



Environment Management Group

Options for a common framework for environmental and social “safeguards”¹

An EMG consultative process

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 Senior Officials of the [Environment Management Group](#) (EMG) asked the EMG, at their 15th meeting in September 2009, to:

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

The initiative is in the spirit of the 2005 World Summit outcomes on system-wide coherence and actions to strengthen linkages between the normative work of the United Nations system and its operational activities as well as ensuring that horizontal policy themes, such as sustainability, are taken into account in decision making throughout the United Nations (A/Res/60/1-169).

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

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;
- 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

¹ 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.

² [EMG 15 Meeting Report](#)

- 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.

A number of norms and standards have been developed to enhance environmental and social performance. 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.

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

- 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.

Methodology for gap-analysis Current UN decision making processes will be compared with international good practice. The baseline places emphasis on impact, transparency, accountability and sustainability, without imposing undue rigidity on UN agencies with different mandates, modes of operation and objectives.

The findings from the gap-analysis will be used to formulate a set of recommended options for a common approach to environmental and social safeguards in the UN.

Political will and leadership Awareness raising, transparency and information on existing standards and decision making procedures will be important contributions from all agencies in the development phase.

Further progress will depend on strong and continuous high level commitment and dedicated resources in each agency.

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 1st workshop in June 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 briefing note 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
<i>Phase III – Formulate recommendations</i>	
-Prepare a progress report for the 16th senior officials meeting of the EMG in September 2010	Completed
- Hold a 2nd consultative workshop on 14-15 October 2010 in Geneva to design the mapping exercise and gap-analysis.	In progress
- Hold a 3rd consultative workshop in January 2011 to consider options for environmental and social safeguards in the UN.	To be confirmed
- Propose a concept paper for the extraordinary senior officials meeting of the EMG in spring 2011	To be confirmed
- Refine and propose the concept paper for the Chief Executive Board for Coordination (CEB) spring session 2011.	To be confirmed