
6th Meeting of the Consultative Process for Environmental and Social Sustainability in the UN System	EMG/
13- 14.07.2016	18.09.2016
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304 E 45 th Street, 9 th Floor, Rio Room New York	

Report

Introduction

The sixth meeting of the EMG Consultative Process on Environmental and Social Sustainability ESS took place in New York from July 13th to July 14th, 2016. The meeting was co-chaired by Ms. Brennan Van Dyke (UNEP) and Mr. Tim Scott (UNDP). The list of participants is provided in Annex I and the adopted agenda is provided in Annex II.

1) Opening of the meeting and adoption of the Agenda

EMG Director, Mr. Elliott Harris opened the meeting recognizing the success of the pilot project, testing the utility of the ESS Framework and Guide, and encouraged the meeting participants to reflect on the links between the ESS Framework and the 2030 Agenda as well as on the ultimate objective of Consultative Process.

The co-chairs reminded the meeting participants of the need to come up with recommendations for the future work of the Consultative Process to be presented to the EMG Senior Officials Meeting in September 2016.

The agenda for the meeting was adopted.

2) Update on progress made in the Consultative Process on enhancing Environmental and Social Sustainability in the UN System

The EMG Secretariat provided an overview of the work of the Consultative Process.

Key considerations:

- Elliott Harris inquired about the possibility to create a community of practice which would promote exchange in knowledge and experience on environmental and social sustainability between UN entities. Such a platform would be useful in particular for those agencies that are starting their internal sustainability work.
- Considering the future of the Consultative Process and mechanisms through which internal sustainability management could be coordinated in the future, the option to create an IMG or a similar facility as the Sustainable United Nations (SUN) for safeguards /sustainability in programmes and projects was mentioned. Another option would be to look at the feasibility in adding this coordination work as a responsibility under the UNDG.
- The pilot phase pointed to the importance of high-level support for successful integration of ESS measures in an organization, which is why it would be important to maintain a reporting line to the senior officials / heads of agencies through the EMG or the CEB.

3) Updates by UN agencies on their recent ESS developments and activities

Agencies were invited to provide updates on their work on ESS, as well as to share observations and thoughts related to the implementation of the Framework.

Key considerations:

- It was recalled that UN system organizations, including at the highest level, had repeatedly pledged their commitment to environmental sustainability and to achieving the goal of climate neutrality in the UN system (i.e System-wide Roadmap for UN Climate Neutrality)
- The meeting participants saw a benefit in having a holistic ESS Framework with a set of basic standards, templates and tools and considered the recommendations of the pilot synthesis report interesting and helpful. The importance of the SUN at the work on the facilities/operations entry point was highlighted.
- Reporting on environmental and social sustainability was discussed and it was proposed that the Consultative Process could produce an overview of the work on ESS reporting in the UN system. The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) was referred to as an instrument divided into three principal elements similar to the entry points of the ESS Framework, that pulls all parts together with a reporting mechanism that requires the definition of indicators and continued improvement. GRI has a public sector supplement that can be useful in the UN context. ISO and GRI are not competing with each other but rather complement one another. While ISO offers a management system standard, GRI offers a system for transparency and a comprehensive menu of indicators among which the organizations are able to choose which are relevant for them.
- The usefulness in sharing experiences and resources, especially with regard to the development of policies, safeguards and grievance mechanisms was mentioned. It was suggested that the future of the process could be in the implementation of ESS measures at the field level and the creation of a community of practice for this purpose was supported. The idea of a common resource library where information could be made available on e.g. the standards agencies use, was supported.
- The creation of a shared database of prequalified ESS experts was supported by some.

4) Report and lessons learned from the pilot project testing the Framework and Interim Guide in seven volunteer agencies

This EMG Secretariat provided a summary of the pilot project and its results in the form of a PowerPoint Presentation (Annex III *to be added*). The feedback and thoughts expressed in this section may be used when the Guide is revised.

Key considerations:

- Agencies that participated in the pilot phase shared that the pilot process had helped to identify gaps, challenges and areas where efforts needed to be enhanced. In-house partnerships and closer cooperation between divisions were observed as a result of the pilot, serving as an effective driver to promote ESS at the management level. The pilot had further been useful in strengthening policy coherence, understanding the added value of a grievance system and identifying where there is a need for additional financial resources.
- The Guide and its self-assessment procedure can help an organization at the beginning of the process to understand how ESS efforts could be structured. It can support agencies in their development of strategic frameworks on environmental sustainability.
- While the pilot did show that the Framework is useful, it did not succeed in facilitating the expected knowledge exchange among participating agencies. Going forward, this exchange of experience can take place for example in the online forum created for the group, where issues of common concern can be discussed in deeper detail.
- The challenge for some of the pilot agencies to continue the work where the pilot left off without additional support was recognized and the possibilities to tap into the pool of environmental expertise that exists within the UN family was deliberated.
- The need to strengthen the social dimension of the Framework was acknowledged, as this aspect is not dealt with within the frames of any other coordination mechanism of framework. It was suggested to have a look at, for example, existing materials in labor and anticorruption standards.

5) Progress made at the facility/operations entry point – links to the ongoing work under the Sustainable UN facility and the IMG on Environmental Sustainability Management

Emma Håkansson gave a presentation about the introduction and application of Environmental Management Systems (EMS) in the UN system (*Annex IV to be added*).

Key considerations:

- The acronym ESS was clarified to refer to Environmental and Social Sustainability (as opposed to Environmental and Social Safeguards)
- It was further clarified that in the UN system, EMS have so far been introduced at the facilities/operations entry point of the ESS Framework. EMS, however, has the potential to cover all three entry points.

6) Future of the Sustainability Framework and the Consultative Process

Mr. Cornis Van der Lugt gave a presentation (*Annex V to be added*) about the results of the pilot process and how these can guide the work of the Consultative Process going forward, highlighting the link to SDG 17 on partnerships for implementations and stressing the need to align the work under the Framework with the 2030 Agenda. Meeting participants were requested to consider the objectives of the Consultative Process going forward, identifying the needs and the desired level of ambition.

Key considerations:

- The need for a neutral body that facilitates work across agency borders and knowledge sharing was recognized. The facilitation of knowledge and information sharing was identified as a core task of the Consultative Process. Good practices could be sought, e.g. from the collaboration on biodiversity among MFIs that was mentioned as a good example of a functioning platform for information sharing.
- Participants saw a need to intensify collaboration at the programmes/projects entry point, to explore the possibility to develop common approach or shared elements with regard to e.g. standards and safeguards. A similar platform as the IMG on Environmental Sustainability Management with focus on ESS at the programmes/projects entry point was suggested. The EMG Secretariat explained that a separate focus on the programmes/projects entry point has so far not been materialized as this has not been a priority for some members of the process. Furthermore, it was clarified that an IMG is expected to lead to specific outputs within a limited timeframe. The desired community of practice that would offer support to individual organizations would be more of a service that goes beyond the functions of an IMG. The Sustainable UN that manages the IMG on Environmental Sustainability Management is not part of the EMG.
- The idea of piloting a common approach to standards at the programmes/projects entry point. Some commonality may exist already, considering that a number of organizations have worked with the same consultants supporting their development of safeguards. The UN system could look to the structure developed by the MFIs, characterized by certain agreed principles, commitments and guidelines while maintaining the autonomy of each institution.
- The following issues were listed to be of interest for agencies, with the potential to be included in the work of the Consultative Process:
 - Mapping out the state of the ESS at the program and projects entry point
 - Collective action on standards for programming at the country level
 - Knowledge sharing
 - Sharing of experts
 - Sharing experience on grievance mechanisms
 - ESS reporting and GRI
 - Common information platform or website (see SUN as an example of success)
 - Common resources and material

a) Revision of the Sustainability Framework and the Interim Guide

Participants' views were sought with regard to revising the Framework and the Interim Guide.

Key considerations:

- Overall, participants were in agreement that the Framework has proven to be useful. The need to revise/further strengthen it was debated with some arguing that the Framework should not be opened up for revision at this time as this would require high-level support that would complicate and prolong the process. The Guide could instead be kept as a living document that is updated as necessary.
- The ESS Framework offers useful support in terms of helping organizations approaching ESS at the policy level; however, it lacks in providing guidance for putting theory into practice and could be strengthened specifically with regard to its social dimension. It was noted that the Framework does not offer a clear set of shared principles or guidance for how to prioritize.
- It was suggested that the Guide should be more practical, adding concepts definitions and a catalogue of templates, a section on EMS and international standards. The Action Plan in the Guide could be expanded and examples of concrete experiences and recommendations could be added. Links to more detailed information could be included where possible and relevant.
- The title of the Guide was discussed and alternative titles including references to "initial steps" were mentioned to clarify the Guide's purpose.
- Should the Framework itself not be revised, the Guidance should be updated to reflect the learnings from the pilot phase. The Guide could include options and alternative ways in which an agency can approach ESS depending on its needs, possibilities and starting points.
- The need to revise the Framework to link it to the 2030 Agenda was discussed. It was proposed that this too would rather be addressed in the Guide, taking note of the point that the same level of commitment would not be achieved compared to if this would be mentioned in the Framework.
- The link and relevance of the Framework in relation to the 2030 Agenda was considered important and should be communicated.

It was agreed to recommend that the guide as a living document while the Framework remains unrevised at this point.

It was agreed that a separate work stream is created to prepare a revised version of the Guide for the consideration of the Consultative Process. Agencies will be requested to volunteer to participate in this work that will be led by UNEP supported by the EMG Secretariat and inputs from UNDP, UNICEF, UN-Habitat and UN-Women. Other members of the Consultative Process will be invited to participate in the work stream.

An online meeting will be held to agree on the next steps in August. A workplan/ToR shall be prepared by October 1.

b) Continuation of piloting the Framework in other UN agencies

- Continuing the pilot could further support the objective to enhance commonality and coherence, however, the Secretariat's capacity to support more pilots is limited and experience from the pilot phase shows that it resulted mainly in individual benefits because the information sharing part was not implemented as planned.
- It was proposed that the Consultative Process could rather go beyond the pilot by creating a work-stream that looks specifically at system-wide cooperation and a possible common approach at the program and project entry point. Agencies could also be encouraged to partner with other organizations, for example through peer reviews, enabling them to look closer at specific common challenges.

It was agreed not to continue the pilot process.
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c) Possible common approach among interested agencies in applying safeguards at country level

- The establishment of a separate work stream focusing on the projects/programming entry point to explore options for a common approach to safeguards and standards was supported. A mapping of existing standards and safeguards used by UN agencies at the projects/programmes level will make evident actual differences, weaknesses, and gaps and to define universal and flexible aspects.

It was agreed that a separate work stream is created to prepare a mapping of safeguards and standards applied at the projects/programmes entry point. Agencies will be requested to volunteer to participate in this work that will be co-led by UNDP and IFAD with inputs from UNICEF, UNEP, UNOPS, UN-Habitat and UN-Women. Other members of the Consultative Process will be invited to participate in the work stream.

A first meeting to plan the work ahead will be held in August. An initial concept note/ToR will be prepared by October.

d) Enhanced communication and awareness raising about the Framework

Meeting participants were invited to brainstorm on ways in which the ESS Framework links to the 2030 Agenda and how this could be communicated as part of the UN System's efforts to lead by example. Participants were further encouraged to think about how communication and information sharing could be enhanced among EMG members and thirdly, how results of environmental and social sustainability work could be reported.

- The linkages with the 2030 agenda which can be described in the revised Guide and reports on progress made in the Consultative Process will continue to be reported to the EMG Senior Officials on an annual basis.
- The work done by SUN on outreach with regard to environmental sustainability management at the facilities/operations entry point, could be looked into as a successful model for communication. The SUN could also be consulted with regard to how they maintain their communications platform.
- The teamwork platform created by UNDP could be used by to share information on standards, policies and guidance, supporting the work stream on a common approach.
- The development of a communications piece on the linkages between the Framework and the 2030 Agenda, articulating the way the UN system works with the SDGs, in particular SDG 17 was discussed.

It was agreed that a separate work stream is created to develop a 2-page communications piece to clarify the link between the ESS Framework and the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs and to develop a plan for how to strengthen communication about the Framework to external stakeholders such as Member States. UNOPS offered to support the work with the graphic design. The work stream will also look at how communication and information sharing between EMG members can be enhanced. A planning call will be held among interested agencies to agree on how to follow-up.

The work on the 2-pager will start in the beginning of September. The EMG Secretariat will be in touch with the SUN Secretariat to solicit further advice.

7) Recommendations for the future of the Consultative Process for consideration of EMG SOM22

The following recommendations were drafted by the meeting participants, based on the discussions and conclusions reached during the meeting:

The Senior Officials:

Take note of the findings of the synthesis report on the piloting of the Environmental and Social Sustainability (ESS) Framework and the progress made by the EMG members in integrating and implementing the Framework at its three entry points of policy/strategy, program/project and facilities/operation, including the recent strategic considerations of the ESS Consultative Process on its future work;

Acknowledge that the ESS Framework as it stands can serve as a common approach and a system-wide commitment for advancing environmental and social sustainability in the UN system, in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

Recognize the role the Consultative Process plays to inspire individual agencies to undertake corporate commitments to ESS and the facilitative role the Consultative Process can play in promoting coherence at the institutional and policy level, as well as interagency collaboration in monitoring progress towards the SDGs, as required by SDG17;

Welcome the progress made by a significant number of UN agencies in introducing and integrating environmental sustainability in their operations and facilities management, with the support of the IMG on Environmental Management and the SUN Initiative;

Agree to revise the Interim Guide, informed by lessons learned during the piloting of the Framework, turning it into a living guide/source book with the aim to concretely guide agencies' sustainability efforts at the three entry points of the Framework;

Agree to elaborate, possibly in collaboration with the UNDG, on a common approach for elaborating and implementing environmental and social standards for UN programming and projects, particularly at the country level, with the potential to inform the UNDG process to pilot and rollout the new UN Sustainable Development Framework Guidance (UNSDG);

Agree to develop options for enhancing communication and knowledge sharing, peer learning and peer reviewing on environmental and social issues among the UN agencies, including exploring options for a possible UN-wide hub to support the ESS efforts at program/project level and integrating these practices at the field level, where relevant;

Agree to extend the Consultative Process by one year to accomplish the above mentioned tasks and report on progress to the next Senior Officials meeting.

Annex I: Meeting of the Consultative Process on Environmental and Social Sustainability, 13-14 July

	Name	Organisation	
1	Tim Scott	UNDP	In Person
2	Nives Costa	UNOPS	In person
3	Sheila Mwanundu	IFAD	In Person
4	Brennan Van Dyke	UNEP	In Person
5	Yunae Yi	UNEP	In person
6	Cristina Colón	UNICEF	In person
7	Agi Kiss	World Bank	In person
8	Holly Mergler	UNDP	In person
9	Marianna Belsky	UN WOMEN	In person
10	Julie MACKENZIE	WFP	Audio Connection
11	Georgina Stickels	WFP	Audio Connection
12	Xenia Von Lilien	CEB	In-person
13	Andrew Rudd	UN HABITAT	In-person
14	Eeshan Chaturvedi	UNEP	In person
15	Emma Hakansson	SUN	Audio Connection
16	Cornis Van der Lugt	EMG Secretariat	In person
17	Jannica Pitkanen-Brunnsberg	EMG Secretariat	Audio Connection
18	Hossein Fadaei	EMG Secretariat	In Person
19	Elliott Harris	EMG Secretariat	In Person
20	Monica Villegas	EMG Secretariat	Audio Connection
21	Elisa Hara	UNDP	In Person

Annex II: Agenda

Day 1

10.00 am – 11.00 am

1) Opening session

- a) Opening Remarks by Elliott Harris, Director of the EMG
- b) Introductory remarks by the Co-chairs of the Consultative Process, Mr. Tim Scott, UNDP and Ms. Brennan VanDyke, UNEP
- c) Adoption of the Agenda
- d) Setting the stage - update on progress made in the Consultative Process on enhancing Environmental and Social Sustainability in the UN System
 - *Overview provided by the EMG Secretariat of progress made against SOM decisions since the last meeting of the CP in May 2014*
 - *Overview of the Consultative Process at large and where we are today –what issues/questions does the Process face now?*

11.00 am – 12.30pm

- 2) Operationalizing the Sustainability Framework - progress and lessons learned
 - a) Short tour de table – updates by UN agencies on their recent ESS developments and activities

12.30-13.30 Lunch break, at own expense

13.30-15.00

- 2) Continued: Operationalizing the Sustainability Framework - progress and lessons learned
 - b) Report and lessons learned from the pilot project testing the Framework and Interim Guide in 7 volunteer agencies ([Reference document: Summary of pilot synthesis report](#))
 - *Presentation of the pilot process, lessons learned and recommendations. Issues for discussion include :*
 - How did the pilot testing help the participating agencies?
 - *How can the lessons learned in the pilot be useful for other agencies?*
 - *Should the exercise be repeated by other agencies on an independent basis? If yes, what approach/method should it take?*
 - *What were the take home messages from the pilot that can guide the Consultative Process in its future work?*
 - c) Progress made at the facility/operations entry point – links to the ongoing work under the Sustainable UN facility and the IMG on Environmental Sustainability Management
 - *Informal report of the work of SUN and exploration of the linkages with the ESS process*

**15.00-15.20 Coffee break **

15.20-17.00

- 3) **Future of the Sustainability Framework and the Consultative Process** - Issues for discussion with a view to agree on the future focus of the Consultative Process ([Reference document: Strategic discussion note](#))
- e) Revision of the Sustainability Framework and the Interim Guide
If and how to revise the Framework and/or the Interim Guide based on the experience from the pilot phase and in order to make the Framework relevant with the 2030 Agenda and Secretary General's report on Sustainable Development ?
- f) Continuation of piloting the Framework in other UN agencies
Would there be added value in continuing the piloting of the implementation of the Framework using the self-assessment method as outlined in the Guide by extending the exercise to other interested agencies?
- g) Possible common approach among interested agencies in applying safeguards at country level
What is the rationale for a common approach? Should coherence in ESS safeguards at national level be a focus of the Consultative Process going forward (e.g. through a sub-group)? How can the EMG process support the UNDG efforts on Delivering as One?

* **End of Day1 (17.00)***

Day 2

09.30am – 11.30am

- 3) **Continued: Future of the Sustainability Framework and the Consultative Process** - Issues for discussion with a view to agree on the future focus of the Consultative Process ([Reference document: Strategic discussion note](#))
- h) Scopes of ESS and EMS and their implication for the EMG consultative process
The ESS Framework includes policy and strategy; programme and projects; and management/facility. The management/facility entry point has been covered by the EMS working group and has relatively well structured management/monitoring/reporting modalities within the UN System. Yet, there remains overlap between ESS and EMS especially for the operation-focused UN agencies. Considering this complexity can we come up with the definitions of these two areas and the future focus?
- i) Enhanced communication and awareness raising about the Sustainability Framework
How to make the ESS process and the Framework most relevant to the 2030 Agenda ? What can be done to make the Framework more graspable and understandable to its stakeholders as well as to Member States? How to contribute more effectively to the SG's report on mainstreaming of the three dimensions of sustainable developing in the UN system?
- j) End target / ultimate objective of the Consultative Process
What would it imply for the Consultative Process to have achieved its final goal? At what point will we consider that enough has been achieved by the Consultative Process to be comfortable in bringing it to a close? What remains to be done by the Process in this context and what should it be aiming to achieve, considering the outputs and outcomes that are already accomplished? What is the ultimate objective of the Consultative Process? Should the idea of developing a common approach / common principles /common vision on ESS be further elaborated? How can the inter-agency cooperation and information exchange on ESS be sustained and coordinated in the future ?

11.30am – 12.30pm

4) Recommendations for the future of the Consultative Process for consideration of EMG SOM22 (September 2016)

- Conclusions in terms of suggested recommendations on the future of the Consultative Process for the 22nd EMG Senior Officials Meeting in September 2016.

5) Other matters

6) Closure of the meeting

End of meeting (12.30pm)