



## Environment Management Group

### **EMG consultative process:**

### **A common framework for environmental and social “safeguards”<sup>1</sup> in the UN system**

### **Rationale, progress report and the way forward**

*The UN system is challenged to improve its environmental and social performance by a more systematic management approach for prevention and mitigation of environmental and social unintended impacts and optimization of resource opportunities.*

**Objectives for the consultative process** The protection and enhancement of human-wellbeing is a common denominator for the entire UN system and can be seen as the ultimate goal of sustainable development. International good practice states that good processes leads to good results and that there is a need to systematically manage environmental and social impacts, such as those associated with climate change and chemical contamination, and resource opportunities, such as those linked to the use of ecosystem services.

The Senior Officials of the [Environment Management Group](#) (EMG) asked the EMG, at their 15<sup>th</sup> meeting in September 2009, to explore needs and options for a common UN-wide approach to environmental and social safeguards. In effect, the group is to analyze management options for how the UN systematically could capitalize on resources, benefit from synergies and prevent negative environmental and social impacts.

The objectives for the consultative process are:

- To undertake a *gap-analysis* based on a representative review of existing environmental and social policy instruments and management tools in the UN system and international good practice;
- To *identify common needs and options* for potential coverage and application of a common environmental and social management framework in the UN system; and
- To recommend *options for developing a common approach to environmental and social safeguards* in the UN.

The roadmap and progress report for the consultative process is presented in Annex 1.

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<sup>1</sup> The consultative process has advised the EMG that the term “safeguards” may not be suitable for a UN-wide and cross cutting environmental and social management framework. The reason why is that safeguards are strongly associated with prescriptive minimum quality standards for projects, and not necessarily facility, operations and policy management standards.

<sup>2</sup> [EMG 15 Meeting Report](#)

**Rationale for a systematic approach** Good environmental and social management systems make a difference by:

- helping UN agencies, funds and programs, 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 implementation stage;
- addressing immediate and long-term impacts of services and processes;
- serving as a tool to improve the triple bottom-line (TBL) which states that corporate and organizational success should include environmental and social management, as well as economic;
- enhancing transparency and accountability by providing a platform for the participation of national and local stakeholders in the design of initiatives in line with the [Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action](#), and the 2008 [Doha Declaration](#) on Financing for Development; and
- 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.

**Rationale for a common framework** A number of norms and standards have been developed to enhance environmental and social performance. Examples are norms and standards of international human rights treaties and instruments, international labour conventions, Multilateral Environmental Agreements and other international agreements such as the Millennium Declaration, the Rio Declaration and the Beijing Platform for action.

In the context of emerging international and national legislation on strategic environmental and social impact assessments in both developed and developing countries, the UN is challenged to find a more transparent and systematic approach to its environmental and social management procedures. However, a recent Joint Inspection Unit report pointed out that there is no single, institutional strategy for making environmental and social norms and standards operational across UN agencies. Some main constraints have been identified as: 1) Too many competing guidelines and frameworks, 2) Insufficient incentives and internal compliance measures, and 3) A lack of leadership and institutional commitment.

*EMG-recommendation* The first EMG consultative workshop agreed that a common UN-wide framework for environmental and social safeguards would:

- be 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 UN-supported initiatives, with enough flexibility to fit respective operational challenges;
- strengthen organizational incentives to develop skills and expertise for supporting safeguard implementation and thereby improving environmental and social performance;
- provide a common reference point and language for UN staff and for country partners and thereby reduce the number and complexity of different agency procedures at country level;
- strengthen monitoring and evaluation processes, and enable the system to share knowledge, learn together, and improve in a more systematic manner; and

- demonstrate to donors and other stakeholders that the UN has a credible, transparent and coherent approach, built on international good practices, and improve the ability of the UN to deliver resources to countries.

**Challenges** The initial consultations have revealed some key challenges for the design and application of safeguards:

*How to choose and structure the standards for common safeguards?* The range of potential negative social and environmental impacts across the areas of the UN’s work is huge. A common safeguard system will need to apply a risk management approach to delimit the range of potential negative impacts, as well as the critical opportunities, it screens for.

*How do we talk the same language?* There are some terminology differences. For example, assessment is an Equator principle, an IFC standard, and a World Bank policy.

*How to ensure consistent application of safeguards?* Anecdotal reports and evidence suggest that usage of safeguard measures is variable. Safeguards require a high and ongoing institutional commitment to support and monitor implementation and follow-up on corrective action. Compliance, reporting, training & learning measures are essential. But which should be common and which are best done at agency level?

*How far can we use national systems?* In the spirit of the Paris Declaration, a common approach would have to consider when and how to use national screening and assessment procedures and standards in lieu of agreed UN system safeguards. While tailoring procedures to country context is an established principle of UN cooperation, too much flexibility could contribute to problems in accountability, performance, and public opinion.

*EMG-recommendation* The consultative process has to keep track of system-wide challenges and assess each identified option accordingly.

**Methodology for gap-analysis** The consultative process should explore needs and options for more sustainable UN controlled facility and operations management, more coherent environmental and social quality standards for UN influenced projects and more environmentally and socially responsible strategic decisions at international and national level.

The gap-analysis should map out current environmental and social management approaches in lieu of internationally agreed values and procedures such as the UN Global Compact Principles and the Equator Principles.

A possible conceptual framework that could be used as a baseline for the gap-analysis is illustrated in Annex 2 and explained in Annex 3<sup>3</sup>. The baseline framework is wide-ranging, i.e. it includes cross cutting

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<sup>3</sup> The proposed baseline framework draws upon common elements identified across well established environmental and social management instruments such as [the ISO 14001 Environment Management System](#), [the UN Global Compact principles](#), [the Global Reporting Initiative](#), [the Equator Principles](#), [the International Finance](#)

environmental and social decision making associated with strategy and policy management, project management and facility and operations management. The proposed framework also seeks to strike a balance between flexibility and accountability: It offers agencies with different mandates, modes of operation and objectives, an opportunity to adapt and implement minimum procedures according to their own needs and internal decision making processes. At the same time, accountability is kept at UN system level through commitment to universal value based principles and minimum procedures.

*EMG-recommendation* To use the environmental and social safeguard framework presented in Annex 2 as a baseline for the inventory and gap-analysis.

**Options for a common framework** The approach to safeguards has a short-term and a long term track:

- In the short-term the EMG should: Finalize the inventory and gap-analysis and look at immediate information needs and conceptual options for safeguards in the UN system, including scope, capacity building, accountability, quality assurance and roll-out plan.
- In the long-term the EMG should: Help to develop a common strategy with minimum procedures for safeguards and take part in the roll-out support.

*EMG-recommendation* A background report with recommended options should be prepared for consideration by the EMG senior officials. The draft list of content for the background report is available in annex 4.

**Political will and leadership** The EMG secretariat would like to thank the following organizations for having provided resources, expertise and/or designated a focal point to the consultative process: DFS/DPKO, ESCWA, FAO, IAEA, IFAD, OHCHR, Ramsar Convention, UNICEF, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, UNFCCC, UNIDO, UN Office at Vienna/UNODC, WIPO, WBG, WFP and WIPO .

A coordinated effort to develop and apply safeguards will require the endorsement of the principles of all participating organizations, and engagement with their governing bodies. Further progress will depend on strong and continuous high level commitment, dedicated resources in each agency and capacity building in both social and environmental inter-agency working groups.

*EMG Recommendation* The concept of safeguards has to be communicated as a shared priority across and within agencies:

- The events and public attention centre on Rio +20 in 2012 should be considered as an opportunity to launch a set of common principles and procedures.
- A formal two-year Issue Management Group on Social and Environmental Safeguards should be established to develop options and recommendations.

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[Corporation performance standards](#), [the World Bank safeguards policies](#), [the Sphere project](#) and other instruments.

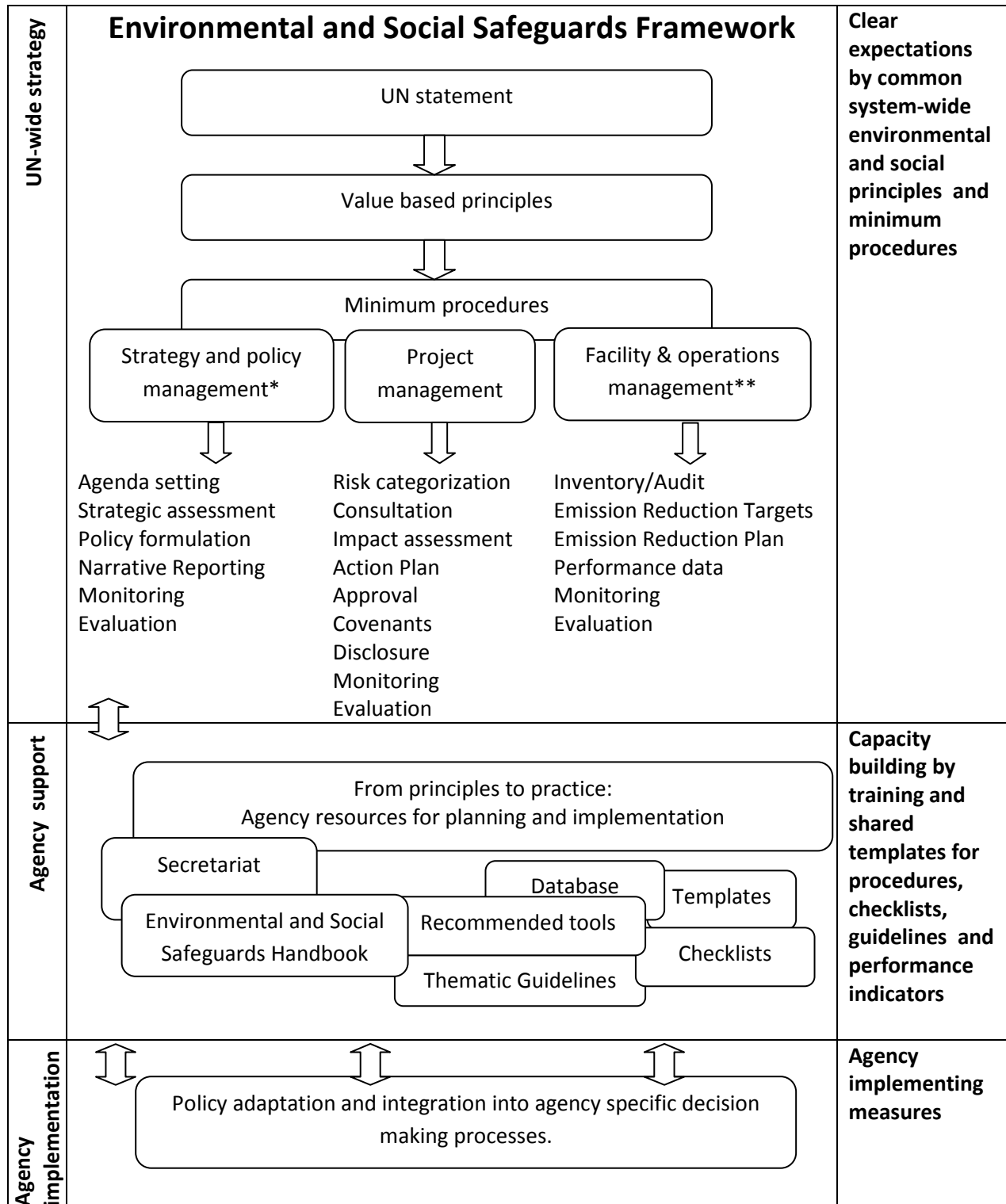
- EMG-focal points must keep their respective agencies informed and make sure that there is a designated focal point that can coordinate internally and provide adequate information for the UN inventory and gap-analysis.
- A social-working group and/or a humanitarian representative must be appointed to the drafting group to oversee that humanitarian operational specificities are fully reflected in the gap-analysis and concept paper.

## Annex 1

**Roadmap and progress report for the consultative process** The process will consult EMG members by use of bilateral meetings, written comments and workshops. The first consultative workshop welcomed the objectives for the consultative process and agreed on the following roadmap:

<i>Phase I - Development of consultative process</i>	
- Conduct a desk study and initial interviews with EMG members to identify common denominators across current practices and shared opportunities and challenges.	Completed
- Hold a <a href="#">1st workshop in June</a> to clarify any outstanding concerns about the rationale for a common approach to environmental and social safeguards and to agree on information needs and roadmap for the consultative process.	Completed
- Establish a drafting group that will prepare the background note and propose options for a common approach to improved environmental and social management.	Completed. Current members are UNEP, UNDP and WFP
<i>Phase II – Identify options</i>	
Prepare a background report that identifies scope and conceptual options for a common approach to environmental and social safeguards in the UN. The background report will build on the current <a href="#">briefing note</a> and: - Additional key informant interviews with focal points to the consultative process for an improved inventory of current environmental and social management policies and practices in the UN system. - A gap analysis which defines common elements, cross-cutting environmental and social risks. - A cost-benefit analysis of an ad-hoc versus a common and systematic approach to environmental and social safeguards.	In progress
-Prepare a progress report for the 16th senior officials meeting of the EMG in September 2010	Completed
- Hold a drafting group meeting on 14-15 October 2010 in Geneva to design the mapping exercise and gap-analysis.	In progress
- Hold a 2nd consultative workshop in January 2011 to discuss and refine the recommended framework and roadmap as necessary.	To be confirmed
- Propose options to the extraordinary EMG meeting, March 2011.	To be confirmed
- Refine options for consideration by the Chief Executive Board for Coordination (CEB), March 2011.	To be confirmed

Annex 2



\* Ongoing implementation through [UNDG](#), [OECD](#), [UNECE](#), [UNEP](#) and other agencies.

\*\* Ongoing implementation by the IMG on Sustainability Management. See [Greening the Blue](#).

## Annex 3

### Explanatory notes on the baseline framework

**Environmental and social safeguard framework** The framework aims to provide a common and more systematic management approach to improved environmental and social performance. It links UN system-wide and agency specific measures to identify cross-cutting opportunities and to prevent and mitigate undue harm to the environment and people at the earliest possible planning stage.

**UN system-wide strategy** The strategy sets out shared values and minimum procedures for UN agencies committed to improve their environmental and social performance. The strategy offers flexibility by being value-based and oriented towards a set of universal good practice procedures:

**Value based principles** The value based principles should be rooted in the UN Global Compact's ten principles in the areas of human rights, labour, the environment and anti-corruption. These principles have universal consensus and are derived from:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- The International Labour Organization's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work
- The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development
- The United Nations Convention Against Corruption

**Minimum procedures** The procedures should work down through the organizational hierarchy and support the agreed objectives and values. They are based on international good practice and categorized into three management categories with significant environmental and social impacts according to the level of organizational control:

*Strategy and policy management* Applies to international negotiations, strategy and program support at international and national level over which the UN has organizational influence. The procedures are often referred to as mainstreaming environmental and social safeguards into agreements, standards and norms. Examples are strategic initiatives under the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). The key procedure is strategic assessments.

*Project management* Applies to field projects over which the UN has significant organizational influence. The procedures are often referred to as safeguards or quality standards. Examples are Global Environment Facility projects. The key procedure is impact assessments.

*Facility and operations management* Applies to buildings, vehicles, procurement and operations over which the UN has organizational control. The procedures are often referred to as greening the UN. One example is greening the UN initiatives. The key procedure is environmental audits.

**Agency support** A one or more dedicated secretariats responsible for collecting, screening and providing practical guidance and tools for agencies to select, adapt and integrate into their own decision making processes. The secretariat could also handle system-level reporting requirements and feedback-loops. The UNEP/SUN is already offering substantial support to environmental facility management procedures.

**Agency implementation** Agencies seeking to improve their environmental and social performance should analyse their own processes and implement gap-filling measures and engage with their governing bodies.



## **Annex 4**

### **Draft table of Contents for Background Report on Environmental and Social Safeguards**

Glossary

List of Abbreviations

#### **1.0 Introduction**

EMG decision

#### **2.0 Rationale for a common approach to environmental and social safeguards**

Rationale for safeguards

Rationale for a common approach to safeguards

International community, agreements and conventions

Challenges

#### **3.0 Conceptual framework for environmental and social safeguards**

Good international practice

Identification of common elements

Conceptual framework

#### **4.0 Inventory of safeguards in the UN system**

What are we safeguarding?

Tabulated presentation of current UN system procedures

#### **5.0 Gap-analysis**

Identification of shared gaps and need of gap-filling measures

#### **6.0 Options for a common framework for environmental and social safeguards**

Options for scope

Options for capacity building

Options for accountability and quality assurance

Options for a roll-out plan

Conclusions

#### **Annex?: Methodology for gap-analysis**

A. Interview Guide

B. In-depth interview reports

#### **Annex ??: References**