

United Nations Entities:

UN Global Compact

Mandates:

- ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work
- Rio Declaration on Environment and Development
- United Nations Convention Against Corruption
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Environmental principles:

- Principle 7: support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges
- Principle 8: undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility
- Principle 9: encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies

Social principles:

- Principle 1: support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights
- Principle 2: make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses
- Principle 3: uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining
- Principle 4: eliminate all forms of forced and compulsory labour
- Principle 5: effectively abolish child labour
- Principle 6: eliminate discrimination with respect to employment and occupation
- Principle 10: work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery

International Fund for Agricultural Development

Principles:

- Scaled-up investment in multiple-benefit approaches for sustainable agricultural intensification
- Recognition and greater awareness of the economic, social and cultural value of natural assets
- Climate-smart approaches to rural development
- Greater attention to risk and resilience in order to manage environmental and natural resource shocks
- Engagement in value chains to drive green growth
- Improved governance of natural assets for poor rural people by strengthening land tenure and community-led empowerment
- Livelihood diversification to reduce vulnerability and build resilience for sustainable natural resource management
- Equality and empowerment for women and indigenous peoples in managing natural resources
- Increased access by poor rural communities to environment and climate finance
- Environmental commitment through changing its own behavior

MDG Carbon Facility

Primary mandates:

- ILO conventions (details below)
- United Nations Charter
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Secondary mandates:

- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
- Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage

- Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries
- Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict
- Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage
- Convention on Biological Diversity
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
- Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property
- Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage
- Convention on the Rights of the Child
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families
- ILO Convention 87 (freedom of association)
- ILO Convention 98 (right to collective)
- ILO Convention 120 (hygiene)
- ILO Convention 155 (occupational safety and health)
- ILO Convention 161 (occupational health services)
- ILO Convention 162 (asbestos)
- ILO Convention 174 (Prevention of Major Industrial Accidents)
- United Nations Convention against Corruption
- World Bank Safeguards

Environmental principles:

- Principle 9: The project takes a precautionary approach in regard to environmental challenges and is not complicit in practices contrary to the precautionary principle.

- Principle 10: The project does not involve and is not complicit in significant conversion or degradation of critical natural habitats, including those that are legally protected, officially proposed for protection, identified by authoritative sources for their high conservation value or recognized as protected by traditional local communities.

Social principles:

- Principle 1: The project respects internationally proclaimed human rights including dignity, cultural property and uniqueness and rights of indigenous people. The project is not complicit in Human Rights abuses.
- Principle 2: The project does not involve and is not complicit in involuntary resettlement.
- Principle 3: The project does not involve and is not complicit in the alteration, damage or removal of any critical cultural heritage.
- Principle 4: The project respects the employees' freedom of association and their right to collective bargaining and is not complicit in restrictions of these freedoms and rights.
- Principle 5: The project does not involve and is not complicit in any form of forced or compulsory labour.
- Principle 6: The project does not employ and is not complicit in any form of child labour.
- Principle 7: The project does not involve and is not complicit in any form of discrimination based on gender, race, religion, sexual orientation or any other basis.
- Principle 8: The project provides workers with a safe and healthy work environment and is not complicit in exposing workers to unsafe or unhealthy work environments.
- Principle 11: The project does not involve and is not complicit in corruption.
- Principle 12: The project adopts a transparent and inclusive approach and respects the rights of local communities and other stakeholders to be informed so as to ensure their meaningful participation.

Special Representative on Human Rights and Business (Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework. The Framework rests on three pillars: The State Duty to Protect Human Rights; The Corporate Responsibility to Respect Human Rights; and The need for greater Access to Remedy for victims of business-related abuse.)

Mandates:

- International Bill of Human Rights
- ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work

Principles:

- States must protect against human rights abuse.
- States should set out clearly the expectation that all business enterprises domiciled in their territory and/or jurisdiction respect human rights throughout their operations.
- States should take additional steps to protect against human rights abuses by business enterprises that are owned or controlled by the State.
- States should exercise adequate oversight.
- States should promote respect for human rights.
- States should support business respect for human rights in conflict-affected areas.
- Business enterprises should respect human rights.
- State-based judicial mechanisms should be provided.
- State-based non-judicial grievance mechanisms should be provided.
- Non-State-based grievance mechanisms should be provided.
- Effectiveness criteria for non-judicial grievance mechanisms should be provided.

UN-REDD Programme

Primary mandates:

- UNFCCC AWG LCA³⁵ – REDD + Safeguards
- United Nations Common Understanding on the Human Rights Based Approach to Development Cooperation

Secondary mandates:

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

- International Convention on Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination
- ILO Convention 169 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples
- UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage
- UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage
- United Nations Convention against Corruption
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- UNDG Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers
- UNDG Indigenous Peoples Policy
- UNDP “Country-led Governance Assessments” (National multi-stakeholder governance assessment for REDD+ are modeled on this.)
- UNDP Policy of Engagement with Indigenous Peoples

Good governance criteria:

- Criterion 1: Integrity of Fiduciary and Fund Management Systems – The programme has assessed and addressed corruption and fiduciary risks.
- Criterion 2: Transparency and Accountability – programme administration and REDD+ readiness activities are carried out in an accountable and transparent manner.
- Criterion 3: Stakeholder participation – All relevant stakeholders are identified and enabled to participate in a meaningful and effective manner; special attention is given to most vulnerable groups and the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples.
- Criterion 4: Avoidance of involuntary resettlement – The programme is not involved and not complicit in involuntary resettlement.
- Criterion 5: Traditional Knowledge – The programme is not involved and not complicit in alteration, damage or removal of any critical cultural heritage or the erosion of traditional knowledge.
- Criterion 6: Social and political well-being – Social and political implications are assessed and adverse impacts on social and political structures mitigated. Benefits are shared equitably.

35 Chapter VI, FCCC/AWGLCA/2010/14

- Criterion 7: Low-Emission, Climate Resilience Development Coherence – The programme coheres with relevant strategies and policies at all levels of government.

**Non-United Nations Entities:
African Development Bank**

Mandates:

- Safeguards are based on Bank policies on environment, involuntary re-settlement, disclosure, and crosscutting issues (poverty, population, NGOs, gender).
- The Bank is in the process of developing an Integrated Safeguards System (ISS) that includes Operational Safeguards and updates its ESAP.

Principles:

- Environmental Policy and ESA guidelines address poverty, environment, population, gender and participation.
- ESIA added health in 2003.
- Poverty Reduction Policy addresses gender, water and sanitation, vulnerable groups.
- Operational safeguards include:
 - ESA
 - Land acquisition and voluntary resettlement
 - Environmental flow and ecological restoration
 - Pollution prevention, control and management
 - Labour conditions
 - Health and safety
 - Operational safeguard guidelines
 - Environmental and social assessment procedures

Earth Charter

Principles:

- Respect and care for the community of life
- Ecological integrity
- Social and economic justice
- Democracy, nonviolence and peace

Equator Principles

Mandate: Largely based on IFC Sustainability Standards and Guidance Notes

Principles:

- Principle 1: Review and Categorization
- Principle 2: Social and Environmental Assessment
- Principle 3: Applicable Social and Environmental Standards
- Principle 4: Action Plan and Management System
- Principle 5: Consultation and Disclosure
- Principle 6: Grievance Mechanism
- Principle 7: Independent Review
- Principle 8: Covenants
- Principle 9: Independent Monitoring and Reporting
- Principle 10: EPFI Reporting

Global Environment Facility

Mandate: Based on World Bank safeguards

Safeguards cover the following areas:

- Environmental assessment
- Natural habitats
- Pest management
- Safety of dams
- Involuntary resettlement
- Indigenous peoples
- Physical cultural resources

International Financial Corporation/Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency

Sustainability standards:

- PS1: Social and Environmental Assessment and Management System
- PS2: Labour and Working Condition
- PS3: Pollution Prevention and Abatement
- PS4: Community Health, Safety and Security
- PS5: Land Acquisition and Involuntary Resettlement

- PS6: Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Natural Resource Management
- PS7: Indigenous Peoples
- PS8: Cultural Heritage

Mary Robinson Foundation: Guiding Principles for Climate Justice

Mission: To put justice and equity at the heart of responses to climate change, particularly those concerned with how best to respond and adapt to the challenge that it poses for the poorest and most vulnerable.

Principles:

- Respect and protect human rights.
- Share benefits and burdens equitably.
- Harness the transformative power of education and research.
- Ensure that decisions on climate change are transparent and accountable.
- Highlight the gender dimension.
- Use effective partnerships to secure climate justice.

Principles for Responsible Investment (An investor initiative in partnership with the UNEP Finance Initiative and the UN Global Compact)

In 2005 the United Nations Secretary-General invited a group of the world’s largest institutional investors to join a process in developing the Principles for Responsible Investment. Individuals representing 20 institutional investors from 12 countries agreed to participate in the Investor Group. The Group accepted ownership of the Principles and had the freedom to develop them as they saw fit.

The Group was supported by a 70-person multi-stakeholder group of experts from the investment industry, intergovernmental and governmental organizations, civil society and academia.

Principles:

- P1: We will incorporate environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG) issues into investment analysis and decision-making processes.
- P2: We will be active owners and incorporate ESG issues into our ownership policies and practices.

- P3: We will seek appropriate disclosure on ESG issues by the entities in which we invest.
- P4: We will promote acceptance and implementation of the Principles within the investment industry.
- P5: We will work together to enhance our effectiveness in implementing the Principles.
- P6: We will each report on our activities and progress towards implementing the Principles.

Multilateral Development Banks

The multilateral development banks initially based their safeguards on the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the International Development Association, but some have since customized and expanded these policies. The Inter-American Development Bank seems to have the most forward-thinking policies: it was the first multilateral development bank to integrate climate change impacts as part of environmental analysis of key sectors. In 2009, it began to limit the greenhouse gas emissions of the projects it finances, and endorsed the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, and is the first MDB with a safeguard for gender equity.

Inter-American Development Bank safeguards cover the following areas:

- The environment
- Involuntary resettlement
- Indigenous peoples
- Gender equality in development

Sphere Project and Humanitarian Charter

The Humanitarian Charter is based on the principles and provisions of international humanitarian law, international human rights law, refugee law and the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations in Disaster Relief. The Minimum Standards and the key indicators were developed using broad networks of practitioners in each of the sectors. Most of the standards and the indicators consolidate and adapt existing knowledge and practice. Over 400 organizations in 80 countries have contributed to the development of the Minimum Standards and key indicators.

The Humanitarian Charter encompasses a set of Minimum Standards for programme design and implementation, and for four interdependent technical sectors: water and sanitation; food security and nutrition, including food aid; shelter, settlement and non-food items; and health services.

The Charter also identifies 10 cross cutting issues that have relevance to all sectors: children, elderly, gender, HIV and AIDS, people with disabilities, protection, psycho-social, climate change, disaster risk reduction and the environment.

Bases for the Humanitarian Charter:

- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
- Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Convention on the Status of Refugees
- Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol I and Additional Protocol II of the Geneva Conventions
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Principles:

- The right to life with dignity
- The distinction between combatants and non-combatants
- Non-refoulement

World Bank

In 1989 the World Bank introduced Operational Policies and Bank Procedures for environmental assessment of Bank-financed projects, which were updated as Operational Directive 4.01 in 1991. The Bank adopted an involuntary resettlement policy as an Operational Manual Statement in 1980, which was revised in 1990. Other environmental and social policies were added over time to address individual environmental and social risks. Ten "do no harm" safeguard policies were established in 1997, some of which have been updated since.

Operational policies cover the following areas:

- Environmental assessment
- Natural habitats
- Pest management
- Forests
- Safety of dams
- Physical cultural resources
- Indigenous peoples
- Involuntary resettlement

Legal safeguards cover:

- Projects on international waterways
- Projects in disputed areas

Annex F:

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

DPKO/DFS	Department of Peacekeeping Operations/Department of Field Support
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EMG	Environment Management Group
ESG	Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GEF	Global Environment Facility
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFC	International Finance Corporation
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMG ESM	Issue Management Group on Environmental Sustainability Management
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDG	United Nations Development Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UN-REDD	United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries
WFP	United Nations World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

Membership of the Environment Management Group

CBD	Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity
CITES	Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CMS	Secretariat of the Convention on Migratory Species
DFS	United Nations Department of Field Support
ECA	Economic and Social Commission for Africa
ECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
ECLAC	Economic and Social Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ESCWA	Economic and Social Commission for West Asia
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GEF	Global Environment Facility
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMO	International Maritime Organization
UN/ISDR	Secretariat of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
ITC	International Trade Centre
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
Ramsar	Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands
SCB	Secretariat of the Basel Convention
World Bank	The World Bank Group
UNCCD	Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDESA/DSD	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for Sustainable Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP*	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UN-HABITAT	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training and Research
UNU	United Nations University
UPU	Universal Postal Union
WFP	World Food Program
WHO	World Health Organization
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization
WMO	World Meteorological Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization
WTO	World Tourism Organization

* provides the secretariat for the EMG



United Nations System contributors: Basel Convention, DPKO/DFS, FAO, GEF, IFAD, OHCHR, Ramsar Convention, UNCCD, UNDP, UNECE, UNEP, UNESCO, UN Global Compact, UN-Habitat, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNODC, UNOPS, UNOV, UN-REDD, WFP, WHO, The World Bank Group.

The Environment Management Group (EMG) is a United Nations System-wide coordination body. It furthers inter-agency **Cooperation** in support of the implementation of the international environmental and human settlement agenda. Its **Membership** consists of the specialized agencies, programmes and organs of the United Nations including the secretariats of the Multilateral Environmental Agreements. It is chaired by the Executive Director of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and supported by a secretariat provided by UNEP. More information on the EMG can be found at www.unemg.org.



UNITED NATIONS